

THE STORY OF PITTWATER YHA



Photo Credit: North Sullivan

The bushland's native fauna and flora and the azure backdrop of Pittwater's bays have attracted YHA hostel users since World War II.

1940

Towlers Bay YHA was the first hostel to grace Pittwater. Towlers Bay was a corruption of the name, Bill Toler, who was a keen camper in the area. The Navy had originally used the building as sailors' quarters before it became a little-used boarding house. Early YHA member Paddy Pallin discovered the run-down property and recommended that YHA obtain the site.

Around 1943 YHA leased the building and volunteers made the hostel habitable. Bushwalkers and sailing enthusiasts often rested weary heads there after a day in the bush or on the water. At night camp fires glowed - sometimes there would even be folk dancing! At other times the hostel hosted important gatherings such as in 1948 when for one of the first times, YHA members from around the nation met together on an official basis.

1960

The newly formed National Parks & Wildlife Service took over the site and demolished the building in 1967. Although the hostel closed another opened on the same day, in the same area, on the opposite side of the bay.

"My first visit to Towlers Bay hostel was circa 1958. I attended its official closing down on a Saturday afternoon in 1967 after which all the guests piled into the ferry to cross over to the other side of the bay for the commissioning of the new hostel."

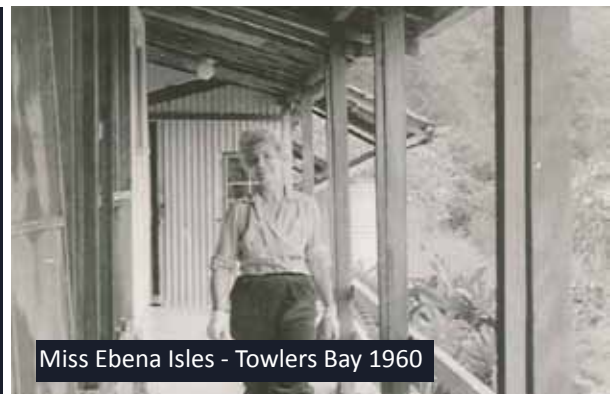
— YHA member Bruce Paterson



Arriving by boat at Towlers Bay



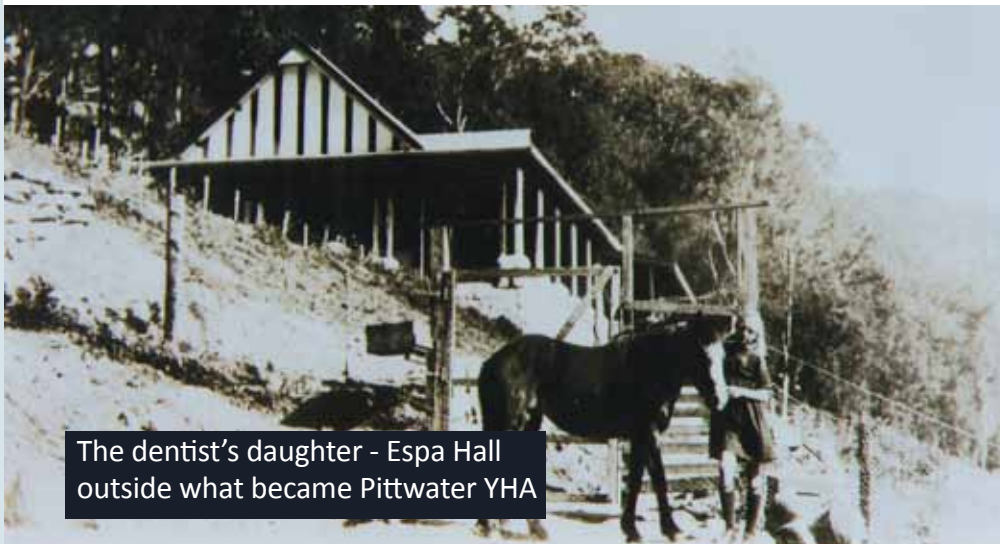
Towlers Bay YHA circa 1940s



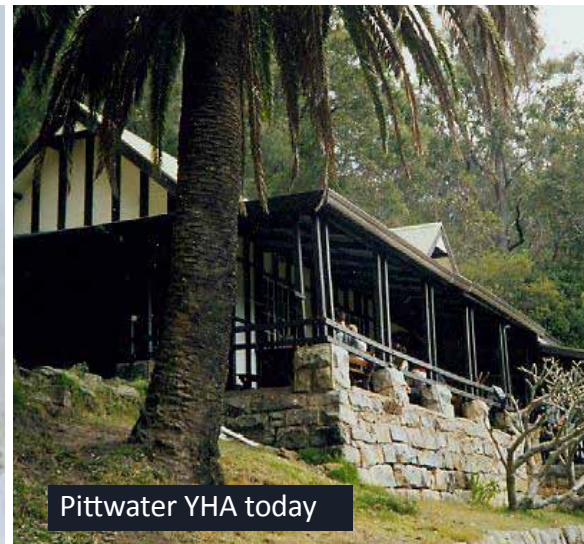
Miss Ebena Isles - Towlers Bay 1960

HISTORY OF PITTWATER YHA

The Building



The dentist's daughter - Espa Hall
outside what became Pittwater YHA



Pittwater YHA today

1920

Dentist Charles Hall built a family home in Pittwater in the 1920s after buying the property from Arthur Woods. His dentistry practice was in North Sydney, and on weekends Charles went home where he kept a chair for locals. The surnames of those two early property owners are perpetuated in Pittwater – as Woody Point and Halls Wharf, from where many YHA guests alight after the ferry ride from Church Point.

1950

Scottish-born Ebena Isles spent most of her childhood in Australia, becoming a teacher and social worker. As an early YHA member she visited Towlers Bay hostel and sometimes took children there when she worked for the Sydney University Settlement, which helped disadvantaged people. The house that Charles Hall had built was on the opposite side of the bay and around 1959 the nature loving Ebena bought the property. She mostly lived there alone, “making do” with just tank water, an electricity generator, and cooking on both a primus and gas stove.

1960

After YHA lost Towlers Bay hostel to the National Parks & Wildlife Service Ebena saw that her house would make an ideal hostel, and generously donated her own home to YHA. In 1967 it became Pittwater YHA. Eventually Ebena moved away to the Blue Mountains where she lived until the age of 95.

1980

By 1984 the bay had reverted to its original name of Morning Bay. In 1988 an extension was added to the hostel which today continues the tradition of hospitality Ebena instituted when it was her own home. She had named the place after an Indonesian friend told her that Bensuta means “full of good things.” A plaque at the front of the hostel continues to greet visitors with that name.



This YHA is part of the world's largest budget accommodation network, Hostelling International, which provides more than 4,000 YHA/Hi hostels in over 80 countries. YHA is a not-for-profit membership organisation providing travellers with quality accommodation and services.