

History of SBYC

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Every good story has a beginning, and it is important to begin this one with an early history of Sunshine Bay. For the last 30 years, Sunshine Bay has been a beloved refuge for many sailors, but few know the secrets of its interesting past and the significance of this site in the local and nautical history of Alberta.

Sometime not long after Alberta was granted provincial status in September 1905, the Canadian Department of National Defense Naval Corps set up a sailor training school right here at Sunshine Bay. To become a sailor in those days, all you need to know how to do was to swim 100 feet.

The Edmonton Wisemen's (Yisemens?) Club, a predecessor of the YMCA, took over the site and buildings at some point. Ownership was then passed over to the YMCA who established Camp Kewayden. Existing artifacts help to prove the existence of Kewayden during WW1. The Camp benefited from inheriting a legacy of buildings from the Naval Corps. A young Gil Cook attended camp there in 1945. While he would become very well acquainted with the site in later years, he fondly remembers an arch at the end of the laneway, a dining hall, chapel, craft shack, 16-17 cabins, the camp caretaker's house, cabins for the nurse and counselors and a concrete washhouse. However, in those days the morning drill at camp was to get out of bed and go directly into the lake to bath. Unlike today, the water of Lake Wabamun was crystal clear.

Today, if you look around closely, you will see some of the tangible remains of this history. The old chapel site remains a peaceful, and almost, sacred space flanked by a huge cross that still rises majestically out of the overgrown bush and bramble. All

you need to do is explore just south of the SBYC parking lot and west of our trailers. Our old Clubhouse is one of the cabins- of wartime prefab cedar building assembled of 4 x 8 bolted sections. While other buildings from the Camp were dispersed to various other locations, many others still remain close by at the Cook residence.

Sunshine Bay obviously made a lasting impression on Gil, because in 1978, he purchased the foreshore and a good portion of adjacent land surrounding Sunshine Bay- all the way out to *White Whale Point*. White Whale Point, now more affectionately known as *Gil's Point*, was aptly named for the huge white fish that existed before the advent of commercial fishing on Wabamun.

Before we lead into the beginnings of Sunshine Bay Sailing Club, you might be interested to know that this was not the first site to be considered for a new marina on Lake Wabamun. In 1978, a non-profit organization by the name of Westwind Marina Limited was established with the purpose of creating a new marina to accommodate approximately 100 boats. The new marina would be located on the south side of Lake Wabamun immediately east of the Sundance Meadows area (close to the Sundance Power Plant. The opportunity existed to lease a quarter section of land from Calgary Power for what even then was a very reasonable annual rate. This initial group of dedicated individuals consisted of Blaine Benson, Sheldon Chandler, John Hill, Doug Watson, Fred Neubert and Karl Braun. By the end of April 1979 the membership of share subscribers had expanded to 21, including several names that would end up on the Sunshine Bay roster such as John Hill, Doug Watson, Gordon Coulman and someone named David Rogers. In 1980 more would follow suit, including John Praetzel who is known to many on the lake, and John Manning, who will become the first commodore of Sunshine Bay Sailing Club.

A major amount of work was done by the core individuals in the application to the County of Parkland for a development permit, the application to the Department of the Environment, and in the design and financial planning of the marina. Despite significant efforts and appeals, the approval from the County for development was

never achieved. In the fall of 1980, funds held in trust for the purchase of shares were returned to the subscribers.

It is also of interest that in the summer of 1979, discussions had taken place regarding Westwind Marina acquiring a half interest in "Lake Wabamun Marina and Campsite Ltd., commonly referred to as Klaus's Marina. However, even if the group were to acquire a half interest, this proposal would only have allowed for 30 boats and the channel into the marina was far too shallow for many of the boats in the Club even at that time.

As often occurs in life, when one door closes, another one is about to open. John Manning, one of the members of the Westwind group, was a fellow who had a considerable vested interest in the sport of sailing. Manning owned Sunburst Sail Craft that was located near the Sunwapta Studios on Stony Plain Road west of Edmonton. Sunburst Sail Craft carried a variety of sail craft of different sizes such as Edels 540's, 665's, Tanzers 22's, and rowing kayaks for a distributor out of Calgary.

Manning also ran a sailing school at Mulhurst Bay on Pigeon Lake. As his class of small sailing craft used for instruction expanded, so did his occupation of the public beach. That did not go over so well with the local council or residents. He was equally unhappy when he was asked to leave in 1980.

While commiserating with his good friend of a number of years, Gil Cook, it was suggested that they build a marina on the piece of property at Sunshine Bay adjacent to where the Cook family had just completed building a new house.

John and the remnants of the Westwind Group organized the financing to build an access road and parking lot in 1980. Gil used his caterpillar tractor to transform a "gooey, muddy swamp" into what would become the present foreshore. A long-established neighbouring yacht club is credited with coining the handle "swamp dwellers" to the new occupants of Sunshine Bay. However, as Gil fondly remembers,

it was not long before the swamp disappeared and what evolved was a “*quiet and very pretty setting soon proving itself to be an excellent natural harbour*”.

The construction of the Club continued through the following winter. Holes were carved in the ice and clean engine blocks and caterpillar tracks were dropped for anchors for mooring; and SBYC began its first season on moorings.

While the new arrivals to what would become SBYC were sure to be delighted with the opportunity to enjoy Lake Wabamun, not everyone who resided in the Bay was thrilled. The official first day of the sailing season occurred with the arrival of a flotilla of new boats to Wabamun Lake and Sunshine Bay all at the same time. That very night, some disgruntled neighbours took it upon themselves to swim over to each boat and cut the mooring lines. In the morning, all were found beached or stuck in the mud on the southeast shore. This came as quite a surprise for member, Bob Bear, who happened to have spent the night aboard with his 4-year old son. The RCMP were called in to investigate but were unsuccessful in laying charges. The involvement of the police seemed to have little effect because a second, although unsuccessful, attempt to cut loose the boats occurred a month later.

The new sailing residents of Sunshine Bay did not stay idle over the winter months. Application was made to the Alberta Ministry of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. On March 11 1981, the newly formed Sunshine Bay Sailing Club was granted a Certificate of Incorporation under the Companies Act. The new Club began with approximately 45 shareholders.

The first installation of docks occurred during the second season. These docks would establish the present day east dock, but the main spine was much shorter than it is today. The docks consisted of 4 long 20' fingers; the rest of the slips were shorter at 15'. In the year following, an extension to 20' could be purchased for \$150; and eventually all fingers were extended to 20'

Upon reflection of those very early days, one of the founding members, Gary Johns, remembers,

"There was no gate, only bumpy rip-rap for a parking lot and a narrow dirt path to the water's edge. There wasn't even a toilet! Once the docks were in and anchored (now that was a hard job!), we got to work to make the Club a little more friendly. I brought out a picnic table. Before long we had a fire pit, a port-a-potty and a barbeque. Gravel transformed the path to the newly established docks".

Other outstanding recollections included one cold wet day when the members burnt down the old outhouses and got into plenty of hot water with Gil, and the antics and stories of one Mr. Colin Boon. Ilene Larson also remembers the seasons of the early 1980s when an infestation of tent caterpillars marched through much of the bush land of northern Alberta. Caterpillars literally dripped from the trees along the path to the docks.

Occasionally, some neighbours would express their discontent as the Club developed and became more substantial. Docks were buzzed and sprayed with water skis and jet boats. Eventually with time, however, more peaceful relations would prevail at Sunshine Bay.

In the early days of SBYC, the standard for boats was different than it is today. Richard and Ilene Larson were the proud owners of a Siren 17 when they were members the Edmonton Yacht Club in 1979. When John Manning showed up one day with his new Tanzer 22 and took everyone out for a ride, the gang was sure impressed. *Wow! What a boat!* Richard recalls that the popular boats of the day were Edel 540's (18 ft), Edel 665's (22 ft) and Tanzer 22's. Tanzer 7.5's were the largest boats around. There were also a few Mirages and Kirbys. Richard and Ilene soon upgraded to an Edel 540, thanks to John Manning and Sunburst Sail Craft. In fact, Sunburst was the source of a good majority of original SBYC boats.

Sailing is not exactly a sport for the faint of heart. As many who have taken an active role in the Club know, neither is maintaining the site. Sailors are typically hearty in spirit and often involved in taking calculated risks. Climbing masts, craning boats and docks, facing down fierce storms and harnessing strong winds are all part of the deal. While considering that in the past 30 years, SBYC has been fortunate to not have experienced much misfortune, there has been tragedy and some very close calls.

One fine sailing day in 1990, Bruce MacLock and companions came across a Tanzer 26 adrift and no skipper. It was not long before they made the sad discovery of the body of Bob LeMasurier floating in the water. Both Bob and Bruce were founding members and so knew each other well. The rescuers stood guard while they waited for the RCMP to arrive. Some believe that Bob had a heart attack and fell in. Other wondered if this was the result of an accidental jibe. It was a sad event for all.

As more anchors were required for docks, the practice of setting engine blocks through the winter ice was still practiced during the late 1980's. Anything that would carve the thick ice was used to provide access. Chainsaws, pick axes and shovels. Gil would then drive his tractor out on the ice to move the blocks. One winter, member Hans Leve, went through the ice, shovel and all. He hit the bottom of the lake and used his shovel to push his way up to the surface again. A mad scramble to his rescue saved the day, preventing what could surely have been a tragedy otherwise. Another member, Dave Mussel, also had a close call when he went through the ice at another time.

John (JJ) Jarvis, a colleague and friend of John Manning, has the dubious honour of being the only person connected to SBYC in 30 years to turtle and sink his boat. JJ sailed a Sunburst-owned Edel 540- the former boat of members Judy and Bob Jones. One morning, after enjoying a champagne breakfast hosted at SBYC, JJ and a few friends decided to go for a sail. However, while making a hard tack, one crewmember tripped and fell into the spinnaker, while another inside of the cabin

fell below. Being a short-keeled, beamy boat, the sudden displacement of weight to one side was enough to turtle the Edel and over it went. Everyone was able to get off board without injury and a nearby motorboat was soon to the rescue. The Edel could be righted by pulling it perpendicular from mid-ship. However, the angle of the tow was off and instead of flipping the boat upright, the movement drove water into the cabin and down it went. As Richard Larson suggests, the only other Edel known to sink occurred in the English Channel. So, this event was truly an accomplishment. However, this story does not end there. The next winter, an ice fisherman bore a hole in the ice, and guess what he landed? A sailboat! Determined to exercise his salvage rights, he first had to do battle with an insurance company. But, in the end, he got his prize- a waterlogged boat.

While these few tales of the early days only scrapes the surface of the history of SBYC, they do help to serve as a reminder of what it has taken to create this wonderful place that we have all come to love- dedication, hard work, commitment, a strong sense of community and the common link that sustains the ties that bind- a fully entrenched love of the sport.

Of those initial 45 shareholders:

- Two remain as active members- the Larsons and Rogers.
- John Manning, Gary Johns, Bruce Maclock and Bob Thompson, and others have all moved to the West Coast.
- Bob LcMasurier, Gordon and Glenna Coulman, Colin and June Boon, Leo Chelkowski and Edna Thompson have crossed the bar
- The others have moved on

We all owe a debt of gratitude to those first members whose diligence, hard work, dedication and perseverance has created a legacy that remains 30 years later.