

IN THEIR WORDS

Audrey Critchlow tells us - The 2009/10 O'Neill Coldwater Surfing Classic

If you have ever wondered what it would be like to hold an international event in a remote, regional location, look no further than the experience of Marrawah's O'Neill Coldwater International Surf Classic.

Audrey Critchlow, the 2009/10 on-ground, O'Neill Coldwater Classic and local resident event coordinator, provides a fascinating insight into the community aspirations and challenges around the Coldwater Classic in our new on-going conversational Q&A format series -

What were the infrastructure challenges presented by CWC and how did this affect the community?

Accommodation

"The inaugural Cold Water Classic was held at Marrawah from 23 – 28 March 2009. There was 6 months lead-in time from proposition to commencement of the event. Marrawah/Arthur River/ Redpa area has under 350 residents. The event brought in over 220 'outsiders' including 75 staff and 144 competitors from all over the planet. Staff included ASP judges, IT specialists, water and land photographers, international film crew, webcast crew, paramedic, jet-ski operators, the list goes on.

Staging the event in a location that has little infrastructure was a logistical challenge. Whilst there are a number of commercial accommodation properties in Marrawah and Arthur River, finding sufficient beds for 75 staff was tricky enough, let alone all the competitors as well. Community associations provided all meals for the staff as well as day time meals for the competitors and spectators.

The event was an outstanding success in every respect – it ran smoothly, the staff and competitors loved the west coast of Tassie and the local community (without whose support the event could not have run) thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

Another great example of community involvement was through the provision of accommodation. It was a necessity, due to the nature of work and long hours, that all staff be accommodated as close as possible to the event site. Despite booking every available accommodation property in the Marrawah/Arthur River area, there were still insufficient beds for the staff. This was resolved by renting private holiday houses/shacks. However, it still left 144 competitors who also want to be as close as possible to the surf to be able to practice and familiarise themselves with the conditions.

In 2009, quite a number of competitors chose to rent motor homes, however, another option that presented itself was 'home hosting'. The 'pioneers' of this were Max and Christel Whish-Wilson who hosted 12 (yes 12) young lads at their Bluff Hill holiday property last year. This was organised after I received a call from a friend who now shapes surfboards in France. He was hoping to organise accommodation close to the event for approximately 6 members of the European Quiksilver team. In the end, Max and Christel, who are renowned for their hospitality, provided bed and meals for a group of 12 who came from Spain, France, Tahiti, Brazil and more. They were ably assisted by 2 couples. As it transpired, Bluff Reef turned on its magic and the first and final days of the event were held there, with M & C's home used as 'event central'. For months afterwards we talked about the wonderful experiences that were had in their home during that week.

Fast forward 12 months. This time there were 17 in-house guests. And I think that's the limit. Max and Christel best describe their experience (see Attachment 1). What I do know is that these young lads who are all famous in their own countries, were bowled over by the warmth and care shown to them on the west coast of Tasmania. Reading the comments in the guest book brought tears to my eyes.

In 2010, more people chose to 'home host'. Following are some lovely examples of their experiences:

Tumma and his family hosted 6 Hawaiians who stayed at his quite remote shack North of Bluff Hill Point. They were fed crayfish and abalone (unheard of in Hawaii) and were able to walk onto the beach and have fun surfing little waves not normally considered by others. Tumma's brother even drove slowly along the beach yelling "taxi" so the boys could catch a lift back to the shack.

Max.R wasn't too keen on the event being held in Marrawah in case it brought too many outsiders into the surf. Close to the commencement date I was receiving calls from competitors (with limited funds) seeking accommodation near as possible to the event site. Max was one of the members of the community who agreed to provide a few beds at

his shack. One of the young gentlemen to stay was Stuart Kennedy – who won the event!! Max is as proud as a papa. We gave him an event banner that now flutters tall in his front yard.

Donald had a few boys staying with him at Bluff Hill Point. I asked him one day how it was all going. “I got two firsts and a second today” he said with a wide smile.

Hosting gave community members an opportunity to be actively involved in the event”.

Catering

“If the event had been held in a location 30 mins out of Hobart, virtually all services would have been provided by commercial enterprises. However in the case of the CWC at Marrawah, these were not available. A good example of this was the catering. Subsequently, most meals for staff were provided by the non profit community organisations as follows: breakfast by the ‘Memorial Hall Committee’, morning and afternoon tea by the church ladies and lunches by the Redpa Primary School Parents and Friends Association (see Attachment 2). The Redpa Football Club operated a ‘takeaway food van’ all day at the event to provide for competitors and spectators.

Other than the dinner caterer (a Smithton family), all man hours were on a volunteer basis, with some community members even taking time from their annual holidays to be able to assist. Bearing in mind, the volunteers were a collection of community members who agreed to give their time for the benefit of fund-raising for their particular group. In this second year, a number of volunteers did so simply because they wanted to join in after hearing of the fun and camaraderie in the first year. Numerous people offered their time for ‘one day’ and then returned daily for the duration of the event – even though it meant early mornings and some cases long days”.

How did the event contribute in building community relationships and breaking barriers?

“It brought people working and laughing alongside one another who would normally never cross paths other than at the local shop/post office. I have now been told of a number of cases where people working together have become life-long friends despite being totally different characters. There is great motivation to be involved again next year.

Behind the scenes, people were contributing by doing such glamorous jobs as cleaning the food van daily, mopping the floors at the hall, dragging the portable toilets back and forth because their vehicle had a tow bar, or carting items from Smithton to Marrawah on their way home from work.

How did the community benefit from the event?

“On a purely financial point of view, each group fulfilled their annual fund-raising needs (and more) in the one week of the event. Further, the funds came from outside the district rather than their own pockets. This has meant security and the ability to plan. As Stafford Heres says in his letter to me, all these groups “are the life blood of any rural community”. Not only did the association members enjoy the camaraderie that came from working as a team, but at the end of the day, they shared a common purpose of raising funds for activities and facilities that are available to the community for the remainder of the year.

“Ned Hine (our ex-mayor’s wife) has said what has been said to me so many times in the past 3 weeks – ‘It brings everyone together. People who would normally never get together did’. With a number of staff returning, faces were recognised thus building relationships outside the district. Here the money raised went back into the community. Yes, the Marrawah Memorial Hall will now have new windows and door. ‘The community would have done it anyway, but the money came from elsewhere’.

Was there anything that struck you as particularly memorable and authentic to the essence of the Marrawah community?

There is no question that the footage and images being broadcast out of the event were spectacular - they certainly showcased the beauty of the area – competitors and staff alike were blown away by the rawness of Marrawah. However, aside from natural beauty, the most common theme that ran through the comments of both staff and competitors was how hospitable and friendly the locals were. One comment made to me was that later in the year when surfing event locations were discussed, Hawaii was noted for its waves, Scotland for its castles, Tassie for the friendliness of the people.

As Sam Lamiroy (competitor and web cast commentator) said to me “it made everyone feel good”.The involvement of the community allowed everyone to not just see the area but to ‘experience’ it.The staff and competitors really experienced the true essence of the district. You cannot replicate that artificially. One of Tasmania’s greatest assets is the people themselves.

Were there any barriers overcome, perceptions and behaviours changed as a result of the event?

“As regards to old attitudes and prejudices - this has been the most amazing change in Marrawah. I think there has been a long held attitude from the older members of the community in particular that surfers were non-contributors. This stems back to the days when the surfers were considered hippies, or dole bludgers etc. Very grating for hard working people. Also as surfers did not tend to mix with the farmers, bushies etc, the perceptions didn't change easily.

However -

One morning when I arrived at 'event central' (the Memorial Hall) I was asked by the most non-surfing volunteer "who is this chick?" I did laugh! After the inaugural event, where the behaviour of the competitors was impeccable, I was continually told what wonderful respectful young men they were. I was genuinely shocked as to how many community members started following 'the boys' or 'their boys' on tour by internet. Even last week, I was quite surprised when a certain member of the community commented on how bad the surf was during the Ripcurl Pro at Bells Beach. I would never have thought that this person would be remotely interested. This would have been unheard of 2 years ago.

There is no doubt that the event has dispelled any old negative attitudes to surfing/surfers. This is terrific as a good proportion of people who have chosen to move here in the past 20 years, have done so for the surf. It has also given the existing non-surfing population another reason to have pride in their area.

At the end of the day, there are always some who don't agree with the event. Apart from the odd guy who doesn't want the status quo in the surf to change, I am only aware of one couple who have fears that the 'retreat' they have discovered will become exposed to the world. Change - a scary word for some. I must say however, that had the behaviour and attitude of the staff and competitors been different, then so definitely would that of the community also.

We have deliberately not advertised the event as a spectator event as this raises people management issues - especially in sensitive areas such as West Point Reserve. Last year, even a lot of Circular Head locals were unaware the event was being held. This changed somewhat this year due to word of mouth - but it's easy to manage as these visitors came in a steady stream and had their own accommodation to go home to.

I hope that the majority of the community continue to gain as much joy from this event as they currently do. It has been a fabulous morale booster for a lot of people.

Bar one or two surfers in the community, most guys are adopting a "wait and see" attitude as to whether the event creates an influx of surfing visitors. Whilst really enjoying the spectacle of the event (the highest standard of surfing possible on their home waves) they are also quietly hoping that it doesn't create a deluge of visitors over the summer months. No-one likes crowds in the water. Also, in a small community of surfers it has been easy to communicate the 'surfing etiquette' of this area with one another. Not so easy when surfers come from busy areas and then adopt the 'competitive' approach when they arrive here, even though it's not necessary.

A couple have expressed concern about the webcast facility which we had this year as it gave 'real time' viewing of the event rather than just a post-event assessment in one of the surfing magazines. People could actually see the quality of the waves - and yes the waves were good - better than many other locations on the tour.

Believe you me, I will know if the natives start getting restless.

What are the plans for the future and the likely legacy of the O'Neill Coldwater Classic?

“As the event co-ordinator for the Cold Water Classic, I was in the privileged position of being in communication with all parties involved in the event – management, staff, community, competitors and spectators.

Would other types of events achieve the same success? This is a difficult question. Surfing is certainly high profile and many people identify with it, and its lifestyle, whether or not they surf themselves. There is also intense media coverage of the World Tour.

As regards to future development. Would I change anything? At the moment no! It works. The size fits. Everyone is happy. The district is benefiting financially. The footage and images coming out are outstanding.

A different event at a different time of the year - absolutely. Just not in December/January when everyone's flat out with hay and silage. Ha ha.

In a small community it's important to acknowledge everybody's contribution – big or small.

In the case of the CWC we were fortunate that as O'Neill is also a clothing company, and 'uniforms' were provided to staff, I was able to give jumpers, hats, beanies etc as 'thankyou' gifts after the event. This also extended to stickers and posters to children of volunteers.

The involvement with Redpa Primary School is important as the kids taking ownership of the event builds up a new generation of cultural understanding.

Marrawah is a community of very capable hardworking people. It's part of the culture and history of this community.

With an event like this, everyone learns what they're capable of – both personally and as a team. It then gives them confidence to be able to apply it to different situations and types of events.

It's also a good way of revealing the infrastructure that is/isn't available in the community.

For me personally, it's been a great experience in getting to know the community. I was a Hobart girl who married a fisherman and therefore moved to where he worked and played. After many years of very low profile, the event required me to liaise with the community who now know a little more about what I do.

If you'd like a competitor's perspective of his time in Tas, click on to: www.aritzaranburu.com and go to the April archives. Scroll down until you see the photo of a group of people. The introduction is in Spanish but you'll get the idea. Aritz is one of Max and Christel's boys. The blog called Tasmania 'Bonus' is of the carrot cake cooking lesson. All in Spanish.

Attachment I

Max and Christel Whish-Wilson

WHERE DO WE START?

With the help of 4 of our very good friends, we prepared our holiday home for the arrival of the surfies from all over the globe. Including – Brazil, Tahiti, France, Spain, Portugal, The Reunion and Indonesia.

The boys (we actually call them our boys, as they are now family) arrived all hours of the day and night, along with their belongings and surfboards which were stuffed in the tiniest bit of room which they could find inside their rented vehicles. OUR boys immediately made themselves quite @ home.

We were expecting 12 but somehow – when the door bell rings we get to work and make up another bed, ending up with 17 boys by the end of the week.

They enjoyed our cooking-eating all that was placed in front of them and even going back for seconds – especially dessert.

Boys kept themselves very busy playing 8 ball, table tennis, darts and attempting to figure out all the brain teasers we had on offer. BUT, watch out if you were beaten @ 8 ball as the shack rules differ slightly from other Tassie venues. Maxim – who is the World Junior Champion – soon found out the consequences when he lost to Alain. We cannot give out any more info, as – WHAT HAPPENS @ THE SHACK – STAYS @ THE SHACK. But we all got a real good laugh with the results.

I gave Aritz a cooking lesson on baking a Carrot Cake which was televised and appeared on Aritz's web site.

We could not ask for a better group of boys, so well mannered and always wanting to lend a hand.

Hopefully they will all return next year, so we can enjoy another week of laughter, love, friendship and fun with OUR boys.

Attachment 2

Sarah Cuthbertson, Principal Redpa Primary School

Impact of the Cold Water Classic for Redpa Primary

The Cold Water surfing event has resulted in a number of positive outcomes for our school.

Economic benefit – The school P&F have always been a highly active fundraising group and is well supported by the entire community. For the past two years they have catered lunches for the event. The greatest benefit of this involvement has been the opportunity to draw funds to the school from outside the community. Being a small district, our P&F have relied on community members year after year to support funding so it has been a welcome chance to source P&F funding from an alternative source.

Educational benefits – During the week students had an educational visit from two surfers involved in the competition to talk about their career and what it involved. We were able to discuss our current knowledge about surfing and children brainstormed many questions to ask prior to the visit. This experience exposed children to a less common occupation and was really informative. It provided an excellent opportunity for students to gain understanding of what it's like to be a professional athlete.

Students also prepared a range of questions for the film crew who also visited the school. For our kids to be able to talk with these people who have such diverse experiences has been invaluable in making connections to the wider world and possibilities open to them in the future.

During the week of the competition, our children came in contact with surfers from all around the world. Living here, our exposure to people from other cultures or who speak different languages is limited and the experience gives students an appreciation for cultural diversity.