

S.L.S.A. History of Patrol Caps and Patrol Flags

Local by-laws had banned daylight bathing since the 1880's. These laws were slowly being rescinded in response to evolving moral views, and the increasing popularity of surf and bathing activities.

With the formation of the Surf Life Saving movement, councils increasingly exercised their authority by proxy. Surf clubs assumed more and more responsibility for the beach and to give them the regulatory power to do so, councils appointed surf club members as Beach Inspectors. The surf clubs proceeded to enforce not only those regulations pertaining to use of the beach, and wider moral codes of conduct, but also those codes of behaviour for use of this public space, which had been developed by the Surf Life Saving movement itself, such as bathing between the flags and hand signalling when in distress.

October 18th, 1907, the Royal Life Saving Society along with 9 surf clubs, founded the Surf Bathing Association of New South Wales, which became Surf Life Saving Association of Australia in 1922.

The beaches patrolled by these club's provided reassurance to inexperienced surfers and local Councils.

As it is the first item of identification for the volunteer Life Saver, I will start with the -

History of the Patrol Cap.

Caps used on Patrol and in competition are based on an English practice used in swimming clubs, where they were worn in competition and to control long hair.

Surf and Life Saving Clubs have worn caps from the start of the movement in 1907, carrying on those of swimming club traditions.

Club caps, in club colours, were originally worn on patrol duty. Royal Life Saving Society club members also wore their caps for club and competitor identification.

On January 3rd, 1939, the red and yellow quartered cap for patrolling became standard patrolling gear. The use of these two colours on the quartered cap worn throughout Australia and New Zealand was recognised as patrolling Life Savers. Some 87 years later, the red and yellow cap colours for water safety have been adopted and remain unchanged almost worldwide.

History of the Patrol Flag.

In 1924, a signage system was developed for patrolled beaches. The original system was blue and white flags to mark safe swimming areas, red flags to warn of dangerous areas and signs with SAFETY FIRST - bathe between the blue and white flags

1924 to 1935 Patrol flags were blue and white.

1935 saw the introduction of the red and yellow flags, which were initially diagonal. The flag system established in 1855 is an ancient British means of communication from ship to ship or ship to shore. The red and yellow flag is the signal for danger or a person overboard, also "O" in the flag alphabet.

In 1980, in conjunction with the Standards Association of Australia, there was an agreement between SLSA and the Standards Association to adopt change from the red and yellow quartered flag to a red over yellow parallel flag. This did happen and the patrol flags are as we know them today - a vital patrolling item.

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