

Victorian Heritage Database Report

BELLS BEACH SURFING RECREATION RESERVE



Location:

COASTAL RESERVE BELLS BEACH, SURF COAST SHIRE

Heritage Status / Level of Significance:

Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number: H2032

Listing Authority: VHR

Heritage Overlay Number: HO88

Statement of Significance:

What is significant?

Bells Beach Surfing Recreation Reserve, located about five kilometres southwest of Torquay, comprises a high concentration of quality surfing spots from Southside to Steps Reef including Centreside, Bells (Rincon, The Bowl) and Winki Pop (Uppers and Lower). Swells from the southern ocean slow and steepen over the reef

strewn shallows to form consistent, rideable waves and the surrounding environment provides excellent viewing from a natural amphitheatre. The roots of surfing in Victoria are in the Torquay/Surf Coast area beginning at Lorne in 1920. From as early as 1939 pioneer surfers from the Torquay Surf Lifesaving Club struggled to the inaccessible Bells Beach from the sea and the land until in 1960 Joe Sweeney, ex-Olympic wrestler and Torquay SLSC member, organised the bulldozing of an access track.

In January 1961 the first surfing event was held, and in 1962 the first annual Bells Beach Easter competition took advantage of the consistent autumn conditions and the full moon high tides. Photographs of the six metre waves for the 1965 competition were widely distributed and established Bells Beach's international reputation as a world class big wave venue such that surfers from Australia and around the world flocked to catch Bells boomers. In 1970 Bells Beach was the first Australian venue for the World Surfing Titles. In 1981 surfing professional Simon Anderson won the Bells Beach Easter competition in testing six metre swells on a radical three-finned Thruster performance enhancing board. This type of board has remained accepted internationally as the standard for high performance surfboards. Since 1991 the Bells Beach Easter competition has been recognised as the world's longest running surfing competition.

The physical development of Bells Beach has remained low key with a high value placed on the protection and regeneration of the indigenous landscape. The 'Wave' sculpture, the 'Spirit of Surfing' sandstone sculptures and the Koori mural by local artists are significant cultural markers. The creation of the Bells Beach Surfing Recreation Reserve (a world first) in 1973, the recognition of its environmental excellence, and even the creation of the Surf Coast Shire 1995 bear testimony to the special place of surfing and Bells Beach in Victorian social history.

How is it significant?

Bells Beach Surfing Recreation Reserve is of social and historical significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

Bells Beach Surfing Recreation Reserve is a landscape that is socially significant as an international icon of Australian surfing culture. Bells Beach Surfing Recreation Reserve is socially and historically significant as the location of the world's longest continuous running surf competition. The Bells Beach Easter competition has world-renown and in terms of prestige and aura is often referred to as "the Wimbledon of surfing".

Bells Beach Surfing Recreation Reserve has historic significance to the development of surfboard and wetsuit technology. The Bells Beach conditions led to important developments in the surfing industry which now makes the nearby town of Torquay the home to the multi-million dollar surf manufacturing industry, and the site of the headquarters of major surfing companies.

Heritage Study / Consultant	
Construction Date Range	
Architect / Designer	
Municipality	SURF COAST SHIRE
Other names	
Hermes number	12711
Property number	

This place/object may also be State heritage listed. Check the Victorian Heritage Database. For further details, contact the local Council or go to Planning Schemes Online