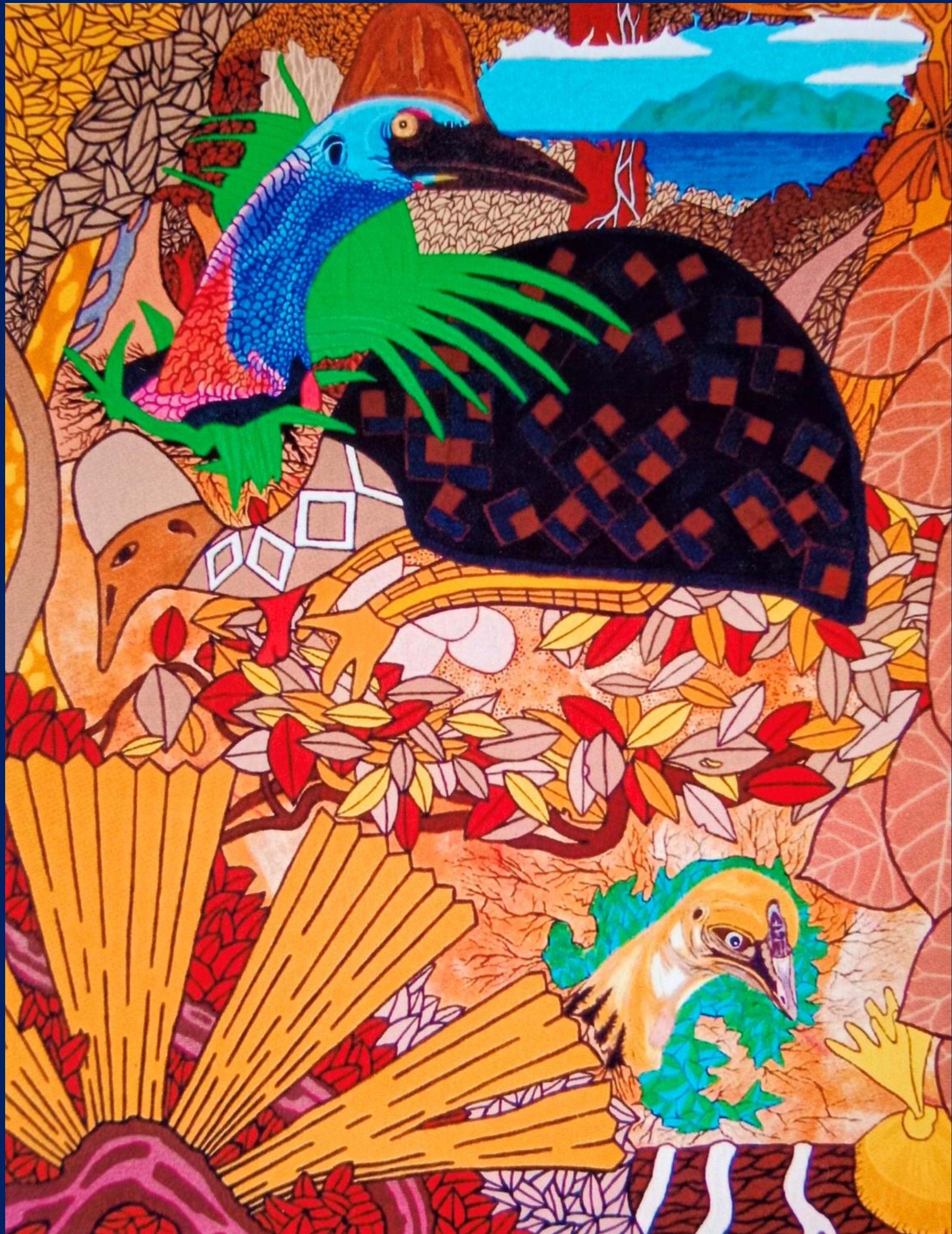
DJIRU PEOPLE: ABORIGINAL LIFE BY THE SEA



By HELEN PEDLEY

With FOREWORD and AFTERWORD
by LEONARD ANDY, TRADITIONAL DJIRU OWNER.

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The histories published by the Mission Beach Historical Society are as accurate as we can make them. Few accounts of history are 100% correct and there are going to be more errors when we recall events of many years ago. We always welcome suggested edits and additions or deletions and where possible we will edit where we find we are in error. However, the oral histories we record are the words of the people we interview, and we can only alter those with the authorisations of the people we interviewed.

Cover Image
Art by Leonard Andy 'Djiru Gunday' copyright L. Andy, Parliament House Collection, Canberra.

LANGUAGE

The words *Aboriginal people* and *Aborigines* are used with no intended disrespect. These names are based on the Latin, *ab origine* "from the beginning". Similarly, "Old People" (past traditional owners, especially of pre-colonial times) is a term of respect which their descendants often use.

Occasionally derogatory terminology is to be found in this work, in quotations from writers of the past. The terminology of the nineteenth century writers is not appropriate today. It has only been retained in direct quotations where they are useful. The thinking of the times is recognised; terminology is a reminder of this.

GLOSSARY of DJIRU, GIRRAMAY, GULNGAY, JIRRBAL WORDS FOUND IN TEXT

banginyu:	zamia, *Lepidozamia hopei*
bara:	yellow walnut, *Beilschmiedfia bancroftii*
bumban:	hairy walnut, *Endiandra insignis*
buya/brun:	ceremonial ground (corroboree ground)
dugan:	*Prunus turnerana*
jubula:	black pine, *Prumnopitys amara*
jujaba:	creation time (time of the dreaming) or creator being
gajirra:	cycad, *Cycas media*
ganyu:	a yam, *Dioscorea bulbifera*
guwal:	everyday language
guway:	black walnut, *Endiandra palmerstonii*
mirrany:	black bean, *Castanospermum australe*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Where Girramay, Jirrbal, Mamu or Gulngay Elders gave information personally to me, I have acknowledged them in the text. The following people in particular gave me some of their knowledge and stories in the late 1970s and the 1990s: Joe Kinjun (Gulngay), Ida Henry (Jirrbal), Daisy and Andy Denham (Jirrbal, Girramay), Davey Lawrence (Girramay, Jirrbal), Molly Grant (Girramay), Bessie Jerry (Girramay), George Watson (Dulgubarra Mamu), Ernie Grant (Jirrbal).

Leonard Andy, Djiru Traditional Owner, provided critical notes as well as the foreword, and afterword.

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FOREWORD
By LEONARD ANDY
DJIRU TRADITIONAL OWNER

Djiru people are Aboriginal Rainforest people and wherever you have rainforest, you'll find Aboriginal people with a shared culture because their culture is shared amongst the other rainforest people - we all live in the same environment.

Since Europeans arrived in this area, they arrived with perceived views from other parts of the country where they had been longer and they stereotyped us with other Aboriginals in other geographical areas, locations around Australia.

It has always been a fight for your own identity, Aboriginal cultural identity, based on the geographical areas of your country where you live. A lot of people have decided what our culture is for us based on their knowledge, their history of Aboriginals in other geographical areas.

To make it seem easier would be to say we are wet country people, not dry country people. But that is why we get stereotyped because the majority of the landmass in Australia is not rainforest. I think we are about 3% of the landmass and for us it is constant, we have to deal with people that think they know everything about us already and tell us our culture. The academics have made a living of our culture and our people and continue to. A lot of times, what they are writing and what they are doing is to support their own livelihood and future. A lot of times, the stuff they are writing is not on a blank canvas, it has already been primed with an undercoat to receive stuff on top that will grip and stay on the canvas. When I say it has already been prepped and primed, they've all been to university. They all have a history and their history is not ours.

In this land today, they tell us we are 3.8% of the population, and this all happened in a couple of hundred years. They talk about a shared history, and we do have a shared history. Except there is a history … the people who tell you about shared history are usually those that didn't share. Because when it comes to the shared history, it is their version, their story about us and them and how we interact with them. In the past, we were the problem and we are still today. They don't want to share with us, they never shared in the past and they still don't want to share with us. And they talk about a shared history, it is a shared history of not sharing. Respect? There was none of that. They never asked us about what we thought, what we think. And those who did, we might have told them things but they were already in their mental makeup, already had pictures of Aboriginals – what they think, what Aboriginals need and should be done for them. There is no asking, it's telling: 'This is what you want, this is what you need'. Nobody asks, and why should they? They might be asked to do something their ancestors didn't do and the making of this country and what we have today, that is not made on sharing with the Indigenous people. That is why our identity has always been under threat and as a rainforest people, I'm not into multiculturalism. I can say that outright. We had our taste of multiculturalism; I'm a product of multiculturalism with European, and Chinese and South Sea Islander blood and Aboriginal. This wasn't an Aboriginal event. This isn't something we asked to be part of; this was forced on us. And it's a history that's shared.

There is no shared history: one is about discovery, conquest and nation building. The other is about invasion, occupation and loss of land and cultural resources and of self (identity and spirituality).

DJIRU COUNTRY

'Where the rainforest meets the sea' is a description that justifiably entices visitors today to the stunning Wet Tropics World Heritage Area of Far North Queensland. It is here that tropical rainforests meet tropical inshore waters, which are complex, stable, and biologically productive ecosystems. The traditional home of the Djiru people includes both, and they have lived here for thousands and thousands of years. They are people of the rainforest and also custodians of the sea country adjacent, from the Hull River to Maria Creek on the coast, and inland to El Arish.

This beautiful part of what became "North Queensland" saw the Aboriginal inhabitants dispossessed of their land by colonial settlers within a few decades during the second half of the nineteenth century. As elsewhere on the continent, "there was almost total miscomprehension of each other's way of life" [1]. Recent granting of native title to tracts of crown land in the area has now done a little towards acknowledging their traditional ownership and spiritual links.

Dunk Island coast scene, 1900s: from E.J. Banfield's *Tropic Days.*

The way in which the colonisers took over ensured that little would be left of the lifestyle the Djiru enjoyed before the arrival of the intruders. The speed with which the Djiru population was decimated, as well as causing great human suffering, also resulted in tragic language loss and inhibited the passing on of cultural and spiritual knowledge. Yet the surviving families, with amazing resilience, continue today to adapt and maintain cultural integrity.

As well as the knowledge that Djiru people have of life before colonisation, there are historical documents extant in which Europeans recorded their observations of, and contact with, Djiru people. We also have the evidence of Djiru Country itself: the ecosystems that the people shared, were sustained by, and which they cared for through spiritual connections that went far beyond ecology.

[1] Berndt (1971:44)

With these things in mind, this project sets out to amplify what has already been collected in other works[2]. To achieve this, ecological, historical and available oral and archival resources are examined. There are now more resources for historical evidence available through online digitised records than were available to researchers in the past. Glimpses of Djiru ethno-history can be found in such records. The resources of the rainforest relevant to Djiru lifestyle are becoming more appreciated as data is collected in the Wet Tropics Management Area. Similarly, the littoral resources are also being documented more fully through the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park authorities, and also with the activities of Girringun Rangers.

Mouth of the Hull River (A.J. Campbell) c.1910.

My personal research in years past with Elders from Jumbun and the Tully River provided some information regarding the neighbouring people of the Djiru, and also a recognition of the significance of the oral traditions and memories that relate to the Djiru. Gulngay Elder Joe Kinjun, talking of going to "fight grounds" (for "corroborees"), said his people would "go along Clump Point, Mission Beach, right to Liverpool Creek and this way… Cardwell mob go there in canoe." Similarly, Emily Purcell (Mamu Elder, now deceased) passed information on through her son, Peter Purcell. She remembered, as a young person, going to Clump Point from Innisfail by canoe to attend ceremonies attended by large groups of people"[3].

Clump Point was a focus point in Djiru country and this became the English name by which people referred to Djiru people; it was used long before there was an aboriginal settlement on the mainland opposite Dunk Island and the beach there came to be called "Mission Beach". In the 1970s, the Girramay and other Elders I spoke with still referred to the "Clump Point mob".

The available ethno-histories are examined below for relevant information, while also considering their limitations due to the conditions of recording. The information from European observers must be understood to be limited by cultural and racial bias, as well as being based on transient contact, little

[2] See Pentecost (2007) and Jones (1960).
[3] Pentecost (2007:35)

or no understanding of the language and, usually, superficial knowledge. In some cases, the record was written down some time after just fleeting contact or passing events.

This study is not intended to be a comprehensive account, rather it provides further information to add to the research findings and reports of Pentecost and others. It is emphasised that the white European point of view is (unfortunately) predominant here.

Location, Land and Language

Today, Djiru traditional country is known as the Mission Beach area. Located in the humid wet tropics of North Queensland, it lies some 120 kilometres south of Cairns and is now within the local government area of Cassowary Coast Regional Council. Historically, after colonisation reached the area, it was firstly designated part of Cardwell Divisional Board and then Cardwell Shire Council, although subsequently the northern beaches were incorporated into Johnstone Shire.

It comprises coastal land and the adjacent sea between Maria Creek to the north and Hull River to the south, while extending inland westwards to the cane fields of El Arish. This was the country of the Djiru nation, who spoke the language Djiru. Djiru was so closely related to neighbouring languages that linguists identify them all as dialects of a single language, which linguist, Bob Dixon, called "Dyirbal". These neighbouring dialects are shown on the map (Figure 1). In 1963 when Dixon commenced working with the people of the district to identify and record a grammar of their language, he found a number of people spoke Jirrbal and Girramay fluently, but for Djiru he found only two elderly speakers. Other dialects were in worse straits: dialect "P" was known only from a list Christie Palmerston wrote in a letter in 1884, and refers to people at Mourilyan, probably Jirribarra Mamu speakers. Dialect "L" was spoken by the Walmalbarra, for whom Roth obtained a list of words in 1900. These last three dialects ceased to be actively spoken early in the twentieth century[4].

Dixon tried to record some Djiru. He spoke to Joe Jamboree, who everyone agreed was the last speaker of Djiru then living at Murray Upper, and on Palm Island Dixon talked to Pompey Clumppoint, who had been sent there some years before[5]. Pompey provided some words and songs, which he thought long and hard to remember after so many years of not using his language.

The other nearby dialects of Dyirbal are Ngadjan, spoken on the Atherton Tablelands, and Mamu which was spoken by the Dulgubarra, Waribarra, Mandubarra and related clans. Jirrbal is identified as having two variants: that spoken on the east of the ranges and Davidson Creek area (by the Jabanbarra people), and that of the adjoining Tablelands around Ravenshoe (by the Gambilbarra people).

Western notions of boundaries were required so that Aboriginal people could work to their advantage within western legal structures. There had to be a line on a map for native title claims purposes, for example. National Parks and other Crown lands have definite boundaries, surveyed and documented. Aboriginal knowledge of their land was collective. They all knew where their own "run" was and to which people and families places belonged, and who had responsibilities for them, while the Elders had more detailed knowledge.

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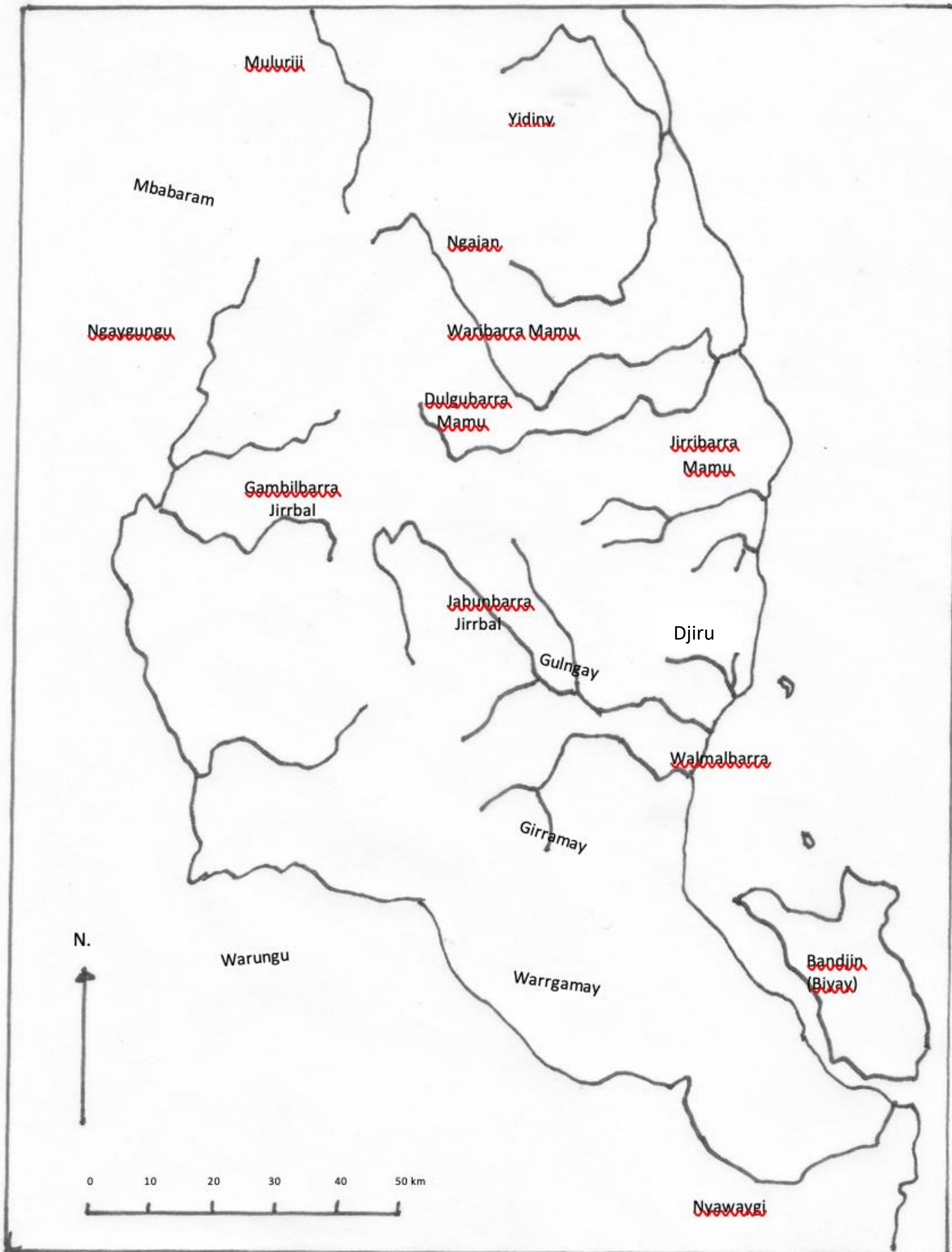
[4] Dixon (1991:188)

[5] Dixon (1984:110)

Figure 1: Map showing approximate location of First Nations' traditional land and language areas.



In the Aboriginal worldview, there is a oneness of all things, there is no separation between people and nature[6]. Pascoe speaks of "a jig-saw mutualism" where the people had "rights and responsibilities for particular pieces of the jigsaw, but they were constrained to operate that piece so that it added to rather than detracted from the pieces of their neighbours and the epic integrity of the land"[7].

Aboriginal people have multiple attachments to their land and a sophisticated spiritual connection that has cultural significance very different from the European view of land ownership and use. Basic to

[6] Neale in Page & Memmott (2021:1)
[7] Pascoe (2014:199)

this is the concept of *jujaba* or creation times, sometimes called the Dreaming or Dreamtime by white people. In an era long ago, creator beings transformed the land to the physiologically diverse country it is now. Their stories tell how they laid down the landscape and a design for their human descendants to live by and perpetuate ancestral dictates. They became features, such as an island out at sea, a lagoon or a rock along a river, like *Yirrinjila* the dragonfly near the Murray Falls, or their activities caused features such as the Split Rock mountain *Dirrabigal* at Murray Upper. Their tracks are known, their stories are recounted, and the instructions they left are "the Law" to be "followed up".

In addition, families have personal attachments to specific areas, handed down to each generation. People each have their own story place; babies are given theirs by the Elders who know the places that were their Grandfather's, or a particular Aunt's in the case of girls. The concept of ownership is not a European one. They belong to the land as much as the land belongs to them. Girramay Elder, Davey Lawrence, said: "Place might be name of your son: everyone can go there fishing but we all know whose is whose"[8]. The family of Peter Prior was from Bowen, but they were taken to the Hull River Settlement, in Djiru Country, where Peter's brother Sylas was born. "He was given a proper Clump Point language name, *Gulga* (meaning sea eagle) because of his birthplace"[9].

As Gulngay Elder, Joe Kinjun said, "Clump Point side, they're Djiru. They walkabout down here [Tully River mouth] for fish then go home. Old Pompey is on Palm Island now, he still alive (1977)." Pompey Clumppoint gave Dixon recordings of songs in Djiru and in Gulngay in the 1960s, which were brought together in a collection of 174 Dyirbal songs and described further by Dixon and Koch[10]. Such songs encode knowledge of kinship systems, social responsibilities, animals, places, cures for illnesses, hunting and fishing techniques and much more. One of Pompey's songs describes how the scrub turkey, when burying her eggs in her nest mound makes a different sound from the normal turkey noise: "bu-wu" rather than "bu-bu-bu". The eggs of the scrub turkey (*guyjarri*) are a sought-after food in the late dry season. Several of Pompey's songs tell about fishing and trapping fish. A song about mullets and a fish trap was sung at a funeral in Jumbun in early 2000 (Leonard Andy, personal recollection). Passing on songs ensured the retention of archived knowledge. Many more songs would have been known in the "Old Days".

When asked about which people lived where, Ida Henry (of Jirrbal descent) said, "Yimunbarra at Lower Tully and Tully Heads, and Djiru down that way. Nobody down the Bluff [Murray River mouth] any more. Yimunbarra and Djiru talk different way"[11].

A report of 21 January 1870, on John Murray, Cardwell district officer in charge of the Native Police, could explain why there were no people there anymore. The report refers to maladministration and complaints with regard to "the dispersal of Aborigines encamped at the mouth of the Murray river and retrieval of stolen property from this camp"[12] . The Murray River was the main means of reaching the Bellenden Plains plantation originally settled by Davidson, subsequently managed by Johnstone in the late 1860s. The consequences of Davidson's activities were particularly felt by the Gulngay and Girramay people of that area.

[8] Pedley (2019:115).
[9] Prior in Pedley (1998:33)
[10] Dixon and Koch (1996)
[11] Yimunbarra people may have spoken the dialect Roth identified as "Walmal".
[12] QSA (846915, 70/993)

Pompey Clumppoint, holding a woomera and boomerang he made, on Palm Island, 1964.
(Dixon 1984:111).

The Europeans settled Cardwell in 1864; after this "Cardwell" for years could mean anywhere in a very wide area. The Police Magistrate at Cardwell oversaw a district that commenced at "Tam O'Shanter's Point and bounded on the north by the northern watershed of the Mackay [Tully] River and Burdekin River; on the western watershed of the Burdekin River; and on the south by a line bearing north-east to Halifax Bay; and on the east by the sea coast to the point of commencement"[13]. The large area of the Cardwell Police district is reflected in the early literature, early photographs of Aboriginal people and also the first collections of artefacts, such as that of W.E. Roth, which are often labelled "Cardwell" but could be from anywhere in the larger district.

Geography and Ecology

A narrow coastal plain is backed by a series of ridges forming the Walter Hill Range which, in the west, rises to some 1000 metres. High ground reaches the coast at Bingil Bay in the centre of the Djiru traditional area. Small streams drain the area, the largest watercourses being Maria Creek in the north and Hull River to the south, both of which enter the sea through widespread swamps, mangroves and wetlands. "The Clump Point shoreline is regionally very significant as it is the only area within the Wet

[13] *Queensland Government Gazette* 1864

Tropics Bioregion where basalt formations extend to the coast... Boulders extend into the sea on either side of Clump Point"[14].

Offshore islands represent parts of the ranges which were partly drowned by a rise in sea-levels in post-glacial times, 8-10,000 years ago. Indigenous fish-traps are found on Hinchinbrook Island and Goold Island to the south. These were probably built when sea levels were lower but are still operational, catching fish, crabs, oysters and other shellfish. On Goold Island, they have been described as consisting of "a large funnel that is clearly visible together with some pools, loops and straight lines that can only be seen at extremely low tides"[15].

Beach, Dunk Island, from a glass negative, A.J. Campbell, Museums Victoria c.1900.

Neighbouring Girramay and Jirrbal people tell the story of *Girrugar*, a *jujaba* (creation) story character who went through the country visiting and naming places. In his day it was possible to walk to all the islands off the coast[16].

Another story place on the lower Murray River is *Majay* where *jujaba* people were at a *buya* (ceremonial gathering) when the ground opened, a spring came up and they were drowned and swallowed up by the ground. Now it is a lagoon on a ridge[17]. This may also represent an ancestral memory of sea levels rising, inundating the coastal shelf.

Importantly, this and other rainforest stories or "myths" are evidence that an unbroken oral tradition dates back thousands of years, if now only "remnant". There are "no other records in the world of a non-literate indigenous culture with such an accurate oral prehistory dating back 10,000 to 15,000 years"[18]. The latter dates refer to the sea level rise, not to overall length of occupation.

[14] Pentecost (2007:10)
[15] Webster (2002:2)
[16] Dixon (1972:29)
[17] Davey Lawrence, pers. comm.
[18] Australian Heritage Commission (1986:40)

Climate

Today, a distinct annual climatic pattern is experienced in this region, with a marked wet season in January-April, when destructive cyclones and floods can occur, followed by a cooler, drier season, building to a hot summer before the renewed onset of the wet. Tully frequently records the highest rainfall in Australia, with an average of 154 rain days a year.

Natural Vegetation and Fauna

By reviewing the natural vegetation and original fauna of the area, a picture can be built up of the environment in which the Djiru people lived, carrying out their hunting, fishing, gathering and other activities. Part of the relationship which Aboriginal people have to Country is "fully understanding the resources available to provide food, tools and medicines"[19] while social and spiritual structures ensure the ongoing care and maintenance of plants, fish and animals within the environment.

Widespread clearing for sugar cane, banana plantations and other grazing and agricultural endeavours has taken place in the hinterland, and settlement along the beaches has continued to grow. Yet there are residual areas where National Parks provide conservation zones, and the original environment is visible. Clump Mountain National Park, for instance, contains some of the few remaining examples of undisturbed tropical lowland rainforests in North Queensland that once flourished extensively throughout the coastal lowlands prior to clearing.

While the landscape provided the natural possibilities, cultural choice, spiritual obligations to Country and creative social practice overlay it all. The foods or food-gathering activities they preferred, how they interacted with their country, the preferred fishing spots, the way they organised *brun* or ceremonial gatherings at home and attended *brun* in other tribal countries, for example. Sophisticated spiritual connections went beyond ecology and basic needs. These will be considered later.

Before the arrival of Europeans, the Djiru traditional area was characterised by complex ecosystems; the plant communities and animal life of the rich marine environment, the shorelines and the coastal rainforest all contributed to a varied and intricate homeland that they knew intimately.

The rainforest between Cooktown and Ingham is floristically and structurally the most diverse in Australia, with some 1160 species of higher plants representing 516 genera and 119 families[20].

The alluvial soils of the coastal lowlands supported complex mesophyll vine forest, with a high proportion of deciduous or rain-green species dominating the closed canopy, and abundant vines.
These rainforests included the nut-yielding trees which were a feature of the rainforest peoples' diet, such as the yellow walnut (*Beilschmiedia bancroftii*) and black bean (*Castanospermum australe*), the fruit of both of which required careful detoxification before being edible. Over the wider area, closed forests with sclerophyll emergents and co-dominants are found bordering the rainforests. Coastal vegetation complexes include coastal ridges where *Calophyllum inophyllum* is found, and also mangrove forests at river mouths and sheltered bays. Found in small patches on poorly drained lowland soils, forests dominated by the endemic *Licuala ramsayi* fan palm are found only in Australia. Most of this type of forest has been cleared, but a small area remains in the Djiru National Park.

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[19] Page (2021:77)
[20] Australian Heritage Commission (1986:1)

Over the larger Cooktown to Ingham wet tropical coast, significant areas of mangrove forests are found. Over half the species of recognised mangroves worldwide are found here, which is the highest diversity in the world. The mangroves on the coast provided a habitat for animal life, and also, two species of mangrove, *Avicennia marina* and *Bruguiera gymnorhiza,* have been identified as food sources, providing the fruit is subjected to detoxification, as also was *Calophyllum inophyllum,* on the Rockingham Bay coast.

Clearing for agriculture has meant natural vegetation of much of the study area must be inferred from soil types and other physical features. Management of the Wet Tropics World Heritage area should now have halted further felling and clearing.

The wider rainforest region is also faunistically diverse, with the richest fauna in Australia. Representing only 0.1 per cent of the area of the continent, it contains 30 per cent of Australia's marsupial species, 23 per cent of the reptile species, 18 per cent of bird species. There are 54 species of vertebrate animals that are unique to the area[21]. Djiru country supported a similarly diverse fauna in the lowland rainforests.

Like all rainforest people, the Djiru were aware of how the fauna occupied specific niches and conformed to seasonal rhythms. Seasonal fluctuations in fruit production by plants affected populations of animals as well as direct access to plant foods. In the rivers and waterways, dry times, rainfall, storms and flooding produced patterns of fish availability.

The Djiru were also a sea country people with special knowledge of the littoral ecosystems as well as of the rainforests. While there may be no specific literature, it is possible to infer how they interacted with their environment in pre-contact times based on ecological understandings as well as some knowledge of neighbouring coastal people. This area of Djiru life is sometimes underestimated due to lack of available information.

As mentioned, this coast is a diverse environment, but it has not been studied in detail at the local level. "At least 283 species of fishes are known to inhabit coastal waters between Cardwell and Bramston Beach", while a study of Boat Bay, a north-facing embayment off Clump Point concluded this area is spectacular because of the diversity of species recorded. In addition, mangroves in the tidal area included five species in a small area of the unique assemblage of basalt boulders, sand and mud. Fauna found among the mangroves ranged from mud-lobsters (yabbies) to mud skippers. Five species of sea grasses (dugong food) grow in Boat Bay, and beds of brown algae, of which the largest is *Sargassum,* form important fish habitats, especially for juveniles and small species[22].

Campbell's work on the fish traps and shell middens of Hinchinbrook Island is illuminating. Some of the tidal fish traps were still productive at the time of his work (1982) and he was able to derive a list of species of fish and shellfish which either were known to be used or might have been used by the Aboriginal people prior to European contact, and also their principle environments and means of capture. He named 34 fishes, 7 sharks and rays, 3 crustaceans and 8 molluscs, most of which are endemic. Some of these species also were identified in shell middens excavated in the area[23]. Fish-traps were built by the Djiru also, as will be seen.

[21] Australian Heritage Commission (1986:21)
[22] Larsen www.missionbeachcassowaries.com
[23] Campbell (1982:99)

Clearly, a wide range of wild food plants was available for food and for technology to the Djiru. Similarly, a diversity of animal foods contributed to the traditional diet. Terrestrial animals in their country included wallabies, bandicoots, cassowaries, goannas, snakes and other reptiles and small marsupials. Fish, shellfish and waterfowl were obtained from the rivers, river mouths, swamps, mangroves and coastal shallows as well as the marine resources accessed by canoe. The latter included saltwater turtles and dugong.

Archaeological Record

The evidence from archaeological studies must always be qualified by a recognition that the environment here is not conducive to preserving cultural materials. The humid climate of the rainforest can quickly lead to decomposition of artefacts made from wood and plant fibre. Heavy rain and flooding can destroy campsites while destructive storms and cyclones affect coastal deposits such as shell scatters, although debris from shell gathering and in middens, does tend to withstand the ravages of time better than that of other foraging activities[24]. The history of rising sea levels also means much of the cultural record is now under the sea.

The archaeological record and cultural significance of sites has been summarised and discussed by Pentecost[25]. At Clump Point, fish traps, stone alignments, shell midden/scatters and artefact scatters have been recorded along the foreshore on both sides of the point and in Boat Bay, attesting to the former habitation and use of the place. It is a highly significant site to the Djiru people and provides material evidence of aspects of Djiru lifestyle.

In providing an assessment of the cultural significance of the identified sites, Pentecost notes: "It is only the relevant traditional owners who can appraise the significance of Aboriginal cultural sites. Through their inextricable links to the land, they have the responsibility of maintaining the health and well-being of all its component parts. The natural features of the land are linked to the people through their mythology, their traditions and through their use of it. The land to them is a cultural landscape that cannot be quantified in terms of its singular parts. Aboriginal people have a concept of cultural heritage that is significantly broader than the material or tangible archaeological record and therefore embraces native flora and fauna and geological and geographical features"[26].

Campbell deduced from his archaeological studies of the stone fish-traps of Hinchinbrook and Goold Islands, that they were well-designed and highly efficient. The Bandjin people who lived on Hinchinbrook Island also had a mainland territory opposite the island. This highly successful maritime adaptation would have supported a population of between 400 and 600[27].

A Djiru fish-trap was located at the south end of Bingil Bay, but the area was greatly modified by the Cutten Brothers when they built a loading facility to export produce in 1895, as told to Don Wheatley by Bert Wildsoet. There is also still "a very well preserved one… still in existence on Stephens Island in the South Barnards"[28].

[24] Meehan (1977:528)
[25] Pentecost (2007)
[26] Pentecost (2007:32)
[27] Campbell (1979)
[28] According to McRobbie (2008:3)

Human Population

It is thought that the first people entered Australia some 65,000 years ago, if not earlier. Recent research has found evidence of grinding stones used in bread-making in the Top End for this date[29]. There is an "immensity of human experience on this continent"[30]. At that time sea levels were lower, and Australia (including Tasmania) and Papua-New Guinea were a single landmass. This was an era of global cooling and increasing aridity. The relationship of the first people with their environment was a dynamic one, adjusting to patterns of drought or other changes. Palynologists have noted that the nature of the changes in vegetation in the last 40,000 years suggest a human influence in the changes to burning patterns in these times[31].

"The Aboriginal people of the Wet Tropics of Queensland have lived continuously in the rainforest environment for at least 5000 years"[32]. The earliest dated archaeological evidence is from 5100 years ago. However, there is no reason to think people were not here for some 40,000 or more years before this and lived through climatic variations and fluctuations in rainforests[33]. Rainforests retreated to refugial areas as the climate cooled to the Glacial Maximum. These smaller areas of rainforest were probably linked by riparian forests or fire-protected patches and spread out onto the exposed continental shelf[34].

During the last glacial period, the lower sea level meant Djiru country included a broader, more extensive coastal plain than the current one, probably with patches of rainforest vegetation as suggested.

From about 17,000 to 7000 years ago, the polar ice caps were melting and the sea level was rising to an eventual 125m. These rising seas inundated the coastal plain to the current levels. The last land link between New Guinea and Australia was submerged about 7000 years ago[35]. Traditional Girramay and Jirrbal stories relate how Creation Story characters once walked from Hinchinbrook Island to the mainland (see above). In another *jujaba* story, a *dugui* tree full of "happy family birds" fell over when two women dug around it with their digging sticks at "Cardwell" and where it fell it made the sea and the islands there [36].

Because of this dynamic environment, the distinctive rainforest culture as observed by the European invaders "probably had an antiquity of no more than 9000 years"[37].

It is estimated that in 1839 there was an Aboriginal population in what became Queensland of at least 300,000[38]. Densities varied, but the northeast coast rainforests supported higher densities than even many other coastal regions. There "must have been at least 5000 people speaking dialects of Dyirbal in the first part of the nineteenth century"[39].

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[29] Cumpston *et al* (2022:5)
[30] Griffiths (2018:293)
[31] Kershaw *et al* (1997)
[32] Roberts *et al* (2021)
[33] Horsfall (1990:39), although 40,000 may now be considered too conservative.
[34] Cosgrove (1996:909)
[35] Dixon (2019:133)
[36] George Watson, pers. comm.
[37] Horsfall (1990:39)
[38] Bottoms (2015:28)
[39] Dixon (2015:314)

Police Commissioner W. Parry-Okeden provided the Queensland Parliament with a map, in 1897, of tribal population numbers, which he would have derived from information provided by local police officers and magistrates. While there may be reservations regarding the accuracy of the numbers listed, and the recording of group names, it remains a useful historical resource. On this map, a population of 130 was recorded for the "Gerra, Gillah" (Djiru), over an area of 260 square kilometres, which is a density of about two people per square kilometre.

This was not the density of people prior to colonisation. A massive attrition rate resulted from the spread of colonisation, due particularly to smallpox deaths, the sterilisation effect of venereal diseases, and the starvation consequent on the killing of males, annexation of women for sexual purposes, and loss of food sources, as traditional lands were taken over[40].

Harris used general estimates of post-European decline in Aboriginal populations to calculate that the pre-European population was not less than two and a half times the 1897 population. For the Djiru, their population in 1800 would have been 325[41]. This is a relatively high density, as would be expected for the rich lowland rainforest and coastal resources available. A Cairns newspaper correspondent remarked in 1878: "The coast in the neighbourhood [Dunk Island to Cooper's Point] is thickly peopled with aboriginals"[42].

However, as will be seen below, the Djiru people suffered a huge proportionate loss of population when the Native Police carried out reprisals following the deaths of eleven white men when they came ashore after the wreck of the brig *Maria* in 1872. The exact numbers are not known, but it is likely that at least 100 Aboriginal people were shot in retaliation. This is explored further below.

Rainforest People

"The Djiru consider themselves and their neighbours to be part of a wider group of coastal rainforest people who shared a common lifestyle… while ethnographic and ethno-historic information particular to the Djiru people is limited, valid comment on their way of life can also be made from sources referring to the wider coastal rainforest region"[43].

"The Yam Digger" from E.J. Banfield's *The Confessions of a Beachcomber*, 1908.

[40] Bottoms (2015: 28)
[41] Harris (1978:11)
[42] *Queenslander* (20.04.1878)
[43] Pentecost (2007:4)

The wider coastal region includes countrymen of the Djiru: the Gulngay, Jirrbal and Girramay people. A number of resilient people belonging largely to the latter two nation groups managed to survive in the Murray Upper region, where their descendants now live at Jumbun, a community property, or in Tully. Although they too suffered loss of their traditional lands, they somehow survived in camps in the difficult slopes of the ranges and upland valleys, hiding from the troopers who came to take them away to the Government Settlement at Hull River and then, later, to Palm Island. They were able to pass down much of their cultural knowledge through family lines, and their languages were still spoken for many years. There are various sources of information on their lifestyle now available[44].

The common rainforest lifestyle of the region between Cooktown and Cardwell is usually summarised as characterised by several features unique to this area, reflecting elements of the rainforest habitat.

Firstly, this environment supported a higher than average population density with frequent gatherings of people from multiple neighbouring groups, often for ceremonial purposes. There was a heavy dependence on plant foods including several species of toxic plants which the people detoxified by various methods[45]. They had seasonally-based, semi-permanent camps; their huts being durable and thatched with bark, palm fronds or grass, which could be repaired when the people returned there at the start of the wet season. Their material culture included unique weapons for settling disputes by duelling: large wooden swords and shields. They also made use of various traps and nets in the hunting of game and fish. They made cane baskets used for the leaching of toxic plant parts in running water and made bark blankets and also bark bags for carrying water and honey. Some degree of food storage applied, as well as extended trading links and specialization in trade.

The annual round (or subsistence cycle) was based on the seasonal variations in the ecosystem. The fruiting of the main rainforest plants that provided food was a major consideration, with the availability of various animal and fish resources also changing with the seasons. During the wet season the groups returned to their wet weather semi-permanent camps away from the flood-prone creek and river banks. Fish, eels and crayfish were plentiful as floods receded. Wallabies trapped between floodwaters, and goannas hiding in trees were hunted. Some trees fruited at this time and other food such as palm tree hearts were available at all times.

As the year became drier people dispersed into smaller family groups. Wallabies were fattest at this time and were hunted, scrub turkeys were trapped. Fish were abundant, caught by stupefaction in small lagoons or by hook and line, spearing and with net traps. In the hot summer, fishing continued, especially for eels. Scrub hen and scrub turkey eggs were dug from the mound nests and crocodile eggs were found. Fruit and tree nuts were available, including those requiring detoxification such as *mirrany, (Castanospermum australe), bara (Beilschmiedia bancroftii)* and *banginyu (Lepidozamia hopei).* The various species came into season over several months and these processes took days because leaching in running water for some time was required. In the Murray Upper area, for many weeks of the year, at least one plant requiring leaching techniques was available[46].

Family groups would forage within their own country but also come together for larger gatherings. The end of the dry season (October to December) was a time when plant foods were most abundant. This was the time when many groups came together for *buya,* the ceremonial gatherings (corroborees

[44] See Dixon, Pedley, Kumm and Girringun web site)
[45] see Pedley (1993)
[46] Pedley (1993:163)

or *brun)* where disputes were settled, items were exchanged; dancing, singing and fighting characterised the social interaction. As Gulngay Elder, Joe Kinjun, said, "mob come up from Ingham, Clump Point, Tableland, Kirrama, Ravenshoe, all come down. Fight in day, then dance and make friends… Enough kai-kai [food] in one place – *mirrany, bara, banginyu* – take him – women carry it, men carry shields, boomerangs, all that, camp on the road along the way"[47].

People walking, Tully River District (photo by A.J. White)

Similarly, Dulgubarra Mamu man, George Watson, said his people might travel as far away as Warrgamay country to a *brun;* they were "fun". They threw boomerangs, spears, had big swords, and there were split heads and smashed shields but not many were killed. They brought saltwater turtle and fish up from the coast and shells (*guba guba)* to exchange for walnuts, black pine nuts, dilly bags, possum furs and fig-tree (*gabi)* blankets. They had the *bruns* when there was plenty of *bara* (yellow walnuts), *jubula* (black pine), mirrany (black bean). Everyone took something: eels, turtle, whatever. The Ngajandji of the Tablelands sometimes came down to Mamu country for a little corroboree. His people seldom went to the sea, just for a *brun* at Mission Beach maybe. As far as he knew, "the blackfellas [sic] [from Djiru country] were all taken to the Mission; most died there, the rest were sent to Palm Island." Hence, he knew of few gatherings in their country.

Ida Henry explained that "*brun*" is a whitefella word, the Jirrbal words are *buya* for the fighting gathering, and *gama* for dancing. Tommy Warren also agreed they came up from Innisfail, Clump Point, Ingham, Cardwell, Ravenshoe, Millaa Millaa, Kirrama when there was enough kaikai (food) – "wild *mirrany, bara, banginyu.*"

A track went from Girramay country to Clump Point and then into Mamu country. The "mailman" would take the message stick to the people along the track, then the people would go to the gathering. It took a week for Gulngay people to get to Innisfail according to Joe Kinjun.

Mrs Jeanie Henry described how the Gulngay people working for she and her husband, Brice Henry, at their Tully River property were notified of a *brun,* probably in the 1900s, and demonstrates how the

[47] Pedley (2019:114)

old ways were continuing despite the white bosses. In this instance, the Djiru people are described as "mob longa Saltwater".

"About mid-day, the black retainers sought an interview with the Missus in much excitement Old Man Bob being chief spokesman.

"Alligator Charlie been come up just now. He been say b-i-g fella booroon (local word for "corroboree -pronounced" almost "broon") tomorrow, close up longa mountain long way that way (with a sweep of the arm towards the distant range). Altogether big mob murri (i.e. blacks) come up, mob longa Saltwater come up, mob longa tableland come up altogether mob longa all about come up. Big fella booroon- plenty boy fight, plenty boy dance- my word might be two day booroon, Missus. Then, with a winning smile, "we fella altogether must go longa that one booroon, Missus," and in still more dulcet accents, "You gib-it little bit tea, sugar, flour, cream of tartar, soda, tobacco, matches, quinine (a special luxury)? S'pose booroon finish, me altogether come back quick fella…"

"Accordingly, the course of another hour saw the place denuded of coloured helpers, who departed in the highest spirits on their walkabout laden with all their paraphernalia of wooden swords, shields, boomerangs, spears and so forth, also dilly-bags containing the Missus' food donation together with their "make-up" of coloured clays, gum, beeswax, cockatoos' feathers, possum-hair tails, feather pendants, etc., for the dressing up, so essential to these festive re-unions."

"Rather a nuisance," reflected the Missus, as the picturesque little procession faded away into the scrub, "but, of course, one cannot blame them. A big booroon like this does not occur often, and it is their lawcourt for settling disputes, also their grand opera, drama, and picture show rolled into one- naturally they want to be 'right there'"[48].

Pentecost noted that such gatherings "are testament to the degree of inter-tribal interaction and communication that was practiced. They also required advance organisation and energy expense on the part of the host groups who had to provide food supplies"[49].

Sea Country People

Just as we can learn from the rainforest what resources would have been available to Aboriginal people and when, inferences can be made from the resources of the coastal fringe, beaches and mangroves. Little such botanical and zoological data is available, but examples are below.

Seasonal variations in availability of marine resources would have been important. During the wet season, rough seas and heavy discharge of waters in the estuaries and creek-mouths from flooding inland would have meant only spearing fish because fishing with hook and line were more difficult. It is likely shellfish from sheltered inshore beds, and molluscs from mangrove communities would have been favoured. Cyclones and storms at this time could also damage shellfish and mollusc habitats. As the dry season ensued, fishing would have become easier, as also would turtle and dugong hunting.

"Although hundreds of Australian shellfish may be collected and eaten, Aborigines gather certain shellfish at particular times of the year, as their taste alters seasonally"[50].

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[48] *Cairns Post* (03.11.1921)
[49] Pentecost (2007:17)
[50] Isaacs (1987:171)

From E.J. Banfield's *Tropic Days (1918)*

Turtle eggs are laid in hot sand, where they require six weeks of incubation. According to GBRMPA information, green turtles hatch between December and May, hawksbill turtle eggs hatch all year but mainly from February to April, loggerhead turtle eggs hatch between December and April. The Djiru would have known which beaches (including offshore island beaches) were favoured and when to seek the eggs.

The lifecycle of the barramundi includes spawning in the estuaries early in the wet season, the maturing males having moved downstream in the creeks and rivers also in the wet season.

The tides are significant to fisher people. An understanding of variations in the tidal system is crucial to the proper functioning of a canoe[51]. The rising tide can bring good fishing as the water entering an estuary from the ocean can have a lower temperature, contain more oxygen and have better clarity. Clean seawater pushed in by the tide brings with it juvenile fish and baitfish. On the turning of the tide, fish may be in a feeding mood, while the bottom of the tide can concentrate bait. At the smallest (neap) tide the flats also remain inundated longer. Where there is minimal slope of the beach out to sea, water may be one to two metres deep for miles[52].

The habits of the migratory Torres Strait Pigeons have already been noted. The Djiru would have scheduled the birds' return into their annual round and subsistence strategies.

Historical observations of Djiru lifestyle

To this broad context of Djiru life can be added some specific information from white men who recorded aspects of Aboriginal life as they observed it in the area. Djiru people had an oral tradition and passed down their histories and knowledge by non-written means. Edmund Banfield and Walter Roth, in particular, provide some records of aspects of Aboriginal life at the turn of the nineteenth

[51] Meehan (1982:26)
[52] Queensland Department of Agriculture & Fisheries website www.daf.qld.gov.au

century. Their information is, of course, limited by their opportunities as well as their attitudes, while some forty years of colonial oppression had greatly affected the traditional owners of the area.

Edmund James (Ted) Banfield was born in England in 1852 but grew up in Australia. He became a journalist and began working on the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* in 1882. Due to illness, he sought a quiet life on an island retreat, so he and his wife, Bertha, moved to Dunk Island in 1897 where he continued to write articles for newspapers. He published four books recounting life on this tropical island and numerous newspaper articles. His most famous work is 'The Confessions of a Beachcomber' published in 1908[53].

As well as his keen observations of nature, Banfield also recorded his interest in the activities and stories of his Aboriginal servants on the island. His diaries reveal the Banfields depended on a succession of male and female Aboriginal workers to clear the scrub for their home and garden, chop wood, and provide food by collecting shellfish, harpooning fish, dugong and turtle[54].

Banfield was a great observer of people and the natural world, with a benign curiosity about Aboriginal life. He was also a colonial product of his time. His impressions "could not help but be 'tinged' by the decidedly racist attitudes prevailing in Australian society at the turn of the century"[55]. The overall context of his writing should, therefore, always be borne in mind.

At the same time as Banfield was writing, Dr Walter Edmund Roth was collecting ethnographic information from Aboriginal people in many parts of north-eastern Queensland.

Like Banfield, Roth was born in England and emigrated to Australia (Roth arrived in 1888) ultimately leaving in 1906[56]. A doctor and an ethnographer, as well as a Government Protector of Aboriginals for some years, Roth provided scientific reports to the Home Secretary that contained meticulously collected data. He was a careful and painstaking fieldworker. His "evident humanitarian concerns conflicted with a harsh administration… [he was] exceptional for his sympathies during an era of social ignorance and racist dogma"[57].

Roth's Bulletins of Ethnography were widely read and are still consulted today by ethno-historians. Of particular interest is his detailed report on the people of the Lower Tully River. This unpublished report is important because the Gulngay-speaking Malanbarra, or "Mallan-para," were close neighbours of the Djiru and shared many aspects of life. Edward Brooke, Orchardist of Brooke & Co., provided a lot of the information Roth wrote down based on his experiences working with the Tully River people for some years. The Malanbarra were considered people of the sand-banks because they camped on the sand-banks of the Tully River. Between the Tully and Murray Rivers, the country belonged to the Walmal people, and "this portion of the coast is called, from the abundance of the sand there, ikan-para" (people of the sand). From the Tully to the Hull, the coast-line belonged to the Kirinja people, and around Clump Point belonged to the "Chiru". Brooke estimated these four groups were comprised of about 300 people. The report was written in 1900, with a supplement added the same year[58].

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[53] See also Pedley (2024) "According to Banfield: Aboriginal Life on the Tropical Coast" especially foreword and afterword by Leonard Andy, Djiru Traditional Owner

[54] McCalman (2015:204)

[55] Porter in Banfield (1983:ix)

[56] Pearn (1990:46)

[57] Mulvaney (2008: 117)

[58] Roth (1900)

Roth and Banfield were writing at a time when the Djiru and Malanbarra people had suffered half a century of colonial depredation and "dispersal", dispossession and loss of culture. Their observations only point to glimpses of pre-colonisation lifestyle seen through a lens of assumed racial superiority.

Like Banfield, Roth described hunting methods, plant and animal foods, cooking methods, artefacts and their manufacture and many other aspects of Malanbarra lifestyle. Only a few will be included here, particularly those relating to beach-dwelling life.

Banfield gives us his picture of cultural knowledge retained after years of contact and destruction. Much of this picture came from Tom, who Banfield says, was "as much at home on top of a bloodwood tree cutting a 'bee nest' as in a frail bark canoe fishing… All the ways and habits of fish, and their favourite feeding-grounds, are to him an open book"[59].

Banfield says Tom was "one of the few survivors of the native population of the island,"[60] while his wife, Nellie, was from the mainland. He had lived on the mainland for some years before the Banfields arrived, but he returned to Dunk to work for them. He had a great knowledge of the coast as well as of the islands. However, Tom was a Warrgamay rather than a Djiru man (L. Andy)[61].

Like many curious observers of his day, Ted Banfield tended to record specific artefacts, techniques and knowledge based on his own classification of the surroundings, although he also came to understand the aboriginal philosophy of 'fellowship' with nature. He was especially interested in canoe-making, fishing means and methods, and knowledge of plants and birds, including plant use. Banfield often provides the scientific name (Linnean binomial) for plant species. Over the years since his time, re-classification of species by scientists has often taken place. In the extracts quoted, Banfield's species names have been retained rather than being replaced by current nomenclature.

Fishing

Banfield presented an article, "Blacks as Fishermen" to the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia which was published in the Queensland Geographical Journal in 1909, some of which also appears in his book "Tropic Days". He presents facts largely from his own observations. He lamented the loss of knowledge exemplified when he asked if they used pearl or tortoiseshell fish hooks and was told they prefer "i-een" (iron) bought from the store. Yet they knew well the habits of fish and had varied and unconventional methods of fishing, which was a serious occupation.

The mouths of the smaller creeks were "sometimes dammed, save for certain sluices and by-washes… Weirs formed by stakes driven into the sand and interwoven with twigs guide incoming fish into ingenious traps, whence they are scooped up in dilly-bags." Men, women and children all took part[62]. The spearing of fish in shoals detected in shallow water did not involve use of the woomera here, although it did in other localities. Fishing at night also took place: torches of paperbark provided illumination as the group of people rushed in to spear the panicking fish.

From November to December myriads of sardine-sized fish (the sprat - *Harengula stereolepis)* appeared in shoals and encircled the islands. Other fish and birds fed on these small fry, while the Aboriginals

[59] Banfield (1908: 204-5)
[60] Banfield (1908: 11)
[61] L. Andy, Djiru Traditional Owner, pers. comm.
[62] Banfield (1909:45)

used a seine net made from trailing vines and grass growing on the beach, rolled up and twisted into a huge loose cable. This was run out at right angles to the beach by the men, curving it back towards the beach, while the women and children waded out in a line and as the net caught the fish they threw them into dilly bags. "The haul often amounts to a surfeit for the whole camp"[63].

Larger fish were harpooned, a long line being used. These included groper, the giant perch, king, bonito, rhoombah, sweet-lips, parrot-fish, sea-mullet, and the sting-rays[64]. The people also had a "decided partiality" for eels, according to Banfield, and would wade in the shallow mangrove-bordered creeks probing the bottom with a spear.

Banfield noted that all the Aboriginal people of the coast could be said to be fishermen, but some were ardent devotees to the sea while others of the same camp restricted themselves to "unsensational creeks and lagoons". The fresh-water men were experts in the use of a "moorgaroo" net or butterfly net, made of fine twine (one-inch mesh), preferably from the bark of one of the fig-trees or the brown kurrajong, tightly stretched on two pieces of lawyer-cane each bent to form the half of an irregular ellipse. This net was manipulated by two men working in concert, principally for the capture of eels. Banfield had been astonished by the size of eel and insignificance of the creek where it was caught[65].

Thomas Allen Young was Police Magistrate at Cardwell from 1885 to 1886. In this position, he travelled throughout the region and had a cutter and four men at his command. He wrote some of his memories of those days in the *Cairns Morning Post* in 1908 under the pen-name "Ishmael". He describes the people at Clump Point as "wonderfully clever at making twine and fishing nets. The twine or string is beautifully made, generally by the women. It is made of the finest ribbon-like bark of the scrub kurrajong, and consists of two strands only, the twist is given by rubbing the strands with the palm of the hand on the thigh and then by a peculiar twist of the hand the two separate strands are allowed to twist together. About a couple of inches of twine is made by each roll of the hand. They are also very expert at making dilly [bags in the] shape of a funnel sometimes 10 feet long. They are closely plaited and are very strong"[66].

Pearl shell hooks seem to have been used "principally for smaller fish - whiting, perch, bream, flathead, etc. - the occurrence of large hooks being exceedingly rare. Mullet (if tradition is to be credited) were seldom caught by hook and line but were speared among the mangroves at high tide - a practice which prevails to this day". With barbless hooks the bait was not impaled but strapped on with shreds of bark.

The images of pearl shell hooks appearing in the article are "a series of pearl shell hooks obtained by raking over the sites of old camps on Dunk island". The making of these hooks was a "lost art"; in overhauling the old midden, samples of partially completed hooks were also found. The island resident who helped look for the pearl shell hooks confirmed they had not been made for many years[67].

In addition to fish, the mangrove swamps were also the source of edible crabs, "oysters seal themselves to the roots" of the mangroves and various shellfish gather here.

[63] Banfield (1909:49)
[64] Only the sand/beige coloured one was eaten (L. Andy, pers.comm.)
[65] Banfield (1909:52)
[66] *Cairns Morning Post* (04.12.1908). This description is very similar to the demonstration of making strindg from the inner bark of a fig recorded by Davey Lawrence, Girramay craftsman (Pedley 1997:12)
[67] Banfield (1908:182)

Echinus (sea urchins) provided good food. Two or three species could be found submerged under coral and rocky caverns, to be removed with a fish spear. The flavour of the flesh "surpasseth the delectable oyster"[68].

Banfield speaks of numerous shell-fish – periwinkles, cockles, muscles, scallops, besides crabs, 3 or 4 varieties at least of oysters as well as many fish being available for food. He also lists a large number of other animal and plant food[69].

Similarly, Roth wrote that the techniques for obtaining shrimps and prawns vary. When the river is at "about half-flood, women wade in and root up with their hands the bundles of watergrass which they throw onto the bank where the crustaceans can be picked out." The women also take a split-cane dillybag into the water and drive the shrimps into it. At the mouth of the river, at certain tides, these animals swarm in such numbers as to give a reddish appearance to the water surface and come in close towards the beach. The people waded out and scooped them into long cane baskets called "chuta" that can be up to 12 feet long. The shrimps and prawns are utilised as bait and also eaten after being baked in ginger leaves or ti-tree bark[70].

Canoes and hunting at sea

Banfield described in detail the skill of catching a turtle. The men would "voyage out each in a bark canoe, which weighs about 40 lbs., is 8 feet long, 2 feet beam and 1 foot deep midships, where the sides are much depressed, leaving little more than an inch of freeboard. There is a good sheer forward and a slight tilt at the stern, while the bottom is level. Occasionally, two men fit themselves into a canoe of the dimensions given".

"The canoe is constructed of a single sheet of bark, preferably of "Gulgong" (*Eucalyptus robusta*) or "Carr-lee" (*Acacia aulacocarpa*), or "Wee-ree" (*Calophyllum inophyllum*) brought neatly together at the ends, which are sewn with strips of lawyer cane. Pieces of lawyer cane are sometimes also stitched in to represent stem and stern posts, and the chaffing pieces also are of cane, though occasionally thin pliant saplings are strapped and sewn on. Across the bow and the stern are stays of cane, with generally a stronger thwart midships. When new, and the stitches of yellow cane regular and bright, the canoe represents about the neatest and nattiest of the few constructive efforts of the blacks and is as buoyant as a duck. The seams are caulked with a resinous gum, "Tambarang," of the jungle tree known as "Arral" (*Evodia accedens*)".

In the canoe, three or four harpoons were carried. Three species of turtle are found in these waters: the loggerhead, the hawksbill and the green, which is plentiful. Both of the latter are herbivorous and edible and are preferred as food to the fish- and mollusc-eating loggerhead, which has stronger flesh but is not shunned[71]. Dugong were also harpooned. The people were familiar with their life-history, the strength and trend of currents and the locality of their favoured feeding grounds and approached the shy creatures with stealth and struck when they surfaced to breath[72].

[68] Banfield (1908:94-5)
[69] Banfield (1908:169-170)
[70] Roth (1900:4-5)
[71] Banfield (1908:101)
[72] Banfield (1908:107)

An unrivalled maker of canoes, an old man Banfield knew as "Cassowary," lived alone in his bark dwelling at a camp near his favourite beach. Banfield describes how he made perfect canoes. "By instinct he seemed to be guided to the best trees for bark, generally selecting "gulgong," though others were equally pliant in his hands. Raw from the tree, he would soak the single sheet in water, and while sodden steam it over a smoky fire, and, as it softened, mould it with hand and knee. Bringing the edges of the end designed for the stem into apposition, using a device on the principle of the harness-maker's clamp, he sewed them together with strips of freshly cut cane. Two stretchers gave to the craft beam, and the necessary sheer and thwart-ship stays of twisted cane stiffness. Gunwales of cane were sewn on, the stitches being cemented with gum made plastic by frequent renderings over the fire on a flat stone, and then the canoe was complete save for the hand-paddles, spoon-bowl-shaped pieces of bark"[73].

Tom saw turtles at sea "quite beyond the visual range of a white man… [then he] hurled a harpoon at what to me was nothingness." He could tell from the line which part of the turtle's body or shell he had pierced with the barbed point and played the line accordingly: very carefully if the shell was pierced, or hauling away if the flippers, shoulder or rear had been speared.

Tom often told the story of how his father had once harpooned a huge green turtle. A whole fleet of canoes barely succeeded in towing the massive creature back to the nearest beach. It was "kummaoried" [cooked] in the sand and fed them all well. Tom pointed to the spot frequently[74].

The use of the remora or sucker fish in the hunting of turtle and dugong also impressed Banfield, and he described the technique in detail in his first book[75].

"Vulgarly known nowadays as "the sucker," and to science as the *Echeneis remora* and *Echeneis naucrates,* and to the blacks as "Cum-mai," this creature has a disc extending from the upper jaw to a point behind the shoulders, which when pressed against a smooth surface, allows a vacuum to form, giving it enormous holding power. The fish uses this "as a means of locomotion, [when it] forms strong attachments to the dugong, turtle, shark and porpoise… If one is seen among the rocks the blacks are at pains to catch it, and as it is shark-like in its nervousness, the sport demands considerable skill and patience… Having secured the sucker... They fasten a line above the forked tall so securely that it cannot slip, nor be likely to readily cut through the skin, and tether it in shallow water, when it usually attaches itself to the bottom of the canoe…

The canoe was then taken out hunting. "In sight of the game the sucker which has been adhering to the bottom of the canoe is tugged off and thrown in [the turtle's] direction. As a preliminary the disc and shoulders of the sucker are vigorously scrubbed with dry sand or the palm of the hand, to remove the slime and to excite the ruling passion of the fish. It makes a dash for a more congenial companionship than an insipid canoe" and attaches itself to the turtle. After playing the line sometimes for an hour or more, knowing the wiles and manoeuvres the animal may try, eventually as the turtle surfaces for air, it is pierced with the barbed point of a harpoon with a strong line attached.

"There is a mad splash—a little maelstrom of foam and ripples, the line runs out to its full length, and the canoe careers about, accurately steered by the aft man, in the erratic course of the wounded creature. As it tires, the heavy haft of the harpoon secured by the half hitches round the thin end being

[73] Banfield (1918:101)
[74] Banfield (1908:62, 82)
[75] Banfield (1908:160)

a considerable drag, the line is shortened up, but too much trust is not placed on a single line; some time may pass before the canoe is brought within striking distance again. When that moment arrives, a second harpoon is sent into the flesh below the edge of the carapace at the rear. Unable to break away, the turtle is hauled close alongside the canoe, secured by the flippers and towed ashore. I have known blacks, after harpooning a turtle, to be towed 6 miles out to sea before it came their turn to do the towing."

Stunning fish was carried out by the coastal people using certain plants to stun fish in small pools. Roth distinguishes between plants the Walmal people used ("wi-ar" and "kilvain") and those used by the "scrub Malanbarra": ("buku", "kurgan" and "pindarin").

"The scrub blacks use log-rafts, the coastal ones bark canoes"[76]. "Outrigger canoes do not really belong to these particular coastal blacks."

Crocodiles

The people were very cautious of crocodiles and knew where individual crocodiles lived and were very careful crossing creeks; Maria Creek was well-known for crocodiles[77]. The people there constructed rafts of logs strapped together with lawyer vine to cross creeks. Banfield says he knew this happened frequently because "these rafts are continually drifting across to the island, proving how general are their use."

In tidal waters crocodiles were caught by means of a temporary blocking of the creek with stakes and lawyer cane. When a crocodile is found to have gone up the creek through a space left in the blocking stakes, they close it with a lawyer cane screen. On the falling of the tide the animal is speared"[78].

Torres Strait (Imperial, Nutmeg) Pigeons

On Dalrymple's expedition along the coast in 1873, he reported: "a shore party was landed to get wood and water; two hours' capital shooting was obtained, nearly one hundred Torres Strait pigeons being shot by Mr Johnstone, myself, and two others". They were anchored off the Barnard Islands at the time. These islands, Johnstone reported for the same expedition, were visited by turtles and Torres Strait pigeons "in immense numbers".

The Torres Strait or nutmeg pigeons arrived from the north in their thousands during the first week of September and departed in March. They found food during the day on the mainland but flew back to the islands in the evening to nest and roost there. They mainly kept to particular routes, flying in flocks. "Most of those which rest on the islands in this neighbourhood quit the mainland between Clump Point and Tam O'Shanter, the trend of numbers being toward the latter point. Six miles separate these headlands, but the channel between Tam O' Shanter and Dunk Island is little more than 2 ½ miles, so that the pigeons here become concentrated to a certain extent. Early in the season, they pass Dunk Island at the rate of about 300 per minute, during the hour and a half preceding sunset." Yet the numbers were greater prior to Europeans arriving. "Pioneers tell of the days when blacks were wont to make regular expeditions, returning to the mainland with canoes laden with fledglings and eggs, which in accordance with tradition were devoured by the older men and women. The youngsters of

[76] Roth (1900:96)
[77] Banfield 1908:190, 96)
[78] Roth (1900:15)

the tribes were nurtured in the belief that if they partook of such luxuries all the pigeons would fly away never to re-visit their haunts"[79].

"No bird is more precise and punctual in its visits. It comes to its nesting-places and departs with almost almanac-like regularity. It is a large bird as pigeons go... Blacks, understanding their habits, climb particular trees known to be well patronised, and as the birds swoop down to rest, kill them easily with a swoop of a long slender stick, or hurl nulla-nullas into the home-coming flocks, just as they alight"[80].

Signs

The people watched the flowering of trees that signal the first appearance or disappearance of birds. "When the leaves fell and the red flowers began to decorate the leafless branches of the coral tree, *Erythrina,* the blacks knew of the coming of the [Torres Strait] pigeons"[81].

The calls of the little white tern mean the coming of vast shoals of sprats that attract bonito and other large fish[82].

Signal plants in one place alerted people to fruiting in another place. Molly Grant, Girramay Elder, said that when golden wattle (*galir)* flowers at Murray Upper, it is time to go to the coast for a certain shellfish[83]. When *bujujur,* growing on the lowlands at Murray Upper bears its red fruit, it is time to go to the Kirrama Range to gather *jubula* fruit[84]. Leonard Andy, Djiru Traditional Owner, mentioned that when the Cottonwood tree, the Beach Hibiscus (*Hibiscus tiliaceus*) is flowering, it signals the availability of grunter and bream. (This Cottonwood is called *manja* in Girramay, *ma:nyja* in Warrgamay, and Banfield recorded it as "mand-jar").

Seasons

"Ordinarily food was abundant… it only had to be picked up and cooked." In very rainy times, food was less easy to find, but oysters were always plentiful. Occasionally, "the whole population would paddle away to the mainland or to one or other of the adjacent islands, even to as far away as Hinchinbrook Island. Turtle do not lay eggs on Dunk, but the people knew which island beaches they favoured, and would visit them at the right time[85]. Of course, he was speaking of a much smaller "whole population" than would have been here in pre-contact times.

Cooking

Turtles were cooked by a "kummaorie". A big fire was made, and large smooth stones placed in the embers to heat up; meanwhile the turtle was killed and head, neck and sometimes front flippers were removed. The entrails and stomach were also removed, cleansed and put back into the cavity. The turtle was stuck upright in the sand, tail-first, banked by sand, then the red-hot stones were lifted with sticks and dropped into it. Another hole in the sand was lined with stones and a fire lit on them. When

[79] Banfield (1908:69)
[80] Banfield (1908:68 *et seq.*)
[81] Banfield (1925:36)
[82] *Northern Miner* (15.12.1910)
[83] Pedley (1993:205)
[84] D. Lawrence in Pedley (2019:104)
[85] Banfield (1908:168)

the stones were hot, the fire was raked away and the turtle was eased onto them, retaining all the gravy, carapace down. The whole was then covered with leaves (native banana, native ginger or palms), a mound of sand was raised over this and left overnight. In the morning the flesh was thoroughly cooked. The lower shell was lifted off revealing a rich, thick soup. Balls of grass were used as sops. The people, "loudly smacking and sucking their lips to emphasise appreciation" ate "to repletion for a couple of days"[86].

"One of the chief vegetable foods of the blacks is the fruit of "tinda-burra" (Moreton Bay chestnut - *Castanospermum australe*)… Blacks regard this tree with special favour and consideration." The raw seeds taken from the bean pods are poisonous as they contain saponin. Leonard Andy confirmed its Djiru name is *mirryn* (also occasionally written *mirrany or mirrayn*)[87].

Banfield mentions methods used on the beans elsewhere, but continues, "Our blacks have a more ingenious method of preparation, and employ a specially formed culinary implement, which is used for no other purpose. They take the commonest of the land shells - "kurra-dju" (*Xanthomelon pachystyla*) - and breaking away the apex grind down the back on a stone until but little more than half its bulk remains. The upper edges being carefully worked to a fine edge, the only housewifery implement that the blacks possess is perfect. With the implement in the right hand, between the thumb and the second finger - the sharp edge resting on the thumb-nail - the beans are planed, the operator being able to regulate the thickness of the shaving to a nicety."

"It is women's work to collect the beans, make the shell-planes, and do the shredding. In the first place the beans are cooked, the oven consisting of hot stones covered with leaves. In three or four hours they are taken out and planed, a dilly-bag (basket made of narrow strips of lawyer cane or grass) full of the shavings is immersed in running water for two or three days, the food being then ready for consumption without further preparation. In appearance, it resembles coarse tapioca, and it has no particular flavour… "an absolutely perfect method of converting a poisonous substance into a valuable and sustaining, if tasteless, food".

Another plant food requiring careful preparation was the cycad. Banfield describes the process. "The fresh nuts of the plant (*Cycas media*) known as "Kim-alo", were roasted, and while hot bruised between two stones, the upper ("Ookara") a sphere flattened at the poles into which the use of ages wore thumb and finger indentations, the nether ("Diban") flat with a saucer-like depression. Fragments of the husks were carefully eliminated. The coarse meal was put into a dilly-bag and placed in running water below a slight fall, from the lip of which fluming, improvised from the leaf of native ginger, conducted a gentle stream. Two days were sufficient to leach the poisonous principle; but if the initial process of roasting the nuts was omitted - as in some districts - the meal was submitted to the purification of water for as long as two months, when it would be tasteless. It was then ground on the nether stone by the "Moo-ki" (almost a perfect sphere), used with a rotary action, until reduced to flour-like fineness, when it was made into flat or sausage-shaped cakes, wrapped in green leaves and baked"[88]. Traditional Owner, Leonard Andy confirmed the zamiad *banginyu* was harvested and processed in Djiru country.

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[86] Banfield (1908:164-5)
[87] See Pedley (2024) "According to Banfield" for further discussion of this important food.
[88] Banfield (1918:325)

"Ishmael" also wrote of Clump Point: "It was here for the first time that I saw the match box bean, a large vine bearing pods from six inches to two feet long made into flour. They steep the nuts in water. A dillybag is filled with the beans and placed in a stream of running water, until the shell bursts, which takes about three days. The nuts are then cleaned of the outer shell and the bean is then pounded into a beautiful white flour and baked in cakes.

"On this occasion I was shown a number of [women] hard at work converting the soaked beans into flour. Eight [women] were kneeling in four pairs; each pair having a large flat stone between them, on one side a large heap of beans, and on the other a cooliman made of the bark of a tree, into which they put the flour from time to time. A few handfuls of beans being placed on the stone, a continual beating and pounding is kept up with a heavy water worn pebble, until it becomes of the required consistency, then it is made into cakes and baked in the ashes the same as a swagman would make a damper. Heat is the purifier, because I asked to be allowed to taste it, but was prevented by the [women], until it had been baked in the fire"[89].

The bean he describes is *Entada phaseoloides*, a common climber in Far North Queensland rainforests especially along waterways. It was recorded as used for food at Bloomfield River [90] however Jirrbal and Girramay people only used the seeds for beads, not for food[91].

Large Gatherings ("Corroborees")

A few years ago, Banfield wrote in 1908, corroborees "took place every week or so... residents from various localities met, disputed and parted… they served to display skill in use of weapons"[92].

Banfield devotes a chapter in his book, "Tropic Days", to a corroboree that he and Bertha attended on the mainland across from Dunk. Message-sticks had been carried into unfamiliar country by "nervous boys" and the men, women and children all assembled. The beach Aborigines carried oysters and scraps of half-baked fish in well-worn dilly bags. They trudged along the margin of the sea where the receding tide left a firm, level, springy track. They were familiar with all the moods of the sea, and "took little heed of any". The natives of the mountains hastened to the coast, some of whom had not seen the sea before ("big fella salt water").

The corroboree began late in the afternoon, "many of the participators having spent hours in the assumption of the festive costume of the down of sulphur-crested cockatoos plastered to the skin with grease and blood… The down was arranged in tufts following the perpendiculars of the body from shoulder to shin, or in a series of circles accurately spaced, or in intersecting spirals, while the heads of all performers and combatants were converted into white mops."

The clapping of hands and clicking of boomerangs accompanied dancing and singing. The airing of private grievances and individual challenges resulted in spears and boomerangs being thrown in aggression, usually over women. "With feasting and fighting, with dancing and storytelling, quarrelling

[89] *Cairns Morning Post* (02.12.1908

[90] by Roth (1901:12)

[91] Pedley (1993a:137). Also, Armit, who was an Inspector in the Native Police, describes a similar process of soaking, pounding and roasting for the matchbox bean that he observed being pounded by a similar number of women, which he says was eaten on the Herbert, Murray and Mackay Rivers (*Queenslander* 13.10.1877). The accounts are very similar although appearing 10 years apart. He also spent a limited time in the area.]

[92] *Northern Miner* (16.07.1908). However, "every week or so" seems an improbable number.

and reconciliations, the assemblage spent a happy week. Then the jungle reabsorbed the nervous hillmen, and beach-combers straggled along the yellow sands"[93].

At another battle between Tully River people and Clump Point people: "Tom of Dunk Island (Leader of the Clump Point party), was severely wounded when hit in the leg by a boomerang"[94].

According to Roth, corroborees, called "prun" (Djiru word: *brun*), took place all year round except at flood time. Disputes were settled, and socialising occurred. Roth "had the opportunity of watching [a] prun… and saw upwards of 200 savages congregated there". "The prun both settles outstanding disputes and at the same time promotes social intercourse & amusement"[95].

Regarding exchanges, Roth writes that not a lot went on but the Malanbarra gave "bulkuru" nuts to the Clump Point people, and received *bara* nuts in return[96]. "Bulkuru" was a species of *Heliocharis; bara* was the yellow walnut, *Beilschmiedia bancroftii,* a large tree that once grew abundantly in the lowland rainforests. Its large nuts required a cooking, shelling, pounding and detoxification process.

Rain-making

A process to encourage rain was practiced by Tom. He cut a piece of bark from a "wee-ree" tree (*Calophyllum inophyllum*), shaped it to a point at each end, anchored it with bush-string to a root or the bank, allowing it to sink into the water. Tom explained: "Subpose I bin put that "milgar" in water deep, too much rain altogether". A modern variation was also added by Tom: an arch of the vine *Flagellaria indica* with an empty bottle hung upon it[97].

Stories

The Aboriginal people knew many stories about their country and the spirit beings that created features long ago. Banfield recorded some of these.

One story relates to Bedarra Island and it's "rocky satellite", "Peerahmah". Banfield was told the story belonging to this place was that of two women who were left on Coonanglebah (Dunk) while the other Aboriginal people all went to Hinchinbrook Island. The women decided to swim there. After swimming to Bedarra they were exhausted and were changed into the stone island "Peerahmah"[98].

The story of the restless stone is told in "Tropic Days". A particular large tree "stands at the spot where generation after generation of the original owners of the soil has crossed the creek, wearing a waving path upon which ferns ever encroach and which every flood amends. In a recess in its massive roots reposes "Kidjo-bang," the restless stone - a boulder, man's-head size, stained with a rim of sober brown. This is its accustomed scat. It roves the locality, returning, swallow-like, to the close-fitting hollow of the root.

"The embraces of the root are sometimes so strong that the dingy stone may not be moved. But the floods of the wet season maintain an unceasing cataract to its dislodgment, and then, according to the

[93] Banfield (1918:93 *et seq.*)
[94] Banfield (1908:195)
[95] Roth (1900:89, 94)
[96] Roth (1900:47)
[97] Banfield (1908:60)
[98] Banfield (1983a:70)

legends of the blacks, it begins to "walk about." It may rest a month just out of reach of the disturbing water among the ferns. It has been known to appear mysteriously on the sandy beach two hundred yards away, to which spot it is said to travel by way of the grass lands, avoiding the slur of the muddy creek… the round white stone returns, independent of the agency of man", to the sanctuary of the tree.

"Kidj-o-bang" is still associated with the ceremonies of the bestowal of totemic names on the children of a certain father"[99].

"The coastal blacks here are known to sink circular wells with yam-sticks. These wells or "pilmba" are from 3 to 4 feet deep, and about two in diameter, and are dug as near to the swamps as they can get"[100].

For the Malanbara, Roth details the cicatrices or scars that were given to boys at an initiation ceremony after which they could be married. Women also could receive scars, "put on after marriage, and then by their husbands: it is not essential that they have any"[101].

"There are certain foods which are forbidden to all, except the old men and old women. Anything so forbidden that comes out of the sea is called "chamolo", this would include barramundi, stingaree, mullet, trevally and salmon. Were any unauthorised person to partake of such, he or she would become permanently grey-haired. Anything so forbidden that comes from land, is called "kamma": this includes bandicoot, iguana, porcupine, black-snake, carpet-snake and platypus. Were any young person to eat these, the particular animal… would build its nest, lay its eggs, etc. at the back of his or her neck, and make them sick"[102].

Further Information: Johnstone

Robert Johnstone's writings entitled "Spinifex and Wattle" appeared in the *Queenslander* newspaper in 1903-1905[103]. They are an assortment of memories and the diary entries of himself and of other people, such as Dalrymple, and they encompass his experiences from Hinchinbrook Island to Green Island and north of Cairns.

Robert Johnstone has a reputation as the police officer directing native troopers in punitive attacks on Aboriginal people over a wide area. He was the sub-inspector in command of troops that effected the reprisal killings at Clump Point after the *Maria* shipwreck, and many others[104].

However, he was familiar with the area and recorded observations of Aboriginal people and camps up and down the northeast coast in the 1870s. Some of his information came from Aboriginal man Dungaree, a Dunk Islander, who later was one of Johnstone's troopers. Dungaree's story is illustrative of the way things were at that time. According to Dungaree, he and two "countrymen" had been turtling off Dunk Island in bark canoes and were making their way to their camp on Kennedy Bay when a schooner appeared and forced the men on board. This was the *Douglas*, which then travelled east to load guano and bêche-de-mer off a reef island (see below for more on bêche-de-mer fishing).

[99] Banfield (1918:252). Note: the Jirrbal people tell of a rock up in the Davidson Creek area which is like a nest with eggs. If you move the eggs away, they go back by themselves.
[100] Roth (1900:47)
[101] Roth (1900:52)
[102] Roth (1900:86)
[103] Also put together as a book in 1984.
[104] See Richards (2008:241

In summary, the Aboriginal men effected a rebellion, killing the crew. Dungaree was found, starving, on an island he had managed to reach and was handed over to the authorities by his rescuers[105].

Another version of the *Douglas* tragedy was published in a number of newspapers in March 1877. According to the crew, the Aboriginal men who met them in canoes off Dunk Island were friendly and were given biscuits, beef and molasses. They assisted in cutting timber for "dunnage" for the guano. The three who joined the crew "seeming to be satisfied with [their] treatment." And the canoes were hoisted aboard. At Chilcott Island the Aboriginals attacked, eventually the crewmen were able to respond with revolvers killing two of the assailants. The third [Dungaree] was wounded as he jumped over the side and apparently escaped to an island. It took three days for the remaining men to get the *Douglas* back to Trinity Bay[106].

Johnstone tells more of Djiru man Dungaree. When he was captured, he was sent south to Sydney where he was tried for murder and piracy but for want of an interpreter and conclusive evidence, he was returned to Queensland. He was "forwarded" to Johnstone, officer in charge of the Native Mounted Police of the district to which Dungaree belonged. "I knew if he got amongst his tribe he would have been made a hero of, and it would have been the means of his perpetrating more outrages. So …I enrolled him as a trooper, so as to have him under surveillance." Some of the other troopers had wives of the same tribal group as Dungaree, and they acted as interpreters.

When the troop went to investigate the wreck of the *Riser* off King Reef, they soon picked up the trail of the Aboriginal people who had apparently murdered the two crew on the mainland opposite the reef. "As this was Dungaree's country, I expected him to bolt at the first good chance." However, Dungaree led them through a dense mangrove swamp to the camp, which the troopers surrounded.

"As he had turned out so well", Johnstone offered Dungaree a discharge, a tomahawk, fishing lines, hooks and rations and he could join his tribe and tell them "if ever they murdered white men we would return and shoot all their men". Dungaree declined, saying he had been away too long and they would kill him; "no good me stop, me go longa you"[107]. He had been thoroughly alienated from his people and country by white contact.

"Dungaree was eventually murdered by the Burdekin blacks and thus ended the career of one of the most notorious blacks of the Rockingham Bay tribe, and one from whom the writer got a deal of information about their painted caves, legends, and why after death some bodies are laid on raised platforms, others are buried, others are eaten, their bones painted and carried about wherever the tribe were moving to"[108].

"The blacks generally chose a camp for the wet season near a sandy beach and build... fairly substantial gunyahs on the sand ridges, that are well sheltered back from the sea shore..."[109]. Johnstone was well aware of where camps were located. Part of his job of "punishing" Aboriginal people was to burn their camps.

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[105] *Queenslander* (13.08.1904)
[106] *Capricornian* (10.03.1877)
[107] *Queenslander* (14.05.1904)
[108] *Queenslander* (21.05.1904)
[109] *Queenslander* (22.10.1904)

Of Dunk island, he noted: "The blacks are plentiful here, but confine themselves to the south end of the island, where the mountains slope away into ridges and game is more pleasant" [110]. The date is not given but must have been after the *Maria* and *Riser* reprisals.

Like the local people, Johnstone was familiar with marine resources in the district. "On the western side of Hinchinbrook Channel there is a mass of mangrove islands and mud-flats, most of which are covered with marine grasses, &c., on which the dugong (or Yungun, aboriginal name) feed. There are also acres of a kind of bastard pearl oyster, packed as closely on their edges as leaves on a book… The blacks use the oysters for food, as the heaps of shells by their old camps testify. I have often eaten them but they are very strong and coarse; but when nothing better offers, they are, nevertheless, very acceptable[111].

Johnstone observed that shields were "often used as lifebuoys," the men "use them in long swims from the islands to the mainland, and across wide tidal rivers, laying their arms on the shields, then resting their chests on top," the women would put small children on the shield and push it in front of them[112].

According to Johnstone, the marks on the message sticks sent out prior to a *brun* could be understood by the people to whom the messenger was sent. Moreover, information "as to tribe, caste and nationality is all scarred on the skin of all blacks at their Bora rites: so that if a strange black comes into camp he produces his letter or cut stick. This tells his tribe who sent him; and if this does not agree with his credentials on his skin he is called upon to explain, and if not satisfactory, he is punished as a spy"[113]. Johnstone does admit that when he asked about "Bora rites", he was told "not belonging white fellow, black fellow only", and any white person who thinks they know are "fool altogether"[114].

Forster's Evidence

W.T. Forster was among the adventurers on the brig *Maria*, shipwrecked off Bramble Reef, east of Cardwell, in 1872. He was one of the few who survived, and he published an account of his experiences soon after returning to Sydney[115]. He and several companions aboard a raft cobbled together from parts of the sinking brig, were carried towards the coast to the north of Cooper's Point. They managed to survive with the aid of the Aboriginal people, who gave them food and shelter until rescuers arrived. They reached the shore well north of the Johnstone River mouth, and the people who aided them were probably Wanyurr people, who spoke a dialect of Yidiny. They were coastal dwelling neighbours of the Djiru.

"Our new friends had fishing lines in their hands, plainly showing on what errand they were bent, they started with us in the same direction we were ourselves travelling, and after going a few miles came to their fishing ground, they first caught a few shrimps for bait, they then walked out into the sea up to their waists and began their work. When the tide rose too high, they desisted, having caught about a dozen fish, some of them nearly a foot in length; there were two kinds, one a species of bream.

[110] *Queenslander* (20.08.1904)
[111] *Queenslander* (06.08.1904)
[112] *Queenslander* (26.03.1904)
[113] *Queenslander* (23.07.1904)
[114] *Queenslander* (30.07.1904)
[115] Forster (1872)

They had baskets "made of split cane and are very prettily and symmetrically formed; they have large funnel shaped ones five or six feet long made of the same material, for the purpose of catching shrimps, these look like immense extinguishers. A little south of Cooper's Point, we found them camping in the open air at some distance from their huts. There were fifteen or twenty in this lot, including children, they appeared glad to see us, and welcomed us heartily, inviting us to sit down and partake of their supper, which consisted of a moist whitish substance made from the Moreton Bay chestnut. This bean in its natural state contains a strong purgative, as with other Leguminosae, this they extract by baking, and soaking in water, after which it is sliced very fine with a shell, and again soaked; it is very tasteless stuff. There are also several nuts and roots which require to be prepared in a similar manner, and are all equally tasteless…

"In the afternoon we went to the beach with the blacks, it was then low tide; they went into the sea and began groping in the sand looking for cockles; when the tide rose, they came out of the water, and making fires, began to cook their spoil. After eating a good many, we went back to the camp, had a few more cockles… "We fared very well, for they had yams, bananas, fern roots, and some small crabs. Meanwhile some more of them were employed fishing for shrimps; they did not get many, but these were a pleasant addition to our banquet."

"We stopped at our friends' hut on the beach to wait for low tide; while there, the women and children caught some small fish, that had been left by the tide in a shallow pool: we had a good meal of them, eating them whole, after roasting them on the coals."

A full account of the *Maria* tragedy appears below.

CONTACT HISTORY

This examination of contact history seeks detail for the Djiru area, the people and their history. Of course, these records are one-sided, but the observations of Europeans that we have, do give glimpses of aboriginal lifestyles at the time of contact and soon after. These reflect the traditions of the observing writers and may only be based on superficial contact. They are inadequate and often in an inappropriate style, but they are what we have. The first navigators along the coast kept logs and journals; the bêche-de-mer fishers and the cedar-getters did not, but soon reports were appearing in newspapers which can yield information of interest. Reports to Government officers, such as the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, and the Police Commissioner, also are of interest from the 1890s and 1900s.

Later, Banfield provided his view of the story, particularly during the establishment of the Hull River Government Aboriginal Settlement. A much later report on this settlement collected some oral histories from Aboriginal people regarding the events of that time[116]. Ideally, more such oral histories and memories from Djiru people would balance the current work.

Survey Ships

Cook's barque, *Endeavour*, was sighted by Djiru people when it sailed past on 8th June 1770. Cook believed Hinchinbrook Island was attached to the mainland when he named its most easterly point, Point Hillock; he passed Cape Sandwich (as he named it) at 6am. Naming Rockingham Bay as he sailed north, he passed through the channel between the three outermost Family Islands and those nearer the shore: "we saw on one of the nearest Islands a number of natives collected together who seemed to look very attentively upon our ship, they were quite naked and of a very dark colour with short hair".

Naturalist of the ship's company, Joseph Banks, wrote in his journal the same day, that the mainland "by the number of fires seemed to be better peopled. In the morning, we passed within ¼ of a mile of a small islet or rock on which we saw with our glasses about 30 men, women and children standing all together and looking attentively at us, the first people we have seen show any signs of curiosity at the sight of the ship"[117].

Until then, they had seen few people but had heard them and observed fires on the mainland, especially as they sailed at night[118]. Cook named Dunk Island and continued north, charting Double Point as he passed. It would be many years before vessels ventured again inside the Barrier Reef to survey the inner passage.

The armed brig *Kangaroo*, from Port Jackson for Ceylon, commanded by Lt. Jeffreys, in 1815 followed Cook's track within the reef. At Cape Sandwich, he "had communication with the natives, who were very friendly and conveyed fruits to the vessel"[119]. It is thought he probably anchored at Goold Island

[116] Pedley (1998)
[117] Parkin (1997:291)
[118] Gill (1988:82)
[119] Gill (1988:148)

which later became well-established as a place for ships to obtain fresh water and wood. He may have also named the Brook Islands[120].

Captain Philip Parker King made several voyages in these seas. In 1819 he sailed the *Mermaid* on an exploratory voyage to the northern waters. He named Goold Island and recorded his meeting with the indigenous people. These people were most probably not Djiru, but the observations are relevant. On the western sandy beach, several huts were seen, while seven canoes were hauled up on the sands and a fire was kindled near the huts. Next morning five canoes headed for the cutter and their occupants ventured on board. They had brought baskets and turtle eggs which they gave to the crew, and received fish hooks and lines, and ship's biscuits.

Banfield quoted King's record: "In order to give each something, the feet of a pair of worsted stockings were cut off for one, whilst the legs were placed on another's arms. A leather cap was given to each of them, and thus accoutred, and making a most ridiculous appearance, they left us, highly delighted with themselves and the reception they had met with." At this date the male population of the island numbered fifteen; the canoes were not more than five feet long, food was cooked in stone ovens, and the record thus -ends- "The natives of this bay seem to be much more ingenious, and to understand better what is useful than the generality of their countrymen." This is a summary of the first recorded history of the Island. Now the native population is extinct, though the beach frontage is thickly strewn with the shells of the molluscs upon which they fed[121].

The Aboriginal people seemed not at all overawed. In the evening some of King's officers visited the camp ashore and were peaceably received by the men, the women having been previously sent across the island[122]. Passing Dunk Island, stopping briefly at Timana, then specified as "one of the Family islands (the north easternmost)" by Cunningham, the botanist aboard, they continued north.

The *Beagle* under Commander John Wickham passed through Rockingham Bay in 1839 and again in 1841 under John Lort Stokes.

Captain Blackwood carried out further surveys on the *Fly* in 1843 with *Bramble* as her tender. Geologist Joseph Beete Jukes was on board, and he wrote and published an account of the voyage. A fortnight was spent surveying in Rockingham Bay and exploring navigable rivers and creeks along the coast, affording time for more than fleeting contact with the indigenous people. Jukes was officially charged with investigating the geology of the Reef and the nature of the reef-growing corals. He wrote in his narrative that he had always "looked with a favourable eye on what we call savages and held a kind of pre-conceived sentimental affection for them"[123].

Jukes found them "friendly and familiar at first", coming every day to the ship, receiving food and presents. On the last night of their stay, the fishing party went ashore and took a good haul of fish in the seine which they shared with the natives who suddenly attacked the party as they dragged their boat into deeper water. Spears and stones were hurled. They had neglected to take most of their arms as the natives had hitherto been friendly, but one had a "fowling piece". One of the attackers was shot and the attack ceased. Also, while Jukes and two men were in a creek on the north side of the bay, they were surrounded by 40 or 50 locals who pelted them with basalt blocks. The assailants were

[120] Jones (1961:6)
[121] *Northern Miner* (03.09.1909)
[122] Jones (1961:6)
[123] McCalman (2015:93)

"discouraged by a charge of No. 4 shot". Perhaps they became less friendly because the intruders had taken a lot of fish without permission.

Jukes had also met several parties of natives, some with excellent bark canoes, who were "peaceable" near "Mount Hinchinbrook", which this survey established was in fact an island. Evans of the *Fly,* also elicited words in the local dialect of aboriginals he spoke to on Goold Island[124].

The Kennedy Expedition and the 1848 Maritime Surveys

Edmund Kennedy was appointed to lead an expedition in May 1848, projected to land at Rockingham Bay, from there to traverse Cape York Peninsula. These men were to be the first white explorers to spend more than a brief time on Djiru country.

Rattlesnake under Commander Owen Stanley, with naturalist T.H. Huxley and zoologist J. MacGillivray on board, was appointed to complete marine survey work and to accompany the barque *Tam O'Shanter,* which carried Kennedy's party and supplies to Rockingham Bay. On anchoring off Goold Island, local people again met the vessels. MacGillivray noted eight canoes approached at once carrying a total of twelve unarmed men, which suggested to him they were friendly, although he was aware of the attacks on the *Fly* personnel some years earlier. Huxley described how one old man came aboard, made himself at home, and readily exchanged fish hooks and lines for biscuits[125].

After unloading Kennedy's supplies and men, the *Rattlesnake* moved to an anchorage off Dunk Island, where some locals again approached in canoes. MacGillivray thought they were the same in appearance as the Goold Island men and used the same type of canoe. Further remarks indicate relations were not totally peaceable.

"Soon after the ship had come to an anchor, some of the natives came off in their canoes and paid us a visit, bringing with them a quantity of shellfish (*Sanguinolaria rugosa),* which they eagerly exchanged for biscuit. For a few days afterwards we occasionally met them on the beach, but at length they disappeared altogether, in consequence of having been fired at with shot by one of two 'young gentlemen' of the *Bramble* on a shooting excursion, whom they wished to prevent approaching too closely a small village where they had their wives and children. Immediate steps were taken in consequence to prevent the recurrence of such collisions when thoughtless curiosity on one side is apt to be promptly resented on the other if numerically superior in force… The men had large cicatrices on the shoulders and across the breast and belly, the septum of the nose was perforated, and none of the teeth had been removed. I saw no weapons, and some rude armlets were their only ornaments"[126].

The shellfish they brought indicate the type of food they considered worthy of barter, as well as being plentiful at the time. Since reclassified as *Asaphis violascens*, this bivalve inhabits the lower shores in this area, favouring protected habitats such as fringes of coastal mangrove forests and found on semi-sheltered reef platforms. It is found elsewhere in the Pacific and attains sufficiently high densities to support sustained collection for human consumption on islands such as Kiribati and New Caledonia[127].

[124] Jukes (1847:93)
[125] Jones (1961:21)
[126] Banfield, quoting MacGillivray (1908:43)
[127] Willan (1993)

MacGillivray describes a later encounter at the mouth of a small river, probably Liverpool Creek. A party of about 20 natives appeared, following them along the bank. They left when they heard the report of his gun while shooting on shore. Near the mouth was a cluster of three or four domed huts, large and roomy, with fishing nets lying around. The owners retired into the bush as the party landed being the first white men to do so on this part of Djiru country[128].

Kennedy's contact at Rockingham Bay between the Djiru and their southern neighbouring people, and the white intruders seems to have been peaceful. Kennedy noted the watching natives were "not troublesome"[129], and at one river mouth (probably Wreck Creek), some "natives" pointed out the best place to cross and some assisted in carrying things over. Some also attempted petty thefts, but small gifts were given out by the expedition[130].

William Carron, a botanist, was one of the few to survive the Kennedy expedition. He wrote a journal from memory several months later, including some comments about the Aboriginal people he met at Rockingham Bay. On arrival at what became known as Kennedy Bay, Carron observed a number of Aboriginal people had assembled on the beach: "very fine strong men". They watched the strangers' proceedings, seeming peaceably inclined. He noted their bark canoes and saw several men returning to camp in the evening who had been fishing, mostly with spears, but some caught with hooks. He talked with them, recording their word for water as "hamoo", which is his rendering of the Girramay and Walmal word *gamu*. In a "native camp" he encountered 18 to 20 "gunyahs", 7 feet long, 4 feet high. In the centre of the camp were 4 large ovens, their food consisting principally of shell and other fish. He thought the "natives here very numerous"[131].

It is noteworthy that Carron wrote that after he had examined the shields, fishhooks and artefacts found in the "gunyahs", he "left them where I found them", an attitude which the Aboriginal owners would have noticed. White people who came across Aboriginal camps in later years frequently helped themselves to whatever they found, including mortuary items.

Dixon was told by Dyirbal Elders that at first, the white-skinned visitors were believed to be the returned spirits of their ancestors. They were not thought to be a threat. "By the time we found out this was not so… it was too late for the Englishmen had taken advantage of our goodwill"[132].

The Bêche-de-Mer Industry

The bêche-de-mer industry brought early external contact to the Djiru people. "Bêche-de-mer", also known as trepang, sea slug or sea cucumber, refers to any of a dozen species of various genera in the phylum Echinodermata. This marine animal, boiled, dried and smoked, was eaten mainly in China, where it was a delicacy. Across northern Australia, the history of trade in bêche-de-mer goes back at least to 1700 when Makassans from South Celebes (Sulawesi) fished off what is now the Northern Territory. Indeed, rock art in Arnhem Land may indicate the Makassans visited as early as the 1500s.

[128] Jones (1961:24)
[129] Beale (1970:159)
[130] Carron (1849:23)
[131] Carron (1849: 20)
[132] Dixon (2019:156)

Shortly after Europeans arrived in northern Queensland, Asians also arrived, attracted by news of mineral and marine resources, but the first recorded commercial fisherman in the Torres Strait was Captain Edwards of the *Bluebell* who set up a trepang station on Albany Island in 1862[133].

Subsequently, there are records of trepang stations dotted throughout the Torres Strait Islands. Pearl (Trochus) shells were also harvested, being in demand overseas for mother-of-pearl buttons. By the early nineteenth century, bêche-de-mer fishing was important to the economies of the Torres Strait Islands people. As Europeans discovered more of the Great Barrier Reef, the activities expanded down the Coral Sea coast. As early as 1867, newspaper reports referred to the industry as "growing in importance", when a Townsville "contemporary" noted four of the fleet of Banner & Co., had come into port after seven months of fishing, carrying 80 tons of bêche-de-mer[134].

Johnstone described the process of bêche-de-mer fishing as follows. A Captain would fit out his boat, "secure" his crew, and then proceed to an island to establish a camp and build a shed (smokehouse). The bêche-de-mer were obtained at low tide and returned to camp to be boiled, gutted and dried. There were risks from sharks, sea snakes, large clams and attacks from Aborigines, both those in his own crew and those of other crews[135].

"Securing" a crew often involved kidnapping Aboriginal people. To engage cheap labour, in some cases, the captains offered flour, tobacco, sugar, tea or alcohol, all largely addictive substances, to the Elders at Aboriginal camps near the coast, some of whom encouraged the young men to go aboard. Elsewhere, men were kidnapped, as also were women. Sex was involved in recruiting methods and "venereal disease was rampant throughout Cape York"[136].

The industry was largely unregulated and the profits were good. In 1889, "bêche-de-mer commands a high price… The best is worth £120 per ton", the next quality £100 per ton, down to as low as £30 per ton[137].

Meston noted in his 1896 report, that while some crews were treated fairly, others were enticed aboard, made to work like slaves, then shot, marooned on the reef or landed far from their own homes. The bêche-de-mer men would occasionally be killed by their Aboriginal crew in retribution, or at least abandoned when the crew secretly left. The operators would also kidnap women from Aboriginal camps, sometimes leaving "a legacy of disease as well as demoralisation"[138]. Parry-Okeden said the bêche-de-mer fishers were "the lowest of the low", wielding absolute power at the lonely fishing stations. He had no doubt that they cruelly wronged and oppressed the Aboriginal people working for them and thereby provoked the so-called "atrocities"[139].

On the other hand, the relationship between Aboriginal people and the luggers was not just one way. Employment on the boats was a way for men to escape the consequences of an adulterous affair or an undesirable marriage, to get away for a time always with the option of escaping from the boat. The older men might use the presence of the boats to increase their own power by acting as recruiters for the younger men, a service for which they received tobacco, flour and "decreased competition for

[133] Chase (1981:7)
[134] *Queensland Times* (19.11.1867)
[135] *Queenslander* (10.09.1904)
[136] Ganter (1994:58)
[137] Brassey (1889:397)
[138] Meston (1896:2)
[139] Parry-Okeden (1897:14)

wives"[140]. The pattern of contact varied across geographical regions and led to various strategies by which the indigenous people adjusted to the incursions[141].

In the Mission Beach region, bêche-de-mer stations were known on Dunk Island by the early 1870s[142] indicating contact from at least this time. Eden, Police Magistrate at Cardwell from 1868 to 1870, wrote how every now and then a bêche-de-mer vessel, which he described as a "dirty-looking little schooner" would arrive at Cardwell, anchor for the night, buy beef and rations and depart[143]. It was the next Cardwell Police Magistrate, Sheridan, who in 1877, reported "kidnapping the natives along the coast and the adjacent islands, and forcing them to act as divers" was known as "shanghai-ing them". Following the *Douglas* incident discussed previously, a wreck was reported at Tam O'Shanter Point. Native Police troopers were sent under Mr Day to investigate. He captured some local women, who explained through interpreters that their men had boarded the vessel anchored off Tam O'Shanter Point at night, killed the crew and cut up the vessel. "And this, from what I could make out, was in revenge for the kidnapping of the people on board the *Douglas*"[144].

Steve Illich (Illedge) was a Portuguese from East Timor who had been a timber-getter in the beaches area. He made a home on Stephens Island, the larger of the South Barnard Islands in the 1880s. From here he carried out bêche-de-mer fishing. He had huts there for his Aboriginal labourers, smokehouses for drying the catch, and a fleet of six boats. He also had a house for his Timorese wife and their children. However, the cyclone of 1890 put an end to his enterprise[145]. He then lived on the mainland at Murdering Point. His granddaughters Grace and Biddy, being of Aboriginal descent, were later sent to Palm Island, as also subsequently was his son Andrew[146].

Reports from the 1870s indicate that the Aboriginal people employed on the bêche-de-mer boats were often taken on far from where they actually fished. Thus, in a widely reported Green Island incident when several white men were murdered, the Aborigines involved, along with their wives, had been signed on at Cleveland Bay[147].

In 1884 the Queensland Parliament debated the Native Laborers Protection Bill, the object of which was to regulate the pearl-shell and bêche-de-mer fishery, and to correct the many abuses found to exist in connection with it, particularly in the kidnapping of Aborigines and South Sea Islanders to work in the industry. Evidence was tabled that relates directly to the Rockingham Bay coast and islands. When Premier Griffith was challenged to provide instances of injustice to Aboriginal labourers, he read a number of reports received from the Police Magistrate at Cooktown.

According to one report, two cutters, tenders of certain fishing smacks "left this port [Cooktown] for Townsville to obtain 'boys', and returned with eighteen natives of both sexes, varying in ages from nine to forty years, and procured under very suspicious circumstances, at Hinchinbrook and Dunk Islands, and in the vicinity of the Johnstone River. Having entered into a compact to 'recruit' in company, upon arrival here they drafted these 'boys' and gins after the manner of sheep, each captain taking nine of mixed sexes, and without the least reference to the inclination or feelings induced by

[140] Anderson (1979:35)
[141] Ganter (1994:34)
[142] Jones (1973:20)
[143] Eden (1872:296)
[144] Sheridan (1877)
[145] Mackness (1983:29)
[146] McRobbie (2008:25)
[147] *Queensland Times* (30.08.1873)

the filial or friendly instincts of the parties concerned, some of whom I know, manifested a strong aversion to being separated.

Amongst those was a girl eleven or twelve years old, a mere child comparatively, who must have received shameful treatment on the voyage between Hinchinbrook and here. The girl was afterwards taken charge of by the police. On the following day, the remaining seventeen were engaged by the masters of the vessels, under the Pearl-shell and Bêche-de-mer Fishery Act of 1881.

The report continued: There was another instance in which a man shipped seventeen Aboriginals on the 22nd of January 1882, here [Cooktown]; eight at Cardwell, on the 29th of March 1882; and three more at this port three days subsequently—all natives of Palm, Hinchinbrook and Dunk Islands. Twenty-five of these boys he discharged here in the presence of the shipping master, on the 9th of January 1883, and reported three as having died in New Guinea. On the 22nd of January 1883, he again appears on the record of the shipping office. On that date he shipped twelve Aboriginals, and on the 9th of February following he shipped seventeen—all natives of Hinchinbrook, Dunk, and Fitzroy Islands, and Liverpool Creek. In June of that year, he reported two as having deserted: on the 26th of March of this year, he discharged twenty-one at the shipping office here; reported five as having died at New Guinea, which leaves one 'boy' unaccounted for, and neither from the shipping master nor the records of his office can I find a clue as to what became of him.

Then, as master of another ship: On the 21st of April last he shipped eleven Aboriginal natives of Dunk Island. The 'boys' in each case have been engaged for one year, at 10s. per calendar month, 'to procure bêche-de-mer on the coast of Queensland or New Guinea, or the islands adjacent thereto, ‘and at the termination of their engagement' to be returned free of cost to their native places.’

At present any man, white or black, can go over to the coast and secure a number of natives by means of a bag or two of flour. The men come willingly enough, as they are in a state of semi-starvation, but invariably decamp on the first opportunity, and kill the men in charge of the boat if they cannot otherwise effect their object[148].

These reports of Aboriginal people being taken from Dunk Island, Hinchinbrook Island, and Liverpool Creek are some instances from just a single year. It is likely that the taking of people to be labourers on the pearling and bêche-de-mer boats had been ongoing for some time by then. Protector Roth reported that while his official vessel was anchored off Dunk Island, the *Agnes* and the *Goldfinch* sailed into the bay and were immediately boarded. Six “boys” and a child were apprehended who had been illegally on board for 12 to 15 months, and neither boat was licensed under the Pearl-shelling Act. The masters were prosecuted at Cardwell. The illegal workers had been taken from Flinders and Night Island[149]. Illegally kidnapped Djiru people would have been found at other ports, far from their own country, if found at all.

In 1903 officials thought there were 500-600 mainland Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders engaged in the trepang and pearl fisheries of northern Queensland[150].

[148] *Northern Miner* (05.08.1884)
[149] *Brisbane Courier* (22.12.1902)
[150] Roth (1903: 5)

Kidnapping was not always successful. A newspaper report describes how, in May 1894, a man named Killaway had "taken (half against their will) a boatload of black boys [sic] from the Tully River for pearl or bêche-de-mer fishing." He had run the boat up a creek and was overhauling it when one of the captives, Koodjarry, had "buried a tomahawk in his skull and the others assisted to finish him off – buried him under some stones." Koodjarry and his assistant, Milky, were later apprehended by Inspector Portley and his troopers with the aid of Mr Brooke of Brooklands and taken away shackled to each other[151].

Conversely, the 'Iris', a boat owned by A.D. White of Bluff Downs, but in the care of W. Watkins, was stolen from its mooring off the Cardwell jetty by "five aboriginals who had been working for a Malay trader… and took it to Bloomfield River to get back to their home country… despite the pleas of grandfather [William Watkins Snr.] to drop charges… they each were sentenced to six months in jail"; this took place in about 1909[152].

Writing in 1899, Roth as "Northern Protector" noted that employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on the trepang and pearling boats was detrimental to the indigenous population in that a high mortality was found among the young males engaged as crew[153]. Contact with the bêche-de-mer fishermen brought in diseases to the tribes. Also, minor ailments that afflicted Europeans and Asians were contracted by the Aborigines, but as they had no immunity, due to "want of proper care and nourishment" the effects of these ailments were "not so transitory".

Djiru encounters with the bêche-de-mer fishers ranged from the unpleasant to the horrendous and ultimately fatal. While the numbers of consequent deaths on either side may not have been huge, they were significant to the people. The cumulative effects of the marauders with their totally different culture and ethics, the threat of kidnapping and being taken far from home and then left there, as well as the diseases they brought were far from negligible.

Cardwell – Permanent European Settlement

The Djiru first experienced contact with Europeans who were passing through, carrying out surveys, or kidnapping people; the establishment of Cardwell on Rockingham Bay in 1864 brought permanent settlers to the general region.

The new state of Queensland separated from New South Wales in 1859; this provided an impetus to the spread of settlement. Exploring parties "rode the length and breadth of Queensland" pushing the frontiers northward. Land hungry settlers from as far south as Victoria packed their belongings onto drays and pushed north, bringing picks, shovels, bullocks, horses and dynamite[154].

Cardwell on Rockingham Bay was originally established as a port outlet for the newly leased Valley of Lagoons station on the Upper Burdekin (which was Gugu Badhun country). In partnership with Arthur and Walter Scott, George Elphinstone Dalrymple had great hopes for the Valley of Lagoons enterprise, which only wanted a practical communication link to the coast and the opening of a port. A party of twenty men was put together, the *Policeman* was chartered, and the party landed on the coast across from Goold Island on January 20, 1864. They were met by local Aboriginal people both at this

[151] *Townsville Daily Bulletin* (24.03.1908)
[152] Hubinger (1988)
[153] Roth (1899:4)
[154] Pike (1976:5)

point, and the next day when they selected a better landing spot. Dalrymple communicated with them through James Morrill, a member of his party, who had survived a shipwreck in Cleveland Bay that resulted in him living with the Aboriginal people there for 17 years. He told them the white men had come to take possession of that part of the coast; no war was intended but they must leave the white settlers alone. They were also to tell this to neighbouring tribes[155].

As more settlers arrived, taking over Girramay and Jirrbal land, they also brought conflict. The Aboriginal people who were being dispossessed of their country retaliated and the white people demanded protection, so the Native Police Troopers followed. Conflict situations lead to reprisals. It was only a matter of time before Djiru country was also the object of encroaching selection. However, before this, an unfortunate and tragic series of events unfolded with the wreck of the brig *Maria*.

Cardwell jetty, c.1912. From 1914, Aboriginal people were put on board boats here and taken to the Hull River Settlement. (Dorothy Jones Library Heritage collection)

The Wreck of the *Maria*

The incidents that took place on the Rockingham Bay and adjacent coast following the wreck of the brig *Maria* in 1872 became widely known and notorious at the time, with reports appearing in numerous newspapers. The episode and aftermath are still discussed in the literature today.

The *Maria,* an old and barely seaworthy vessel, left Sydney in late January 1872, carrying a gold prospecting expedition consisting of 75 men, bound for New Guinea. She ran into gale-force winds and eventually struck Bramble Reef on February 26. The ship carried a reasonably good boat that the Captain commandeered with six of the crew as oarsmen. Two other leaky boats would not hold all the remaining men, so they made rafts from the ship's timbers. When the *Maria* went down some men drowned, others were picked up by the boats.

The 28 men in the two smaller boats ultimately made their way to Cardwell via Hinchinbrook Island and told their story. The *Tinonee* was chartered to search for other survivors, but none was found. Then two exhausted survivors from the Captain's boat arrived at Cardwell on March 6. Their party had been attacked by Aboriginal people soon after their boat made land, the Captain and two others had been killed but these two had escaped and worked their way to Cardwell, travelling mainly at night. The

[155] Farnfield (1968:69)

remaining two from the Captain's boat arrived in Cardwell a day later. Midshipman Sabben of the *Peri,* then lying at Cardwell under the charge of Captain Moresby of the *Basilisk,* was sent to locate the Captain's boat; the men were well-armed. It was found near Tam O'Shanter Point. As they removed the boat, the men were attacked by 120 "hostile natives" who threw a volley of spears, none of which struck any of the party. Sabben's men opened fire at 80 yards. Eight Djiru were killed and eight lay wounded when they ran to safety (Moresby 1876). Hayter later stated the attackers numbered about 200[156] which perhaps demonstrates how the story was already evolving.

Survivor of the large raft, Ingham, was to recall that a search was made of Tam O'Shanter Point where the Captain's skull was "found in the blacks' camp and was identified by his artificial teeth. His remains and those of the men who were killed by the blacks… had evidently been eaten, for Sub-Inspector Johnstone found dillybags in a native hut containing pieces of partly roasted human flesh"[157]. Whether or not this was true, or if the bodies of the Captain and the other two men "were never found"[158] such claims fuelled the fears of the settlers and increased their calls for reprisals on the Aboriginals of the district.

Sometime later, a rusted rifle barrel was found on the beach near Tam O'Shanter Point by Banfield. Thinking it could be a relic from the *Maria* wreck, Banfield wrote to Lawrence Hargrave, who had survived the wreck by getting to Hinchinbrook Island and then to Cardwell. Mr Hargrave replied to Banfield, agreeing the rifle barrel would be "the one that Captain Stratman fired on the blacks with and brought about the deaths of himself and some of the boat's crew"[159].

Following Sabben's report of the attack when they sought to remove Stratman's boat, Police Magistrate Sheridan at Cardwell requested Captain Moresby's assistance to take necessary action following the acts of violence and murders committed by "the blacks" to ensure the coast would be safe. Moresby commanded Lt. Hayter to take the *Peri* with a crew of fourteen to transport Sub-Inspector Johnstone and his Native Police troopers to the scene. A second boat accompanied them, crewed by volunteers from Cardwell. Moresby felt the step was painful but necessary. Hayter was instructed "to punish the Blacks for their murder and attack on the boats' crew". When Moresby wrote his account published in 1876, he said "I felt it painful to take such a step… necessary not only for the sake of justice and in the interests of all white men who might hereafter be placed at the mercy of the tribe, but to secure the safety of Cardwell itself"[160].

The *Peri* firstly anchored off Dunk Island. The native police troopers walked around the island in two groups. Hayter and Johnstone found only deserted camps and canoes, which they destroyed, but heard a number of shots. Crompton, in charge of the second group, later told Hayter there had been only "a very few blacks" on the Island and that the main body was on the Mainland. If this account reconciles with Gowlland's information (recorded in his journal) that Johnstone's troopers had accounted for 16 Aboriginal people on Dunk, then Crompton clearly thought 16 was "very few".

Moresby's information was gathered from Johnstone as well as Hayter, who was not with the troopers at all times as he remained with the boats. On the mainland, "the tribe was surprised before daylight, several unfortunate blacks were shot down by the native troopers, who showed an unrestrained ferocity

[156] Hayter (1872)
[157] Johnstone, *Queenslander* (16.01.1904)
[158] Maiden (2000:151)
[159] Banfield (*Northern Miner* 05.08.1915)
[160] Moresby (1876:41)

that disgusted our officers; and the camp, in which some of the effects of the four murdered men were found was destroyed." Hayter's party "heard firing and saw a tremendous column of thick black smoke about a mile up the coast so we knew pretty well what had happened." He arrived at the burnt-out camp and found a large quantity of the men's effects (revolvers, trousers, etc.) as well as "a lot of human bones that had been burnt but whether of white or black men it was impossible to say". Hayter took a native boy back to Cardwell; he was about six and his father had been shot. "He became a great favourite on the *Basilisk* but died in England of disease of the lungs"[161].

Hayter's men continued to burn all the camps they came across as they continued south to Tam O'Shanter Point. The troopers then told Hayter they were watching a large camp at the Hull River with about 100 "fighting men" but when they went to attack, they "couldn't find the camp and the party only came across four or five Blacks who had been constructing a canoe to cross the Hull and watch the schooner. Three of them were shot and the Gin taken prisoner. She deliberately threw her child in the river, I was told, when she saw the party coming". Hayter then returned to Cardwell.

Meanwhile, the search for survivors continued in the *Basilisk* under Captain Moresby's command. North of the Johnstone River mouth, eight emaciated men were found on 12 March, the survivors of the thirteen who had embarked on the larger raft. The friendly disposition of the tribe they had encountered (probably Wanyurr people, who spoke a dialect of Yidiny), had ensured their survival, as Forster later described[162]. The second raft was found south of a river that Moresby named "Gladys" (Johnstone River), but only two bodies and no survivors were found there. A few miles south another body was located, apparently killed by the locals. A later search by Lt. Gowlland of HMS *Governor Blackall* accompanied by Robert Johnstone and his troopers, located six more bodies further south. Three were in the vicinity of the "Louisa" River mouth (Maria Creek). The men were probably trying to walk to Cardwell but had been killed. All but one of the corpses had had their skulls smashed, probably by a rock[163].

Gowlland had been instructed to take the *Governor Blackall* from Sydney to the area to search for survivors. In his report he stated he had requested the assistance of Mr Johnstone and his detachment of native police. "Every native camp between Cardwell and Point Cooper, a distance of some fifty miles, was visited and minutely searched for any traces of white men... ". His diary also records that following the discovery of the final three bodies, Johnstone and his troopers "surprised a large camp of natives and found several pairs of trousers and shirts in it… Mr Johnstone's trackers shot 27 Blacks in this camp".

As well as burning all the camps they found along the coast during their search, while the *Governor Blackall* was anchored under Brook Island, Johnstone was instructed to land at Hull River and "examine the two large blacks' camps there indicated by immense hunting fires". Gowlland then proceeded to Dunk Island to take on water. He noted they saw tracks but thought they would be "gins" as "Mr Johnstone and his trackers having given a very good account of the 16 he came across"[164].

In Johnstone's official report that accompanied Gowlland's report, he stated, "I have severely punished the guilty parties." Johnstone's actions on carrying out this punishment were noted in a country newspaper article claiming also that Johnstone spoke of killing whole camps, including women and

[161] Moresby (1876:42)
[162] Forster (1872)
[163] Gowlland (1872)
[164] Gowlland (1872: March 21)

children, with the greatest coolness. The matter was brought up in the Queensland Parliament as it reflected on the policy of the Queensland Government and was an atrocious libel[165]. Johnstone denied the charges. The people of Cardwell thanked him for his "exertions throughout the late sad catastrophe" in a signed testimonial that subsequently was displayed in the Shire Hall of the Johnstone Shire, a shire named in his honour which no longer exists.

The native police carried Snider rifles; Snider bullets – "they made a hole in a human body as large as a twenty-cent piece"[166]. Rifles do not have great advantages over spears in the scrub, but on the beach they are supreme. The first-hand accounts of Gowlland, Moresby and Hayter tell the horrific tale too well. Recent commentaries have also drawn their own conclusions on the reprisals dealt out to the "murdering" native people.

Richards, in his work "The Secret War", concludes that in Queensland, the Native Police played a major role in the dispossession of the Aboriginal people of their land, the almost complete destruction of Aboriginal law, and the disintegration of Aboriginal families. The task of the Native Police on the frontier was to immediately and brutally suppress any Indigenous resistance to European colonisation. Their business was "dispersal" of the Aboriginal people who resisted the colonists.

During the *Maria* reprisals, all Aboriginal people apprehended in the ensuing searches were shot, including, probably, those who helped one group of survivors. "There can be no doubt that the Native Police on this occasion operated in a retaliatory fashion rather than a preventative manner. The indiscriminate slaughter of Aboriginal people, for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, decimated some local groups[167].

Bottoms, in "The Conspiracy of Silence", provides a review of Sub-inspector Johnstone's work with his Native Police troopers, listing the killings he was responsible for, including the "punitive raids" he led following the wreck of the *Maria*. While eleven white survivors of the disaster were killed by local Aboriginal people, the retaliatory action resulted in what Bottoms estimates as a total of about 88 Aboriginal men, women and children being killed in response when camps were raided[168].

Others put the figure higher. Gray's careful analysis of numbers in available reports concludes that between 113 and 140 Djiru died as a result of the *Maria* reprisals[169].

There is no doubt that many Djiru people died and those remaining were even less inclined towards friendliness. The settlers at Cardwell for years lived with anxiety about Aboriginal attacks even as they annexed land and debarred the original owners from their Country. Aboriginal resistance to this intrusion was persistent. The people of the Rockingham Bay hinterland became notorious as fiercely resistant, "the most murderous and war-like of any tribe in Northern Queensland" according to Johnstone writing about the murder of the crew of the *Riser* which struck King Reef in 1878. He had warned the two white men to beware of the tribe and not to land on the mainland until they reached Cardwell[170].

[165] Jones (1961:176)
[166] Pike (1976:35)
[167] Richards (2008)
[168] Bottoms (2013:114, 135)
[169] Gray (2022:16-27)
[170] *Queenslander* (14.05.1904)

Memories were long. The Djiru now associated white men with incursion into their territory and horrific loss of life. "The Sketcher", writing in 1880, said of the Tam O'Shanter Point people: "the natives here, the most warlike and aggressive of any on the coast, boast that no white man has landed on this point and returned to tell the tale"[171].

Cedar-getters

From the early colonial days, bêche-de-mer fishermen raided the coast and islands kidnapping young aboriginal men to work on their boats and women for sex; they were soon followed by men intent on cutting valuable timber, specifically the red cedar of the area. They trespassed on Djiru country, cutting trees and clearing tracks for their bullock teams to haul the timber to the waterways for shipment out. They were also "avid sexual predators", who took aboriginal women by force[172].

In 1824 cedar was the second most important export from New South Wales after wool. The Australian red cedar (*Toona ciliate var. australis*) is a deciduous tree of the Mahogany family, found on the fertile soils of rainforests, and has been called "red gold". Individual trees could reach 60 metres in height and were easy to spot and identify. Red cedar was in great demand in the south as well as abroad. It was easy to cut and to transport and useful in building, joinery, furniture-making and shipbuilding.

As settlement spread northwards in the new colony of Queensland, the cedar cutters were often the pioneers of the pioneers: they were the advance guard that preceded the squatters. They came only for the timber and moved on when they had taken what was profitable to take. They gathered local knowledge, cleared the richest stands of cedar and were an effective guide to the best sugar-growing country[173]. One writer declared, "they are the roughest of rough fellows, muscular as a working bullock, hairy as a chimpanzee, obstinate as a mule, simple as a child", with a fondness for rum[174].

The industry in the north remained largely unregulated for years despite legislation, due to the logistics of practical implementation of any royalty system. A licence fee allowed a timber cutter to cut as much as he wished on the crown estate.

In the area under study, there are meagre records of the cedar-getters. However, some newspaper reports on cedar availability would have encouraged intrepid searchers. J.B.O., writing of his "wanderings in the North" in 1871, looked for red cedar from the Murray to the "Macalister" [Tully] River. He had a "terrible job" crossing very swampy land between the rivers. He noted no land had been taken up, not even by squatters, and "the black man holds undisputed sway, and his family is very numerous and rather cheeky"[175].

Also in 1871, Surveyor Alfred Hull carried out surveying and exploring trips both south and north of Cardwell, keeping a journal which he later published in newspapers. His assessment of the area for sugar-growing and cedar getting would have been widely read. Surveyor Hull was possibly the first white man (other than white police officers such as Johnstone) to venture inland in Djiru country when he went up the "New River" which would later be named after him.

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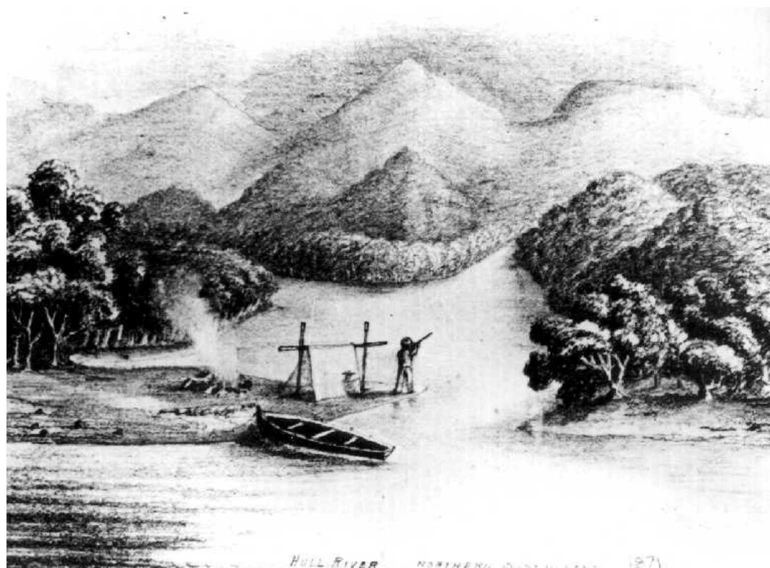
[171] *Queenslander* (25.09.1880)
[172] According to Reynolds (2013:114)
[173] Bolton (1963:76)
[174] Jervis (1939:156)
[175] *Brisbane Courier* (04.11.1871)

He wrote: "October 17. - Went this morning up the New River about twenty miles. Found it deep and good navigation, but very tortuous, and the banks lined with mangroves for several miles up, when they give place to dense scrubs. The soil (in the scrubs) is rich and deep, and there are several small hills on the banks covered with dense scrub to their summits. There appears to be plenty of cedar in the scrubs along the banks, but what open country I saw was very low and swampy. This river has two branches of about the same size, one coming in from the north, and the other from the south-west."

He then travelled up the Mackay (Tully) River and camped on a sandbank near Banyan Creek, (in Gulngay country), "saw great numbers of blacks, but very timid", and a week later, "the blacks appear to be harmless"[176]. An earlier incident on the Murray River on September 23rd probably had not encouraged the local Aboriginal people to be friendly: "While resting, and enjoying a pipe, near a waterhole here, several blackfellows crept up to within a few yards of us before we saw them, but a prompt display of revolvers sent them scampering away through the long grass at once. I do not know whether their intentions were hostile or not, but the fact that they were armed and painted leads me to think that they intended mischief. They had tracked us along the sand for some miles"[177].

In 1873 George Elphinstone Dalrymple was charged with undertaking an expedition along the coast of Queensland north of Cardwell. Dalrymple was fully aware of the *Maria* disaster: to his mind it had been "caused by white men's culpable negligence and had been followed by a ferocious punitive expedition by native police against the natives"[178]. However, the subsequent reports by Johnstone and Moresby who carried out the searches up the coast for survivors and the reprisals, described fertile lands and wide rivers, not to mention the discovery of Mourilyan Harbour, encouraging the government to fund an exploratory expedition.

Dalrymple and party left Cardwell in September 1873, under orders to explore all the rivers and inlets of the North Queensland coast from Cardwell to the Endeavour River. Also, he was to report on the soil near the banks for agricultural purposes and to collect specimens of the tropical flora. In his company was Walter Hill, botanist, and Sub-Inspector Robert Johnstone, with an attachment of Native Police.



Surveyor A.A. Hull's sketch of the mouth of the Hull River, with his camp, boat and gun, 1871.
(Courtesy W. Kitson and Natural Resources & Mines Museum, Brisbane.)

176 *Brisbane Courier* (16.12.1871)
177 *Brisbane Courier* (17.10.1871)
178 Farnfield (1968:128)

Dalrymple's Report on his North East Coast Expedition appeared in many newspapers throughout the colony, including the *Rockhampton Bulletin*, the *Sydney Mail & New South Wales Advertiser*, the *Sydney Morning Herald,* the *Brisbane Courier*, the *Mercury* (Hobart) and the *Queenslander*. His narrative was supplemented with accounts by Hill and Johnstone. He reported enthusiastically on the agricultural possibilities, particularly for sugar, and the good stands of red cedar he had observed.

He also commented on the Aboriginal people of the district. Every shore party was accompanied by armed Native Police troopers, in every encounter they assumed they had a right to take items from camps and otherwise intrude. It has been suggested that some of his comments were misleading and incited hostility towards the traditional owners, who, in the usual mode of the time, he never considered to have ownership of the land. Published accounts of the *Maria* incident included Forster's statements regarding the kindness he received from the people north of Cooper's Point. Yet Dalrymple's report emphasised "nine unarmed helpless starving Englishmen were murdered in cold blood by these bloodthirsty savages"[179].

Soon after 1873, cedar-getters arrived and short reports began to appear in the newspapers. In August 1879, on Liverpool Creek there were three parties working, and 800,000 feet of timber was felled[180]. It was reported in October the same year that on the rivers and creeks between Liverpool Creek and Cardwell "it is known that cedar exists in quantity about the heads of the creeks" but there are difficulties getting it rafted down to their mouths. Floods scatter the logs and their recovery is expensive. "Most of the cedar on Liverpool Creek is felled and the owners are rapidly getting it into position for rafting down in the coming season"[181].

Cedar operations ceased at Liverpool Creek in November 1879. About 600,000 feet was cut, and there were three full teams of bullocks occupied in bringing the logs to the water's edge. Then Liverpool Creek "will again be the resort of its original owners, the blacks".

A party exploring the large streams south of the Johnstone River "had some startling adventures, were surrounded by blacks; frightened them off; destroyed their weapons and made it a caution to them not to molest white men again"[182].

News reached Cardwell in December 1879 that Mr Freshney Junior had found a fresh patch of cedar of considerable dimensions on a portion of the coast very rarely visited – between Tam O'Shanter Point and Liverpool Creek. The "blacks were reported as very daring and dangerous on Liverpool Creek, so much so that work is greatly hindered"[183].

"Cedar-Getter" wrote from Clump Point that cedar there was good quality but very scarce, there not being more than 300,000 to 400,000 feet when all cut. C. Freshney prospected the Hull and Tully River south of Clump Point the previous September but found none. However, there was plenty of fine grazing[184]. "Timber Getter" observed that Mr Freshney's bullocks were employed to draw timber down

[179] Bottoms (1992:17)
[180] *Brisbane Courier* (27.08.1879)
[181] *Queenslander* (04.10.1879)
[182] *Morning Bulletin, Rockhampton* (07.11.1879)
[183] *Queenslander* (13.12.1879)
[184] *Brisbane Courier* (15.04.1880)

to the beach at Clump Point where "the soil here is superior to any in the North for sugar-growing, not excepting even the Herbert River and there is plenty of good grassland"[185].

Timber merchant Charles Freshney, his son and his daughter-in-law died in December 1880 when their boat capsized in Hinchinbrook Channel following a sudden squall during a pleasure trip. The "kanaka" on board survived by swimming to shore[186]. This may confirm Freshney employed Pacific Islanders among his cedar-getting crews.

One aspect of relations with the Djiru people is indicated in the account of "Dicky" a cedar-getter who had a camp at Clump Point, employing a dozen men, in the 1880s. He obtained a "good team of bullocks from the Herbert River", but whilst they were crossing the Hull River, a man named Saunders was taken off his horse by a crocodile. His body was never found. "Dicky" used to go alone into the dense Tully and Hull River scrub searching for cedar but the "natives never molested him… they had an idea that he was a little bit gone in the head"[187]. The Djiru appeared to be able to largely avoid these timber cutters.

Reports on the cedar-getting activities fuelled interest from prospective settlers. It was reported that Mr Freshney's cedar camp at Clump Point and Mr Forsyth's cedar camp at Liverpool Creek both were places where "the soil possesses magnificent sugar-growing properties and will no doubt ere long be selected for that purpose." Mails were run every Friday from Cardwell to Clump Point and Liverpool Creek. An additional advantage to future settlers was that Mr Johnstone, sub-inspector of police, was to make Cardwell his permanent police HQ, and having a steam launch at his disposal he could quickly reach the Herbert River on one side, and the Johnstone River on the north "as occasion may require"[188].

Although the cedar-getters were only temporary occupants of limited areas of Djiru country, as well as cutting down the red cedar trees, they cut tracks through the scrub for the bullock teams, destroying whatever was in the way and took over the best landing spots and tracks to the beach where the logs could be loaded and shipped. They also took over Djiru camping places near freshwater at the coast. The white men were hard working and hard drinking, in an industry unregulated and, apart from accounts of the superfeet of timber removed, unrecorded. They also shot wallabies, ducks, pigeons, scrub turkeys and helped themselves to the riches of the Djiru estate as their right.

They were strangers, and strangers should have asked permission or been invited as visiting tribal groups did through message sticks and exchange of artefacts and food items. A number of neighbouring Girramay stories tell what can happen if a stranger does the wrong thing. One waterhole must not be visited by a stranger because "*yamani* will follow him and the spring will go dry". Other places had rules to be followed, such as putting a leaf in a certain place, or hitting a certain rock, in order to follow up the stories and the Law. Strangers would not know what to do and would upset things.

It can only be surmised what forcible taking of Djiru women and children, and other abuses took place. What is known is that Djiru people continued to attack white men straying onto their country. The cutter *Riser* foundered on King Reef in 1878, and the wreck was reported to Johnstone at Cardwell,

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[185] *Brisbane Courier* (09.06.1880)
[186] *Telegraph, Brisbane* (09.12.1880)
[187] Ishmael, *Cairns Morning Post* (02.12.1908)
[188] *Queenslander* (26.06.1880)

who attended in the police boat and investigated. The two bodies of white crewmen were found on the mainland opposite the reef, the skulls smashed and parts of the flesh removed. This place was then known to white people as Murdering Point for many years.

Timber cutting did not cease when the cedar was cut out. Cutters operated at Narragon Beach from an early date although there were no permanent settlers there until John Unsworth in 1892[189]. Mr Watkins of Cardwell procured a traction engine to be used in hauling logs to the waterside of the Hull River, which would facilitate considerably the timber-getting operations on the banks of the Hull[190]. Sawmills at Cardwell, at Bicton, Bingil Bay, and later El Arish, continued to be served by timber cut from the general region.

The Settlers at Bingil Bay

James Tyson took up a huge acreage on the Tully River in 1880: three 5120 acre blocks in the names of Hewitt, Henry and Tyson. Tyson's interest in the area encouraged other selectors to come forward. Two Clump Point blocks were selected in 1880 by R.M. Hyne, a sugar planter in the Mackay district and another person. Hyne, whose brother had an established sawmilling business in Maryborough, did not develop the block until after 1887, when, with the aid of 14 South Sea Islander labourers, his manager put in large mango and citrus orchards. The 1890 cyclone put an end to the plantation.

In the meantime, four brothers: James, Herbert, Leonard and Sidney Cutten, had rowed up the coast from Tyson's selection on the Tully River, scouting for property to select for themselves. They liked the Clump Point area but Hyne had already made his application. However, in 1886 they made a successful application for the Bingil Bay property they soon called "Bicton". They cleared land and planted every kind of citrus tree, tea, coffee, coconuts, tobacco and pineapples. They overlanded horses from Rockhampton, cutting "miles of track" in the "jungle" to get the horses in. At the peak of their coffee enterprise, they had 100 acres under coffee and a coffee mill with pulpers[191]. They built a sawmill and case mill; they cut timber on their selection and sent it south from the stone jetty they constructed[192]. This stone jetty probably destroyed a Djiru fish trap at this location. They also supplied local timber, including to the Banfields for their bungalow on Dunk Island.

They employed Aboriginal labourers, Malays and South Sea Islanders ("Kanakas"). There were cottages for the latter, while the Aboriginal people "had their own grass gunyas", which can be seen on the beach at the creek mouth in a photograph in Taylor's book[193]. James Cutten stated in 1889 that at times they had as many as 50 Aboriginal workers but on average there were 10[194].

They also employed Kanakas, deeming Aboriginal labour 'unreliable'. They recompensed the Aboriginal workers with rations, and "to those who are sufficiently civilised to wear clothes, we give clothes". They paid the Kanakas £1 a week and their clothing and rations. The Cuttens expanded their enterprise and in the early 1900s "sixty - seventy boys were required just to maintain Bicton"[195].

[189] Mackness (1983:18)
[190] *Queenslander* (12.06.1897)
[191] Jones (1961:239)
[192] Taylor (1982)
[193] Taylor (1982:25)
[194] Cutten (1889)
[195] Taylor (1982:28)

Not surprisingly, the Djiru attitude to the white men who had invaded their country and shot many of their people was armed resistance, and this had given the Djiru and their neighbouring tribes a reputation for fierceness. But this could not stop the tide of incursion and white settlement that commenced when the land was officially opened up for selection in 1882. Soon after the Cuttens moved onto the Bingil Bay land, Banfield took up residence on Dunk Island in 1897. Edward Garner came from Cardwell, working first for the Cuttens and then moving to the northern beach, now known as Garners Beach, in 1910. Unsworth was the first non-indigenous settler at Narragon Beach. He is recorded as employing only one Aboriginal worker. The Porter brothers took up selections at the tidal creek bearing their name at Wongaling Beach, and Bryant, Dewar and Fenby commenced fruit farming at what is now North Mission Beach at about this time. It was not until 1912 that selectors began permanent residence at what is now Wongaling Beach. These included the Reids, Ben Beamon and George Webb[196].

The move to employment by the white people occupying their country, as well as the introduction of Pacific Islanders, must have required more major adjustments by the Djiru. There were allegations of Kanakas taking Aboriginal women by force, including in 1888, three women from Liverpool Creek being named in correspondence from the Police Magistrate at Geraldton that also claimed sugar plantation owners were supplying liquor to Aborigines and Kanakas and also ill-treating Aborigines[197].

South Sea Islander labourers were first brought to the colony of New South Wales in 1847 and the practice continued after the colony of Queensland came into being in 1859; Robert Towns brought South Sea Islanders to his Logan enterprise in the 1860s. They were Melanesian (rather than Polynesian) and were largely kidnapped ("blackbirded") to work on sugar plantations in particular.
In the Cardwell district, soon after John Davidson commenced sugar growing at Bellenden Plains, newspapers in 1866 reported he had Kanaka labour. More were brought in subsequently, and Robert Johnstone, as manager of the property for a short time, wrote in 1871 of regular fights between the Kanakas and the local Aboriginal groups (probably Girramay and Gulngay).

Forty-four Kanakas were brought in by Tyson in 1882 to begin falling scrub to establish cane growing on his Tully River property. Jones was unable to suggest how many more subsequently arrived[198]. Pacific Islander labourers were employed not only by the Cuttens but also by timber cutters in the Liverpool Creek area, and by the Johnstone River sugar-growers.

The South Sea Islanders brought into Djiru country by the Cuttens were thus another source of contact. As well as being uninvited aliens on Djiru country, they had their own health issues. While official statistics were not kept, anecdotally it was known that they had a higher death rate than white people. Dysentery, measles, chest and lung complaints, alcoholism and venereal diseases all affected the Pacific Islanders, and the Aboriginal people they were in contact with[199].

The Aboriginal people working for the Cuttens had perhaps come to a forced compromise. In order to remain on their own country, the men worked, giving them access to European food and goods, which had become attractive, such as flour, steel "tommyhawks", metal fishhooks, tea and sugar. European flour was preferable to "wild flour" made from tree or cycad nuts that had to be cooked, grated or pounded and leached when in season. Tobacco was enjoyed, as also were illegal substances

[196] Mackness (1959:22)
[197] QSA 88/9906
[198] Jones (1961: 224)
[199] Bolton (1963:82)

such as rum. Metal and glass additions to indigenous technology such as spears improved efficiency of some activities. Metal containers allowed boiling to replace ground oven roasting and were usually preferred.

Those Djiru who signed up to work were not likely to be rounded up by the troopers and removed to a mission such as Yarrabah. Provided tracts of their country remained undisturbed, the women and some older people who were not employed could continue to forage for food for those living in the camps. However, not just the broad clearing but also the felling of timber continued to reduce available sources of food.

Mackness[200] quotes a conversation between Arthur Garner and Len Cutten after a particular bean tree (*Castanospermum australe*) had been felled. Cutten admitted the Aboriginals were "not exactly pleased" and had previously "been a bit difficult" whenever such a tree was cut down. Cutten gave them "the regulation amount of flour and trade tobacco" as compensation for destruction of the tree and ignored their "angry mutterings," feeling safe in his opinion that "Bicton blacks had never been really savage". His attitude exemplifies the lack of understanding between the cultures. Not only were black bean trees a major source of food for several months of the year, but each tree would also have been known to specific family groups, perhaps even in the care of individuals, and growing in places with spiritual meaning to the people. A one-off allotment of flour and tobacco (which they were probably owed in wages anyway), could never compensate for the loss of such trees.

The Cuttens began to have labour problems. They complained that the bêche-de-mer fishermen interfered with their Aboriginal labour because they arrived when their own season was ripe and bribed the Aboriginal people with liquor to work for them. However, these were the men the Cuttens had fed during the unproductive wet season times when their labour was not required in order to keep them on for when they were needed. The captains left the Cuttens with "nothing but the very young and very old"[201].

Their labour issues increased when the Chinese banana growers on Maria and Liverpool Creeks commenced paying the Aboriginal people they employed with opium, specifically the degraded opium charcoal known as utchee or inchee. In addition, in 1906 Government policy required Pacific Islanders to be returned home to their native islands, as "coloured labour" was being phased out in Queensland.

The Opium Issue

The Chinese came to Queensland originally to the goldfields, in this region, particularly to the Palmer River, which saw a rapid rise and decline between 1873 and the early 1880s. As the goldfields declined, the Chinese moved down the coast, some arriving in Geraldton [Innisfail]. Along the Johnstone River and nearby rivers, including Maria Creek, Liverpool Creek and Tully River, they worked, clearing for the sugar-growers and commenced market gardens, growing bananas successfully where Europeans failed. They also ran stores. Before the importation of opium was prohibited, "practically all the Chinese merchants carried the drug [opium] as a legitimate line of merchandise"[202]. The Chinese found the opium charcoal useful cheap payment for both Aboriginal and Pacific Islander labourers.

[200] Mackness (1983:68)
[201] James Cutten (1889)
[202] May (1984:122)

The problem of opium use and abuse was a contributor to the passing of the notorious 1897 Act that was devised ostensibly to "protect" the Aborigines of Queensland, and directly led to the Hull River Government Settlement to which Aboriginal people from both the local area and further afield were forcibly removed from 1914 until it was destroyed by the devastating cyclone of 1918.

The Cuttens wrote repeatedly to the Colonial Secretary requesting the government supply rations to the Aboriginal people on their property[203]. This concern for "the plight of the aborigines" was also reported in 1890 in the *Rockhampton Morning Bulletin*[204]. On their property was a main camp of about 60 souls who demanded rations. When they were refused they stole items so the Cuttens had to burn their camp and shift them elsewhere. They gave work to the young men but there were old men, women and children who were unprovided for because their sons and fathers had gone bêche-de-mer fishing or elsewhere. Currently they were camped in the next bay along the coast, but they carried out "midnight depredations" on the crops and induced those that were employed to steal. The Government was requested to come to their assistance and send sugar and flour urgently. Otherwise, "they will have to be dispersed, a course we sincerely trust you [the Colonial Secretary] will not pursue".

As a result, the Colonial Secretary requested Mr Ogilvie, Police Magistrate at Geraldton [Innisfail], to investigate. Subsequently he advised that he visited the station to find only twenty Aboriginals in the camp a mile north of the homestead; only three seemed too old to provide food, and none was starving. He saw no need to supply rations. He advised that there is abundant game, fish, fruits and nuts and plenty of yams, etc in the surrounding bush[205]. A telegram[206] from the Cutten Brothers complained that the Magistrate had refused to recommend the supply of rations. As a result, they "have now requisitioned the services of the Native Police to disperse them and under existing circumstances you consider shooting inadvisable kindly wire what course to pursue"; a further letter[207] from Cutten Brothers advised: "as to shooting the blacks, had we intended doing anything of the sort, we should certainly not have previously written to inform you. We were merely intending to refer to the action of those Government Officers appointed for that purpose". The Colonial Storekeeper was instructed to forward a supply of clothes.

The Protector of Aborigines did make grants of food and other relief for sick, aged and starving Aboriginals. This had been established in 1888 by the Queensland Government so that the Aboriginal people would not raid the settlers. Mr Cutten may have been aware that more than twenty residents of the Murray and Tully Rivers petitioned the Police Commissioner for protection in 1893 and 1895 (including Mr. E. Brooke, of the lower Tully River) because Aborigines were killing their dairy cattle and destroying property. Colonial Secretary Tozer instructed the Police Commissioner to organise protection (through the Native Police) and to arrange for the distribution of food[208]. Meston's 1897 report on "Queensland Aboriginals" included the information that, in addition to the five Mission Stations supported by the Government, there were also 15 stations for the distribution of food and tobacco. One of these was Kirtleton (Cardwell). This was the nearest station to Djiru country. The 15 Stations represented "about 1400 aboriginals of all ages", with a budget of £1123[209].

[203] QSA 93/7458
[204] *Rockhampton Morning Bulletin* (06.01.1890).
[205] QSA 89/11361
[206] QSA 89/11156
[207] QSA 89/11309
[208] Loos (1982:114)
[209] Meston (1897:8)

In 1902, the numbers of starving Aboriginal people, unable to gather food on their traditional lands, had increased and just over £60-worth of rations was distributed monthly at an average of 21 relieving centres[210]. The Djiru people at the Cutten camp, however, were not deemed to qualify.

Northern Protector of Aborigines, W.E. Roth, in his report for 1903, mentions a complaint by Messrs. Cutten Brothers of Clump Point that Chinese and Malays were supplying opium and harbouring Aborigines. Investigation by Sergeant Casey of Geraldton showed the "Chinese no doubt supply opium, which the aboriginals demand in isolated places… Nearly every month there are Chinese prosecuted for supplying opium but still they keep giving it"[211].

The Annual Report for the following year includes mention that Messrs. Cutten Brothers reported that they would "probably be unable to get their coffee picked during the season, owing to the blacks with their gins being enticed away by the Chinese with opium"[212].

Protector Howard, carrying out inspections that ultimately led to the selection of the Hull River site for a government aboriginal settlement, interviewed Mr Cutten. He found the 12 - 15 "natives" employed on the coffee plantation were "well-treated and look well" but Mr Cutten complained the Chinese banana growers on Maria Creek supplied opium to the natives[213].

Mr J.W. Cutten, in 1910, wrote to the Premier, Mr Kidston, about the situation with the Chinese, after which Police Inspector P. Galbraith, based at Townsville, was instructed to visit and interview Mr Cutten. His report to the Police Commissioner included the following information[214].

Mr Cutten said a number of his Aboriginal employees on Sundays went to Maria and Liverpool Creeks but he did not think they obtained opium. However, Mr Unsworth, who lived two miles from Mr Cutten, informed Galbraith that the "blacks" get opium charcoal from the Chinese that has been mixed with water, which they drink. This mixture inflates their abdomen, rendering them "perfectly useless." Galbraith also interviewed several Aboriginal people at Clump Point, who said there were "plenty Chinaman" at Liverpool Creek. He concluded there was little doubt the Chinese employed Aboriginals and gave them opium. He then discussed the situation on the Tully River where there were 23 Chinese, having five gardens and one store. The opium traffic and "harbouring" of Aboriginals occurred here also but was controlled better due to frequent patrols by police from Cardwell. Clump Point, in contrast, was the responsibility of the Geraldton officers but was 50 miles from Geraldton over a rough track with many creeks that flooded for half of the year: a two-day trip by horseback, and plenty of time for both Chinese and Aboriginal people to be warned and to disappear into the scrub.

Galbraith discovered "another evil" when visiting Clump Point: the 20 aboriginals employed by Cutten were "not under agreement". He paid them himself three shillings per week. In addition, the Captain of the '*Lass O'Gowrie*', the regular coastal steamer, informed Galbraith that Mr Cutten gets two gallons of rum weekly from Townsville, which he gives to the blacks according to Mr Unsworth. Nellie, one of the Aboriginal people he spoke to, told Galbraith Cutten always gave them rum every Saturday and "plenty get drunk". Mr Cutten, Galbraith concluded, paid most of their wages in rum. Owing to the rum, drunken Aboriginals regularly are wounded by spears or native swords. Mr Cutten, though a

[210] Roth (1902 Annual Report)
[211] Roth (1903:11)
[212] Roth (1904:8)
[213] *Brisbane Courier* (10.10.1907)
[214] QSA Pol/J17

Justice, had taken no steps to have the guilty ones punished. Also, two of Mr Cutten's Aboriginal employees were living with two little Aboriginal girls about the age of ten, which Mr Cutten did nothing about.

In his conclusions, Galbraith's opinion was that "the blacks at Clump Point, Maria and Liverpool Creeks are not under enough police supervision"[215].

Banfield in a "Rural Homily" also wrote about the Chinese and Aboriginal interactions, referring to Maria Creek as well as the Tully River. The Aboriginal workers did most of the "hoe-work" in the banana gardens. Sometime "Chinaman bin gib it little bit rice, little bit plour. No gib it money." If government officials visited, the blacks disappeared by little used tracks to the beach. Instead of the corroborees of the past, the Aborigines were engaged with "a shady kerosene lamp and an opium pipe improvised from a stone ink bottle or a Chinese sauce pot"[216].

In 1910 some 350 Aboriginals were counted in Innisfail police district (formerly Geraldton), but only 129 agreements were in place. Their average weekly wage was four or five shillings. Considerable quantities of opium still found its way into the district. In 1912, £600 in fines was collected from Chinese offenders for supplying opium in an 18-month period[217].

On the one hand, the payment of wages "under agreement" (under the 1897 Act) involved payment into an Aboriginal employee's bank account that was overseen by the local Police Officer in the towns of Geraldton or Cardwell, which was legal but demeaning. On the other hand, avoiding this on the grounds of difficult logistics and paying with rum or opium was not acceptable either.

The *Seymour* loading bananas at Maria Creek. Chinese growers here and along the Tully River paid their Aboriginal workers with opium charcoal (Dorothy Jones Library Heritage collection)

The Political Setting

The political context and government thinking and policy regarding the Aboriginal population of Queensland affected Djiru people, particularly with the enactment and implementation of the 1897 Act for the Protection of Aborigines. The philosophy of paternalistic protection on the cheap

[215] *The Worker* (27.10.1910)
[216] *Northern Miner* (16.07.1908)
[217] Protector's Reports (1910, 1912)

underpinned this legislation, which provided the power to remove Aboriginal people to reserves against their will[218].

Archibald Meston as Special Commissioner, undertook to report on the Aborigines of North Queensland with a view to proposing a scheme for their so-called 'improvement'. His report recommended the maintenance of reserves for their own protection. He advocated a reserve in Northern Queensland "on the sea coast… [containing] a considerable area of rich soil for cultivation, some good pasture land, abundance of timber, an extensive hunting field, and command an unlimited supply of fish… so situated that no white settlement can ever interfere"[219].

This report influenced the drafting of the 1897 Protection Act. A report in 1897 by W.E. Parry-Okeden, Commissioner of Police, was also relevant. Parry-Okeden submitted information on the Aborigines in relation to the detachments of Native Police stationed in the north. This information was provided to the government to assist in their consideration of the best means to be adopted for the "amelioration of the condition of the Queensland blacks" (Parry-Okeden 1897:7). Meston claimed the Native Police had "decimated northern tribes by random shootings and habitual kidnapping of women and boys leaving a legacy of terror". He suggested that the Native Police should be abolished, advising of the Cardwell area: there were "few other localities in which the blacks have more bitter reason to hate and distrust the native police and settlers"[220].

Parry-Okeden, in contrast, recommended not only the maintenance, but also the strengthening of several Native Police detachments as a "valuable auxiliary to the work of the police"[221]. The detachments were retained, and it was they who rounded up Aboriginal people and took them, often in chains, to the reserves and settlements.

In 1897 the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act* became law, with additional clauses enacted in 1901. Under this legislation Aboriginal people were not allowed to drink alcohol, or to marry a white person or to keep their own savings bank book, which had to be kept by the local policeman. The leading police officer in each district was delegated local 'Protector of Aboriginals', most of whom now became wards of the state. Aboriginal reserves became strictly monitored areas, with public access denied, and to which Aboriginal people under the Act could be forcibly transferred. Missions such as Yarrabah were also designated reserves soon after 1897. Employment of Aboriginal people was to be restricted and policed to prevent assault, exploitation and the manipulation of employees to gain access to wives or female workers 'for immoral purposes'[222].

Aboriginal people called this Act "the Dog Act" because they were treated like dogs[223].

As has been discussed, it was the arrangements under this Act that the Cutten brothers of Bingil Bay found unworkable, claiming the regulations now in place "practically prohibit the white employer from engaging the aboriginal… they foster and encourage the vile trafficking of their women by the blacks for the sake of opium, [resulting in] ...numerous deaths by poisoning and diseases"[224].

[218] Loos (1982:178)
[219] Meston (1896:26)
[220] Meston (1896:10)
[221] Parry-Okeden (1897:16)
[222] Kidd (1997:48)
[223] Prior, in Pedley (1989:32)
[224] *Northern Miner* (10.10.1905), letter from L. Cutten

Hull River Queensland Government Aboriginal Settlement

Meston's concept of a Government Reserve on the northern coast was accepted. Continuing problems and complaints from settlers in the Rockingham Bay hinterland led Chief Protector Howard to recommend, in his annual report for 1910, that a settlement be established in the Tully River district[225]. His official tour the following year included two visits to the proposed site at Hull River[226]. He was assisted by, among others, Mr. Banfield of Dunk Island. Bleakley succeeded Howard as Chief Protector and in July 1914 his recommendation to the Home Secretary was "that the natives at Clump Point be removed to the Hull River" settlement[227].

At this time there was little understanding of the relationship between Aboriginal people and the country where they lived (and certainly no concept of aboriginal ownership). Foxton's report to the Governor of Queensland included this comment: it is claimed by "men who have had life-long experience of aboriginals that the latter cannot be transferred from one district to another, as suggested, with satisfactory results. It is said that they fret and pine for their old haunts and surroundings, and if too far away to enable them to return they are apt to become restive and rebellious, and a source of danger to those about them." His solution was instead of moving just a few individuals, to transfer them all[228].

Prior to the Hull River Settlement being established, some Aboriginal people were forcibly removed from the area, with records showing people being sent to Yarrabah, Fraser Island and Barambah. For example, Biamba, for ill-treating a girl and trading her for a prostitute with a Chinese at Clump Point, was sent to Barambah[229]. But when the Hull River site was opened, wholesale forced removals to the Settlement commenced. Indeed, the forced moves were the cornerstone of the reserves, keeping Aboriginal people in one place, away from white settlers.

A resident of Cardwell stated that Cardwell people at first welcomed the prospect of the Settlement believing that it would be 'a home for sick, aged and infirm blacks that required one, and further, that opium eaters and smokers among the Chinese on the Tully River, would be interned and treated for their own benefit'[230]. The Settlement scheme was met with suspicion and fear by the Aboriginal people of the district.

Cardwell Shire Council (C.S.C.) minutes record a motion to "apply to the Home Secretary to have the Cardwell and Murray River Aboriginals who are not known opium smokers or thieves to be exempted from the Aboriginal Settlement at Hull River and not be compelled to return there. They be instead under the protection of the Local Protector of Aboriginals [local Police officer in Cardwell] as the Settlement is such an out of the way place." This would also facilitate employment of those people[231]. This request was not subsequently granted. Two weeks later, among matters for Council to speak to the Minister for Agriculture was that "the Aboriginal question be reviewed and the Settlement not be used as a Penal Settlement." Sanitary conditions were to be bettered "at once"[232].

[225] Howard (1910:9)
[226] Howard (1912:1)
[227] *Cairns Post* (14.07.1914)
[228] *The Advertiser* (05.08.1901)
[229] Roth, Chief Protector's Annual Report (1908: 28)
[230] *Townsville Daily Bulletin* (17.06.1915) letter from Cardwell Resident
[231] C.S.C. Minutes (04.05.1916)
[232] C.S.C. Minutes (24.05.1916)

Aboriginal people at the Hull River Government Settlement, c.1916 (Chief Protector's Annual Report)

Banfield wrote that when the Settlement was definitely going to eventuate, "most of the blacks in the immediate neighbourhood disappeared" a result of their dreadful past experience of measures by 'big fella Gubberment' and rumours it would be a prison (put about by the Chinese and others). They also knew rum and opium would not be allowed at the Settlement[233].

The appointed superintendent, John Martin Kenny, a former officer in the Native Police at Cooktown, arrived at the selected site in 1914. Clearing land and erecting quarters commenced. Several local indigenous people were recruited from properties along the Murray River to carry out this labour. Those indigenous people who knew of the Settlement were 'in great dread' of the scheme, a circumstance blamed on "some unscrupulous white and Asiatic residents", but by the end of the year 41 Aboriginal people "had mustered up courage to join"[234]. Of these, 21 were locals who had been removed from Clump Point[235].

The non-indigenous people who objected to the removals to the Hull River did so because they were being deprived of cheap labour, for which there was a fair demand. Some who opposed the removals had been exploiting Aboriginal labour for years without officially signing them on, and thus avoiding having the wages they paid scrutinized.

Large numbers from the Cardwell district began to be "rounded up" from 1915. The Chief Protector's Annual Report for that year states the Settlement was "absorbing practically the whole of the native population of that and the neighbouring districts"[236].

Stephen Creedy, Police Sergeant and local Protector at Cardwell, suggested that, as the Hull River Settlement had been opened, "the whole of the aboriginals within the Cardwell district outside the Settlement be removed to the Settlement, and kept there, as there is simply no discipline amongst them at present. The camps *want* all breaking up and all the ones not under agreement be removed to the

[233] *Townsville Daily Bulletin* (24.07.1914)
[234] Bleakley (1914:16)
[235] Pedley (1998:20)
[236] 1915:4

Settlement. There are to [sic] many non-workers in this district who simply are a burden and annoyance to them that do work. The employers throughout my district are unanimously of the opinion[237].

The camps which attracted the workers away from their employment seem to have been located in places commanding a good view of people approaching, often near the edge of dense scrub where the Aboriginal people could hide and not be pursued on horseback by the police.

Once at the Hull River Settlement, the signing on system with employers was confusing, it was claimed. Some employers were told they must apply to the Hull River Superintendent and others were referred to the local Protector in Cardwell. Records of 'Aboriginal and half-caste males aged 18 to 45 years under agreement' were maintained by the Cardwell Clerk of Petty Sessions. In October 1915 there were 7 listed. On the same date 'Aboriginals and half-castes' with money in credit, whose bank books were held at Cardwell numbered 76, of these 53 were then at Hull River or controlled by that Settlement[238]. Those taken to the Settlement who were captured in Djiru country would have been referred to the Geraldton Protector, if at all.

Lists of removals to the Hull in 1915 show three people were taken from Barambah to Hull River, who were probably local people returned to their home country: Kinga Clump Point, Pouran Clump Point and Yikki Clump Point. From Mourilyan, 20 people were moved to the Hull, also from Strathmore (1) and from the Tully and Murray Rivers (27), from the Valley of Lagoons (1), Yarrabah (8), and from Yungaburra (1)[239].

The Chief Protector's 1916 Annual Report stated that at the Settlement a steady demand for surplus Aboriginal labour was noted and 90 agreements were signed[240]. The wages offered ranged from 6 shillings to 30 shillings per week of which 40% was paid to the Settlement and banked to the workers' credit, with the total for the year at £1489.

People continued to be taken to the Settlement, but available records indicate they were from the wider Murray River area as well as from further afield including Charters Towers, Bowen and Townsville. Jirrbal and Girramay people fled to the rainforested mountain areas rather than become inmates at Hull River, of whom there were 400 in 1915, with a further 82 added in 1916. Deserters, if caught, were returned through Cardwell as the Settlement was only accessible by sea, often also spending time in the watch house awaiting a boat.

At the Settlement, food was supposed to be supplied and there was a store where those who earned a wage could purchase food. Recounted memories of the life reveal the rations were sparse and the people supplemented them with hunting, but there were a lot of people and only a small area where they could hunt. Willie Messina said there was a "big mob people there, nothing to eat. We gotta go and hunt shellfish, cook our own tucker". Peter Prior was taken to the Settlement with his family as a child. He remembered Mr. Kenny [the Superintendent] had a boat and sometimes let his father take it out to catch turtles, often returning with enough turtles to feed the Settlement (Pedley 1998). This is confirmed in the 1917 Annual Report: "the fishing boats did much towards providing supplies of fish, turtle, dugong, oysters, etc. to meet the scarcity of beef"[241].

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[237] Creedy 1915
[238] QSA CPS 12J/G2
[239] Pedley (1998: 24) information from records compiled by the Central Queensland Aboriginal Land Council
[240] Bleakley (1916)
[241] Annual Report (1917:9)

When asked about Mr. Kenny, Peter said he knew little and people were not allowed to ask questions: if they did, they became known as troublemakers. They had to work or be punished and were under guard all the time[242].

Chloe Grant's memories of the Settlement (passed on to her son, Ernie) were also of too many people in one place and not enough rations. The old people were not happy, they hadn't wanted to be there and some of them had been rounded up and taken there in chains. Chloe had worked as a maid for the Superintendent and spoke kindly of him and his daughter, but Ernie's Uncles Willie and David, also told how he flogged Tommy Brook with an axe handle. They ran away soon after that. Chloe was about 15 when the cyclone hit; she was very shocked by it. She told how she ran away with some older people. They ran all night; the old people were very scared and insisted the kids travel in silence. They made it to *Balara* waterhole, where there was plenty of fish and other food to find[243].

It was on 10 March 1918, that the devastating cyclone destroyed the Hull River Settlement. The huts and humpies along the beach were demolished, as were the buildings. Superintendent Kenny and his daughter died during the destruction. There is disagreement over how many people died in total. Doctor Leary reported 9 deaths while the Chief Protector reported there were 12 dead as a result of the cyclone[244]. Others asserted some two hundred were buried along the sand ridge, with coral heaped over the graves[245]. The graves were pointed out to Ernie Grant in 1944, "down on the flat". The graves of those who died in an earlier fever epidemic at the Settlement were also there.

One list of those who died in the cyclone includes Old Billy Clumppoint[246]. The Cardwell Protector, O'Regan, informed the Chief Protector that the deserters "hide in the scrub so that the Police cannot catch them and others have gone to live at Liverpool and Maria Creeks" and the white people get free labour[247]. Deserters and absconders from Hull River, when caught, were later sent to Palm Island, including Johnny Clump Point in 1922[248].

The Hull River Settlement was never rebuilt in Djiru country. Instead, a new station on Palm Island was commenced, conveniently off the coast where inmates could not escape as they had often done, disappearing into the bush surrounding the Hull River site. Removals to Palm Island commenced in June 1918 with those who had stayed at the Settlement. Others who had taken to the bush were also rounded up by the police. From then, and for many years afterwards, police patrols continued to apprehend Aboriginal people in the Cardwell district and send them to Palm Island. The people lived in fear of being caught, as is well-documented in oral histories from Girramay and Jirrbal people. Yet there always remained some who either worked for the white employers or who survived in their own country by moving camp frequently, keeping one step ahead of the police. These people retained much of their cultural heritage, passing it on to their children.

[242] Prior in Pedley (1998)
[243] Ernie Grant pers.comm.1998
[244] Bleakley (1918:6)
[245] Pedley (1998:41), Prior, Wildsoet and others
[246] QSA: Cardwell Police Letterbook 25.03.1918
[247] QSA: letter to Chief Protector (4.01.1919)
[248] QSA Cardwell Police Letterbook (22.03.1922)

Lass O'Gowrie off Dunk Island, c.1900. This vessel transported people to the Hull River Settlement from Cardwell (via Dunk Island) and people were taken over to Palm Island on this boat after the 1918 cyclone. (Photo by A.J. Campbell courtesy N.L.A.)

The *mija* memorial at South Mission Beach tells some of the stories of the Hull River Settlement.

There is now a memorial at South Mission Beach to the people who were taken to the Settlement, where some of their stories can be read. John Andy's grandmother and her sister (Djiru people) were sent there. They ran away, crossing the mouth of the Hull River and walking south. They "deliberately walked in the water along the beach to ensure they didn't leave behind any tracks, as they were afraid of being tracked down and sent back to the Settlement by the police".

Leonard Andy, Djiru Traditional Owner, said of the Hull River site (now South Mission Beach), "for our people it was an extremely sad place and always will be." The memories are all bad, and people don't want to go there now. It will not be forgotten how deserters from the Settlement were severely punished or even murdered. Men were cut at the back of the leg so they could not run away again. One group managed to get away to the Tully River, but they were caught; the old, old people were killed and only the young people who could walk and work were brought back to the prison[249].

White people had bad memories of the place also. Peter Wheatley, a white settler who came to the area as a child in the 1940s, remembered Toby, Nellie and Tommy as the only Aboriginal people around then. Toby had survived the 1918 cyclone and "would not put a foot on the Mission Hill anywhere" [the Settlement site]. When asked why, Toby replied "Big debil debil there". Other early settlers had told Peter the people "were driven there and if they refused, they were whipped and those who rebelled were shot and left there to rot"[250]. And once at the Settlement, "they were dying like flies from measles.

[249] Andy (2022)
[250] Peter Wheatley pers. comm. (1996)

They had no resistance at all. If they got sick with fever, they would go to the sea, go into the water and die there."

Diseases and Health

It is unquestionable that the diseases and sicknesses that Europeans and Asians brought with them to the Australian land mass affected the indigenous people drastically. Lack of immunity to illnesses that affected the intruders only mildly, coupled with lack of treatment, malnutrition and the other evils of early contact situations resulted in numerous deaths as well as poor health and consequent misery.

In a study of infectious diseases introduced to Aboriginal people in South-eastern Australia, it was concluded acute infections such as whooping cough caused severe epidemics of infectious respiratory diseases among the Aborigines in the days of early contact, while major epidemic diseases were smallpox, syphilis, tuberculosis, influenza and measles[251]. These infectious diseases spread like wild fire, causing a great deal of sickness and mortality, while others like syphilis and tuberculosis were more insidious, creeping slowly, causing chronic illness and eventual death[252].

For the study area, specific information is not available; data were never recorded or indeed considered important until recent times. It is only possible to glean a picture of the local scenario from scattered records.

In 1891 Mr G. Griffin wrote from Cardwell that the Aboriginal people of the district were "afflicted with weeping sores on their bodies." He suggested it would be an act of mercy if something could be done to give them some relief[253]. A note attached intimates the Police Magistrate for the district based then at Geraldton would investigate the "best means of affording relief".

Meston, after visiting the "Cardwell tribes", stated that there are "few other localities in which the blacks have more bitter reason to hate and distrust the native police and the settlers" and here "disease communicated by white men was also painfully apparent"[254]. He wanted Aboriginal people to be isolated on reserves where white men were excluded.

Consequent upon the passing of the 1897 Act, the appointed Northern or Chief Protector of Aboriginals provided annual reports to the Queensland Parliament that occasionally included reporting on the health of the inmates of the Missions and Reserves.

Dr Roth observed in 1899 that the minor ailments that afflicted Europeans and Asians were often contracted by the Aborigines, but as they had no immunity, due to "want of proper care and nourishment" the effects of these ailments were "not so transitory" as they were for Europeans. More serious diseases, however, including venereal diseases discussed at some length by Dr Roth, were seen as a danger to white people. It was "impossible… to arrive at any absolute conclusions as to the proportion of aboriginals suffering from venereal disease". In remarking that Dr Shorter reported that at Mount Garnet "the natives are reeking with syphilis, etc", Roth recommended sites were needed where the Aboriginals could be isolated for treatment[255]. Government response to Aboriginal health

[251] Dowling (1997)
[252] Dowling (2021:xix)
[253] Letter in QSA, ID8472397, 91/7745
[254] Meston (1896:10)
[255] Roth (1901)

continued to be medical segregation for many years, rather than addressing issues such as nutrition, sanitation and education.

The health of the local population did receive a measure of support in 1913 when the local Shire Council carried out a vaccination program for smallpox with the aid of the Health Officer in Townsville, for which they applied to the Chief Protector of Aboriginals for a refund of the cost of vaccinating the Aboriginals[256].

Chief Protector J.W. Bleakley in his report for 1914, the first year after operations commenced at the settlement at the Hull River, advised that Superintendent Kenny "writes in strong terms of the terrible effect the opium traffic has had on the natives of this district. During the few years which have elapsed since the introduction of Asiatic races, what was once a huge population of fine, well-developed men and women has dwindled down to not more than a couple of hundred, the majority of whom are physical wrecks. It seems to have been a contest between the Asiatic and the low European for the right to exploit the aboriginal financially and morally, and, though the white man descended to the rum bottle and even to morphia, the Asiatic easily won with his deadly opium charcoal or "inchee". The effects of some of these drugs on the poor aboriginal are appalling, producing aggravated constipation and eventually an agonizing death. Owing to the dense scrubs and bad roads, most of the surrounding districts are practically inaccessible, thus making detection of offenders a difficult if not impossible task.

The theme continued in Bleakley's 1915 report when he noted the Hull River Settlement was right at the heart of the worst opium trafficking district, but the "old slaves to the drug habit" were now removed from its influence. Deaths at Hull River were listed as due to senile decay, venereal diseases, tuberculosis, pneumonia and malarial or coastal fever in 1916.

Banfield's observations of the Aboriginal people who worked for him, and those he met on the mainland, led him to write that before the establishment of the Hull River Settlement, "many of them were saturated with disease and subject to the opium habit… the majority lived in a state of utter wretchedness"[257].

According to Jones, but not listed in the official annual report, in February of 1917 malarial fever was found in the settlement and a medical officer ordered the Aboriginal huts to be removed from the swamps to higher ground. Jones records that some 200 people died at the settlement, possibly from this fever, measles or whooping cough. They were buried near the beach to the north of the shelter shed[258]. Official correspondence reveals there were a number of deaths due to 'fever' in April and May of 1917 and the quarantining of the station on 2 April by Cardwell Shire Council on account of fever[259]. Doctor Leary, Government Medical Officer, visited the settlement on a monthly basis and made a number of recommendations for improvements, including the erection of a jetty, the building of a hospital and the appointment of a nurse[260]. The cyclone of early 1918 put paid to such improvements even if they had received approval.

[256] Cardwell Shire Council Minutes (04.09.1913)
[257] *Northern Miner* (03.07.1916)
[258] Jones (1961:305)
[259] Q.S.A. A/5900
[260] Pedley (1998:30)

Following the cyclone in 1918 and the end of the settlement, Banfield commented that some saw the Hull River Settlement as a means of "an extraordinary dissemination of malarial fever," while "the graveyard on the seaside ridge tells its own story". The surroundings of the site were far from "salubrious"[261].

We cannot know the number of Djiru who died at the Settlement as a result of illness, but there must have been many. They had already been decimated by the violent reprisals following the *Maria* wreck. Following the 1918 cyclone, the remaining people were transported to Palm Island. In 2023, Traditional Owner Leonard Andy advised there were only 15 Djiru living on their traditional lands; most lived on Palm Island or Innisfail.

[261] *Northern Miner* (06.07.1918)

THE DJIRU ESTATE

For a long time, the view prevailed among white people that Aboriginal people followed a lifestyle that was shaped by the environment in which they lived. They had close and intimate knowledge of their country but fitted into it rather than affecting it themselves. More recently, especially with Gammage's monumental work, *The Biggest Estate on Earth* (2011) and Pascoe's popular and occasionally controversial *Dark Emu* (2018), the fact of Aboriginal management of their estate throughout Australia prior to 1788 has been established. They were "not simply hunters and gatherers, as they have been portrayed in the past. They had a system of land and resource management that included firing the land to increase productivity, and erecting weirs or fish-traps for harvesting fish"[262]. Such management was informed by skill, inherited knowledge, spiritual links to Country and the Law which insured people took care of their country at the personal, family and national (previously known as "tribal") levels. Sophisticated and sustainable methods of hunting and fishing had been devised that worked with nature and its rhythms. Detailed local knowledge, including the creation stories that held and archived that knowledge, was crucial not only for spiritual wellbeing and for the gathering of food for sustenance, but also in the use of tools such as controlled fires to manage biodiversity and shape the country.

Existing archaeological, paleoenvironmental, and historical evidence demonstrates the diverse ways in which the rainforests of the Wet Tropics of Queensland "are globally significant, not only for their ecological heritage but also for their preservation of traces of millennia of anthropogenic activities, including active burning and food tree manipulation."[263]

For Djiru and adjacent traditional areas, there is some evidence from European sources for resource management. When the first settlers arrived at Rockingham Bay in January 1864, Dalrymple reported they saw the imposing lofty mountains of the mainland "rising from level forest-clad low country… from which numerous smokes of bush fires of the natives curled upwards into the clear blue sky"[264].

Early settlers in Girramay country at Murray Upper, the Butlers, noted how the local Aboriginal people would burn sections of the forest before the "fire season" (in the hot months fires could be very destructive). They "just singed the edges" in about September-October, to stop the build-up that led to bad fires later. The fire chased out the goannas and the subsequent new shoots brought out the wallabies[265].

Cycas media is a species of cycad found in the drier areas of open canopy woodlands. The seeds were collected and detoxified by many of the rainforest people whose country included such woodlands. It produces a large number of poisonous seeds, easily harvested. It is resistant to fire, and differentially favoured by burning, and also long-lived. It is not known how far the Aboriginal people of north-eastern Queensland went in managing cycads through burning to increase yields, but "both fieldwork observation and inference from the biology of the plants suggest that the large stands of cycads extant today may be, in large measure, the result of Aboriginal manipulation of the woodland ecosystem[266]. Banfield records knowledge of this cycad by his Dunk Island and mainland Aboriginal colleagues, and they certainly were known and used by Girramay people. Johnstone mentions there were "many kinds

[262] Donovan (2002:57)
[263] Roberts *et al* (2021)
[264] *Brisbane Courier* (06.08.1864)
[265] as told to G. Pedley, pers. comm.
[266] Harris (1977:428-9).

of tree ferns, cycads and zamias" within the dense jungle of the small valleys running back from the coast into that of the Hull River[267].

Manipulation of the rainforest also took place. Research on the Atherton Tablelands and coastal lowlands demonstrated that the nut-bearing trees important to the traditional owners are "tightly clumped". This would mean a predictable pattern of resources would be available to them. Old campsites near the patches of trees would be re-used. According to Cosgrove, as the Aboriginal people exploited these nuts in large quantities, this encouraged germination of unused nuts. The clearing and maintenance of large open spaces for campsites and ceremonial grounds also favoured seedling growth[268]. Horsfall speculated that, just as mango seedlings at camp sites have been observed to be watered and nurtured, so too in the past might seedlings of the desirable nut trees have been encouraged[269].

Girramay Elder Davey Lawrence, when recording sites of significance, frequently mentioned "pockets" (open areas in the scrub); usually these were also "early day" camping places, and for some of them he stated there was a mango tree there still.

Burning patches to encourage new shoots to attract the animals that prefer such feed was underpinned by knowledge of what to burn and when. At the coast they also factored in the land and sea breezes with their diurnal rhythms in order to burn a required swathe, after which the fire would extinguish itself before nightfall[270]. Burning rainforest would only be possible where open areas such as *brun* grounds, burial sites, and camp sites at water holes already existed but would be deliberately maintained.

Walter Hill, Queensland Government Botanist, accompanying Dalrymple's expedition in 1873, examined the Maria Inlet, where he found trees such as *Calophyllum inophyllum* and *Eugenia grandis*. They grew so regularly that they had the appearance of being planted and gave the place the aspect of a well-laid out park. The natural groves of Maria Inlet, to Hill's taste, produced a far more pleasing effect than the work of the landscape gardener's art which he had seen in royal parks in the "mother country" [England][271]. It is not known if this was a result of thousands of years of nurturing by Aboriginal people, but the possibility is there.

In sea country, knowledge of saltwater animals, fish, shellfish, tides, winds and seasons was similarly drawn on. Fish-traps were built in suitable places, some of which, like that at Scraggy Point on Hinchinbrook Island, still operate today. Clump Point fish-traps are archaeological evidence of long-term manipulation of marine resources by the Djiru. The early European observers remarked on the diversity and number of items of fishing equipment the people made and used as occasion required, from spears to nets, to hooks and lines, harpoons and canoes, in both riverine and coastal settings. Traditional artefacts were highly efficient for specific functions, but if not available, usually an *ad hoc* substitute could be found. They were made from materials found locally by well-known techniques, but individuals could be particularly skilled at specific technologies.

[267] Johnstone (17.09.1904)
[268] Cosgrove (1996:905)
[269] Horsfall (1990:42)
[270] Gammage (2011:174)
[271] *Queensland Times, Ipswich Herald & General Advertiser* (27.06.1874)

TO THE FUTURE

The Djiru people have experienced a dark and sad history since the arrival of the colonists. They were subject to alien diseases, kidnappings, mass shootings and deprivation of land and liberty. As numbers declined, language was spoken by fewer and fewer. When the Europeans took over the land, not only did the Djiru lose access to hunting, fishing and gathering territory, they also experienced spiritual loss when they could no longer visit the places their ancestors had bequeathed to their care. Their rich and complicated spiritual heritage and knowledge that underpinned life, archived in the memories of the Elders through the land itself, struggled to survive.

The present study has not looked at their history since the destruction of the Hull River Settlement in 1918, where most of the remaining Djiru people had been incarcerated since its inception in 1914. After 1918 the survivors were taken to Palm Island, another government place of effective imprisonment, where they had to adjust further and make a home. Today only a few Djiru people have chosen to live in the Mission Beach area; some live in Innisfail and others remain on Palm Island. They bear a precious heritage of stories and memories and a special understanding of their Country.

The application for Native Title rights by the Djiru was commenced in 2003. In 2011, over an area of 94 square kilometres of land including the Hull River and Clump Mountain National Parks and the Walter Hill Range Conservation Park, Djiru rights were acknowledged officially following a Federal Court decision[272]. The title deeds to 89 hectares of land at Mission Beach were also handed over to Djiru Traditional Owners in 2012[273].

Native title has thus been granted for certain parts of Djiru country, and the Traditional Owners are encouraged to share knowledge in caring for land and sea country. As part of the Girringun Aboriginal Corporation, Djiru people seek more meaningful management involvement in policymaking, planning and on-ground action affecting the rainforests and adjacent coasts and waters of this unique region. Girringun's corporate vision is "Strong Aboriginal people, strong culture, strong Country"[274].

The "holistic, adaptable, sustainably focused perspectives held by Indigenous people offer a way forward through the chaotic times of climate and environmental change that we find ourselves in"[275]. On the journey to understand the long human history of this place from the fragments that have survived the vicissitudes of time, we also are led to respect the "deep past" as a living heritage that generates responsibilities[276].

[272] *Tully Times* (08.09.2011)
[273] *Tully Times* (28.06.2012)
[274] Girringun (2013:15)
[275] Neale in Noon & de Napoli (2022:4)
[276] Griffiths (2018:8)

AFTERWORD

By LEONARD ANDY
DJIRU TRADITIONAL OWNER

Leonard Andy, Djiru Traditional Owner, 2024.

Our knowledge needs to be protected because we are being taken over - like the knowledge. They want us to believe that Australia, we are all Australians – that's what they tell us. History tells us that it is not true, especially around here where we are. And for knowledge, we have two different types of knowledge systems. Our knowledge is based on the land. It's not a knowledge based on what the land can do for me or how many dollars the land can create – economic potential in that. With the forest, you take away the forest then we start to see the economic potential of that land. That doesn't come from our culture or our history. That comes from Europe and it has been relocated here, another geographical area and today we can see it is not a benefit to the land here because these practices brought from the past from somewhere else don't fit on this land. They come from another land. They should be able to see that today when they use language like minimise, mitigate not stop. They don't mean stop those words. It will continue to go on. What they are doing to the land affects the reef, straight out here from us, because we are rainforest and saltwater people. How our Old people tell us stories about things that we never see that we will never see, I guess - when they talk about herds of dugongs and large herds. Where are they gone?

Everyone today wants to protect things and they want to ask us about our intellectual property and our knowledge, like we have little secrets … secrets that have been there for thousands of years but no one wants to listen to them. And today, they want to listen, but why? They got their own motives and they can be around the one bracket and that bracket is Australia. It's for Australia's benefit. I don't know if that's a benefit for us, the Aboriginals. So far, Australia has benefited us to 3.8% of the population. I don't know if we need more of that benefit. Because with knowledge comes respect, also you don't get anything for nothing. And not everything has a value on it you called money. Some of

our knowledge comes with obligations and responsibilities. A lot of our people don't know about that today in some areas because their ideas of responsibilities have all been changed because of a different cultural base. They don't know any different because this started before our grandparents were born. They were all the same, they all came under the same system. If you are talking about knowledge, when I was younger I was told 'You don't need to know that's only blackfella stuff. It's not important.' It's not as important as learning how to plant cane and drive a harvester or a tractor. That was more important.

But I don't always listen. And everything I know now is because I didn't listen. I got told who the Elders are and what knowledge they had. They were not my Elders. They were family to me, but I didn't consider them as Elders. Grey hair doesn't make you an Elder and doesn't make you a knowledge holder either. When I was younger, some of the knowledge holders I know, people rubbish them, put them down. They are not Christians, so you had religious segregation and religion has played a part in sanitising our stories and our knowledge because you can't say this and you can't say that. Me, I just didn't listen. I didn't learn my culture from these people that want to change our culture to make it more friendly and adaptable and more acceptable to the wider Australia so we can fit in. But we never have fitted in and I don't think we ever will. That may be down the track. You have to remember that we think in different timelines. Australia, some people think Australia is important but it has only been here for how long? When we look at things around the world, cultures come and go, countries stop and change. People who make these countries usually make them with power and guns; they draw up boundaries. Groups of people that are enemies in one area, in one land, and say they are all the same now. And they rule over them with their cultural authority, which is the Commonwealth, the Queen, now the King. I don't think everybody tells me the thing I don't like to hear is 'it's everywhere, it happens all over the world'. I don't like to hear that because I'd like to go all over the world and talk to all the people it happened to. I think they'll tell you the same story I'm telling you.

I look at other places around the world. I don't want to become like Africa: wildlife parks, protect the lions, the zebras, the elephants. Look who is protecting it and you'll find out who created the situation why these animals need protection. In our area with the rainforest, don't trust World Heritage. They are the ones that are telling us how they are going to protect the rainforest. They tell us they are the ones who are going to protect the reef. That's where our cultural knowledge comes from, those places. And they are going to protect it? It won't be for us. They are going to protect it, they might tell people 'It'll be for Australia'. My fear is when they say they are protecting it for everybody in the world. We are not everybody in the world. Rainforest people, we are not everybody in the world. Our identity doesn't come from the world.

I've never liked that saying, 'We are protecting it for everybody', 'Oh, it happens everywhere in the world'. There's another kind, there's a name for them. Clarence [Kinjun] told me a long time ago. I've heard it, but I keep forgetting it. It has a funny name. The pronunciation of that name and it's a name for people of colour, that don't come from here. Not Migalloo, white man, there's another name for people of colour, and other cultures that came here. It's a made up name. It didn't exist before. Like 'Gullidgi', it comes from somewhere else – further north – it means 'pig'. After a while, it meant 'policeman'.

And other things brought in by other Indigenous people, not just language. These other people are indigenous to where they come from, but they didn't come here on their free will. They were brought here for greed - some of their own greed and the Europeans' greed. The gold, when that run out they

started to go into areas like agriculture and they were allowed to do things because they are from somewhere else. They are not Aboriginal. Multiculturalism – in the past Aboriginal women had the chance to be raped and have children to every culture that was brought here – and they were brought here. Today we are all part of it, whether it is Chinese, Japanese, and Timorese. The name they use, we didn't hear too much about Sri Lankans but some Old people call them Singhalese. They were the overseers in the cane paddocks, follow with the stick and the leather belt and a whip and made our people work. When they are intermarried now, their children grow up different too than us. Things change over time, but people don't forget. That's why the other people that were brought here, they were not brought here for the benefit of the Aboriginals. They were brought here for the benefit of the people that brought them here. They were already slaves over where that British culture already hit – the other Commonwealth countries – before they came here. The people who were brought in were already assimilated; they've assimilated. When they came here, they are boss.

There was no law and order. When the Europeans came, they were the boss. You don't have to listen to other Aboriginals. Because they judged us as all the same, any Aboriginal could turn up and say, 'Hey boss, I'm from here.' How are you going to question it if you are white man? You don't question it. They just assumed that what that Aboriginal told them was, you know. It goes in the ear, but when it goes in the ear, it touches the brain. Their brain is already brought up and fed by knowledge, cultural knowledge, lifestyles … nothing to do with Aboriginals. They'll make those decisions based on their history and their background about us – yet they never met us and they have talked to us, seen us, took photos of us, shot and killed us and stole all our artefacts, our 'treasures'. And they took it all, but they never really met us. They never met us as equals or met us … when I say 'equals' I mean on equal footing and open heart. They came here with an ulterior motive, set agenda – something that came from Europe, and they relocate to this land. 'Aboriginals don't do anything with the land, look they are just wasting the land. They are not using it'. That doesn't come from here. That's a new concept brought in. That's a bit of multiculturalism. Yeah, you can go and cut all these trees, because them black fellows not using them. Look they are just wasting the land'. We are not making money from it; we are not doing as our forefathers and our history tells us that we should be doing work on the land. It worked in Europe, I guess it worked anywhere. Today we can see that on a global scale with the Commonwealth, what they've done – geographically and environmentally – on other people's country around the world. These ideas and concepts, they come from their part of the world. They try to transfer them geographically, and it doesn't work. The Aussie battler, ask him what he's battling. What is he battling … the land! They don't live with the land; they live on the land. They make the land change for them.

When you say credibility of information sources, credible to whom? Like-minded people with a shared education and cultural background and geographical connections to wherever. Credible to whom? As long as it sounds good to them, they'll write it up and make it sound good to make them look good. You know, you don't write anything … you don't hear anything in history about people praising each other up about you had the best massacre, who is using the best poison on their cattle property around here for the Aboriginals. You don't hear such stories. My Snider rifle is better than a Martini-Henry when you are having a massacre. We have cultural connections with those things. Easy one is 'bambu' that's language name for 'egg'. After the white man came 'bambu' became bullet and the medical procedure to fix that wound is the same as a spear being put through you. Same material, same methodology. All your stuff comes from the forest. The injury was nearly the same just the instrument used, but the medicine and the practice of healing were the same. Everything used in that procedure comes out of the forest. That didn't change, it's just … you were not getting hit with a spear you were

getting shot with a bullet. That's that cultural connection, 'bambu' is still 'egg' but back then became bullet. They had no medicine for strychnine; people tried to eat mud and grass because they see animals doing it too. This was before cat came to this country and dog, white man dog. People were trying to do that but it didn't work because in the past we don't have a shared history of – I don't believe we do – of extermination, of killing people for their land. You can kill people, but the idea of stealing land from someone else is mad. It's a foreign concept for us. You never steal someone's land. You can kill them all, bury them in the ground and make them disappear like they were not here and tell whatever stories you want about them and you can call it yours.

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Helen Pedley was born in Nottingham, England and first came to Tully in 1976. Here she met her future husband and stayed.

Prior to coming to Australia, she graduated from University College London in 1974 with a BSc Hons (First Class) in Cultural Geography and in 1974/75, she studied Geography and Anthropology at the University of Michigan with a Fulbright travel scholarship. Later, she completed an MA from James Cook University with a thesis on plant food detoxification by the Jirrbal and Girramay people of Jumbun.

Helen was Shire Librarian for Cardwell Shire Council and then Library Services Administrator and Museum Curator for the Cassowary Coast Regional Council at Tully until she retired after 24 years. She has published several books and monographs including local histories such as *Tully Street Names: Signs of History* (2010), *Streets by the Sea: a Cardwell chronicle* (2014) and *A Brief History of Mission Beach* (2021, online). Helen has also researched and worked with local Traditional Owners and published books and reports about Indigenous culture such as *Aboriginal Tools of the Rainforest*, *Aboriginal Life in the Rainforest* (1992), *Storykeeping: Davey Lawrence remembered* (2019) and many other works, some being commissioned and unpublished.

In 2024, Helen Pedley worked with the Mission Beach Historical Society to publish two Djiru history volumes online, this one and another: *According to Banfield: Aboriginal Life on the Tropical Coast*. Her contribution to the community and the culture of the Cassowary Coast Region has been both enduring and immense. Mission Beach Historical Society is grateful that Helen chose to create and publish these histories and thanks her for such diligent research and well-balanced accounts. Our historical collections are greatly enriched by these important works.