



## 50 years on and Chris is still swimming strong

FIFTY years after taking home a record win in the Magnetic Island to Townsville Swim, Chris Bell has his eyes set on another win on Saturday.

The 70 year-old heart patient and veteran swimmer will be marking the 50th anniversary year that he won the race in record time.

"In 1959 I placed first with a record of 1.54.33," he said.

"I was the first person under two hours followed by Victorian surf champ and swim champion, John Gibson and surf ironman Hayden Kenny.

"I can remember we had extremely rough weather and all aboard my tow boat were seasick, tow lines broke, cages broke up."

While the cages limited the amount of competitors in 1959, competitors and onlookers regarded the swim as the ultimate experience.

"It was a big deal to be a part of the swim in the first few years," Mr Bell said.

"It was the ultimate test of immense physical fitness under severe conditions and perceived as daring as some extreme sports are viewed today.

"The swim event was a popular event in Townsville attracting crowds of thousands to cheer on the swimmers as they finished.

"We even had a Centenary Queen and the mayor to present the competitors to the crowd."

Townsville Open Water Swimming Association promoter, Karen Uhlmann, said the swim had greatly evolved over the years.

"This is the 55th year the Subway Magnetic Island to Townsville swim has been conducted," she said.

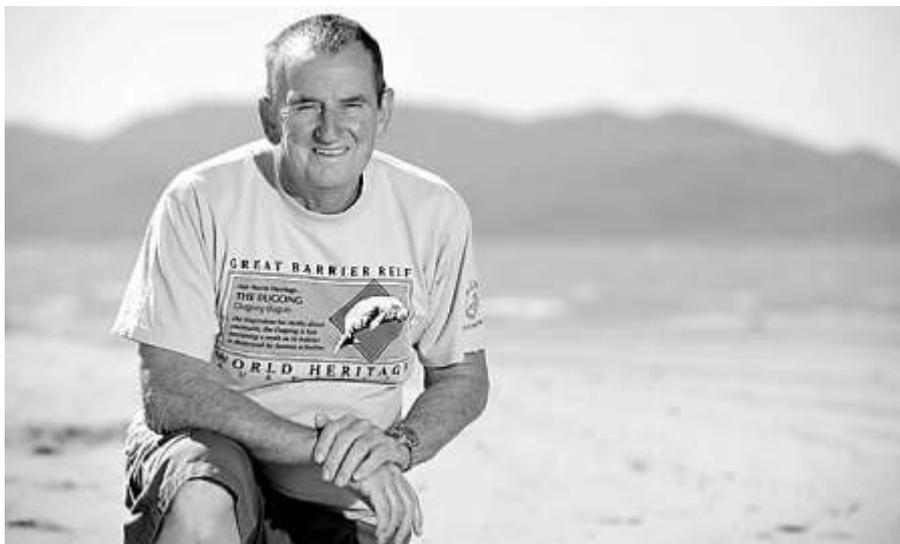
"The swim has since evolved from cages to cageless over the years since Chris first attempted the swim back in 1959.

"Conditions and equipment were markedly different back then as the cages were constructed on a wooden frame with chicken wire to keep out the sharks and 44 gallon drums in the corners."

The swim is from Picnic Bay on Magnetic Island to the beachfront on The Strand, Townsville, a distance of 8km.

Eighty participants will swim the 8km from Picnic Bay on Magnetic Island to the beachfront on The Strand on Saturday from 9 am.

— LYDIA KELLNER



CHRIS Bell, 70, will be the oldest swimmer in this weekend's Magnetic Island to Townsville swim. It will also mark the 50th anniversary year of his win in 1959 of the same event

Photo: DARREN HILDER JJ133571