

Melbourne’s year-round open water swimming group

Lead Article – ‘On this lonely rock I stand...’

Coogee Rock Sit - Anzac Day 2023

After the Anzac Dawn Service at Coogee Beach last year I noticed a large group of swimmers and paddlers making the 1,000 metre journey out to Wedding Cake Island all of whom were loaded with an assortment of eskys, floating containers and shopping bags. Upon reaching the island they raised the Australian flag and set-up a picnic lunch as they were smashed by the pounding surf.

According to locals, the Anzac Day Rock Sit is a revered tradition. The eskys are laden with ‘tea’ and the rock sitters spend the day on the rock, always getting drenched and sometimes badly cut as they negotiate the reef in wild surf. Precarious as the crossing is in daylight, some rock sitters have been known to swim or paddle back at night after a day of rock sitting and drinking ‘tea’.

Rock sitting had its apogee in the late seventies in Australia after originating in Darwin in 1974 and spreading to other states and New Zealand. Rock sitters had their own 15-point Official Rules whereby a minimum of one third of sitters had to be female and five of the fifteen Rules stipulated “No funny business”. Beer was referred to as ‘tea’.

Undertaking such a precarious swim to commemorate Anzac Day has its parallels in the larrikinism and irreverence of the ANZACs, particularly those who swam at Anzac Cove in 1915 under enemy fire, some of whom lost their lives for a swim (Newsletter 15th April 2021) and Tobruk (Newsletter 9th November 2023).



Rock-sitters on Wedding Cake Island, Coogee Beach NSW 25th April 2023. *photo by Ria*

This article is not as an endorsement of rock sitting but is a record of the local history of this country that would otherwise be lost to the passage of time. Each of us relates to, and engages with, the great oceans that surround this vast land which begets an essential characteristic of being Australian and an intrinsic part of the Anzac Spirit.
Lest We Forget

Wedding Cake Island Swim - Coogee NSW 2024

by Ria Bleathman



On Sunday 14th April 2024, I participated in the second Wedding Cake Island swim event for this summer season. During my swim I took a selfie (left) about 1.2kms offshore and at the very point where I had a heart attack in the first event on 27th November 2023. My times for the two swims were modest, although this most recent swim was a personal achievement after five months of rehabilitation from heart surgery.

Such an achievement went unnoticed amongst the excited hubbub of finishers which did not in any way diminish my sense of victory and shows that winning has less to do with times and placings but rather in the personal obstacles one surmounts in order to participate in such events.

Wilhelmina "Mina" Wylie – Swimming Legend

by Ria Bleathman

Wilhelmina "Mina" Wylie (1891 - 1984) was one of Australia's first two female Olympic swimming champions, the other being her friend Fanny Durack (refer to Newsletter 28th March 2024). Wylie grew up in South Coogee, Sydney where her father Henry Wylie built Wylie's Baths in 1907 - the oldest surviving communal sea baths in Australia. Wylie competed in NSW and Australian championships from 1906 to 1934, winning 115 titles.



Wylie and Durack persuaded officials to let them attend the 1912 Summer Olympics in Stockholm, Sweden, where women's swimming events were being held for the first time. Durack won a gold medal and Wylie a silver medal in the 100metre final (pictured left - Fanny in cap).

Following their success at the Games, the fame of Wylie and Durack spread around the world and they toured America three times over the next few years and helped to break down many of the taboos which prevented women from taking part in elite swimming competitions.

Mina Wylie held world records in trudgen freestyle, backstroke and breaststroke. In 1911, 1922 and 1924 she won every Australian and NSW championship event in freestyle, backstroke and breaststroke. In 1922 Mina won the NSW 880-yards title by an extraordinary 110 yards.

Mina Wylie lived the last forty years of her life in Neptune Street Coogee across the road from Wylie's baths where a statue of her stands at the entrance. Mina Wylie was inducted into the International Swimming Hall of Fame in 1975 and the Sport Australia Hall of Fame in 1992.



Kerry Watson RBYC 18th February 2024

photo by Ria



Kathy Roberts (Iceberger #12) and Rob Hooper (Iceberger #2)

17th February 2024

Photo by Ria

The Iceberger Calendar

Date	Event
7.00pm Friday 26 th April 2024	Annual Trivia Night. RBYC Bayview Room with Quizmaster Don Warner.
9.00am Sunday 5 th May 2024	Winter Swimming OH&S briefing, Member's Lounge RBYC - Ralph O'Shaughnessy



25th April 2024

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