

PLOD ESSAY: Holiday Destinations; Alistair Stirton Remembers Inverloch

When the State Coal Mine was still working there was an intriguing exodus of Wonthaggi people over the summer months to holiday destinations. These destinations were: Inverloch, Flat Rocks, Eagles Nest, Cape Paterson, Back Beach. Alistair Stirton's family headed for Inverloch each Christmas for their 'five-star' holiday.

Alistair' memories:

Each year we packed up and moved from Wonthaggi to Inverloch for Christmas and stayed there for the full six weeks of the holidays. Now the Stirtons were the ones who went from Wonthaggi but it wasn't all Stirton family. My mother had been a Grieve. Dad was the only one of the Stirtons here in Australia after I was born, but Mum was from a fairly large family. My grandmother was still alive and Mum had three brothers – Tom, Harry and Bob – and three sisters – Emily, Nellie and Bess. Only one of those is still alive. Bess Kidd is still with us in Rose Lodge. Emily was married to George Speed, who lived in Footscray. Nellie was married to Tom Cutter who lived in Yallourn. Bob and Harry were single. Tom Grieve lived in NSW. Bess was married to Ray Kidd and lived in Wonthaggi. At Christmas time we packed up and we all piled into Uncle Bob's 1927 Studebaker and headed down to Inverloch. That is the car I learned to drive in.

The block our holiday house in Inverloch was on didn't have a number; didn't have a street name back in those days. To get there you travelled along a track, which is now Bayview Avenue and you turned right into another dirt track with a rather steep hill where Grandview Road is now. The actual block is now much lower than the road because of the earth moving they did to make the modern roads. We never regarded the buildings we stayed in as houses, but we called them huts. We had Big Hut on the front of the block and Little Hut on the back of the block. The Big Hut consisted of five rooms – kitchen, three bedrooms and a lounge room. The front bedroom was the boys' room and it had eight beds in it. Little Hut and Big Hut no longer exist because other houses and blocks have taken their place.

The actual property belonged to my Uncle Tom. He had bought it back in the 1930s with the two huts and an Ooma, an 18-foot clinker-built

boat with an inboard motor, a single cylinder thing that putt-putt-putted up the inlet, plus a 12-foot clinker-built dinghy. All that for £40.

In time, the neighbourhood we interacted with consisted of three main blocks with huts on them along a track. Next door was Freddy Davis, who had a little hut and they were connected to

Dobsons. So Wes Dobson and his family also stayed there. The next block up belonged to a very well-known Wonthaggi family, the Chambers. The Chambers Clan also used to come and stay for the whole Christmas Holidays like we did. They came from all over the place – from Boolarra South, from

Tallangatta, and from Melbourne. Between our two blocks, was Freddy's block with the hut set back and in front of it was a volleyball court. That's the sport that we played, volleyball. The Stirtons used to challenge the Chambers and there was a fair bit of rivalry.

My grandmother was the person in charge on our block. She ruled the roost, but Mum did all the cooking. Mum sort of led the charge... In those days you could go out fishing in Inverloch and come home with 100 whiting easily. And that's what happened during the whole time we were there. Someone went out fishing everyday and we had fresh fish at least one meal a day. We had to eat the catch quickly because in those days there was no refrigeration. We had an ice chest.

Dad and Freddy Davis used to go out fishing almost everyday, but Dad wasn't particularly mechanically minded so he and Freddy used to go out in a dinghy. That boat stayed in the family for all the kids to use over generations until only a few years back. Dad and Fred used to row it up the Inlet. They used to fish with the tide, go off in the morning with the tide coming in and some days they rowed for an hour-and-a-half before they got to the spot they were going to. They had their spots: Solomans, Mahers Landing, Carters. When they arrived back at the end of the day, all the fish they'd caught they would just throw into a basket and hand it over to Mum. She would scale and gut and fillet every one. Dad finally realised he had to help her out and he would scale them, but Mum did all the filleting. I have seen her sit down and clean 150 whiting. Then we kids got to take all the guts and heads down to the beach to feed the seagulls.



Clinker-built dinghy

My cousin, Bob Speed and I, went fishing together when Dad and Freddy weren't using the dinghy. We used to row up the inlet, take our lunch with us and go fishing all day. We were quite successful.

If you go fishing, you need bait and we used get clams. Most people call them pipis, but we called them clams. We kids loved to go clamming. We usually went over in the motorboat to the back beach where we were dropped off with our bicycles and lots of sugar bags. We spent the morning filling the bags with the clams, hung them off the handles of the bikes and rode home. Sometimes we would have four bags each on a bicycle. When we got the clams home, we stored them under the house and they would last, depending on the weather, up to about seven or eight days. If it was really hot, by about the eighth day it was very hard to put the clam on the hook, I'll tell you that. But, that didn't seem to worry the fish. There was a bloke named Kevin Toy, who sold clams. If he was very, very busy and he couldn't get over to the back beach, we kids would go around and get clams for him. We just did it. We didn't charge him for them or anything, even though *he* charged people for them. That was just what you did for each other.

When we weren't fishing, we walked through tea-tree scrub to get to the beach and the old pier was still there. Where the car park is at the pier now, that was actually water. My mother remembers diving off that pier into water sixteen feet deep. Not anymore. When I was a kid, there was a lot more water in Inverloch than there is now. In front of Grandview Grove is a sea wall and there were times when waves splashed over that sea wall. Of course all that is now is sand.

Briggs amusements used to come to Inverloch at Christmas and they set up along the Glade where the boat shop is now. They had a flying horse, a merry-go-round and, in later days, a caravan where you rolled balls down and you played poker. The best hand won. You paid six-pence a game and Briggs kept half of the take and gave the other half to the winner.

New Year's Eve was a very important time down there for the families. My father and the Chambers being Scottish, meant the tradition ran really strong. At midnight we would get together out in the open area and sing out *Auld Lang Syne* and wish each other Happy New Year before we went up to the Chambers and partied until dawn. Each of the family members always had traditional items they presented. Joe Chambers

always recited *Bloody, Bloody, Bloody* and he composed his own words to it, which were a parody of what was going on between all the camps over Christmas. A merry time was had by all.

Each year we used to do certain things. We always had a trip around to Eagle's Nest. We waited until the tide was right and walked around to Eagles Nest. Uncle Bob would drive around with all the food. We'd spend the day having a picnic and then all the older ones would drive home with Uncle Bob, but we kids would walk around the beach. We always had a day over at the surf – the other side of Smyth's Point. We'd all get into the motor boat – we'd need two or three crossing to get us all over there – and we go over to a place called Carters, which was half way along on the Inlet shore where they had a little jetty. There was a track from there through to the surf at the open beach. My Cousin Skimmer – Albert Speed – had a surfboard, just a wooden plank in those days, and we all had a turn on that. No standing up I am afraid.

We usually had a trip down to Tidal River at the Prom. One year I distinctly remember that thirteen of us travelled down in the Studebaker. I always sat in the front seat next to Uncle Bob, who was driving. There were six adults that day and the rest were kids. You could fill a car up like that in those days.

When I was in my teens – I think I got a bicycle for my fourteenth birthday – I used to ride my bike over to Inverloch so I had more independence when I was over there with the family for the holidays. All of us older kids must have done that. There was an open-air theatre along the foreshore and quite often we older kids used to go up there for entertainment.

We don't go to Inverloch much anymore. What was the Little Hut is where Mum ended up living, but it was eventually moved off the block. The Big Hut was demolished and so now there is no evidence of our holidays on that block. Jim Hamilton bought Freddy's place and lived there all his life until he left for Rose Lodge. But the Chambers still have their compound and use it every year. They were good times. Great memories.

(This is an edited version of the talk Alistair gave at Wonthaggi Library for Senior's Week. Next month we'll hear what the Cutlers remember about their days in the huts on the beach and Terri Allen's descriptions of a place of plenty along the coast.)