

Lake Ellen today is a popular playground and recreational area for Bundaberg families. How many people remember the origins of that area, and how it transformed from bushland to barbecue spot?

The beginnings of the project came from the members of the Bundaberg East Rotary Club, who were looking for a possible tourist attraction they could develop for the Bundaberg region.

One of the suggestions put forward in 1980 was that the East Water Tower might make a good tourist lookout, so club member Bert Bent investigated the Tower. It was fairly obvious that there were safety problems with the building as a tourist attraction, but while he was there Bert climbed the tower —presumably when no-one was looking — and had a look around. As he looked over East and South East Bundaberg, he noticed the bush area that is now Baldwin Swamp, and thought that it had the potential to be developed as a recreation area for public use.

The Club was looking for a Community Service Project, and believed the area at the eastern end of George Street was ideal for a lake and picnic area. The proposed site was at the beginning of what was then a large teatree swamp, and part of Bundaberg's greenbelt.

The Project was originally referred to as Bywash Lake. Bert Bent approached the Bundaberg City Council and asked if they would give permission for the Club to turn the land into a lake.



bun02616 Site for Bywash Lake

Once permission was obtained, the question of who would be interested in using the lake was raised. Another club member was also in the Model Boat Club, and they were keen to have a lake big enough for their boats, and gave Bert the width and depth of the lake which would suit their requirements. The Rotary Club also donated \$4000 to start the project, which they knew would take a number of years to complete.

The First Lake—Stage 1 1980

The whole project was assisted by Bundaberg City Council, who allowed the use of their plant to clear and dig the lake area. The primary cost would be the excavation of the lake area, and to fund the project the Club had two lucky number machines in the East End Hotel, two in the Grand Hotel, and ran raffles each Friday evening and Saturday morning. These machines eventually raised almost \$30,000 for the project.



bun02618 Dredging Bywash Lake 1980

local history

The first stage included clearing the scrub, digging the lake basin area, putting in the running tracks and the fitness circuit, and a children's playground.

1982

Work continued through 1980 into 1981, with another \$3,700 spent continuing the development of the Bywash lake. Bert Bent supervised the construction of the Lake, and as 1981 was a wet year, it proved to be difficult going, with constant problems with Alec Walker's machinery getting bogged. The Bundaberg Council helped with their plant wherever possible, and the hole for the Lake gradually took shape.



bun01830 Digging the lake in 1980

In 1982 Club members decided to name the lake after Ellen Previte, who with husband Phil ran the East End Hotel. Ellen was tireless in her fundraising for the Lake Project, and so the Bywash Lake became known as Lake Ellen.



bun01828 Lake Ellen, 1982



bun02620 Fitness equipment 1984

1983

Construction continued through the year and into 1983, with a concrete platform built for the Model Boat Club to launch their boats into the lake. Two picnic shelters were also constructed on the western side of Lake Ellen, and 120 trees were planted by club members.

The Lake Ellen development was finally completed in 1984 with the installation of a gas BBQ for the public and a fitness circuit, and handed over to the Bundaberg City Council for the official opening. Mayor Allan Stewart named and opened the Lake complex on Sunday June 3, 1984.



bun01841 Lake Ellen after completion 1984



Model boating was the name of the game yesterday when the Deputy Mayor, Ald. A. L. Stewart, officially opened the model boat complex, Lake Ellen, at East Bundaberg. In addition to providing model boat facilities, the area has been landscaped and fitness track and exercise aids have been installed as well as climbing games and swings for children. Pictured with Ald. Stewart (right) are Brian Hodgkinson, of the (model) sailing club, and Bundaberg East Rotary Club president, Gerry Carson. The complex has been a club project since 1981. It was named for Ellen Previte, wife of the East End Hotel licensee, Phil Previte.

Lake Ellen—Stage 2

The development of Lake Ellen didn't finish in 1984 with the grand opening. In 1990, another picnic shelter was erected and painted, and in 1995 Stage 2 began.

Club members had noticed the edges of the Lake were crumbling, and the lake silting for some time, so the decision was made to drain the lake, dredge it again, and put stone pitching down around the edges. Using DEET *New Work Opportunity* funding, eight long term unemployed people were supervised by Rotarians in half day shifts, as they stone-pitched the banks. Bert Bent was again the Project Manager, and recalls that the work ethic of the NWO men was interesting at times. Workers would vanish regularly from the lake area, to be found by Supervisors sleeping in a wheelbarrow somewhere, or just gone for the day completely.

Bert decided to use a bit of human psychology to get the job done, and put to the workers that if they reached a set target each day, they could spend the rest of the day playing cricket near the Bywash. This was incredibly successful, and the project was completed in half the time originally estimated.

As well as pitching around the lake banks, a concrete ring path was constructed, the picnic shelters were repainted, and more tree planting and landscaping was undertaken.

And ironically, the original users of the lake—the model boat club—were asked to leave the area in 1995, after local residents complained about the amount of noise generated by the model boat engines. Council maintained that the lake was built for sail boats, which were no longer in use due to the sinking water level. The Model Power Boat Club were willing to adjust the noise level, but Council stuck by its decision that the decibel restriction at the lake outlawed the use of power boats.



bun01831 Excavating basin in 1995



bun01835 Laying stone



bun01832 Beginning stone bays



Since 1995, Lake Ellen has become a popular recreation and barbecue area, and in 2008, the Lake was once again redeveloped.

bun02621 Lake Ellen redevelopment in 1995

local history



*bun02622 Lake Ellen stage 2
Completed 1995.*

Since Stage 2 was completed, other groups have contributed to the development of Lake Ellen as a community and recreational area. Lake Ellen has also been developed into a Heritage hub, recognizing the many cultural groups that make up Bundaberg's diversity.



Lake Ellen photos from BRC Photo Gallery.

The vibrant recreational area today is a long way from the scrub and tea tree swamp of 1980, and a testament to the hard work of a community service club.

Sue Gammon

Many thanks to Bert Bent for his help compiling this story.

References

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