

# THE CANOE SPORT IN AUSTRALIA

*By R.N Chenoweth. Hon Secretary Australian Canoe Federation 1949.*

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Canoeing in Australia is now established on a very firm footing, and is increasing in popularity, both in touring on the rivers, lakes and bays of the Commonwealth, and on a competitive basis, as practiced mainly in Victoria.

With the formation of the Australian Canoe Federation, on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1949 at a meeting in Sydney, with representatives of the Victorian Amateur Canoe Association, and the New South Wales Association of Canoe Clubs in attendance, we are now in a position to link Australian canoeists, with devotees of the sport in other lands, through the medium of the International Canoe Federation.

The South Australian Amateur Canoe Association and Queensland Canoe Club, are also supporting the Australian Canoe Federation, but were unable to be present at the foundation meeting. As yet there is now news of organized activity in the sport, from any of the other states, where it is probably practiced by individual efforts.

A brief history of the sport as it progressed in each state, should be the way to follow the development of canoeing since the first records from Victoria in the early 1900's.

## **Victorian Amateur Canoe Association**

Canoes were first introduced to Victoria in the early 1900's when several Canadian Canoes were imported for private use. From these, others were built locally as more people became interested in the sport.

In 1912 the Victorian Canoe Club was formed, and continued as the only Canoe Club until 1919, when they were followed by Fairfield Boomerang, Hawthorn, Hawthorn Glen, Twickenham and Maribyrnong (later Essendon) Canoe Clubs.

From these clubs the V.A.C.A was first formed in 1920, in an effort to bring the members together by inter-club competition in canoe racing, and a general pooling of information on canoeing.

This first attempt did not succeed, and functioned for only a few months, the Clubs themselves met with various degrees of success while some went out of existence altogether.

More clubs however took place, and in 1924 the Elwood Sea Canoe Club canoed into the picture.

In 1926 another attempt was made to bring the clubs together, and the V.A.C.A was reformed, Fairfield, Essendon, Elwood Sea, Hawthorn, Hawthorn Glen, Twickenham and the Brighton Sea Canoe Clubs, were the affiliated clubs at this period, the Victorian Canoe Club still going strong, but on their own. This time proved more successful, and another club, Burnley Canoe Club linked itself with the V.A.C.A in 1931.

Elwood and Brighton Sea Canoe Clubs withdrew from the V.A.C.A in 1934, transferring their activities solely to sailing, and linking with yachting organizations.

Hawthorn, Hawthorn Glen and Twickenham Clubs met with disaster in 1934 when a record flood in the Yarra Valley wrecked the club buildings. The Victorian Canoe Club was another that also lost their buildings in this flood, and they also went out of existence after a run of 22 years.

Melbourne Canoe Club was founded in 1936 and became a member of the V.A.C.A and another club, Riversdale, had a short life, starting in 1940 and ending in 1943. This club did not join the V.A.C.A.

With World War 2 in progress, and most clubs finding it hard to keep going, the V.A.C.A went into recess in 1941.

1945 saw the revival of fresh interest in the canoe sport when Rudder Grange Canoe Club was formed at Rudder Grange Boat House, on the Yarra. This effort was closely followed by the renewal activities at Fairfield,

Melbourne and Essendon Clubs, with still another new club starting at Studley Park Boat House in 1946, also taking their name from their headquarters.

At a meeting held at Rudder Grange on August the 22<sup>nd</sup>. 1946, The V.A.C.A was once more put into operation, with Studley Park, Melbourne, Essendon, Fairfield and Rudder Grange as the affiliated clubs, some of the pre-war clubs not reforming.

Another club started activity in May 1947, calling themselves the Victorian Canoe Touring Club, they also joined the V.A.C.A in June 1947. This club made up mainly of the Youth Hostel Association membership, became a section of Y.H.A in September, 1947 and changed their name to the Youth Hostel Association Canoe Club.

The most recent club to start in Victoria is the Yarra Valley Canoe Club, forming in January 25<sup>th</sup> 1949 and affiliating with the V.A.C.A on February 22<sup>nd</sup> 1949.

The Studley Park club has gone into recess from lack of support and activity from the club which was never very strong, has slowed to a standstill. Of the present clubs only Fairfield and Essendon are equipped with their own building. Both these being constructed on a voluntary basis, both in finance and labour, by the clubs members, Fairfield holding a full title to land and building, and Essendon owning the building which is erected on council park lands.

The Fairfield project started in June 1925, and the building completed and occupied in January, 1926. Essendon started their effort in 1934 and finally occupied this building in 1936.

The activities of the modern canoeist follows closely that of their fore-runners. Competition in racing events over distances of 440 yards to 10 miles are held for singles, pairs and fours paddlers, with points allotted for places obtained in these events. These points totalled for the season, the club having the highest score being declared the premier club.

Canoes used for these events are of the Canadian type, eighteen feet long for singles and pairs, and twenty-six feet in length for fours paddlers. With the formation of the Australian Canoe Federation, and prospects of Interstate and International events in the sport, the eighteen foot class racing canoes will soon become obsolete, and canoes used will conform with the rules and specifications of the International Canoe Federation.

To date, the Kayak class canoe, which is very popular in competitions overseas, has not been adopted, but the time should not be far distant when these craft will also figure in V.A.C.A events.

Combined tours on the waterways of the State, is also a part of the programme of the V.A.C.A, some trips taking up to eighty canoes and one hundred members. The majority of these cruises however, are done by small parties within the various clubs, and total many miles each season. Here again the Canadian type is used almost exclusively, with the most popular size, a model sixteen foot in length, with an average beam of thirty-two inches.

With the chance of placing canoeing on an International basis, the V.A.C.A is looking for a rapid growth of popularity in the sport in the new future.

### **New South Wales Association of Canoe Clubs**

Records concerning canoeing in N.S.W prior to the formation of clubs, are hazy and indefinite, but some outstanding achievements are worthy of note.

In 1911, Dr. Dark-now of Katoomba, canoed the Shoalhaven River from the Endrick River to Nowra. At a later date he was followed by Arthur Lee Hunt, of Goulburn, who started from Callan's Ford which is considerably further upstream than the Endrick River.

Arthur Lee Hunt can rightly claim to be the outstanding pioneer canoeist of the state, because he also canoed the Murrumbidgee - Murray system from Canberra to Adelaide with Harrison, and with Gray, he pioneered the Wollondilly - Warragamba - Nepean - Hawksbury system from Goulburn to Brooklyn, both these trips taking place between 1928 and 1932. In 1937 he topped his efforts by conquering 300 miles of the toughest river in

Australia, the Snowy, from Jindabyne to Marlo, with Stan Hanson of Nowra. This trip took over three months and the descent was from 2,824 feet down to sea level.

In 1933 Gordon Doherty and Tom Connor canoed 1300 miles along the Murray River from Albury to Murray Bridge.

The first Canoe Club in New South Wales was the Chelmsford (later Botany) Canoe Club of some thirty members who met on a purely social basis with a varied fleet of galvanized iron canoes. They only lasted a few years prior to cessation owing to the depression.

The Woronora Canoe Association commenced organized racing activities just after the depression. The handicaps were largely based upon the latest addition to their fleet, for they finally developed to the point where there was little difference in design and speed between their two-man Kayak Racing Canoe and the one man sculling shell. Their membership rose over the hundred prior to the war, but activities ceased in 1946.

In August 1935, the River Canoe Club of NSW was founded by Paddy Pallin, and each year membership has increased to the present total of one hundred and sixty nine. This club almost exclusively uses the Canadian Canoe for individual and club trips down any of our many coastal and inland rivers, and consequently many pioneering trips from the Queensland border right down to the Murray and out as far as the Darling, stand to the credit of its members.

As a result of their experience they have a comprehensive set of over 60 canoeists maps, showing every detail of concern to canoeists. Their club trips are well attended, the record being 68 canoeists in 33 canoes on a trip through the Warragamba Gorge in 1938, just after the construction of the temporary 40 foot weir. It would be quite safe to say that in the fourteen years of their existence, their members have covered 90% of canoeable rivers in NSW.

The Jolly Roger Canoe Club existed for a short period in 1936 on Sydney Harbour, and mainly indulged in harbour cruises. The upper Hawksbury Canoe Club functioned on a social basis at Windsor with a mixed fleet until the war compelled them to terminate.

On 20<sup>th</sup> May 1949, Ted Riley founded the Cruising Canoe Club to cater for those who prefer open water in kayaks.

The Youth Hostel Canoe Club has just been formed and all clubs in NSW are members of the NSW Association of Canoe Clubs, which in turn is a member of the Australian Canoe Federation.

From these small beginnings, interests in canoeing in NSW is growing rapidly, and soon it will be impossible to do a pioneering trip on NSW rivers

### **Queensland Canoe Club**

The Queensland Canoe Club was founded in July 1947, with eight members. Kayak was the most prominent canoe at this time, and now the club beginning it's third year, they have a membership of twenty-one, and nine canoes of the Canadian type in their fleet, and two more under construction.

The club does not comprise all canoes in the state, and many can be found still, as private and independent owners use them on the rivers.

Prior to this club's formation, it seems that there was no organised efforts in the sport, although we have some news of canoe activity.

In approximately 1924 the canoe of the district, mostly Canadians, were active under the auspices of the Oxley Sailing Club. In 1925 a group of canoeists known as the Delaware Canoe Club were housed in a shed at the mouth of the Oxley Creek, some of these members belonging to the present club. Another group operated from Clancy's shed at Indooroopilly, which was also the headquarters of the Q.C.C, in 1927.

### *South Australian Amateur Canoe Association*

It is not known when canoeing was first introduced to South Australia, and although there were many canoes in use around the bay and rivers, no attempt to form organised groups was made until August 1948, when the South Australian Youth Hostel Association started operations in Adelaide.

The Youth Hostel Association Canoe Club was formed in conjunction with this movement, and to this club the credit of looking ahead and forming the S.A.A.C.A., which took shape in June 1949, with only one club affiliated.

They did not have long to wait before another club was formed in July 1949, calling themselves the Dulwich Kayak Club. This club, formed from members of a youth group of the Churches of Christ, uses mainly Kayaks as the name implies.

Still another club followed suit in August 1949, when the Adelaide Y.W.C.A. Canoe Club was founded. This club is rather unique in Australia, as it is composed solely of women members.

October 1949, activity in another part of the state, this at Mount Gambier, from members of the National Fitness Youth Club.

In the short time they have been functioning the S.A.A.C.A. has made remarkable progress, mainly due to the drive and organising of W. Morrow, the secretary for the State Association. As yet not much has been done on a competitive basis, but S.A have hopes in this direction, and in the meantime are training their members in the handling of their craft on the rivers and bays.

Books on the subject of canoeing are few in number, more so those covering the sport in Australia. The first "Canoes and their Construction" was published in 1937 by the River Canoe Club of N.S.W. John Fairfax, a foundation member of the same club collected a number of his short canoeing stories under the title of "Run-O-Waters" and this was published by John Sands Ltd. early in 1948. Towards the end of the same year "Canoe in Australia" by Major Raven Hart, the celebrated author and canoeist, also made its appearance.

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### *Note*

This document was originally compiled by Ross Chenoweth, co founder of the Australian Canoe Federation. He was the first member of the "Rudder Grange Canoe Club" and later formed the "Ivanhoe Canoe Club" which later became the Ivanhoe and City of Northcote Canoe Club.

Ross Chenoweth is a life member of the Victorian Canoe Association.

This document was collected for Australian Canoeists by Fred Jordan, Life Member, Essendon Canoe Club.

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