

Surf Life Saving Australia - 1

Australia is famous across the globe for its beach culture which includes the popular sport of 'Ironman' and 'Ironwoman'. Today, this sport is a combination of swimming, board paddling, ski paddling and running. It was originally created as a way to keep lifesavers fit and develop their rescue skills.

Surf Life Saving Australia includes thousands of men and women who volunteer their time to keep us safe at the beach. Over the years, more than 600 000 people have been rescued from our oceans. The most famous operation took place on 6 February 1938.

Black Sunday

After the day's events at Sydney's Bondi Beach, 6 February 1938 will go down in history as 'Black Sunday'. Never before have conditions changed so quickly, requiring such a massive rescue operation. Almost 300 people had been swept out to sea by an unexpected series of freak waves.

Thanks to 80 members of the Surf Bathing Association of New South Wales, using eight 'reel and harness' reels, it took just 20 minutes to clear everyone from the water. Some life savers were on duty but most just happened to be at the beach, taking part in a club competition.

Sadly, five lives were lost but the death toll would have been much higher without the incredible efforts of these amazing men.

The day will be remembered with sadness for those who perished, but it is a tribute to the surf life savers who responded so quickly and with such strength and proficiency that so many were saved.



For over one hundred years, thousands of volunteers have patrolled stretches of beach, keeping a keen eye on all swimmers. Since 1910, generations of lifesavers have trained hard to achieve the Bronze Medallion award, proving they have reached the required standard of skill and fitness to be a part of a rescue operation.

Surf-bathing became popular in the first decade of the 20th century when laws which had banned daylight bathing were lifted. At that time, not many people were good swimmers but the dangers of the ocean were just as they are today.

As more people took to the water, it was inevitable that tragedy would eventually strike. The number of drownings and unsuccessful rescue attempts highlighted the need for competent, efficient rescuers to look out for people in distress and to work together as a rescue team.

The first surf lifesaving clubs were established on the beaches around Sydney in 1907. At the end of that year, the Sydney clubs and other groups from further afield, formed the association which today is known as Surf Life Saving Australia.

In the summer of 1923-24, patrolled beaches were first marked - blue and white flags for safe areas, red for dangerous areas. Since 1980, all SLSA-patrolled beaches in Australia have used the horizontally divided yellow and red flags we know today.

Everyone in the surf lifesaving community, from the 6-year-old Nippers to the seasoned competitors and regular lifesavers, has contributed to the vibrant beach culture that much of the Australian population can enjoy today.