

YEAR 2, ACTIVITY 3

MAGNETIC ISLAND IN THE PAST – SCRIPT

My name is Charlie and I know the real Magnetic Island. To most people Magnetic Island is just a lovely holiday resort, noted for good swimming, clean white beaches, well conducted hotels, several popular motels and guest houses—altogether they say it is a place of pleasant memories. Few indeed know her early history and interesting background.

For those who don't know, Captain Cook called it Magnetic Island because he thought the island possessed some magnetic force that made his compass all funny. It's not magnetic at all, but its name hasn't changed.

Of course Captain Cook was not the first person on Magnetic Island. Local Indigenous peoples lived there and others who lived on the mainland would often visit. Mr Butler, one of the earliest non-Indigenous people to move to Magnetic Island told me. He said it was not uncommon to see Indigenous people wade in the very low August tides from Kissing Point to the channel alongside the Island. Then they then swam this last lap to reach the Island and once there they would hunt and pow-wow with their friends of the tribe that lived on Magnetic Island. Occasionally they would return the visit; some would paddle across in their little bark canoes.

Mr Butler remembered a lot. He told me that when he and his family moved across to Magnetic Island they use to watch out for the big boats carrying new settlers to Townsville. There was no train in those days so the most common way for people to get to Townsville was by boat. Once they got to Townsville some people had to be rowed over to the Island to receive medical care. Travelling by ship in those days took a long time and people sometimes got sick, especially those who had come all the way from Britain. Magnetic Island was used as a quarantine station, firstly at Picnic Bay and then all the way over at West Point, until finally a better one was built on the mainland.

It wasn't long before people who lived on the mainland started to come over to Magnetic Island for fun. Most would use their own sailing boats, but others arrived in larger boats. Some would come just for picnics but more and more began to come to stay the night. People, like Mr Butler, decided to build huts and started to operate small accommodation services. Back then people had to grow food on the island in order to feed themselves and any travellers that were coming. So they grew things like mangoes, pineapples and grapes. Some people had cows, chickens and pigs. Some had great success growing tropical fruit. Horseshoe Bay pineapples, pawpaws and mangoes were amongst the best, and sold for good prices in markets all over Australia!

People who came to Magnetic Island would do all the things you see people do today. We swam, fished, and walked. Although we didn't have the stinger nets you have today. When more and more people started to come over, and more motels and buildings were built in different bays, then the roads started to appear. There were wooden enclosures built eventually in the bays to keep the sea-wasps and sharks away from swimmers, but until then most people were content to swim unprotected.

It didn't take long before ferries began to ship people between Townsville and Magnetic Island. There were two companies Butler and Hayles, and both operated ferries. Butler's went to Picnic Bay and Hayles to Arcadia where each operated a hotel and guest housing. The Hayles family were particularly energetic and really put Arcadia on the map by establishing a sea-side resort famous everywhere within and without this continent.

There were other interesting things going on at Magnetic Island in the early days, too. There were gold mines over there; at least there was talk of them. One was around Ned Lee's Creek and one not too far away from it. The one around Ned Lee's Creek was operated by Dr Sparks, a medico from Townsville; he called it 'The Dot' after his wife Dorothy. He didn't have much luck. The other one was called Anderson's Mine, run by Mr Anderson. Mr Anderson was a typical old miner and had to work hard. He would lower an oil drum bucket and then descend the mine by ladder, fill the bucket and return by ladder and retrieve the filled bucket with a machine called a windlass. On occasion I recall, he had accumulated quite a large stockpile and was very nervous that his visitors might remove what might be a souvenir to them, but his bread and butter to him.

Eventually, enough families had settled in all the bays for a school to be built for the Island's children population. I remember there was a fair bit of talk for the need of a school when it was built it was an exciting time for the Island's children, all of whom attended, some climbed over-mountain-side tracks to attend Picnic Bay School. Two more schools were eventually built, one at Nelly Bay and the other at Horseshoe.

It basically became the ritual for people to mention Magnetic Island any time they mentioned Townsville. Townsville was where all the business happened, but Magnetic Island was where people came to relax, to enjoy themselves, and to forget the hardships of city life.