



# There were always people here: a history of Yuraygir National Park



Department of **Environment & Climate Change** NSW



This publication was written by Johanna Kijas.

This publication is the outcome of two DECC projects through which many people generously shared their stories. The first project was in 2006. Many thanks to Roy Bowling, Shirley Causley, Allen Johnson, Peter Morgan, Bill Niland, Joyce Plater, Marie Preston, Rosemary Waugh-Allcock and Clarrie and Shirley Winkler for their vivid memories of the pre- and post-national park landscape. Thanks to Ann Blackadder, Stewart Blackadder, Ian Brown, Sandy Murphy, Dave McCleary and Ken Teakle who took the time to be interviewed on the phone. Thanks to Ken Teakle for providing DECC with copies of his photographic history of Pebbly Beach, and to Barbara Knox for permission to use her interview carried out with Gina Hart. The second project was in 2007. Many thanks to Yaegl Elder Ron Heron and Yaegl Local Aboriginal Land Council Administrative Assistant Liz Mercy-Bushell for their support for the Yaegl post-contact history project, and to Senior Custodian Auntie Lillian Williams, Judith Breckenridge, Thelma Kapeen, Fox Laurie, Eileen McLeay, Glenda McPhail, Lester Mercy, Veronica Pearce, Michael Randall, Annabelle Roberts and Rosemarie Vesper for sharing their stories about their connection to Yaegl Country which is now in Yuraygir National Park.

Aboriginal readers are warned that this publication contains the names and images of some Aboriginal people who are deceased.

**Cover photo: The Fish Trap, Yuraygir National Park – photo: J. Kijas.**

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# Foreword

## Why does the past matter?

How can knowing the history of a protected area contribute to its effective management? In exploring this question it is recognised that managing protected areas is essentially a social process.<sup>1</sup> It requires park managers to understand ways in which people relate to the world and the roles that parks play in communities. The historical and current connections of local communities to park landscapes should be acknowledged and, where possible, supported. Provided they are not in conflict with park management objectives, these connections should be allowed to continue and evolve.

In the global history of protected area establishment, however, Indigenous and non-indigenous local people have often been excluded from or felt unwelcome in their special places in protected areas. It is important, therefore, to explore the diverse ways in which people become attached to the land and why these attachments enhance community identity and wellbeing. By understanding and acknowledging people's attachments to protected areas, park managers can ensure there is increased community support for protected areas.

The New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service has done much work over the last decade to recognise, support and restore Indigenous and non-indigenous local people's connections to special places and landscapes within NSW's parks. The present publication continues our work in this important area of park management and is part of a larger project that examines how we manage the heritage of cultural landscapes.

We recognise that if park managers do not engage with people who have connections to a place, they can quickly 'forget' who lived or worked there, what happened and to whom and why the place is important. If park staff 'forget' by putting people's stories out of mind or omit to record such connections, the stories can disappear from history telling (but not always from local memory). Recognising people's memories and experiences of, for example, regularly burning the heath, visiting favourite fishing spots or massacres of Aboriginal people, can support the achievement of park management objectives. Writing park histories is therefore about remembering (in a corporate sense), acknowledging people and respecting their rights to continue their connections to places that they care for and value.

## About this publication

The Yuraygir landscape has a vivid and diverse human history.<sup>2</sup> This publication explores the ways in which:

- Aboriginal people have retained their connections to Country
- settler Australians have created new lives and formed new attachments to the landscape
- complex historical and social forces and conflicts have shaped the creation and establishment of Yuraygir National Park.

The publication also records some of the wonderfully rich memories that people have of this landscape. It records the way they experience it, the way they remember it, how they continue to revisit it, and how the landscape itself provokes powerful emotions.

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<sup>1</sup> Lockwood M and Kothari A 2006

<sup>2</sup> Yuraygir National Park was declared in 1980, and incorporated the former Angourie and Red Rock National Parks (both reserved in 1975).

## Never without a history

The landscape that is now Yuraygir National Park has been, and remains, the Country of Aboriginal groups. From the early nineteenth century, however, it has also been a relatively isolated place in an economically marginal region. The soils of its forests, heathlands and swamps were not suitable for intensive agriculture. Its distance from major roads and from large regional centres meant that it was not easily accessible and was bypassed in the 1960s North Coast development boom. Its unsuitability for agriculture and its inaccessibility have shaped the history of its coastal villages, the park landscape and the pattern of people's recreational activities to this day.

Yuraygir National Park has always been a peopled landscape. Generations of Aboriginal owners and their neighbours camped, fished, held ceremonies and traversed the country. Despite its isolation after settlement, and long before its gazettal as a park, there was logging in the forests and hinterland, grazing of cattle and wintering of bees. While commercial fishing, sandmining and summer holidays brought people to the coast in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it was after the park's gazettal in 1980 that human activity in the coastal areas once again increased. This is partly because park gazettal coincided with a rise in tourism and recreational activity, partly because 'sea changers' moved to the north coast to live from the 1960s and 1970s, and partly because the end of pastoral activities, timber getting and mining made the area more amenable for recreation.

## Evolving culture, evolving landscape

As the tracks left by the timber workers, graziers and sandminers grow over, the imprint of these people's lives becomes harder to see. Memories, however, are passed down through the generations of local residents, park staff and regular visitors who have attachments to the park. For example, because of the successful revegetation of 'Banana Hill' near Station Creek, one would have to know its history to realise that there was once a banana plantation on its slopes. In other places, the imprint of past land uses remain more deeply etched into the landscape. Pasture grasses, planted and fertilised at Station Creek in 1970, still exist on the lowlands at the base of Banana Hill. Around Brooms Head, the native grasses which were encouraged through regular burning for grazing cattle have been gradually replaced by native heath species since regular firing has ceased.

This publication explains ways in which people's views of places differ according to their personal history, philosophy and cultural background. The park landscape holds within it a myriad of stories and perspectives which will continue to influence ways in which people form attachments to Yuraygir National Park.

## Lessons to be learnt from history

Modern approaches to protected area management recognise that human history has an important role to play. This publication provides broader lessons relevant to park management across NSW and, like Sharon Veale's history of Towarri National Park,<sup>3</sup> develops historical themes that park managers can use to ensure that historical context and contemporary attachment become an integral part of the day-to-day management of any park. This integration of history and park management will help make local people recognised stakeholders and partners in managing parks.

## Memories and stories

There were always people here: a history of Yuraygir National Park recognises the importance of memories and oral histories in giving 'life' to landscapes. Often, cultural heritage management focuses mainly on the material traces of history, including the artefacts and buildings left behind. These are important in themselves but we recognise that they also function as triggers for memories and stories about the history of places. The memories and stories, unless written down or recorded (for example, by sound recording or video), are unlikely to survive as public history. Much work remains to be done to record memories and stories associated with parks in NSW, especially those in isolated situations.

If they are not recorded, the impression is created that the park landscape is a wilderness – that it does not have a human history. Recognising human–environmental interactions enables park managers to understand

the landscapes they manage. History and environmental science can help explain the present and help ensure there is community support for protected areas.

## **Aboriginal people's right to care for Country**

History aids understanding of the custodial and spiritual connections that Aboriginal people have with protected area landscapes. How do Aboriginal people maintain and restore attachments to those places? The history of the last 200 years has seen Yaegl and Gumbaingirr people excluded from many other parts of their traditional Country. They did manage to maintain their links to many areas, though, and the commercial collecting of worms carried out along the Yuraygir beaches by Aboriginal people from the mid-twentieth century is a good example of such a link, one that enabled them to retain knowledge of Country and family. For Aboriginal people, Yuraygir is a living cultural landscape. Attachment to Country extends well beyond a sense of belonging, and involves a custodial responsibility to care for Country. It is therefore important for Aboriginal people to be involved in land management activities.<sup>4</sup> Park managers need to understand the histories of Aboriginal movement in relation to Country, the variety of spiritual and custodial relationships they have with park landscapes, and the aspirations they may have for their Country, their community, and themselves.

## **Respecting staff knowledge**

Park staff have considerable knowledge of and attachment to protected areas and, in most cases, have long-term connections with local communities. In some cases, as with Dave McFarlane and Don Wall at Yuraygir National Park, the connections of park staff and their families to park landscapes sometimes pre-date the establishment of the parks. Equally, new park staff can develop a sense of belonging and attachment to park landscapes in which they work. The imprint that particular staff have left on park landscapes can be forgotten. The two lines of concrete bollards constructed in the mid-1980s to close the Shelley Beach Track are a good example. Locally known as 'Friederich's Line' (named after Bob Friederich, National Parks and Wildlife Service Manager of the Grafton District, who oversaw the closure of the track), these barriers are a visible reminder of the 'battle' to conserve the northern Yuraygir coastline. A challenge lies, therefore, in finding a balance between park staff doing their job and recognising that park staff are also knowledge holders and stakeholders in conservation.

## **History is our business**

One of the Department of Environment and Climate Change's (DECC's) goals is to integrate landscape management for long-term ecological, social and economic sustainability. Landscape management without history is not integrated. It follows from this that DECC is irrevocably in the business of history.

### **Reece McDougall**

Acting Executive Director  
Culture and Heritage Division

### **Sally Barnes**

Deputy Director General  
Parks and Wildlife Group

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<sup>4</sup> Ridges M 2006, p. 105

# Section 1: Overview and maps



Yuraygir heath 2006. Photo: J Kijas

## 1.1 Introduction: a history of Yuraygir National Park

Most people visiting Yuraygir National Park in 2008 head straight for the beach. They drive without stopping through gaps in the Coast Range, pass through the eucalypt forests, cross the grasslands and heath, and avoid any boggy swamps to arrive at their holiday destination on the coast.

However, people's attention was not always focused on the beach. Prior to contact with non-Aboriginal people, Yaegl and Gumbaingirr people travelled and camped across the whole of the rich environment between the Clarence River and the coast. Settlers arriving in the area worked in the forests and grazed their cattle on the grassy heath beyond the beach. For six weeks each summer, however, many of them trekked to the coast to gather together, fish, swim, read, walk and camp. Although the landscape of Yuraygir National Park has been isolated and sparsely settled since colonisation, it has always been a known and peopled landscape.

This publication combines two previous reports which were commissioned by the Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC); *Yuraygir National Park contextual history*<sup>5</sup> and *Yaegl post-contact oral history project for Yuraygir National Park*.<sup>6</sup> This publication is set out in four sections:

- **Section 1** outlines the location and geography of the national park, and includes a chronology of relevant historical dates.
- **Section 2** provides the broad context for Yuraygir National Park's history. Regional, state and national contexts help provide a framework in which to place local stories of people's attachment to the land, and their work and leisure activities. The section also contains the background for the gazettal of the national park.
- **Section 3** explores people's experiences of the landscape before the park's gazettal. These include memories of working, particularly in relation to the early timber, grazing and fishing industries, and recreational experiences which focused on the coastal villages and annual camping holidays.
- **Section 4** briefly outlines some people's histories of attachment to the park. The development of the national park brought closures and new beginnings, and involved hard-fought battles.

### 1.1.1 The geography and history of Yuraygir National Park

Yuraygir National Park is the state's largest coastal park. Situated on the north coast of NSW, it lies to the south of Broadwater and Bundjalung national parks. Yuraygir National Park stretches over 60 kilometres along the coast from Angourie in the north to Red Rock in the south, and is the traditional country of the Yaegl and Gumbaingirr people. Its closest regional centres are Coffs Harbour in the south and Grafton in the west. It encloses the coastal villages of, from south to north, Red Rock, Woolli, Diggers Camp, Minnie Water, Sandon, Brooms Head, Angourie and Wooloweyah.

The local government area is Clarence Valley. The counties are Clarence and Fitzroy, and the parishes from south to north are Calamia, Corindi, Dundoo, Red Rock, Woolli Woolli, Scope, Candole, Canoulam, Tyndale, Gulmarrad and Yamba.

The relevant topographical 1:25 000 maps are: Red Rock, North Solitary Island, Bare Point, Pillar Valley, Sandon, Tucabia, Brooms Head and Yamba.

Yuraygir National Park was gazetted in 1980, incorporating Red Rock and Angourie national parks which were both reserved in 1975.

The land tenure history of Yuraygir is complex. From the time of its gazettal, acquisitions of land to 'plug the gaps' have continued. Much of the land was held in family-owned perpetual occupation Crown leases, with some freehold. In recent years, large areas of state forest have come into the reserve through the north-eastern forests' Comprehensive Regional Assessments scheme.

The national park is managed in three sections, reflecting the geography and history of the area. Red Rock River in the south, Woolli Woolli River in the centre and Sandon River in the north have each created geographical boundaries which have shaped the park. Despite dedicated planning for a north-south road to broach the rivers and swamps throughout the booming tourism years from the 1960s to the national park's gazettal, the coast remains accessible only by side roads from the Pacific Highway up to 30 kilometres inland. This lack of thoroughfare staved off coastal estate and resort development which boomed to the north and south of the area in the late twentieth century.

The three sections of the park are:

- **Southern Yuraygir**, between Red Rock and south of Woolli, which is accessed by a road to the camping areas of Station Creek and Pebbly Beach.

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5 Kijas J 2007a

6 Kijas J 2007b



- **Central Yuraygir**, between Wooli and south of Sandon, which is accessed by a road to the villages of Wooli, Diggers Camp, Minnie Water and the camping areas at Illaroo and Bookram.
- **North Yuraygir**, which is accessed by a road from Maclean to Brooms Head, the Sandon River and the Lake Arragan/Red Cliff camping area. In the far north, the national park is accessed from the Yamba road to the villages of Angourie and Wooloweyah.

In 1978, Alan Fairley described the region in his field guide to NSW's national parks:

Between the small coastal villages of Red Rock and Angourie and east of the Coastal Range is an extremely beautiful and varied coastline, still mostly natural as the heath lands and swamps have been of limited agricultural value. A few small fishing and holiday settlements... have grown up along this coast, but access is by narrow spur roads. Therefore the bulk of travellers keep to the Pacific Highway. Salt and freshwater lakes, sand-dune systems, headlands connected by long curved beaches, fine heaths and swamps are characteristic of the area... The main interest... is the variety of its landscape.<sup>7</sup>

The Coast Range forms a forested backdrop to the coastal landscape. Remnant littoral rainforest; wet, dry and swamp sclerophyll forests; mangrove forests; dry and swamp sclerophyll woodland; mallee; and dry and wet sclerophyll shrubland have been extensively surveyed throughout the national park.<sup>8</sup> Most forests have been selectively logged throughout the twentieth century.

The principle of naming a national park with an Aboriginal word was first proposed in 1974 by Ray Kelly and Howard Creamer of the National Parks and Wildlife Service's Sites of Significance Survey team. Referring to the 'Greater Angourie National Park', Howard Creamer wrote: 'In considering the area involved, the most appropriate course of action would be to give the park the name of the small tribe which occupied an area almost identical to that of the park.'<sup>9</sup>

A variety of spellings for the Yaegl people are listed by various authors. They include: Jeigir, Jiegera, Jungai, Yagir, Yegera, Yegir, Yiegera and Youngai.<sup>10</sup> In 2008, the Lower Clarence Elders use the preferred spelling of 'Yaegl'. In 1977, the spelling of 'Yuraygir' was considered the closest reflection of the Aboriginal usage of the word, allowing it to be phonetically accurate and easy for visitors to pronounce.

Much disquiet over this interpretation of the group's name and hence the park's name has been voiced over the years. However, in 1977 the battle to gain a voice for Aboriginal people in the National Parks and Wildlife Service had only just begun and there was still a lack of understanding about contemporary Aboriginal communities in NSW.

Ian Brown and Dee Murphy recommend the following:

It should be noted that when the emphasis is put on the middle syllable Yur-ay-gir, and the final r is rolled ('rr'), this is close to the correct pronunciation for the National Park, and more similar to the pronunciation of the word Yaegl (as 'l' and 'r' are interchangeable).<sup>11</sup>

### 1.1.2 Histories of attachment

Yuraygir National Park has a big history. Each section of the park has its own history of attachment. Indigenous, work and recreational histories are interwoven in particular sections of the national park, where often people had little knowledge of or attachment to other sections. For example, some regular campers at Pebbly Beach in the south refer to Minnie Water as 'the north of the park', while people in the northern villages of Brooms Head and Angourie historically have little connection with each other.

7 Fairley A 1978, p. 47

8 National Parks and Wildlife Service 2003a

9 Creamer H 1977

10 Nayutah and Finlay 1988 in Brown I and Murphy D 2001

11 Brown I and Murphy D 2001, p. 24

Yuraygir National Park was a resource-rich and well-populated region before the arrival of colonial settlers, and contains a wealth of archaeological remains. However, until recently, the social and cultural history of post-contact Aboriginal attachment to the region has been poorly researched. Aboriginal history in the southern section of the park has been better researched because of the detailed work that has been carried out with the Garby Elders of Yarrawarra.<sup>12</sup> In 2007, Yaegl social histories of attachment to the central and northern sections of the park were conducted to fill in some of the gaps.

Settler Australian work and recreational histories of attachment began later than in most other regions of colonial Australia, commencing around the 1880s. These histories have also been poorly documented, requiring oral history sources to expand the richness of the area's history.

Yuraygir's birth as a national park also has a contested and complex history. This publication begins to tell the story of Yuraygir National Park, but leaves much to be explored.

### **1.1.3 Project sources and methodology**

The research for this publication has been carried out through a review of relevant literature, and primary research in the field. The published literature consists mainly of academic analyses relating to the North Coast, commissioned reports for DECC and local historical texts. Relevant material was also reviewed at the Maclean, Yamba and Clarence (Grafton) historical societies. The literature is important in understanding the history of Yuraygir and how it came to be a national park. It provides the broad context for understanding the impetus for coastal leisure activities, understanding the background to the timber, grazing, fishing and other industries in the area and gaining an overview of the political and bureaucratic influences which affected the development of the national park.

*Yuraygir National Park contextual history*<sup>13</sup> contained a review of existing documentation, supplemented by a small number of oral interviews. The choice of interviewees was based on covering the important work and leisure activities in the national park before and after the park was gazetted, and the geographical areas of the park (far north, north, central and south). Local history books from Brooms Head and Sandon also provided oral sources, which have been used in this publication.

Northern Gumbaingirr oral stories have been recorded for parts of Southern Yuraygir National Park. This research, conducted by Yarrawarra researchers, was used in this publication. A separate project to find out about Yaegl attachment to the central and northern sections of the park<sup>14</sup> has also been incorporated into this publication.

Oral accounts help provide the primary source material for history, and particularly Aboriginal history, when little has otherwise been recorded. They also provide the detailed and the nuanced memories which are crucial to understanding the landscape history of this area.

People's names have been used with their permission, and all quotes and references have been checked with participants. Some people preferred not to be named and they have been given a first name pseudonym. Telephone conversations and untaped interviews were written up and returned to the participants for checking and editing before being used in the publication.

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12 ibid

13 Kijas J 2007a

14 Kijas J 2007b

## 1.2 Chronology: general dates and specific events<sup>15</sup>

1828	Captain Rous's expedition notes the existence of the Sandon River on its journey north
1838	Cedargetters and squatters arrive on the Clarence River
1841–42	William and Christopher Wilson survey the central and northern sections of what would become Yuraygir National Park
1840s	Probable decade of Red Rock massacre
1861	Crown Land Alienation & Occupation (Robinson) Acts
1863	Ryan's coach road developed from Corindi, across Colletts Crossing to Grafton and Yamba (then know as Wooli Wooli)
1871	First forestry reserves in Australia
1884	Crown Lands Act
1884	Fishing industry on the Lower Clarence established
1885	First oyster leases granted at Wooli
1888	WRN (Reeve) Waugh buys Taloumbi Station
1890s	Closer settlement establishes sugar cane and dairying as the major industries in the region
1895	Homestead Selection Act passed
1904	Aborigines Protection Board (APB) establishes Ulgundahi Island reserve
1900–05	Series of 'closer settlement' Acts encourage 'dummying' amongst larger landholders
1907–08	Royal Commission of Enquiry on Forestry created
1908	Forest Reserve (FR) 42961 created covering area from Sandon River to Dirty Creek
1909	Forestry Act passed, which provides for the creation of state forests
1909	Commercial oyster leases operate at Sandon
1912	First NSW Labor government introduces Crown lease tenures
1913	FR 42961 is revoked and Wooli Wooli State Forest is dedicated over the same area
1914	First hut built at Sandon (north side)
1916	Forestry Commission established
1920s	Tick eradication program begins – fences built and tick camps established

<sup>15</sup> Based in part on Curby P 1995, p. 5

1923	Wooli Wooli State Forest revoked
1930	Newfoundland, Barcoongere and Candole state forests dedicated over a similar area
1935	Legislation passed allowing for multiple use of forests
1940	Bird and animal sanctuary proclaimed between Angourie and Woolgoolga: shooting prohibited.
Early 1940s	Logging intensifies during World War II
1943	World War II mustard gas trials take place between Wooli and Minnie Water (Wire Fence)
1945	Rocky and Bella Laurie move their family to Reedy Creek near Yamba
1940s	Barcoongere Pine Plantation established
Early 1950s	The chainsaw and swingsaw are introduced to North Coast forests
1950s	Maclean Shire Council establishes camping reserve by the Sandon River (north side)
1950s–60s	Continued population loss and economic depression on the North Coast
1950s–60s	Acceleration of family car-based tourism on the North Coast
1957	National Parks Association (NPA) established
1960s	North Coast beaches become mecca of surfing community
1960s	Rampant development of coastal holiday housing estates create ribbonstrip development along the NSW coastline
1962	Clarrie Moller establishes a banana plantation near Station Creek
1962	The last residents leave Ulgundahi Island
1963	Gibraltar Range National Park (north of Grafton) gazetted
1966	Askin Government establishes the Sim Committee to investigate the conflicts of sand mining, conservation and scientific research
1966	Pippie Beach reserve at Yamba gazetted (now Ngaru Village)
1967	National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) established
1968	Sim Committee Report released, recommending three areas between Angourie and Red Rock for national park protection
1969	Sand mining escalates along the Yuraygir coastline
1969	Lawrence Downs Pastoral Company buys the lease for most of the proposed Red Rock National Park area

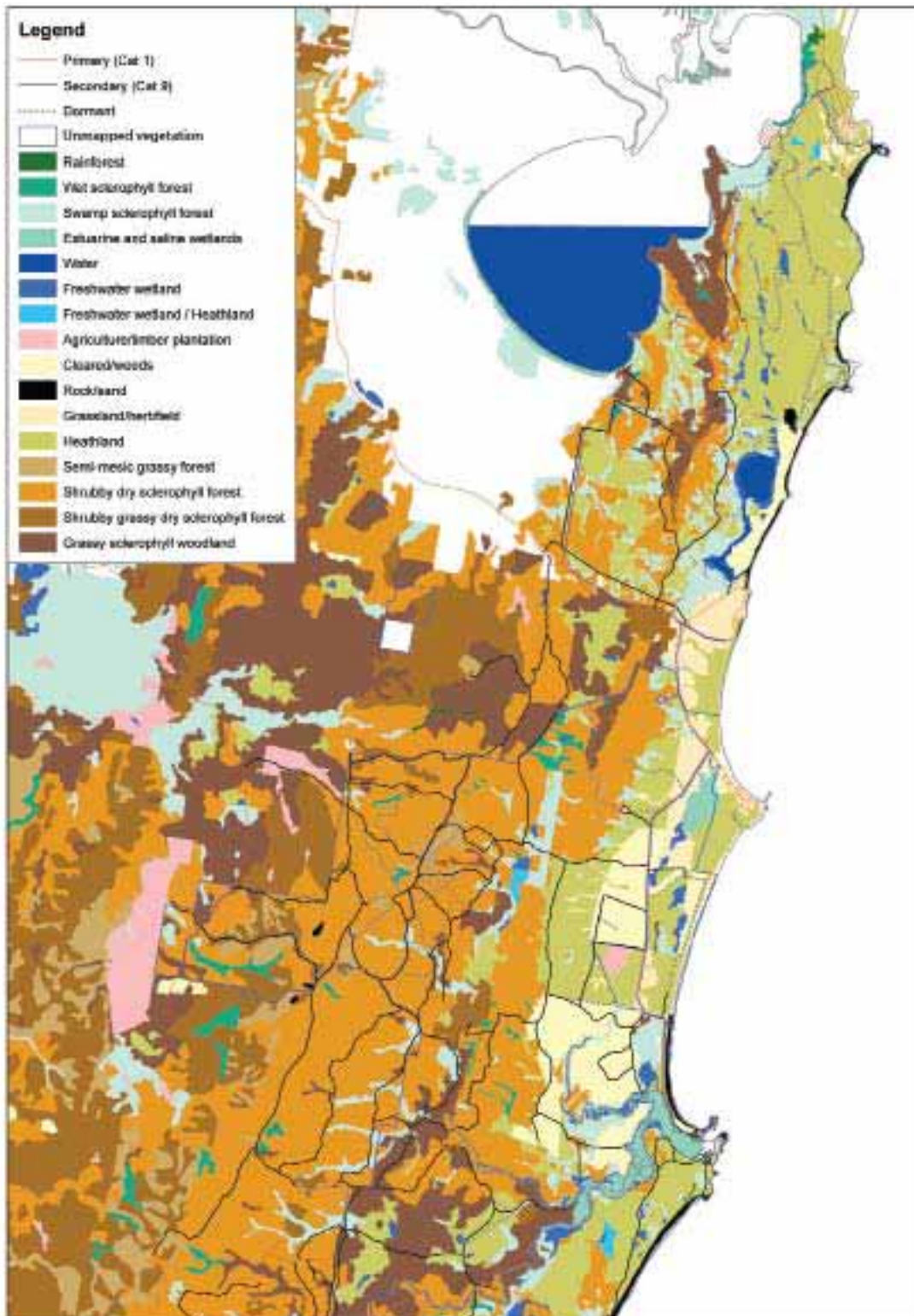
1970	Lawrence Downs ploughs swamp and heath country around Station Creek, planting over 700 acres with setaria and other exotic grasses
1970s	Rapid, unplanned escalation of people from within NSW moving to the North Coast
1972	Guy Fawkes River National Park (north of Grafton) gazetted
1972	On the recommendation of the 1968 Sim Committee report, Myall Lakes, Crowdy Bay and Hat Head national parks are gazetted
1974	On the recommendation of the 1968 Sim Committee report, Broadwater National Park is gazetted
1975	On the recommendation of the 1968 Sim Committee report, Red Rock and Angourie national parks are gazetted
1977	Recently elected Wran Government bans sand mining in national parks
1980	Yuraygir National Park gazetted, amalgamating Red Rock and Angourie national parks
1980	On the recommendation of the 1968 Sim Committee report, Bundjalung National Park is gazetted
1980s	Direct-action forestry and other environmental campaigns take place in the Grafton area
1980s	Development and tourism escalate along the North Coast
1982	First draft of the Yuraygir National Park Plan of Management written
1983	Washpool National Park gazetted
1987	Shelley Beach Track closed
1993	Second draft of the Yuraygir National Park Plan of Management written
1999	Parts of Candole and Newfoundland SFs are incorporated into Yuraygir National Park following the Comprehensive Regional Assessment process
2000	North East Regional Forest Agreement established
2002	Solitary Islands Marine Park zoning plan commenced (August)
2002	Wooli Fishing Co-Operative closed (November)
2003	Yuraygir National Park Plan of Management adopted

## 1.3 Maps of Yuraygir National Park

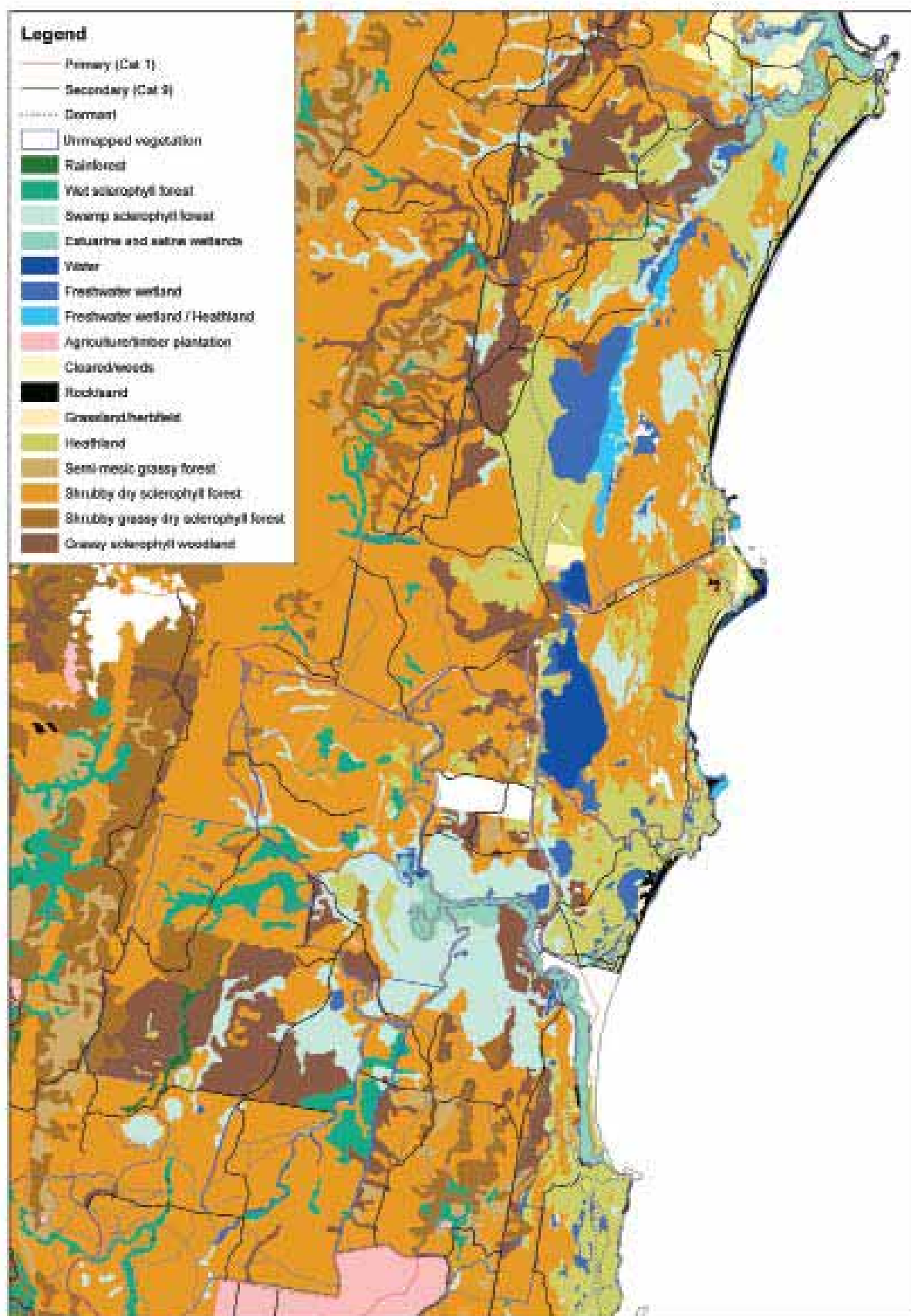
Maps 1–6 are:

- maps 1–3, which comprise vegetation maps for each section of Yuraygir National Park (north, central and south)
- maps 4–6, which show, respectively, Yuraygir National Park in 1983, 1993 and 2003.

### Map 1: Vegetation map of Yuraygir National Park: northern section

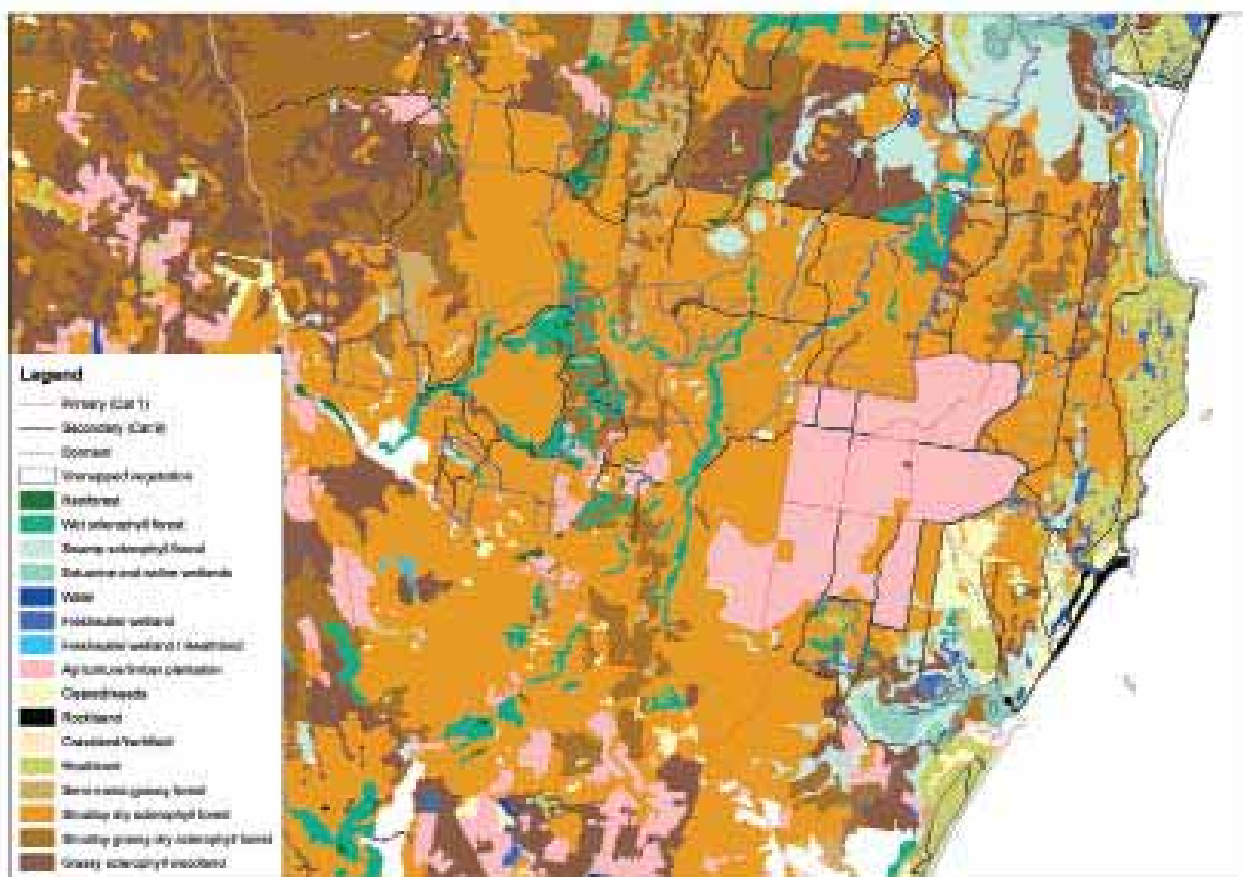


Map 2: Vegetation map of Yuraygir National Park: central section



Source: North Coast Region Yuraygir Draft Fire Management Strategy map 2006

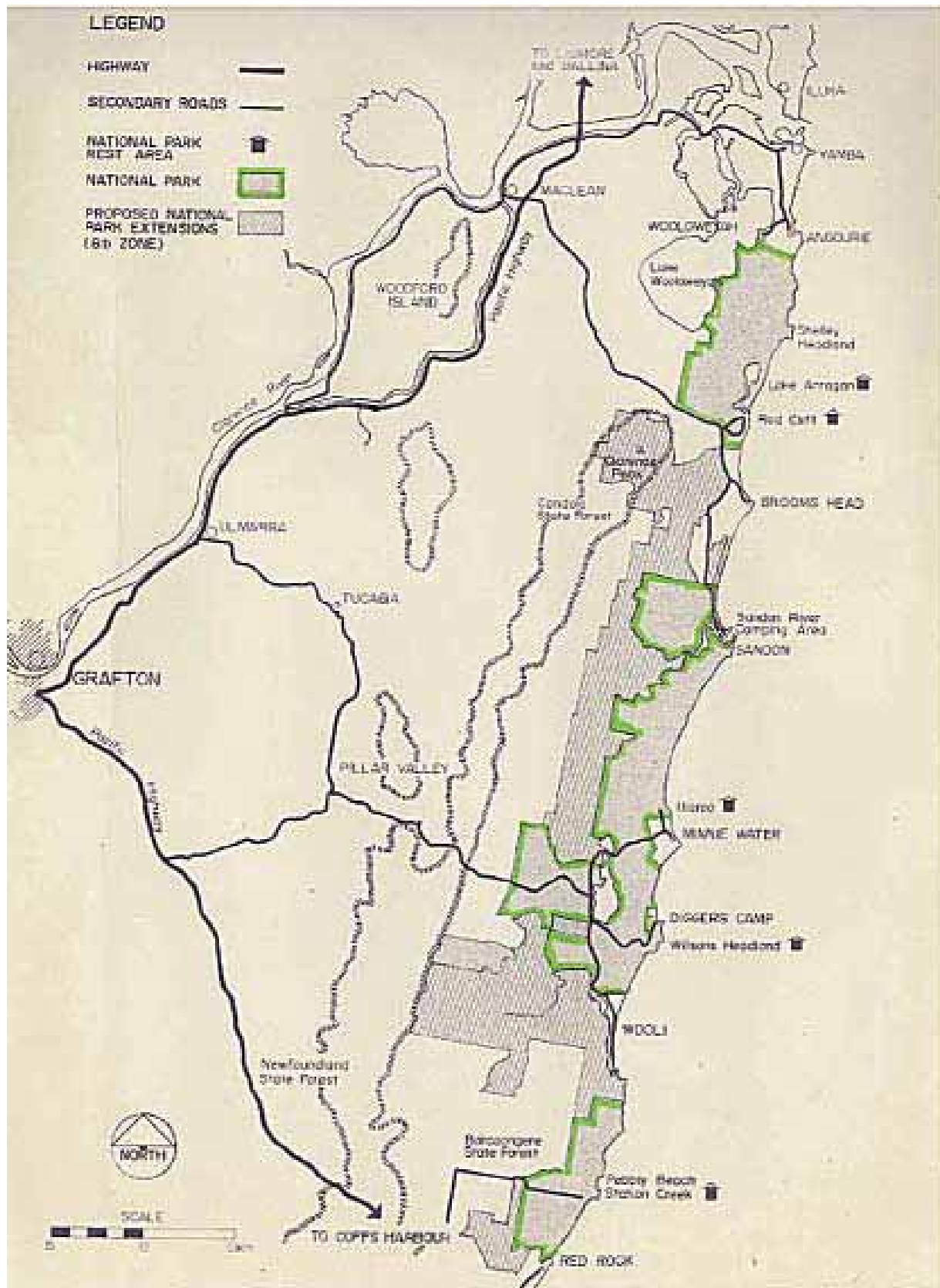
Map 3: Vegetation map of Yuraygir National Park: southern section



Source: North Coast Region Yuraygir Draft Fire Management Strategy map 2006

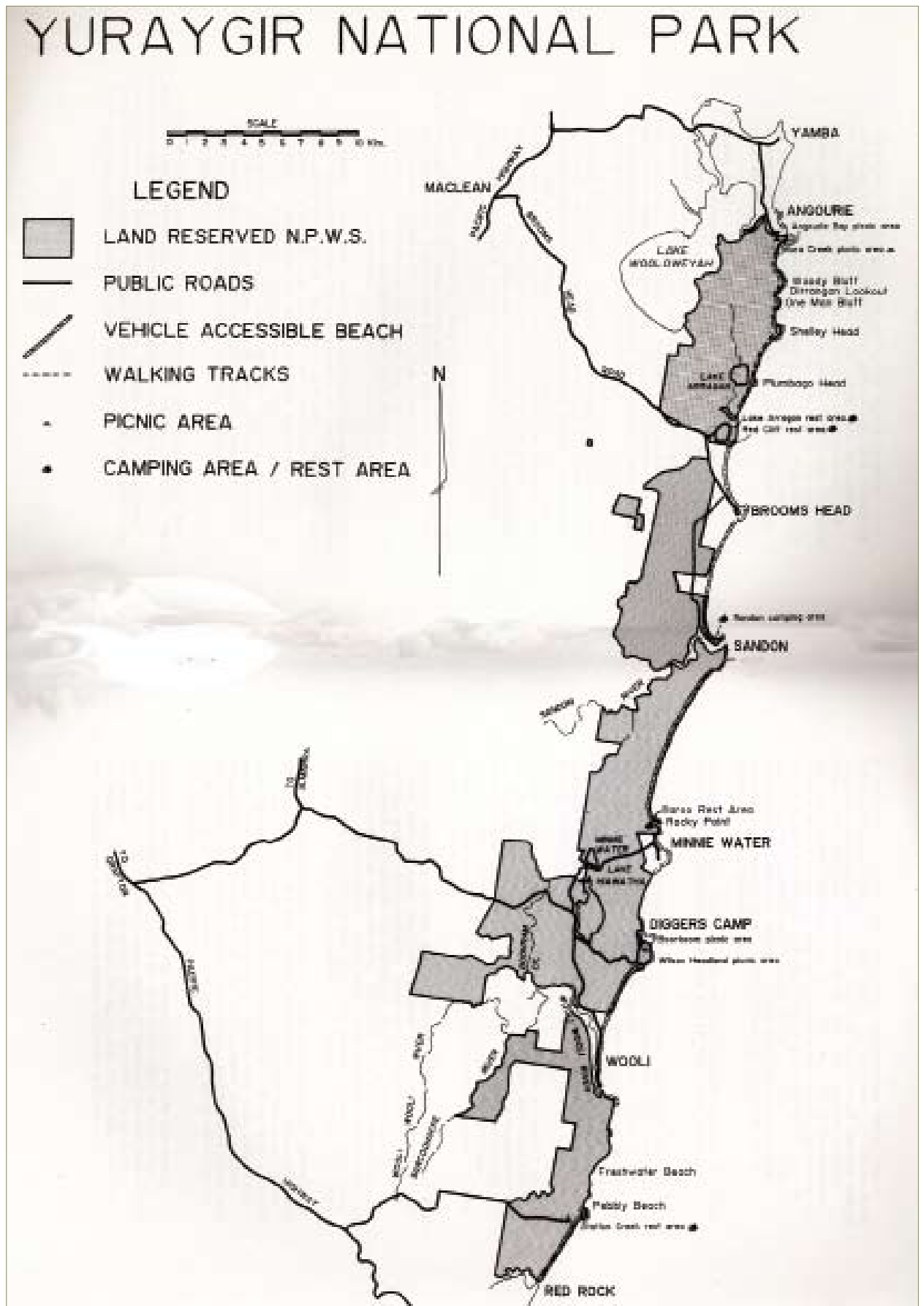


Map 4: Yuraygir National Park in 1983



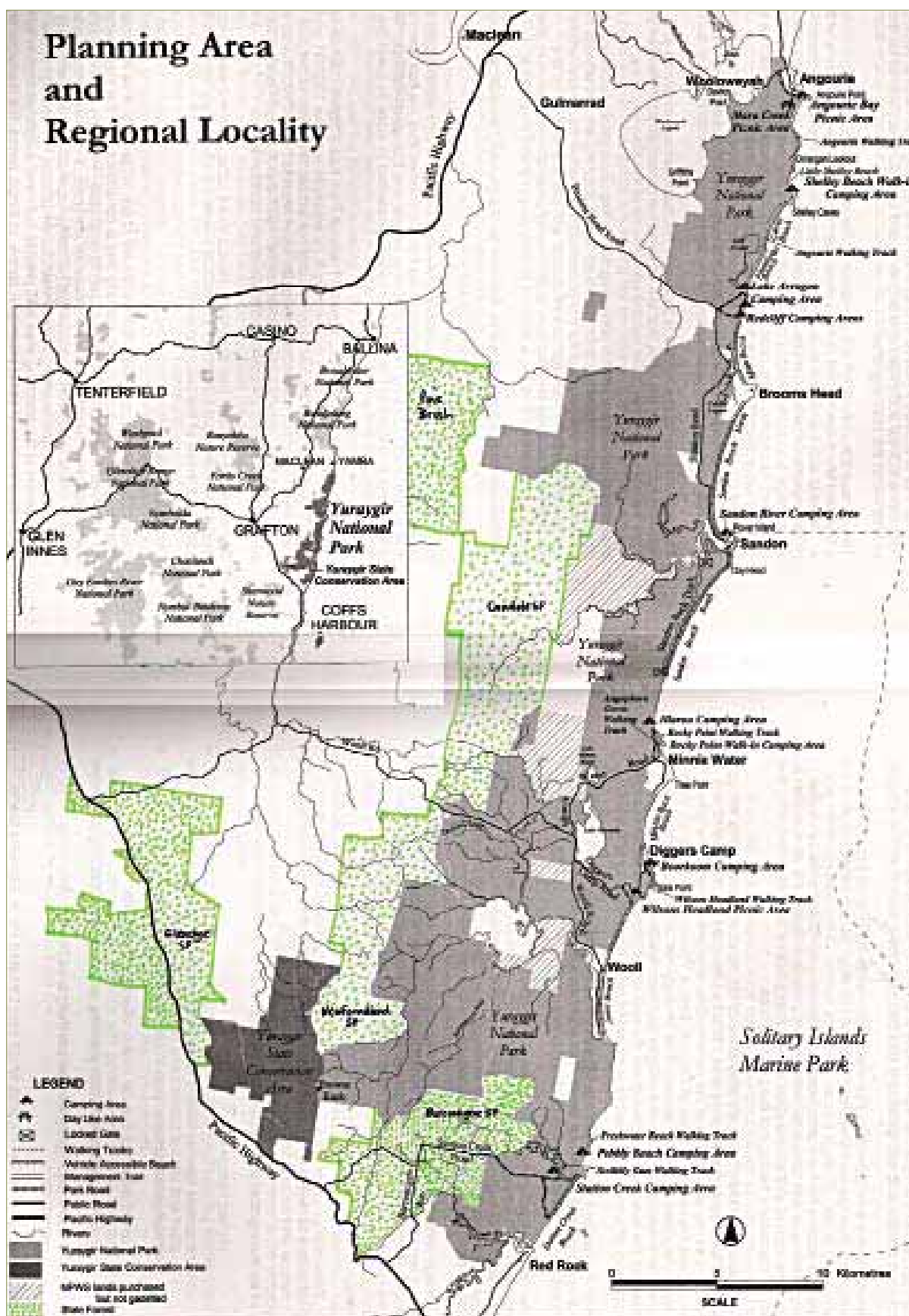
Source: Yuraygir National Park 1983 (Red Rock acquisition file, DECC archives)

Map 5: Yuraygir National Park in 1993



Source: Yuraygir National Park Plan of Management Draft 1993

Map 6: Yuraygir National Park and Yuraygir State Conservation Area in 2003



Source: Yuraygir National Park and State Conservation Area Plan of Management 2003

The map shows further extension of gazetted land and neighbouring state forests

# Section 2: The regional context: North Coast NSW



Plover Island. Photo: A. Lugg

## 2.1 Section overview

Local histories are about places where global influences have been shaped by the local people and landscape to reveal unique stories. However, they are never detached from the world beyond. Therefore, a history of land use and people's relationships with Yuraygir National Park must be placed within the area's broader social, economic and political context, alongside the more intimate stories of the locale.

The immediate study area for this publication stretches from Coffs Harbour in the south to the seaport of Yamba in the north, encompassing the regional hinterland centre of Grafton, and the river ports of Ulmarra and Maclean and their farming lands. When referring specifically to the national park area, the publication refers to either 'Yuraygir National Park' or 'the park'.

The wider setting of the study area straddles the upper section of the mid north coast and the southern end of the far north coast of NSW, from Port Macquarie to the Queensland border. This region is referred to in this publication as 'the North Coast'.

The broad historical context for Yuraygir National Park is explored in this chapter in two parts. Section 2.2 describes the Aboriginal and settler-colonial history of activities undertaken on the North Coast, while Section 2.3 discusses the particular historical impetus behind the gazettal of Yuraygir National Park in 1980.

## 2.2 North Coast history

### 2.2.1 Introduction

Yuraygir National Park exists as the result of a combination of historical factors which include economic, social and political features as well as regional environmental issues. The Clarence River region, which is part of the study area, contains rich natural resources which enabled it to support one of the densest populations of Aboriginal people on the east coast of Australia before it was settled in 1838. However, for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it was an economically marginal and isolated region which was poor and largely ignored in the context of the broader colonial and state economy. In the second half of the twentieth century, increased tourism, new patterns of internal migration and a shifting environmental ethic focused attention on the coastline north of Sydney. Conflicting perspectives on uses of the coastal zone accelerated in this period.

### 2.2.2 Yaegl and Gumbaingirr Country

The traditional owners of Yuraygir National Park encompass two language groups: Yaegl and Gumbaingirr. Territorial areas are complex and have been debated in the literature throughout the twentieth century. Broadly, Yaegl territory encompasses the Lower Clarence River and the coast, possibly reaching as far north as Black Rocks/Jerusalem Creek (south of Evans Head), with a disputed overlapping area between the two groups between Woolli and Red Rock/Corindi Beach in the south. Gumbaingirr/Gumbaynggir territory is much larger, reaching from Nambucca in the south to north of Red Rock, across to the Clarence River around Grafton, inland to Nymboida and up to Ebor on the Dorrigo Plateau. Within this broad language grouping are a number of smaller groups with different dialects.<sup>16</sup>

A variety of spellings occur currently and historically. For example, when referring to Yaegl people, Jiegera, Yegir, Yaygir, Yureygir and Yureygurra are some of the spellings anthropologist Howard Creamer cited when suggesting the name for Yuraygir National Park.<sup>17</sup> Local historian of the Coffs Harbour region, George England, told Elder Harry Buchanan he had counted 12 spellings for the Gumbaingirr/Gumbaynggir, settling for a common spelling at that time of Kumbaingeri (c.1970).<sup>18</sup>

This publication uses the preferred spelling of the Lower Clarence Elders for Yaegl (rather than an earlier spelling, Yaygir). It uses the preferred spelling of the Garby Elders of Yarrawarra Community at Corindi, which is Gumbaingirr, when referring to the southernmost section of Yuraygir National Park.<sup>19</sup>

The Yaegl and Gumbaingirr, along with their southern neighbours the Dhan-gadi and Birrpai, formed what anthropologist Barry Morris argued was a cultural bloc. This is because the kinship, marital and descent arrangements of these groups contrasted with other coastal groups such as their Bundjalung neighbours to the immediate north.<sup>20</sup> They shared a matrilineal system which seemed to have nothing in common with the social relations of other neighbouring coastal groups.

The territories of the coastal groups were smaller than in many other parts of Australia due to the richness of the resources available to them. Nineteenth-century observers commented favourably on the appearance of the North Coast Aboriginal groups, especially when comparing them with groups on the New England Tablelands where food was less plentiful.<sup>21</sup> While there has been much debate amongst archaeologists about the extent of the seasonal movement of the North Coast local groups for food, it is now generally agreed that Yaegl and Gumbaingirr people occupied their core tribal areas all year round, travelling between the coast and the river and range hinterland.<sup>22</sup> Other groups visited for times of feasting and ceremony, and they also travelled long distances for ceremonial and other special events including to the Bunya nut festivals in southern Queensland.

<sup>16</sup> Heron R 1991, Brown I and Murphy D 2001, Goulding Heritage Consulting Pty Ltd 2001

<sup>17</sup> Creamer H 1977

<sup>18</sup> George England interview with Harry Buchanan, c. 1970, Coffs Harbour Historical Society

<sup>19</sup> The preferred spelling for the traditional owners of the Coffs Harbour and Nambucca regions is Gumbaynggir

<sup>20</sup> Morris B 1994

<sup>21</sup> Ahoy C and Murphy D 1996

<sup>22</sup> Byrne D 1986

The pre-1788 population estimates of archaeologist Jim Belshaw are widely cited. He used the records of the Commissioners of Crown Lands (CCL). In 1842, CCL Oliver Fry estimated a population of about 2000 people for the Clarence and Richmond regions. Belshaw estimated the humid coastal zone from the Macleay to the Tweed had a population of about 6300 people, where the highest population densities of between three to six people per square mile were in the coastal estuarine areas.<sup>23</sup> In the northern part of the study area in the Macleay Shire Council area, Denis Byrne estimated the pre-1788 population of the Yaegl to be spread over 1.25 kilometres per person in comparison to 12 kilometres per person for the Western Slopes or New England.<sup>24</sup>

Country was nurtured and cared for, not only through physical manipulation such as regular fires, but also through spiritual and social responsibilities. The Gumbaynggir authors of Elder Harry Buchanan's book explain:

Each jagun (homeland) had its sacred paths and areas where the life passed on by the Dreaming heroes was remembered and renewed – but only by those clans who were guumunbu – belonged or were related to – each place.<sup>25</sup>

While some places were accessible by most of the local group, other places were accessible only on the grounds of gender, initiation status or other knowledge-based criteria. Places were dangerous to those who should not trespass, so sacred places were often completely avoided. Settlers, who gradually spread across Yaegl and Gumbaingirr country, came with very different understandings of those same places.

### 2.2.3 A gradual incursion: nineteenth-century colonisation

By the time the first colonists settled in the Clarence Valley, the British had been in NSW for 50 years. The same physical features which attract tourists and new settlers to the North Coast today forestalled settlement of the area. The mountains were too rugged to cross, the dense forests a feared wilderness that needed conquering, the rivers too wide to broach and the seas and sandy beaches the graves of many. Colonisation of the region was therefore slow and the area remained isolated in relation to the rest of NSW until well into the twentieth century.

Captain Henry Rous and his crew in the *Rainbow* were among the first Europeans to view the Yuraygir coastline when the ship's master, William Johns, explored the Sandon River by boat in 1828. Despite calling the already named Tweed River the Clarence, Rous never noticed the mouth to the Clarence River on that trip. It was another ten years before the first cedargetters arrived by ship on the Clarence River in 1838, a few years after the escaped convict Richard Craig returned to Sydney and alerted the government to the existence of the 'Big River' and its fine timber.<sup>26</sup> By then, the pastoral frontier had pushed out towards Tenterfield, and by 1840 squatters were accessing the Clarence region from the New England Tablelands.

Administratively, in 1842 the Clarence and neighbouring Richmond River valleys were made into the new Clarence Pastoral District as the area was too far from the original district at Port Macquarie for efficient control. In each North Coast valley, settlement centred round the major rivers, the settlers relying heavily on the water transport which carried timber, and later agricultural produce, to the markets, brought in goods and transported passengers around the region. Therefore, in the Clarence Valley, the population was concentrated around the Clarence River in hinterland river ports like Grafton, and later Ulmarra and Maclean on the south side of the river, establishing a river-focused demographic pattern which only began to shift in the 1970s.

One of the first parties of Europeans to blunder through part of Yuraygir was led by Major Henry Oakes (Commissioner of Crown Lands of Port Macquarie when the study area was still part of Port Macquarie). Coming from the south and trying to get to the Clarence Valley in August 1840, the party struggled for a number of days through the coastal sections of the southern part of the park. At one stage, Oakes described 'fine depasturing country well watered with lagoons. I was brought up by a saltwater creek exceedingly deep with steep muddy

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23 Belshaw J 1978

24 Byrne D 1986

25 Gumbaynggir Language and Cultural Group 1992, p. vii

26 Maclean District Historical Society 1974



North Coast rivers and towns of 1838. Courtesy of Leonie Lane 2006

banks about 50 yards wide<sup>27</sup> The Coast Range and extensive swamps impeded their progress, and they had to abandon one horse in a swamp and kill another for food.<sup>28</sup>

The central and northern parts of the park were surveyed in 1841 and 1842. William (WCB) Wilson and his brother Christopher were contracted at the end of 1839 to survey the natural features from the south side of the Clarence River to the coast. WCB Wilson surveyed Coldstream, Tyndale, Gulmaradd, Taloumbi, Conoulau and Woli-barri.<sup>29</sup> His maps are full of detailed descriptions of the landscape. For example, Wilson described the area between Brooms Head and the Coast Range:

The whole of the land for two and three miles from the Coast is very clear of trees and slopes gently to the sea. The timber chiefly consists of Gums, Blood, Tea Tree, Myall, Black Butt, Stringy Bark, Apple, Turpentine, Honeysuckle, Oaks...<sup>30</sup>

Wilson named many of the places in the area after Greek place names, such as Clarenza, Lavadia, Lanitza and Tucabia. According to the nineteenth-century lectures of Thomas Bawden, this was because Wilson had served in the Greek War of Independence as a lieutenant in the British army.<sup>31</sup>

As on the rivers to the south, cedargetting along the Clarence River attracted the first non-Aboriginal people to the region. Pastoral activity also began around the same time. The area was found to be too wet and humid for sheep, so the region shifted to cattle raising.<sup>32</sup> Ramornie Station was the first claim, taken up in 1839 on the banks of the Orara River near its junction with the Upper Clarence River. Large cattle runs were situated on the north side of the Orara and Upper Clarence rivers.

<sup>27</sup> Mackay N 2001, p. 70

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*

<sup>29</sup> Bawden T 1997

<sup>30</sup> Wilson WCB 1842

<sup>31</sup> Bawden T 1997

<sup>32</sup> Jeans DN 1972, Sabine N 1970

The first pastoral run taken up near Yuraygir National Park was Glenugie Station. Skirting the southern part of the park, it was taken up in 1840 with an outstation established near Corindi.<sup>33</sup> When it was taken over by John Pike in 1848, it was renamed Red Bank Station as it ran south from the mouth of the 'Red Bank River' (Red Rock River).<sup>34</sup> On the north side of the river, there were two runs on the eastern side of the Coast Range extending to the coast: Bookram and Barungary stations.<sup>35</sup>

In the northern section of the study area, Rosemary Waugh-Allcock believes that Taloumbi Station was first taken up by the surveyor WCB Wilson in the 1840s. It was then sold successively to Edward Ryan, George Powell and the Smalls who sold it to WNR (Reeve) Waugh and his brother John Waugh in 1888.<sup>36</sup> The station itself was on the western side of the Coast Range, but the 'bush blocks' or 'the run' once took in all the Yuraygir National Park's coastal belt from Angourie to the Woolli Lakes. Reeve's granddaughter Rosemary Waugh-Allcock and her son Alec Waugh still own Taloumbi Station.

Somervale Run in Shark Creek Valley, on the western side of the Coast Range parallel to the central section of the park, was taken up in 1843.

While these stations were established early in the history of settlement in the area, they were very isolated compared with settlements in the rest of the region.<sup>37</sup>

The physical environment that impeded and isolated settlement, the same environment that produced the abundant food sources that sustained Yaegl and Gumbaingirr people, meant that violent conflict came later and more sporadically to this region than other eastern Australian regions.<sup>38</sup> Such conditions also allowed ceremonies and cultural continuity from before colonisation to last into the first three decades of the twentieth century. This was generally far longer than in other parts of settled Australia.

Nevertheless, in a detailed assessment of the reports of the Commissioners of Crown Lands for the Clarence and Richmond regions, historian Heather Goodall argues that once settlement was established, the Clarence region experienced higher levels of violence than other pastoral districts. There was a widespread sense amongst the thinly-spread population of settlers that they were constantly under threat, even though the numbers of deaths at Aboriginal hands were comparatively few. Larger stock losses from Aboriginal attack than in other pastoral districts were also recorded.<sup>39</sup>

In 1856, Commissioner Bligh took over from Oliver Fry as Commissioner of Crown Lands. He had come from the isolated Gwydir region where the violence between Aboriginal people and settlers had been severe. However, he found the atmosphere of violence on the Clarence River disconcerting. He wrote early in 1857: 'The amount of outrage on the part of the Aborigines has far exceeded that which I have been accustomed to notice in Districts more remote than that of the Clarence River.'<sup>40</sup>

As in other parts of the country, Aboriginal attacks on settlers and their cattle were avenged by attacks on entire groups of Aboriginal people. In the southern section of Yuraygir National Park, there are possibly two main massacre sites: Green Hills (on the opposite bank of Red Rock River from Red Rock) and Station Creek. Oral histories also mention killings at Wire Fence (Minnie Water) and in the Blackadder/Cassons Creek-Red Rock area.<sup>41</sup> Just beyond the southern borders of the park, one of the most infamous coastal massacres was at Red Rock. Thomas Bawden comments that after Aboriginal people had attempted to rob a hut at Glenugie Station in the early 1840s, a revenge party, led by Major Oakes, overtook them 'somewhere about Corindi' where they were 'severely punished for their deeds.'<sup>42</sup>

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33 Bawden T 1997

34 Government Gazette Supplement 1848, p. 709

35 Bawden T 1997

36 *ibid*

37 Bawden T 1997

38 Morris B 1989, Goodall H 1996

39 Goodall 2003

40 Bligh R (CCL for Clarence) 1857

41 Brown I and Murphy D 2001

42 Bawden T 1997, p. 47, Cane S 1988 for the first documentation of the Red Rock massacre and Yarrawarra Place stories



Aboriginal writer Ian Brown feels that: 'Massacre sites are extremely sad places.'<sup>43</sup>

Little at this time is publicly known of massacre sites in the central or northern parts of the park.

Despite the devastating affect violence and disease had on Aboriginal groups along the Clarence River, the number surviving was high compared with other places. During the first 50 years of colonisation, there was only a thinly-spread population of settlers across the region. This initially allowed for dual-occupation, where Yaegl and Gumbaingirr people could stay in parts of their own country. Some worked for certain stations regarded as 'safe', while others avoided all settlements.<sup>44</sup>

Walking tracks linked the local Aboriginal groups up and down the North Coast and into the hinterland. Coastal routes provided meeting places in the park area from the north and south. Garby Elder from Yarrowarra, Michael McDougall, said:

...they used to meet halfway, just have a yarn and that. How everything is going at that end of the world and down here... Yes, my father use to go up to Wooli... Minnie Waters, that's how far they go and then back down to Woolgoolga.<sup>45</sup>

In the local area, travel routes came from the south across Colletts Crossing on the Wooli Wooli River, linking initiation routes for young men to Pillar Rock with other significant places like Cabbage Tree Mountain and the 'big camp' at Tucabia on the Coldstream River. Routes went north to Maclean and upriver or forked west towards Grafton.<sup>46</sup> Roy Bowling, who grew up in Tucabia, was told of these Aboriginal routes by his father and grandfather.

As in other places in Australia, some of these routes formed the first coach road in the area in 1863. The road started at Bellingen and went through Corindi, across Saltwater Creek Crossing, north to Wooli Wooli River at Colletts Crossing, north up Colletts Crossing Road and joined the Wooli Road, splitting to go west to Grafton or east through Taloumbi Station to Yamba (then known as Wooli Wooli) on the eastern side of Lake Wooloweyah. This road was named Ryan's Road after its surveyor, and members of the Casson family drove the first coaches on that route.<sup>47</sup>

It was harder for Aboriginal people to avoid settlements along the lower reaches of the Clarence River from the 1870s as the population of selectors increased. Settlers fenced the land and thus excluded Aboriginal people from accessing their traditional food sources. Increasingly, the traditional owners were pushed back onto the fringes of coastal settlements where the land was not suitable for agriculture, or onto islands in the Clarence River which were prone to flooding, such as Ulgundahi Island opposite Maclean.<sup>48</sup> However, a range of traditional and explicitly Aboriginal practices within the landscape have persisted in the study area.<sup>49</sup>

Denser settlement across NSW came after the establishment of the Robinson Land Acts of 1861 that encouraged agricultural, family-based, permanent settlement beyond the old 'limits of location'. Early male settlers hauled timber and drained the swamps to grow maize. Later in the nineteenth century, farmers grew sugar cane and set up dairy farms. The fishing industry on the Clarence River was established in 1884 at Iluka. Banana farming, raising pigs and chickens, and bee keeping were all agricultural activities in the region, offering greater diversity to the small farmer than in other parts of NSW, even if such activities were often very economically marginal.<sup>50</sup>

43 Brown I and Murphy D 2001, p. 81

44 Goodall H 1996

45 Uncle Michael McDougall (15 May 2001) in Brown I and Murphy D 2001, p. 21

46 Brown I and Murphy D 2001, Roy Bowling interview, 7 March 2006

47 Roy Bowling interview, 7 March 2006, MacKay N 2001

48 McSwan EH 1992

49 Heron R 1993, Brown I and Murphy D 2001

50 Jeans DN 1972, Maclean District Historical Society 1974

## 2.2.4 Twentieth-century growth

It took until the first decades of the twentieth century for agricultural industries that would dominate until the 1960s to become established across the region. Yaegl and Gumbaingirr people participated in these industries, cutting timber and moving with the seasonal labouring jobs. A variety of southern and northern Europeans worked in the timber industry and on the railway line as it crept across the North Coast, and Sikhs worked the sugar cane and helped clear the land.

Despite the early twentieth-century rhetoric of the North Coast as a 'land of plenty', it was not a prosperous area of economic growth. Such rhetoric ignored the facts that the region was a long way from viable markets, floods were a problem, and the subtropical climate as well as the fertility of the soil for cropping was not well understood. These factors meant that North Coast farmers continually struggled for anything beyond subsistence.<sup>51</sup>

From the early twentieth century, residents believed that the country–city divide was behind their poverty and isolation, where the government in Sydney did not care about or understand the region's landscape and people. 'Why is this area, the most prospective in the Commonwealth, not developing?', demanded W Ager in 1919 in the newspaper *The Voice of the North*. Answering his own question, he claimed that Sydney was: 'strangulating this area... the country gets the promises, the city gets the money...'<sup>52</sup>

In collaboration with others, Grafton resident Earle Page, founder of the Country Party, argued for the subdivision of NSW to address this problem, proposing a new state in the north incorporating New England and the North Coast. This 'New State Movement' had its roots in the mid-nineteenth century, was revived in Grafton in 1915, and was galvanised into the New England New State Movement which was active on the New England Tablelands and North Coast between 1948 and 1967. Advocates claimed that Sydney retained all the political power which enabled it to 'unscrupulously manipulate' public funds to provide superior facilities in the city and concentrate all the trade there.<sup>53</sup> The local bitterness and rancour which emerged from the 1960s, as predominantly Sydney-based state planners and conservationists began to implement new strategies to protect the study area's coastline (see section 2.3), had as its basis this historical resentment.

The period between 1930 and 1945 was one of particular stagnation across rural regions of NSW. The Depression stunted the growth of country towns and accelerated the drift to the cities, draining vigour from rural environments. However, economic stagnation and population decline were worst on the North Coast, especially between the census counts of 1921 and 1961. Grafton-based Ulrich Ellis, a long-time activist for the Country Party and New State Movement, claimed an estimated 48,000 people between 1954 and 1964 had been 'spirited away in one decade, dribble by dribble.'<sup>54</sup>

At the same time that the rural population of the North Coast was decreasing because of this 'malaise', people from the city and inland areas began to take their holidays on the coast. Promotion of the coast and beaches as holiday areas was a post-World War II phenomenon. Before then, romantic notions of beauty and the sublime, embedded in the scenic tourism that had arisen in nineteenth-century Europe, promoted the North Coast mountain and river hinterland as the ideal tourist destination, and the coast was largely ignored.<sup>55</sup>

Within the region, however, the coast had always attracted local holidaymakers. From the late 1800s, while the new settlers staked their claims to hinterland farms, they holidayed at the beach. For example, families from the cane and dairy farms along the Lower Clarence River spent six weeks camping at Brooms Head over the summer.<sup>56</sup> Farmers began to build shacks on the seafront from the 1920s, decades before the influx of outsiders started carving up the coast into subdivisions. Surf bathing took off very quickly once daylight restrictions on swimming were lifted, and Yamba rapidly established its Surf Lifesaving Club on the heels of the first lifesaving club in Sydney in 1909.

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51 Kijas J 2002

52 Ager W 1919, p. 8

53 Page E et al 1920, p. 10

54 Ellis U 1965, pp. 1–2, Kijas J 2002 and 2003

55 Kijas J 1999, pp. 143–151

56 Plater J and Committee 1990

It took until the 1950s and 1960s, however, for tourism from outside the region to focus on the North Coast and its beaches. Better transport and roads, increasing individual wealth and longer holidays all contributed to the acceleration of tourism. By 1950, 2,546,000 Australians were entitled to holidays with pay. The great increase in private car ownership and consequent travel within NSW is reflected in figures from the state government's road service, the NRMA. In 1946, they issued 219,601 strip maps. Twelve years later they issued 2,876,000.<sup>57</sup> By the 1960s, 80% of Australians were travelling away from home in their holidays, setting out to 'see something of the country'. However, during this period most people went to easily accessible beaches surrounding towns such as Coffs Harbour.<sup>58</sup>

The shifting nature of tourism on the North Coast reflected national and international patterns. The increased desire and capacity for leisure time meant tourists increasingly invaded previously isolated beaches, where they erected shacks and cleared land for campsites. They encouraged the increasing subdivision of coastal land and provided the impetus for the growth of coastal villages and towns. Closer to Sydney, subdivision for holiday houses started in the late 1940s and proceeded rapidly.<sup>59</sup>

Continuing national economic prosperity in the 1960s meant that families and retirees set out to see the country, as did predominantly male surfers and their girlfriends. Car-based transport expanded beyond the family sedan, becoming accessible to and affordable for young single people. North Coast beaches became a mecca for Australian and international surfers. Kombi vans and Holdens filled the car parks of coastal villages and featured in such famous surfing films as *Endless Summer*.

Therefore, at the same time as the rural economy was faltering on the North Coast, the tourist industry was producing new economic opportunities. By the 1960s, the countryside around Australia was diversifying quickly. Primary production fell from around 90% of total Australian exports to below 50% in the early 1970s.<sup>60</sup> Towns on the North Coast reflected this shift, with the hinterland agricultural centres such as Grafton losing their populations while previously small towns like Coffs Harbour began to boom with the migration to the coast.<sup>61</sup>

By the 1970s, there was a burgeoning population growth on the coast of people who had migrated from southern states. However, development was patchy. For example, the local council areas of the river hinterlands such as Ulmarra and Maclean (the councils which were responsible for the area encompassing Yuraygir National Park) had much lower rates of growth than areas on the coast. As new settlers started moving into the area, local young people continued to move out of the rural areas into the growing regional centres and Sydney. Employment in the rapidly expanding service industries, the building trade and small-scale industry could not compensate for diminishing rural industry employment, and rates of unemployment escalated as in-migration outstripped available work.<sup>62</sup>

Many high-profile Australian environmental campaigns from the 1970s occurred inland, despite the huge pressure that escalating numbers of tourists and new settlers brought to the previously sparsely-populated coastline. However, there were bitter environmental clashes on the coast as well. Although only two coastal protests usually appear in environmental histories of the last four decades of the twentieth century (mining on Fraser Island in the early 1970s and the preceding Great Barrier Reef campaign<sup>63</sup>), this focus on the hinterland battles diminishes the extent to which the coast was also the focus of environmental campaigns.

57 Best HE 1959

58 Hannah B 1968c

59 Piper G 1980

60 Aitkin D 1972

61 Kijas J 2002

62 Walmsley DJ 1990

63 Hutton D and Connors L 1999

In the study region, an ongoing campaign to establish a marine national park around the Solitary Islands has had a long history of various coalitions fighting for and against it since the 1960s. In this region, warm northern currents overlap with cool southern currents, producing southern coral communities and a rich diversity of marine life. Tourist and conservation groups in Coffs Harbour had been arguing for a marine park since the late 1960s, colliding with commercial and recreational fishers, four-wheel drivers and industry lobbyists. The Solitary Islands Marine Park was finally established in 1998.

Some of the most bitter clashes were fought over access to the beach for four-wheel drive vehicles, such as the long-running controversy over the closure of the Shelley Beach Track through the 1980s in the northernmost section of the park (see section 4.5.3).

As discussed in section 2.3.2, concerns over sand mining first galvanised direct environmental action and paved the way for the establishment of the North Coast national parks in the 1970s. After the initial battles over sand mining at Myall Lakes north of Sydney in the 1960s, focus shifted in the late 1970s to Middle Head near Nambucca. This favourite beach of both locals and new migrants, including surfers, was outside the potential protection of a national park. In 1980, sand mining was challenged at Middle Head by direct-action protest.

In an address to the Mineral Sands Industry Symposium in 1981, head of the Environment Protection Division of the Department of Environment and Planning, John Whitehouse, proposed four phases in the history of mining on the North Coast. First came the pre-Sims Committee era from 1930–1968 when there was minimal government regulation. Then the Sims regime between 1968–1977 attempted some resolution to the land conflict between mining and other interests. Thirdly, there was ‘open slather’ outside national parks to 1980. Then the fourth phase began at Middle Head, which he called the ‘Hippy Era’, from 1980.<sup>64</sup>

The campaign against sand mining was important in the history of the mid-north coast region because it brought direct environmental protest to the beach for the first time. The protesters introduced new strategies, new coalitions across generations and between Aboriginal people and settlers, and many arguments for and against issues which would become familiar in environmental campaigns in the local area in the 1980s. The protest also reflected the move of new populations to the North Coast. There was a noticeable difference in demographics between the population at Myall Lakes which comprised predominantly city-based individuals and groups, and the Middle Head protesters who were local and other North Coast residents, some of whom were alternative lifestyles.<sup>65</sup>

Many Middle Head protesters agreed that it was ecologically necessary to prevent mining, rather than just arguing about aesthetic or landscape issues as had been evident in the earlier protests at Myall Lakes. This shift was also reflected within the government by the end of the 1970s as they began to look at acquiring land for coastal parks for ‘nature conservation’ purposes beyond the earlier aesthetic concerns of protecting ‘beauty spots.’

By the early 1980s, there was a new environmental focus in the study area. The *Coffs Harbour Advocate* reported on ‘battles’ looming between conservationists and industry, especially over trees and koala corridors, a ‘battle for the beaches’ between conservationists and off-road vehicles and conflicts over the increasing pressure of resort and housing estate developments on the coastline. Concern over sewage and ocean outfalls was gaining momentum and would erupt into direct-action protests in Emerald Beach by the end of the 1980s. This occurred in conjunction with a boom and bust in large developments funded by Australian lending institutions and foreign capital.<sup>66</sup>

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64 Whitehouse in Parkhouse TWF 1986

65 *ibid*

66 See *Advocate* 7 November 1980, 23 April 1982, 18 November 1983. For a history of the Look-At-Me-Now Headland ocean outfall dispute at Emerald Beach which would focus Coffs Harbour’s attention for nearly a decade, see LAMN Arts Project Committee 2000

The staunchly conservative city of Grafton was also being rocked by environmental conflict. There were protests about conserving the rainforest at Washpool and anxiety around the establishment of Yuraygir National Park and the forest national parks to the north of Grafton. One of the biggest regional fights outside the forests erupted in the late 1980s over Daishowa International's proposed pulp mill on the Clarence River. This brought environmental concerns about trees and water together, facing off against concerns about jobs in the ailing timber industry and other powerful industry forces.<sup>67</sup>

From the late 1970s therefore, there was the beginning of a heightened sense of urgency about the state of the environment shared amongst diverse people in the region, reaching across multiple issues and involving debates about the link between local and global phenomena. These debates were occurring in an economically poor region where the local economy still largely relied on the increasingly vulnerable primary sector. Local, state, national and global circumstances created the conditions for the unfolding environmental conflicts into which the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) based in Grafton was establishing Yuraygir National Park.

## 2.3 Coastal planning and moves towards establishing Yuraygir National Park

### 2.3.1 Introduction

This section provides a historical context for the establishment of Yuraygir National Park in 1980. Planning for this park and other North Coast coastal parks had been under discussion since the 1960s when two threats placed imminent pressure on areas of undeveloped coastline. One was the surge in sand mining on the north coast beaches and dunes, and the other was the rampant and unplanned growth along NSW's coastline. Because of the isolation of the region, due to its distance from Sydney and the Pacific Highway, the coastal zone between Red Rock and Yamba was identified as needing protection before it was overtaken by development.

Two fledgling and interlinked strands of environmental concern for the North Coast were discernible by the 1960s, gaining strength in the 1970s. One came from within state government and involved the State Planning Authority and the new NPWS. The other came from academic researchers from the University of New England at Armidale, and city and local conservationists such as representatives of the National Trust and the independent National Parks Association (NPA).

These people joined government speakers in a series of national conferences on the state of the eastern coastline held in Terrigal in 1964, Adelaide in 1969, Coffs Harbour in 1970 and Kempsey in 1975. Together they shared the fear that the coast was being swallowed up by uncontrolled sand mining, land subdivision, suburbanisation, and the consequent shrinking of public access to 'beauty spots'.

### 2.3.2 Sand mining and the Sim Committee

Sand mining initially galvanised overt environmental action on the North Coast, leading to proposals for new coastal parks. After World War II, Australia had become the major world supplier of the sand mining products rutile, zircon and ilmenite. The surge of new technological knowledge and increasing foreign and Australian capital in the 1950s and 1960s dramatically shifted the pace and direction of resource exploitation in the region. Sand mining moved off the beaches and back into the dunes up to five miles inland, sometimes displacing mature coastal forests.<sup>68</sup>

67 Eric R 1993, pp. 125–160

68 Claridge G 1978, Morley IW 1981

The consequences of mining on the landscape had been witnessed in the heavy mining of Queensland beaches from the late 1940s. In NSW, political action to protect the sand dunes of Myall Lakes, two hundred kilometres north of Sydney, first brought wide public attention to the issue in the early 1960s.<sup>69</sup> In October 1965, the new Liberal government, through the Minister for Land and Mining Tom Lewis, established the Sim Committee to investigate and if possible resolve the conflict between the expanding sand mining industry, conservationists and proponents of scientific research.

The Sim Committee investigated 12 areas which had been proposed as sites for national parks. Even before the NPWS was established under the 1967 National Parks and Wildlife Act, members of the Lands Department, Fauna Protection Panel and the NPA, and scientists, had proposed a number of national parks and fauna reserves on the North Coast, including parks at Red Rock, Sandon and Angourie.<sup>70</sup>

The final report of the Sim Committee, tabled in December 1968, recommended ten areas be reserved between the Tweed River and Port Stephens. All three areas the committee studied between Angourie and Red Rock were nominated. These areas were Angourie Point to Brooms Head, Sandon River to Rocky Point and Freshwater Beach to Red Rock River. It was suggested that dedication should proceed as quickly as possible due to increasing land speculation.

Within each area, the committee delineated small 'scientific areas'. Sand mining would be able to continue in all recommended park reserves except in these scientific areas. Of the 64 km of coastline recommended for reserves, ten kilometres were contained in scientific areas, of which six kilometres were in the Myall Lakes reserve.<sup>71</sup> In 1970, the NPWS began to acquire freehold and Crown lease land in the Sim Committee areas between Angourie and Red Rock. This process is discussed in section 4.2.

The committee's recommendations pleased nobody. They produced much hostility amongst landowners who feared that coastal lands would be 'locked up' in national parks and scientific areas.<sup>72</sup> On the other hand, conservationists were horrified by the lack of protection that coastal lands were granted from sand mining. Not only had mining continued unabated, but more leases had been granted in all the proposed parks. Under the recommendations, mining would not cease in national parks until the current leases expired or at the latest by January 1988.<sup>73</sup>

Red Rock and Angourie national parks were both dedicated in September 1975. In 1977, the Wran Labor government overturned the Sim Committee recommendations by discontinuing mining operations in all existing and proposed national parks. Exceptions were granted to five operations under way in Angourie, Myall Lakes, Crowdy Head and the proposed Bundjalung national parks as compensation costs would have been too great. The mining industry was outraged by the government's actions, and the Australian Workers Union declared that the Labor Government had discarded working people.<sup>74</sup>

### **2.3.3 Planning on the unplanned coast: 1960s and 1970s**

While sand mining is often seen as the impetus which led to the establishment of Yuraygir and the other coastal national parks, the pressures of population growth and development were considered just as pressing by the State Planning Authority (SPA), conservation groups and an increasing number of concerned individuals.

The scramble to subdivide and build on the North Coast increased in the early 1970s, as tourism and new permanent-settlement populations merged. However, planning authorities were unprepared for an increasing coastal population, and as the general public showed little interest in coastal planning, there was little political incentive to regulate development. Despite this lag between the population shift and the broader recognition of planning needs, concerns about the impact of accelerated population growth on the rural coastline were publicly raised from the 1960s.

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69 Hutton D and Connors L 1999

70 National Parks and Wildlife Service 1982, Charles I 1998b

71 Piper G 1980

72 See Recher H 1970, pp. 22–31

73 Wigham F 1970, Wigham F 1975, Piper G 1980, Hutton D and Connors L 1999, Morley IW 1981

74 Charles I 1986, Morley IW 1981

Government planning regulations had intermittently been put into practice in metropolitan areas since the late nineteenth century, and Coffs Harbour had made some attempts at town planning from the 1950s. However, before the 1960s, the government generally did not recognise that rural areas also needed planning strategies. Recognition of the need for coastal planning took even longer. This lack of activity reflected the ongoing metropolitan focus of NSW state governments and the lack of recognition of economic and lifestyle changes which were shifting focus to the coast.<sup>75</sup>

The SPA, which was established in 1964 in the last year of the McKell Labor government with town planner Nigel Ashton as Chair, took the first tentative steps towards planning on the coast. Ashton had a particular interest in coastal conservation. The change to the Askin Liberal/Country Party government in 1965 diluted the enthusiasm for coastal planning which he initiated. However, while the Askin government was on the defensive against the growing confidence of resident and environmental action groups, it could not ignore an increasing call for government intervention in environmental matters. As a result, it maintained the SPA and then established the Planning and Environment Commission in 1974.

The approach of the academic researchers and government representatives interested in coastal planning was cautious. They generally requested a 'balance', where there was 'room for all' once some elements of planning were implemented to stem the excesses.<sup>76</sup> For example, the SPA attempted to encompass all active commercial activities such as sand mining, agriculture, tourism and marine industries, while setting out to stem speculative land buying and premature subdivision.

Under Ashton's leadership, the SPA initiated inter-departmental cooperation between the Minister for Lands, the Minister for Local Government and the Director of the NPWS to discuss acquiring rural coastal land in need of protection and providing public access by reserving the land as national or state parks or nature reserves.<sup>77</sup> The Sim Committee had started an inventory of coastal assets, and a series of other planning strategies, and orders were devised to speed up the process of coastal planning.<sup>78</sup>

By 1969, the SPA had cajoled all but four coastal NSW councils, all on the North Coast, to adopt planning powers and agree to interim development orders (IDOs), which forced them to take responsibility for planning which conformed to statewide principles within their localities.<sup>79</sup> Ashton conceded that this only provided the legal power to prevent the worst activities from occurring.<sup>80</sup>

One of the four councils to resist the planning IDOs was Ulmarra Shire Council. They argued that town planning would retard development of their economically poor shire and that with the proposed national park (Red Rock, to become Yuraygir) and huge state forest areas, there was little left for Ulmarra to develop. Ashton's response was that the shire was not an isolated piece of countryside but part of NSW.<sup>81</sup> He later echoed the comments of speakers at the 1970 and 1975 coastal seminars when he said:

[L]ocal councils have been notorious in encouraging development no matter what the cost in loss to our coastal heritage, sometimes through ignorance, sometimes through vested interest and almost invariably due to each council's slice of the coast being considered as its own slice of real estate to be treated in isolation, and for the immediate profit as the councillors see it.<sup>82</sup>

75 Ashton N 1977

76 State Planning Authority 1965

77 Ashton N 1977

78 Recher H 1970

79 Ashton N 1977, Hannah B 1968a

80 Ashton N 1977

81 *Coffs Harbour Advocate* 21 April 1969, p. 1

82 Ashton N 1977, p. 9

The outcome of this planning activity was the Coastal Lands Protection Scheme, which was devised in 1971 and implemented from 1973.<sup>83</sup> The scheme sparked discussions on land acquisition and restrictions, and zoning for national parks on the basis of public access, and landscape and scenic values. At this time, there was still little understanding of, or willingness to act on, ecological protection of coastal environments. Much of the coastal land which would become Yuraygir National Park was acquired under the scheme (see section 4.2.2).

North Coast councils, developers and private landowners said the scheme meant a loss of freedom, rights and access to land. The purchase of only a tiny proportion of the land recommended as needing urgent acquisition was financed by an unwilling Askin government, one consequence of which was to leave many landowners in limbo over the fate of their properties. Consequently an outcry against proposals for national parks and public reserves was heard across the North Coast, impeding new proposals and pulling back large areas already proposed for the new Yuraygir and Bundjalung national parks.<sup>84</sup>

As already noted, tourism in rural north coast areas was increasing at the same time as its permanent population was moving to the city. Therefore, within local council areas, there was growing support for industries that could bring in money. Tourism and population growth could provide employment for poor rural communities; better services such as shopping, health and education; and the hope that employment prospects and better services might prevent family members from moving to the city.<sup>85</sup>

One favoured plan of the Ulmarra and Maclean shire councils to bring more tourists to the area was a coast road to be built from Red Rock to Yamba. This was linked with a larger plan to build new roads to create a scenic coastal road trip from Sydney. In the late 1960s, Barbara Hannah wrote her extensive reports on North Coast development as if the 'coast road' was a *fait accompli*.<sup>86</sup> The proposal was opposed by Ashton and others who were working against further 'ribbon development' along the coast, especially on the undeveloped Yuraygir coastline.

As concerns over the Red Rock National Park escalated within Ulmarra Shire Council from the late 1960s, one of the main fears communicated to the NPWS was that the road proposal would be shelved. In 1973, the Department of Main Roads wrote to the NPWS alerting them to a 'long range scheme' for the construction of a 'motorway' a little inland from the coastline. Indeed, at that time the NPWS was promising that the north-south road could be built through the proposed national park. In the early 1980s, Ulmarra Shire Council was still discussing the road which was proposed to come through Red Rock along the power line route, crossing Woolli River and heading north above Sandon River.<sup>87</sup>

The coastal heath, swamp and woodland of Yuraygir were considered as 'just the bush' by many hinterland locals. If such areas could be opened up to tourism and housing estates as with developments up and down the coast, the area could become a productive part of the river shires. These areas were also valued by those who worked and holidayed in them. Timber work, grazing and fishing were the main industries carried out across the landscape. Others knew the coastline through their annual holiday at one of the tiny seaside villages which came to life for the six-week summer holidays.

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83 State Planning Authority 1973, NSW Planning and Environment Commission 1975

84 Recher H 1970, Ashton N 1977

85 For example Hannah B 1968a

86 Hannah B 1968 a, b and c

87 National Parks and Wildlife Service undated a and b, Roy Bowling interview, 7 March 2006



# Section 3: Red Rock to Yamba: the pre-park landscape to 1975



The Fish Trap, south of Angourie Headland at the end of Back Beach, Yuraygir National Park, 2006. Photo: J. Kijas

## 3.1 Section overview

Section three explores the nineteenth- and twentieth-century interaction between the people and places of the study area before the gazettal of Red Rock and Angourie national parks in 1975 (which together would become Yuraygir National Park five years later).

As has been noted in section 2.2, the whole region was isolated and economically poor well into the twentieth century. In the Clarence Valley region, the focus was on the river, the ports and the fertile floodplains. The agriculturally marginal landscape south of the Clarence Valley to the sea (Yuraygir) was an isolated pocket largely ignored by settlers until well into the twentieth century.

However, this should not imply a lack of human activity in the park landscape. Generations of Yaegl and Gumbaingirr custodians and their neighbours camped, fished, held ceremonies and traversed the country. Throughout most of the twentieth century, timber cutting and pastoralism provided a living for many people throughout the hinterland forests and heathlands of today's park.

The Yuraygir beaches and estuaries have also had a long human history of resource use, recreational and commercial activity. Since the late 1800s, settlers from the hinterland river ports and farms have been travelling to the coast for the six weeks of every summer holiday, and some commercial fishing has taken place since the

early twentieth century. Aboriginal attachment, European working lives and holidays meant that this sparsely populated region was nevertheless well-known to a diversity of people.

## 3.2 Two communities: Yaegl attachment

### 3.2.1 Introduction

Most of Yuraygir National Park is the traditional country of Yaegl people. While a substantial group who identify themselves as Yaegl and Gumbaingirr people live around Corindi Beach in the south, historically, the two communities on Yaegl Country have been situated near or at Maclean and Yamba. Members of these two communities have regularly accessed the area between Yamba in the north and Minnie Water in the centre of the park, as well as having interests in Red Rock. The historical attachment of Northern Gumbaingirr and Yaegl people to the southern part of the park has been extensively documented in *Southern Yuraygir national park cultural heritage study*.<sup>88</sup> However, until DECC's 2007 *Yaegl Oral History Project*, little had been documented about Yaegl people's histories of attachment to the central and northern park landscape. Therefore, this section outlines aspects of Yaegl people's connection to the central and northern parts of the park.

### 3.2.2 Yaegl Country

Yaegl people are coastal and river dwellers of the Lower Clarence region of the North Coast. Their immediate northerly neighbours are the Bandgalang, of the broader Bundjalung language group, and their southern neighbours are the Northern Gumbaingirr, of the broader Gumbayngirr language group.

In the past, some anthropologists and linguists have suggested that rather than being a separate language, Yaegl is a dialect of Gumbayngirr.<sup>89</sup> This is strongly refuted by many Yaegl people as well as linguists such as Terry Crowley and William Hoddinott.<sup>90</sup> In confirming the separate boundaries of Yaegl and Gumbayngirr people, the Gumbayngirr Language and Cultural Group do however confirm they are 'closely related' to each other.<sup>91</sup>

RL Dawson and WE Symthe were some of the first people to record Yaegl and Gumbayngirr languages.<sup>92</sup> During the 1960s and early 1970s, Terry Crowley, William Hoddinott, John Gordon and Janet Mathews recorded Yaegl language with Sandy Cameron, Wally Blakeney and Clarence Skinner.<sup>93</sup> Transcriptions of the Sandy Cameron interviews, plus the studies of Hoddinott<sup>94</sup> and Dawson,<sup>95</sup> and the list of words made by Esther Mercy (nee Laurie), were collated into the *Yaygir to English Dictionary* by Rita Flynn.<sup>96</sup> She notes that both Bundjalung and Gumbayngirr influences are found in the Yaegl language and that many words are similar to Gumbayngirr. However, she also states that: 'The differences that exist are looked on as highly significant as they are seen to indicate tribal affiliation.'<sup>97</sup>

Boundaries between indigenous groups are contested in the current environment of Native Title legislation, and are made particularly complex by the contradictory information that has been recorded in anthropological and linguistic accounts over the past two centuries.<sup>98</sup> To the north, the Yaegl area is now generally believed to

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88 Brown I and Murphy D 2001

89 Discussed by Heron R 1991. Also see Ryan J 1964. Ryan did not differentiate Yaegl from Bundjalung

90 Crowley T 1978, Flynn R n.d., Hoddinott W 1978

91 Gumbayngirr Language and Cultural Group 1992

92 See Goulding Heritage Consulting Pty Ltd 2001

93 These recordings are held in the AIATSIS sound archives, and William Hoddinott's collection of published articles, field notes and oral recordings are also held at the University of New England. Hoddinott was an Associate Professor of English at UNE. All were recorded at Yamba or Corindi except for Janet Mathew's interview with Wally Blakeney while he was picking peas in southern NSW.

94 Hoddinott W 1978

95 Dawson 2000

96 Flynn R n.d.

97 *ibid*

98 See Heron R 1991, Goulding Heritage Consulting Pty Ltd 2001, p. 44, and Collins J 2002 for discussions of the key authors regarding boundaries. This remains an area of discussion between Native Title claimants.

extend to Black Rocks/Jerusalem Creek (south of Evans Head). In the south, a shared area south of Woolli to Red Rock remains under dispute between Yaegl and Northern Gumbaingirr people.<sup>99</sup> Yaegl custodian Ron Heron notes Ulmarra as the westerly boundary.<sup>100</sup>

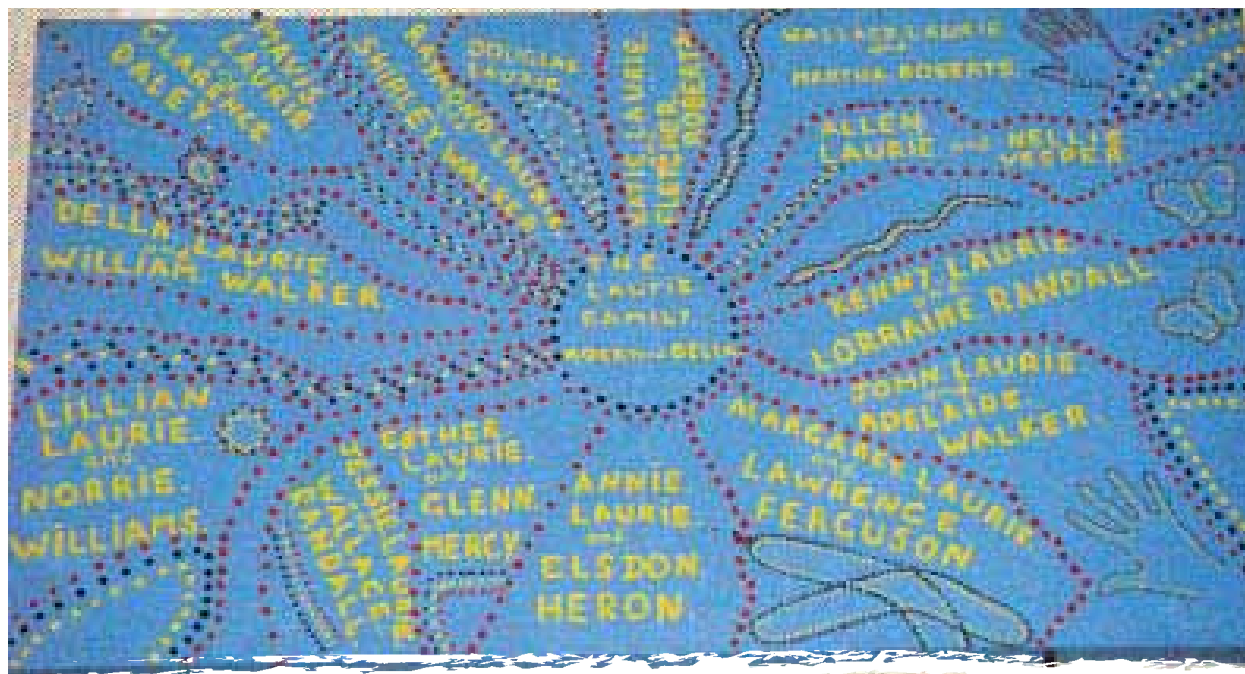
While there has been much debate between archaeologists about the extent of the seasonal movement of the North Coast local groups for food resources in pre-contact times, it is generally agreed that Yaegl people occupied their core tribal areas year-round. People would have travelled the relatively short distances between the coast and the river and range hinterland.<sup>101</sup>

Fox Laurie notes the ongoing attachment of Yaegl people to the park landscape:

The Yaegl people are the traditional custodians of the Clarence Coast. Its outcrops, estuaries and beaches hold places where people have camped for thousands of years and used abundant resources provided by nature in this favourable location... The coastline is a network of pathways between places of spiritual importance. Its landmarks are associated with stories and important figures. A local dreamtime story relates to Durrangan and the creation story of the stone canoe... A strong attachment between the Goorie people and their local landscape indicates the presence of long-standing knowledge about animals, plants and the environment: a complex web of places associated with fishing, hunting and collecting where people continued to return to meet, to fish, to collect bush foods and to trade.<sup>102</sup>

### 3.2.3 Post-contact families and communities

By the late 1800s, the pressures of non-Aboriginal settlement had forced Aboriginal people to marginal areas of the Clarence River region, and in 1904 the Aborigines Protection Board set aside land on Ulgundahi Island for an Aboriginal Reserve. They began removing people to the island in subsequent years.<sup>103</sup>



Laurie Family Tree (as told by Aunt Della Walker – nee Laurie deceased) on the wall at the Ngaru Village Community Hall. Artists: Lewis Walker & Alexander Vesper. Courtesy Birrigan Gargle LALC Yamba, 2007. Photo: J. Kijas.

99 Heron R 1991, Brown I and Murphy D 2001, Goulding Heritage Consulting Pty Ltd 2001 and 2004

100 Heron R 1991

101 Byrne D 1986

102 *Angourie Surfing Reserve*, date unknown

103 *Daily Examiner* 1936, McFarlane J 1980, Heron R 1991, Ledger J 1998



In 2007, the senior Yaegl custodians were Aunt Lillian Williams (the youngest of Bella and Rocky Laurie's 14 children) and Uncle Ron Heron (Annie Laurie's son and nephew to Lillian). Photos: J Kijas



Some of these families went to Yamba for holidays from early in the twentieth century.<sup>104</sup> In 1945, Rocky and Bella Laurie permanently moved their family off the island to Reedy Creek and then into Yamba. Rocky Laurie was a Gumbaynggirr man, who married Bella Cameron (Sandy Cameron's sister) of the Yaegl people. Their father, Dougall Cameron, was a Yaegl man born on Chatsworth Island. Today many people who live in Maclean and Yamba trace their Yaegl ancestry to the Camerons via Bella Laurie (nee Cameron) or her sister Annie.

Since the 1930s Yamba and Maclean have been the two central Yaegl communities in Yaegl Country. While Yamba and Maclean people are related and intimately connected through their histories with Ulgundahi Island (see section 3.2.4) and holiday visiting at the beach (see section 3.2.5), they have also developed as separate communities with some differing histories of attachment to the national park area. Both communities support a Local Aboriginal Land Council: Yaegl LALC at Hillcrest, Maclean and Birrigan Gargle LALC at Pippie Beach (Ngaru Village), Yamba.

Government policies and practices that restricted the movement of Aboriginal people, and the economic and demographic history of the region, have affected Aboriginal people's knowledge of the park area, and the various reasons and ways in which they have used the area at different times.

### 3.2.4 Ulgundahi Island

By the late 1880s, the NSW Aborigines Protection Board (APB) started confining people along the Lower Clarence River to segregated reserves at Grafton and Southgate near Woodford Island.<sup>105</sup> Further downstream, Frank Werry wrote that Aboriginal people camped in bark tents on his father's property near Harwood. After concerns that the Aboriginal people's dogs would frighten the cattle, the farmer burned down the huts when the people were away, after which 'they went up to Ulgundahi Island, just up river from here'.<sup>106</sup>

Most Yaegl people lived on Ulgundahi Island in the first half of the twentieth century until 1962, when the last residents left.<sup>107</sup> The current generation of interviewees all either remember living on the island, or their parents and older siblings' stories of

104 Walker D 1989

105 McFarlane J 1980, Goodall H 1996

106 Werry in Smith B 1990, p. 1

107 NSW Heritage Office 2004

the place. It was hard for people to get off the island. When they did, holidays were often spent at Yamba which was easier to access by boat or, in later years, by taxi, than Brooms Head, which could only be accessed by a dirt road. Thus, confinement on the island affected the access that the current generation of Maclean-based interviewees had to the park area before they moved to town.<sup>108</sup>

Some Aboriginal families were living on Ulgundahi Island at the end of the nineteenth century and the APB established a reserve there in 1904. In 1907, they built five huts for the approximately 30 people living on the island. Pressure to remove Aboriginal people from around Maclean, especially from non-Aboriginal parents who had children attending the local school, had increased and over the following years relatives from further south voluntarily joined others in moving to the island. In 1908, the APB moved the community at Ashby to the island. In 1909, a white manager was appointed for the reserve and a school was established. By then there were nearly 60 residents, numbers having swelled due to hard economic times.<sup>109</sup>

Frequent flooding meant that people had to evacuate the island for weeks or months at a time, finding refuge on higher ground at Ashby or on the margins of Maclean. However, land on the island was therefore very fertile. While never easy, life on the island is remembered with fondness by many as a place where they were never hungry because of their gardens, bush tucker and fishing, and where pride in culture and lifestyle was perpetuated.<sup>110</sup>

Unlike other reserves where management ruthlessly forbade any cultural expression, Allan Cameron, the manager from 1921–1958, seemed less oppressive. He encouraged: ‘... the dancing of corroborees, singing and speaking in the native dialects and other harmless Aboriginal customs...’<sup>111</sup>

Interviewees in Brenda Smith’s book of oral histories, *Life was what we made it: a history and stories by Lower Clarence Aborigines*, and Lyn Gow-Laurie’s *The Life Stories of the Aboriginal Elders of the Yaegl Tribe*, recount their memories of parents and grandparents telling them cultural stories. Both these books are important sources of people’s memories, especially since many Yaegl elders and knowledge holders have died tragically early in life.

### 3.2.5 Yamba

From 1910 onwards, some families travelled from Ulgundahi Island to Yamba each summer by boat, living there in tin huts.<sup>112</sup> Yamba was a small, isolated village within the sparsely populated North Coast region, enabling Aboriginal people to live relatively independent lives on its outskirts. Evidence suggests Aboriginal people were living permanently in the Yamba area from at least the 1880s.<sup>113</sup>

Yamba developed as an important regional port from the late nineteenth century, by which time Europeans from the hinterland and upriver were travelling there for annual summer holidays. Sand mining brought more people to the area from the 1920s. All these factors combined to bring employment opportunities to Aboriginal people.

In 1945, Della Walker (nee Laurie) tells of the permanent move of their family off the island to Yamba.<sup>114</sup> As noted above, her parents Rocky and Bella Laurie took their large family to settle firstly at what they knew as Whiting Beach, which came to be known as Reedy Creek, at the entrance to Yamba near the current Blue Dolphin resort.<sup>115</sup> They joined other families who were already living closer to Yamba, including Bella’s mother.

108 In particular see the interviews with Thelma Kapeen and Judith Breckenridge in Kijas J 2007b (Part Two)

109 *The Daily Examiner* 13 June 1936, Herron R 1991, Ledger J 1998. Also see the Ulgundahi Island file in the Maclean Historical Society

110 See the Yaegl Elders oral histories in Smith B 1990 and Gow-Laurie L 1996

111 *The Daily Examiner* no date in Heron R 1991, p. 170 and *The Daily Examiner* 13 June 1936

112 Heron R 1991

113 Walker D and Coutts T 1989, Goulding Heritage Consulting Pty Ltd 2004

114 Walker D 1989, Goulding Heritage Consulting Pty Ltd 2004

115 Walker D and Coutts T 1989, Goulding Heritage Consulting Pty Ltd 2004

The Lauries moved closer to Yamba around 1947, to the Story House site near the current Historical Society and golf club, where the community continued to grow. During the 1950s, this small community was shifted by Maclean Shire Council to Angourie Road, near the race course. In 1966, they were again forced to move when the NSW government gazetted the Pippie Beach Reserve, which is now Ngaru Village.<sup>116</sup>

The Lauries move away from Ulgundahi Island was identified by Desi Ferguson as a turning point in living arrangements in the region:

I think it was just a case of follow the leader – where old Rocky went everyone else went. He decided to come to Yamba to live and the Randalls... moved over to Maclean. Rocky had a couple of relations already living at Yamba and I think he moved down to be near to them.<sup>117</sup>

The different residential sites around Yamba were under the scrutiny of the Maclean Shire Council, not under the control of the APB. Oral histories have been published since the mid 1980s that refer to many happy memories of life around the Yamba beaches and hinterland, whether as permanent settlers or visiting relatives.<sup>118</sup>

These recollections are full of stories and knowledge about collecting beach and bush resources, self-sufficiency through gathering food and making a living through selling resources such as worms to local non-Aboriginal fishers and fishing cooperatives, ongoing customs and cultural knowledge about where one could and could not go, and passing down cultural stories embedded in the land and waters.

### 3.2.6 The coastal strip

One of the few published stories referring to the national park landscape comes from Della Walker. In telling her story about how her father, Rocky Laurie, made a living for the family catching beach worms, Aunt Della remembered:

Holiday times he would get these orders. Certain ones would say, 'Oh Rocky, would you get me some sea worms, about four or five pounds of worms?' Dad would go and make himself busy. We had a horse named Bobby and Dad used to ride it right out to Shelley Beach [now in the park] to get the orders. He'd come back with two or three cans full of worms and do them up in paper packets, then sell them for so much a packet. That's how we made money, with the worms that he caught along the beach. We'd all go down and watch him. He'd show us how to catch them, then we'd have a go.<sup>119</sup>

In another recollection, Della's brother Allan Laurie said their father would say:

'Boy, come out to Angourie.' So we used to get a sugar bag and walk out there. We caught Black Fish from a hole there which was called 'The Fishtrap' [now in the park]. The Aboriginal Fishtrap is in the water with a lot of stones around it. It is still out there today but when my father showed it to the White Men the traps all disappeared. Aboriginal people shouldn't show things like that to White People; they should keep such things a secret.<sup>120</sup>

In the 1960s, when the Yamba community was forced to move to Pippie Beach Reserve, the remaining people still living on Ulgundahi Island were moved to Hillcrest on the outskirts of Maclean. The fatigue caused from constant flooding, having to row children to school at Maclean (since the closure of the island's school) and the increasing dilapidation of houses that the government no longer wished to repair because of the new policy of assimilation, drew the last families off the island in 1962.<sup>121</sup>

116 Kijas J 2007b (Part Two), Heron R 1991, Goulding Heritage Consulting Pty Ltd 2004

117 Desi Ferguson in Walker D 1985, p. 17. In the quote, Mr Ferguson identifies Rocky's wife Bella as a Randall, although she was a Cameron.

118 These memories and oral histories have been published in Walker D and Coutts T 1989, Smith B 1990, Gow-Laurie L 1996, Goulding Heritage Consulting Pty Ltd 2004 and in the film *Lousy Little Sixpence*

119 Walker D 1989, p. 17

120 Allan Laurie in Gow-Laurie L 1996, p. 12

121 Ledger J 1998

Della Walker's sister Esther Mercy told her children that the initial plan was to develop the reserve for Maclean people out at Plumbago Beach area (now in the park), rather than Hillcrest. Family members recall her story that the local Anglican priest, Reverend Stan Gaden, lobbied for the Hillcrest site, declaring that people without transport needed to be much closer to town so they could use all the amenities.<sup>122</sup>

The stretch of beaches and immediate hinterland from Shelley Beach south to Red Cliff, broadly referred to by some interviewees as Plumbago, is remembered as a good place.<sup>123</sup> For example, Thelma Kapeen and Eileen McLeay remember their mothers telling them that the Plumbago area was a 'very good place', and indicated that their parents went there from Maclean in the 'old days', probably by horse and sulky.<sup>124</sup> The whole area was regularly accessed by Yamba residents and their visitors by walking or on horseback. From the 1960s, some people had cars, accessing the beaches along the sand mining tracks.<sup>125</sup>

### 3.2.7 Employment

Interviewees in Smith, Gow-Laurie, Goulding Heritage Consulting Pty Ltd and this publication remember being poor but never hungry.<sup>126</sup> Their fathers had a range of seasonal employment while their mothers often worked as domestic labourers as well as in agriculture. As children, those who lived at Yamba earned pocket money and contributed to the family coffers through beach worming and other ventures. They all supplemented meagre wages with bush, river and beach resources.

Surrounding cane farms provided regular seasonal employment until the 1970s with the advent of mechanisation. Close relationships were formed with some European families such as the Petries at Ashby and the Causleys at Harwood. Eileen McLeay (nee Mercy) considered the Causley men her 'uncles', as her father Glen and the Causley brothers were close friends. Shirley Causley related how the men in her family would go fishing with Aboriginal men on Shelley Beach when her family holidayed regularly at Angourie, and how the Mercy and Laurie men worked for them seasonally on their cane farm, picking peas and stripping cane.<sup>127</sup>

Sand mining provided some Aboriginal men with local work, and as was common across NSW Aboriginal communities, men and sometimes families travelled on seasonal employment paths around the state. For example, Janet Mathews interviewed Yaegl man Wally Blakeney in 1964 when he was pea picking in southern NSW.<sup>128</sup>

Women also worked seasonally, stripping cane and picking peas, and found employment in many homes as domestic labourers. Thelma Kapeen remembers that her mother, Annie Cameron, enjoyed her last years in the Maclean nursing home because so many staff and visitors remembered her fondly from when she worked for their parents, having helped raise many of them as children.<sup>129</sup> Annie, who died in her mid-nineties, was Bella and Sandy Cameron's youngest sister.

Tourism at Yamba also provided work, and women and girls worked as domestic labourers in the boarding houses and hotels for the seaside visitors to Yamba. Esther Mercy cleaned the rooms, washed and ironed for the Craigmores Boarding House with her mother Bella, and worked at the Ritz Hotel. She remembered that her uncle cleaned outside the hotel and did the heavy lifting jobs.<sup>130</sup>

Many interviewees lived at Yamba for some part of their childhood. They followed in the footsteps of their parents, aunts and uncles, engaging in activities that brought food and money into the family. Some learnt to

122 Eileen McLeay interview, 17 May 2007, Kijas J 2007b. Also see Esther Mercy in Gow-Laurie L 1996, p. 27

123 See Godwin L and Creamer H 1984 for a discussion of post-1788 sites of significance including 'good food places' and 'recent camping places' in Yaegl Country

124 Kijas J 2007b (Part Two)

125 *ibid*; Walker D and Coutts T 1989

126 Smith B 1990, Gow-Laurie L 1996, Goulding Heritage Consulting Pty Ltd 2004

127 Eileen McLeay interview, 17 May 2007, Shirley Causley interview, 6 May 2006. See Esther Mercy's story in Gow-Laurie L 1996 (repeated from Smith B 1990)

128 Mathews J 1964

129 Thelma Kapeen interview, 14 May 2007. Also see Smith B 1990 and Gow-Laurie L 1996

130 Esther Mercy in Gow-Laurie L 1996

be good wormers, packing the worms and selling them to the local fishers and cooperatives. As young children, girls and boys accompanied older children, aunts and uncles into the heath country to pick wildflowers. They had their regular customers, selling to individual households and tourist establishments.<sup>131</sup>

Esther Mercy remembered:

On weekends I would help Dad and my brothers catch sea worms which we sold for 15 cents each. In the summer, we would also pick bunches of Christmas Bells, Boronias and Flannel Flowers at Shelley Beach which we sold to the hotels for 50 cents a bunch.<sup>132</sup>

This generation, growing up near the golf club, found that collecting golf balls provided money for the pictures (cinema) and chips at intermission.<sup>133</sup>

Beach worming was not just an enjoyable and competitive pastime for children to gain pocket money and add to the family's income. During periods of unemployment due to the seasonal nature of cane cropping and other work, men and women earned a substantial part of their families' income through worming. As the interviews for this project indicated, Aboriginal men, women, children and teenagers before and after World War II routinely moved south from Yamba throughout the national park beaches to worm.

### **3.2.8 Flat Rock to Minnie Water: themes from the interviews**

Twelve Yaegl people from Maclean and Yamba were formally interviewed for the Yaegl Oral History Project.<sup>134</sup>

A initial list of interviewees was developed by elders Auntie Lillian Williams and Uncle Ron Heron who chose people who had remained in, or were continuously connected to, the area. They included women and men from a range of age groups and from both communities. The interviewees, and their main residence during childhood, were: Lillian Williams nee Laurie (Ulgundahi Island and Yamba), Ron Heron (Yamba), Judith Breckenridge nee Randall (Ulgundahi Island), Lester Mercy (Yamba and Ulgundahi Island), Michael Randall (Maclean), Ken/Fox Laurie (Yamba), Annabelle Roberts (Yamba), Rosemarie Vesper (Yamba), Thelma Kapeen nee Randall (Ulgundahi Island), Veronica Pearce nee Laurie (Yamba), and sisters Eileen McLeay and Glenda McPhail nee Mercy (Yamba and Maclean). Copies of the interviews are held in both land councils and DECC's Hurstville and Grafton offices.

The interviewees ranged in age from their late 40s to their early 60s. Their memories therefore are predominantly of activities in, and attachments to, the park landscape after World War II. Little explicit knowledge of their parents' activities in the area before the interviewees were born was known, beyond a clear understanding that the area had been continually accessed. The tragedy of early deaths which affects Aboriginal communities across settled Australia has seen many Yaegl knowledge holders pass on in recent years. Despite this, the interviews provided clear evidence of regular activity, knowledge and custodianship of the study area. The main themes which emerged from the interviewees relating to the park landscape are summarised below.

#### **The beach**

The themes which recurred most often in the interviews centred on the beach landscape and the activities of worming, fishing, and collecting and eating pippies and periwinkles. Most interviewees who grew up in Yamba told of their own and their elders' worming activities. Those who grew up on Ulgundahi Island and in Maclean were less likely to be good wormers, but everyone enjoyed the beach during the holidays and at weekends. Eileen McLeay commented that Pippie Beach and Dump Beach just to the south would be full of Aboriginal people, whereas now 'you can look down those beaches and not see anyone'. Eileen and Rosie Vesper noted

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131 See Lillian Walker and Ron Heron in Kijas J 2007b (Part Two)

132 Esther Mercy in Gow-Laurie L 1996, p.25, Kijas J 2007b (Part Two)

133 For example see Lester Mercy and Annabelle Roberts amongst others in Kijas J 2007b (Part Two)

134 Kijas J 2007b





An avid wormer herself, Rosie Vesper stands in front of her niece Fiona Vesper Robert's painting of men catching sea worms (left) and pippies (right). Ngaru Village Community Hall, 2007  
 Courtesy Birrigan Gargle LALC. Photo: J. Kijas

that the skill of worming is something they want to pass onto the younger generation as a way of maintaining and continuing Aboriginal ways. They also noted 'how important a good feed of pippies still is to the old people.'

### **The bush/heath hinterland**

While discussion and explanation of beach resources were central to all interviews, bush foods were also important. These included foods from the dunes and immediate hinterland such as 'piggie' face and a variety of berries, as well as the fruit and vegetable plants that grew wild from early settler plantings. These foods, and knowledge of fresh water sources, meant that the children would leave home for the day knowing they would find their food along the way.

The heath was also very important to the children as it was where they collected the wildflowers to sell to their regular customers in Yamba. This activity brought in pocket money for the pictures (cinema) and assisted with income for the family. Ron Heron remembers walking in the heath country, which is now part of the park, towards Cassons Knob with his uncles. Veronica Pearce and Lillian Williams remember their main haunts lay within a more contained and closer area around Lake Wooleweyah which they went to with aunts and cousins.



Judy Breckenridge, 2007. Photo: J. Kijas



Lester Mercy, 2007. Photo: J. Kijas

Care and caution were taken in accessing the hinterland heath. Most interviewees noted they only went there for specific purposes such as collecting wildflowers, or accessing the coast from hinterland car tracks. Lester Mercy said one had to go with elders because of the death adders. Members of the younger generation, like Fox Laurie, who were still collecting wildflowers in their youth for selling, also remember such cautions. He recalled his father's stories about the numbers of death adders one might see while sitting quietly in the heath, and how dramatically reduced the snake population had become.

Boys and men appeared to have free access to the area of bush between Flat Rock and the Red Cliff area. However, with a few known exceptions, girls and women such as Thelma Kapeen were told by their mothers that they should generally avoid the hinterland. When she and her sister would ask why they should not go into the bush, they were just told 'not to ask questions'.

Fox Laurie also noted a number of important guidelines one should always abide by in the bush, such as not urinating, as that would be encroaching on the territory of the dingoes and kangaroos.

### Access

A number of issues arose about access to places in the landscape. One great regret expressed by many adults was that many younger people did not know about or were not interested in where they should, or should not, venture. They visited places they should not, where consequently they became sick, which in turn could perpetuate alcoholism and depression. Newcomers to Yaegl Country, as well as Yaegl young people, often found themselves in such situations.

Michael Randall, Eileen McLeay, Judy Breckenridge and Veronica Pearce each related stories about their relatives who either unknowingly went to the wrong place in the park landscape or were given signs to move on. Everyone discussed the need for non-Yaegl people to be accepted before comfortably and safely accessing certain places in the landscape. Most people said there would be storms on Shelley Beach when strangers were taken there unless they had been adopted into the Yaegl community first.

Veronica also remembered it rained in Minnie Water if strangers were taken there, and said she and her sisters and mother were never comfortable camping

at Sandon, although her father was very happy to camp there. Red Cliff (also known as Red Rock), however, always felt very good to Veronica. Thelma Kapeen also remembered her mother telling them that the Red Cliff/Plumbago Beach area was always a very good place.

Access into the park has also been a physical issue that has affected people's use of the area over time. For example, while Thelma remembers her mother Annie Cameron telling them what a good place Plumbago was, they had little access to the area in her childhood as they lived on Ulgundahi Island. She only started regularly accessing the area during the late 1960s and 1970s after she had left the island and her brother got a car. Then they often went every second day. During her childhood, however, when they went to the beach for holidays, it was to the more accessible Yamba.

Annabelle Roberts also said that access into the park depended on the availability of private transport. Annabelle rarely had the use of a car, so she could only walk around the Yamba area. With children and domestic responsibilities in adulthood, she was still restricted to a confined radius. For others, vehicle access was their only way to their favourite places. For example, as people grew older and less mobile, the closure of the Shelley Beach vehicle track (or 'Shelley Track') meant a loss of access to places like Shelley Beach and the Lake Arragan/Buchanan Headland area.

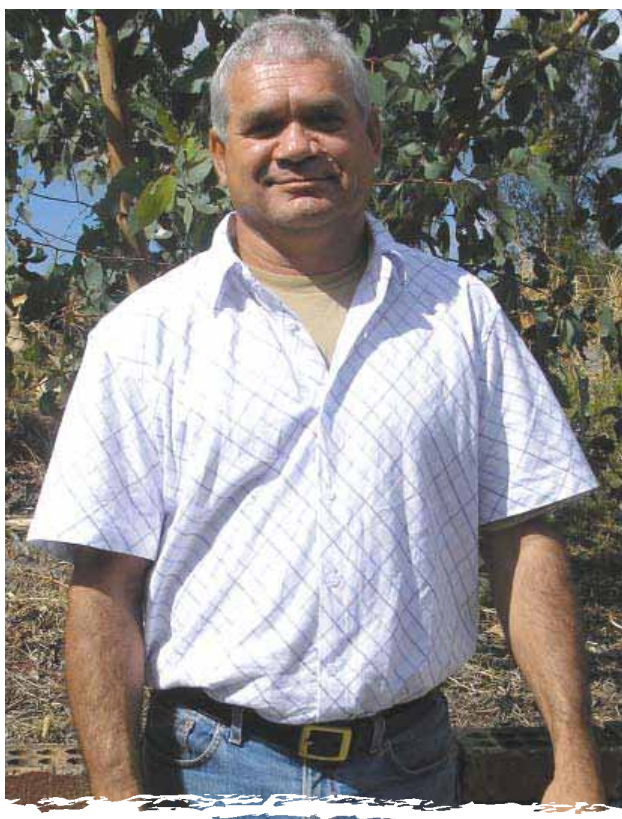
Some of the older men are remembered to have had horses, riding as far as the Sandon River mouth for fishing and worming. Later, some of the uncles such as Uncle Bilo Laurie and Uncle Kenny Laurie got cars, which were important in times of flood. When flooding made the road from Yamba to Maclean inaccessible, women in labour could be taken on the Shelley Track to the Brooms Head road and to the doctor at Maclean. Extra passengers were always needed to push the car if it got bogged. Eileen McLeay got a black Holden in her later teenage years that allowed access to worming further afield – north to Black Rocks and south to the stretch of beach between Sandon and Minnie Water.

### Camping

Some differences between Maclean and Yamba interviewees emerged. Most of those growing up in Yamba did not go camping overnight as children, and always made sure they were indoors before dark. However, this was not universal as Bilo Laurie



Annabelle Roberts, 2007. Photo: J. Kijas



Michael Randall, 2007. Photo: J. Kijas



Mercy sisters Glenda McPhail and Eileen McLeay, 2007.  
Photo: J. Kijas.



Thelma Kapeen, 2006. Photo: J. Kijas.

took his family camping to Red Cliff/Red Rock regularly for days at a time to fish and worm.<sup>135</sup> Veronica Pearce (Bilo's daughter) remembered that her father would often talk to the pastoralist family, the Waughs, who had a cottage on the top of Red Cliff and rode their horses on the beach (see section 3.3.3). She also remembers a lovely camping spot under oak trees on Dump Beach.

While constantly accessing the park area during the day time, Fox Laurie and Rosie Vesper have only started camping in the national park in the past decade, Fox taking groups of boys and young men to re-bond with Country.

Maclean people, however, have a sustained history of camping in the park around the Red Cliff, Lake Arragan/Plumbago area. Thelma Kapeen remembered her mother Annie Cameron talking about Plumbago from her childhood, and she believes her parents must have camped there in the years before World War II. And while Thelma did not camp out there, her brother and their friends often did. Whether they just went for the day or whether people camped for days at a time, Thelma emphasised that it was about 'getting away'.

While Eileen McLeay did not camp, her sister Glenda McPhail camped regularly at Plumbago with other Aboriginal families. The Randall family also camped in the area every Christmas and at other holiday times. Judy Breckenridge remembers plenty of Aboriginal families camping in the area but also remembers some stories that Lake Arragan was not an appropriate place to camp.

Other stories of camping or not camping in certain places are provided in section 3.4.4.

### Spirits in the landscape

Most interviewees related various signs that indicated one should not be in a place. They also related stories about learning where one could or should not go, or when, as children, they should be accompanied by their elders. Thelma Kapeen related how as children they learnt these lessons:

'Don't ask,' our parents would say. My sister and I would ask: 'Oh, what's up there?' and they'd say: 'Never you mind', so we just took their word for it and wouldn't go.

135 As with local non-Aboriginal people, some local Aboriginal people call the area Red Rock, while others have always called it Red Cliff. Some call the whole area Plumbago, rather than differentiating the headlands from the beach.

As children, the interviewees felt very obliged to do what their elders told them. Nearly all the interviewees remember that in their childhood they had to be indoors before it got dark. This meant getting home from a day on the beach before the sun went down.

Ron Heron and Michael Randall gave examples of ancestors who appeared as ghosts, or provided other signs of their presence, at Minnie Water and on the beach near Red Cliff. Ron was always told by his uncles not to camp near the top end of Mara Creek as the tribal people who had a 'prehistoric village' there would disturb his sleep.

### **Auntie Lil's comments**

During the interviews, senior custodian Auntie Lillian Williams was asked what she thought were the really important things that had to be understood about Yaegl people's association with their Country and therefore Yuraygir National Park. Auntie Lillian said:

We want to keep our culture alive and be careful not to destroy our sacred sites. It's got to be protected at all times. And we want to pass on our knowledge to the young people of this land and this country. And talk to them about our ways, our rules, and make sure that they know how important it is to us as a Yaegl tribe. And to look after our country and our land and not destroy it ... What I could say about that is number one – as I feel deeply about it – it is our language, our culture and our land. That's the main thing.<sup>136</sup>

## **3.3 'Making a living out there'**

### **3.3.1 Introduction**

In response to the author's request to interview non-Aboriginal local, Marie Preston, about her memories of the study area, she said 'sure', she would be happy to be interviewed: 'a lot of people made a living out there.'<sup>137</sup> Her brothers were timber workers snigging logs out of the state forests, as well as grazing cattle in the forests and on freehold land they owned on the eastern side of the Coast Range.

Cattle were grazed and bees were wintered over most of the park, and some banana and sugar cropping was carried out. Several families made their living from fishing, and sand mining employed a number of people along the coastline from the early twentieth century. Some of the ways people made a living in the study area before park gazettal are explored below. The gazettal of national parks stopped pastoral, timber and farming activities, while commercial fishing and bee keeping continued after gazettal.

### **3.3.2 Out of the forests: timber**

Much of the broad study area is still covered in forest, most of which has been selectively logged at some time in the twentieth century. The extent of the forest remaining today results from the poor soils for agricultural purposes and the rugged coastal range. Therefore, the study area escaped the pressures of closer settlement that had burgeoned in the broader region from the late nineteenth century. This process had seen the river plains and fertile rainforests cleared for maize, sugar cane, dairy farming and other agricultural pursuits.

Some concern for the preservation of forests for future use in the colony was apparent from first settlement, and timber reserves had been set aside in the Clarence Valley in 1871. However, it was only after the 1907–08 Royal Commission of Inquiry into Forestry (the Commission) and the development of professional forestry management that government policy set out to systematically establish a reserve system for NSW forests. A series of Forestry Acts followed in 1909, 1916 and 1924. Most state forests were established by 1916 with 67 dedicated in the upper north-east region.<sup>138</sup>

<sup>136</sup> Auntie Lillian Williams interview, 28 February 2007

<sup>137</sup> Marie Preston interview, 10 April 2006

<sup>138</sup> Bickford A, Brayshaw H and Proudfoot H 1998, Blackmore and Associates 1993, National Parks and Wildlife Service 1995

Pauline Curby notes there was a constant fear that the timber in the area would be destroyed by closer settlement. WN Reeve Waugh, who took up Taloumbi Station in 1888, wrote to the Commission in 1908 recommending that the area from Sandon River to Dirty Creek (now Saltwater Creek) be made into a timber reserve. He wanted to set up a mill on Candole Creek.<sup>139</sup> As a result, Forest Reserve 42961, covering the area above, was created in 1908 even before the findings of the Commission were handed down. This made it one of the earliest state forests created. In the reserve, grazing leases could be held and licensed logging could occur, but the land could not be clear-felled. The reserve was revoked and re-established in the same area as Wooli Wooli State Forest in 1913. In turn that state forest was revoked in 1923, deemed unsuitable for forestry after detailed assessment. However Newfoundland, Barcoongere and Candole state forests were established over much of the same area in 1930.<sup>140</sup>

The forests of the study area have many past and continuing values for the Aboriginal people of the region. These include:

ceremonial sites (carved trees, stone arrangements, natural mythological ceremonial sites, Kaparra [initiation] grounds and waterholes); extractive sites (stone and ochre quarries, axe grinding grooves and scarred trees); open campsites; middens; fish traps; contact sites; rock shelters and art sites.<sup>141</sup>

Ian Brown and Dee Murphy state that 'old growth forests play a major role in the preservation of Goori culture and heritage.'<sup>142</sup> The scarred and carved trees in the old growth pockets of the south-western part of the park around Browns Knob and Pumpkin Patch are particularly significant.

The logged forests, which are either now part of Yuraygir National Park or lie just outside the park boundary, are on the western side of the park along the scarp and foothills of the Coast Range. They comprise Newfoundland State Forest, parts of which are now in the Yuraygir State Conservation Area and National Park; the Barcoongere State Forest which is passed through to access Station Creek; and Candole State Forest in the north, much of which is in Yuraygir National Park. Pine Brush State Forest lies further to the west.

The main hardwood timber species collected from Candole State Forest by the Preston brothers (Jack, Mervyn, Howard and Stafford) were blackbutt (used primarily for sawlogs), brush box, ironbark and white mahogany.<sup>143</sup> From 1961, Candole State Forest was intensively treated to cull unmarketable trees to promote rapid regeneration and growth of blackbutt after logging. Forester Clarrie Winkler commented on the changing forestry practices where those remaining 'unmarketable trees' are now often heavily protected as 'habitat trees.'<sup>144</sup> Red mahogany, grey gum, blue gum, tallow-wood and spotted gum were also logged in the surrounding forests for poles, girders and sleepers.

Employment in the forests came in different forms. The Preston brothers worked independently, leasing areas in the Candole State Forest. They provided long straight logs for boat building and power poles, and much of the timber they cut went to the Snowy Mountains Scheme and to New Zealand. They supplied the Maclean timber mill from the 1930s onwards. Other people worked for the Forestry Commission on a set wage, while the most marginal living was made by the sleeper cutters. Marie Preston recalled the variety of work and number of people:

There was log cutters, there was pole cutters, people cutting posts and rails for fences, there was sleeper cutters. They all made their living out there. Then there were the bullockies and the log lorries when they come out and took them to the markets. Then the bulldozer came in in later years so the bullock teams sort of disappeared out then... There'd have been, I suppose, with the fellows carting the stuff and the fellows snigging it out and the fellows cutting it, it could be thirty people out there.<sup>145</sup>

139 1908 Royal Commission of Inquiry into Forestry in NSW final report in Curby P 1995

140 Curby P 1995

141 Murphy D and Perkins T 1995, p. 6

142 Brown I and Murphy D 2001

143 Preston interview in Biddle B 2001

144 Clarrie Winkler interview, 1 May 2006

145 Marie Preston interview, 10 April 2006



Looking over Yuraygir National Park from the top of the Coast Range, 2006. Photo: J. Kijas

When Marie Preston said she thought that around 30 people lived and worked in the forests, she was referring to the native forests of the study area around Candole State Forest.

The Prestons had two bullock teams of between 18 and 24 animals. Rosemary Waugh-Allcock remembered their fine teams of red Devins with white horns, the favoured breed for team bullocks.<sup>146</sup> Other people ran teams such as the Greens from Tucabia, Bert Casson around the Candole area and Jack Casson in the south. In the early days, the bullocks would haul the logs to the mills at Woolgoolga, Tucabia, Milleara, Grafton and Maclean. George Hanna was the first to bring a team into the northern area after World War I and he moved the logs to Shark Creek for transport to Grafton. In later years, when lorries transported timber to the remaining mills, bullocks were still used to snig the logs to central dumps for collection within the forests. Bullock teams were used on the North Coast well after bulldozers were doing the same work in forests to the south, and Jack Casson of Woolgoolga was still running a team in Newfoundland State Forest in the 1960s.<sup>147</sup>

A grass lease in the state forests allowed for grazing of bullocks, and trees were felled along the creeklines to allow in enough sun to encourage the growth of grass. The Prestons bought portions 15 and 16, in the Parish of Canoulam, between Candole State Forest and the coastal heath country, from Stan Waugh (Reeve Waugh's son; see below), partly so they had somewhere to graze their bullocks. This was timbered land which they never logged. They sold the land to the NPWS in 1996.

They maintained a regular regime of starting fires in the forest to keep the undergrowth clear of 'rubbish', and to produce clear access and grass shoots for bullocks. Marie described the practice that was maintained until the NPWS took over the forests:

<sup>146</sup> Rosemary Waugh Allcock interview, 24 April 2006

<sup>147</sup> Clarrie Winkler interview, 1 May 2006, Bickford A, Brayshaw H and Proudfoot H 1998

Marie: 'In those days, all that rubbish was kept burnt down and it was grass. But now the rubbish has overtook the grass.'

Author: 'So how often would they have burnt, do you think, to keep that grass happening?'

Marie: 'Well, in the bullock team days they would throw a match down of a night when they went to unload their bullocks and the next morning that's where the bullocks would be because they love burnt grass... It would mostly go out during the night because fires and those things at that time of night don't burn too much.'<sup>148</sup>

The management of fire in the forests, as elsewhere, remains a highly contentious issue.<sup>149</sup> Marie feels that her father and brothers passed on such beautiful forest that the NPWS wanted it: 'It must have been managed well, mustn't it?'

For her and others who feel similarly, Marie believes the NPWS has squandered the careful land management which her family maintained through their burning regime. The changes noticed in the forest, which include the encroachment of weeds; the thickening of tea-trees; the growth of banksias and the consequent choking of previously grassed areas with 'rubbish' since the cessation of regular burning, are all commonly held up as evidence of a lack of care for the forests.

Not all felt the same at the time, however, about the burning practices of the previous land managers. Clarrie Winkler from the Barcoongere Pine Plantation complained to his boss in the early 1960s about such fire management practices, which he argued jeopardised the forests. Barbara Knox used to drive the fire truck (the family Ute) at Minnie Water and often put out fires when the men were out at sea fishing. Barbara remembers that one man often burnt around his place for his property's safety, but he was not always careful about the fire getting into the bush. Barbara thinks he would wait until she had gone fishing before he would light a fire as he knew she would otherwise put it out. She would see the smoke while she was on the water, and would have to row back in to put the fire out.<sup>150</sup>

Fires have always been a significant issue in the state forests. Ann Bickford, Helen Brayshaw and Helen Proudfoot reported that wild fires in the coastal forests had resulted in lack of regeneration and poor distribution of timber. There had been bad fires in 1916, 1926, 1939, 1951–52 and worse still in the late 1950s.<sup>151</sup> In the fire season of 1959–60, Woolgoolga forester Terry Connelly recalls how they fought fires in the broad study area from 'bank holiday in August to Australia Day'. He says that those were the worst fires he had experienced until those of 1993–94.<sup>152</sup>

The Preston brothers and their father started working in Candole State Forest in 1933. They lived in a house on their Boundary Flat property. Most of the people who worked in the forests lived in rough camps, or, if they worked for the Forestry Commission, in more established forestry huts. People rode their horses, walked or later drove into the camps for the weekdays, travelling out again on the weekends to homes in Woolli, Woolgoolga, Tucabia, Pillar Valley, Halfway Creek and Grafton.

The main camp in Candole State Forest, just outside the park, was the Bookram Huts which were built in the 1940s where Ridge Road and Flat Road meet the Candole Forest Road. Forest workers came from various backgrounds. For example, north of Bookram Huts on Candole Forest Road, a camp of Italians was established.

While systematic logging of the Newfoundland and Barcoongere forests are recorded from the 1920s, the forests were busiest after World War II. Tea-trees were harvested in the post-war years. Allen Johnson remembers the stills around Fan Tail above the headwaters of the Sandon River.<sup>153</sup>

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148 Marie Preston interview, 10 April 2006

149 See Gill M 1981, pp. 50–56

150 Clarrie Winkler interview, 1 May 2006, Barbara Knox interview by Gina Hart n.d.

151 Carron L in Bickford A, Brayshaw H and Proudfoot H 1998

152 Curby P 1995, p. 35

153 Pearson S 1993, Blackmore and Associates 1993, Marie Preston interview, 10 April 2006, Allen Johnson interview, 6 May 2006



Timber was felled by hand until about 1950, using either an axe or a two-man handsaw. It was a slow job. Around 1950, the Preston brothers bought a chainsaw, believed to be the first one on the Clarence River.<sup>154</sup> Jonaas Zilinskas, a 'displaced person' from Lithuania, designed and introduced the swingsaw to the North Coast forests when he began work as a sleeper cutter in the Newfoundland and Candole forests around 1950.<sup>155</sup>

Jonaas became a legend from Woolgoolga to Grafton. He is famous for building a large cement statue of himself at his camp off Yellowcutting Road, which was originally in Newfoundland State Forest and is now in the national park. After ten years of living permanently in the forest, he built the statue just before he left as a way of saying thank you for the opportunity he was given to start his new life in Australia.<sup>156</sup>

His camp was well-maintained and clean, surrounded by a carefully manicured garden of orchids and ferns which he gathered from the forest.<sup>157</sup> Before he came to Australia, he had been a circus performer. In the forest, he slung a tightrope between the trees to keep up his skills. He was also famous for working in the nude except for his boots, not only because of the heat but because, he said, 'he wanted to be like the Aborigines'. An article by Charis Chang in *The Advertiser* in 2006 reported that Dee Murphy from Yarrawarra said Jonaas was deeply admired by the local Aboriginal community for his incredible strength.<sup>158</sup> He left the forest in 1960 to join Ashton's Circus.

In the 1940s, exotic pine trees were planted in Barcoongere State Forest. The aim was to use marginal areas for the production of timber. The first experimental plots of *Pinus taeda* and *Pinus elliotti* were planted in 1940.<sup>159</sup> A small airstrip was built south of the plantation so planes could fertilise the pine trees (on the Richards/Lawrence Downs lease now in the national park). By 1966, it was decided not to plant any more pine trees in the area. Today, the plantation is passed through on the way into the park at Station Creek.



Jonaas Zilinskas statue saluting the forest, 2006. Photo: J. Kijas



Clarrie and Shirley Winkler with John Kennedy (NPWS Area Manager), 2006. Photo: J. Kijas.

154 Preston interview in Biddle B 2001

155 Brown M 2004

156 ibid

157 Richards V and Comisari M 1976

158 *The Advertiser*, 12 June 2006

159 Chang C 2006, Curby P 1995

Clarrie Winkler and his wife Shirley arrived in the plantation in 1960, a few weeks after marrying. They lived in a small house on Barcoongere Road. The foreman (Sam Martin) and his family lived a couple of kilometres further on and beyond that was the single men's camp. In its heyday, about 60 men lived at the camp. There was a tennis court, offices, a blacksmith's forge, sheds and 'Drones Castle' – the accommodation for the 'public servants'.<sup>160</sup>

Shirley found the house terrible. She had grown up in a big family and the lonely, silent days spent in the tiny house which creaked and groaned were awful. She returned to live in Woolgoolga after 12 months on Barcoongere Road. Clarrie stayed on through the week, returning to Woolgoolga at weekends. He remembers that people would walk across country from Wooli to work through the week and return on weekends. Shirley remembers one woman who would row across Wooli River and drop her husband off on Monday morning, then pick him up on Friday night. It was about a 13-kilometre walk from Wooli, but Clarrie felt people with the Depression years still clear in their minds were relieved to have a job.<sup>161</sup>

Early in their time at Barcoongere, Shirley remembers escaping from the house and sitting by the road. But she was startled to find a rather 'rough-looking' Aboriginal man walking down the road, and having never met an Aboriginal person she quickly retreated. She later came to know him as Jimmy Runner, a much respected man.

A number of Aboriginal people worked in the plantation at various times. Tony Perkins from Yarrawarra said: 'Back in the 50s Jimmy Runner and Pa Laurie, Fred Laurie, they were working out in Barcoongere forest. They were logging there, like, splitting posts, all sorts of things out there.'<sup>162</sup> Ken Craig spent 16 years working in the plantation.<sup>163</sup>

Tom (Billy) Perkins worked in the Cabbage Tree area of Newfoundland State Forest and sometimes stayed at the forestry camp at Barcoongere. He remembered:

... We were cutting girders and sleepers... Once you finished cutting that area, you moved onto another area and set up a new port. We were out there with my father, Bill Perkins, Col Stewart, Len Stewart and Keith Lardner... If you were working on poles, it would take a long time and we would camp there. There was a hut which belonged to Clarry Morris, it was in the bush near Cabbage Tree.<sup>164</sup>

One of the biggest changes that has occurred in the forests is the speed with which timber work is done. Clarrie Winkler noted:

When they first started cutting the timber, they were looking for the absolute best and there was plenty there to choose from. The other thing that's different to today's operations is that they were incredibly slow doing it, you know. Like to log a compartment with bullocks – it might take them six months to a year. To log a compartment with machinery you've got today, it might take you two weeks.<sup>165</sup>

Another group of people living and working in the forests were the 'tickies' or 'tick dodgers' and their families. These men patrolled the boundaries of the double-line quarantine fence which was built in the 1920s to stop the cattle tick moving southwards. While the men patrolled the fence, the women operated the gates to let passing traffic through. Shirley Winkler remembers camps in the 1960s with families at both the southern and northern edges of the plantation.<sup>166</sup>

From around 1942 to 1944, the area in the central part of the park around Minnie Water was 'shut-up' due to the tick eradication program. During this time, Bill Niland, whose family drove their cattle out to their land near

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160 Clarrie Winkler interview, 1 May 2006

161 *ibid*

162 Uncle Tony Perkins (18 May 2001) in Brown I and Murphy D 2001, p. 19

163 Uncle Ken Craig in Brown I and Murphy D 2001

164 Uncle Tom (Billy) Perkins (18 May 2001) in Brown I and Murphy D 2001, p. 20

165 Clarrie Winkler interview, 1 May 2006

166 Shirley Winkler interview, 1 May 2006, Moy M 1994

Minnie Water each winter for grazing from Ulmarra, does not think there were any cattle people out there. The farmers had to be regularly accountable for every animal, and in those days there were no fences on that part of the coastal land. Bill remembers his father being among the large group of farmers who were very angry about the tick eradication program.<sup>167</sup>

### 3.3.3 Living off the land: pastoralism

Since early settlement, coastal forests have been linked with cattle grazing. The long-term presence of grazing in the north-east state forests is well documented in the Grafton district.<sup>168</sup> There were cattle throughout the Newfoundland and Candole forest area from the mid-nineteenth century. Thomas Bawden notes two nineteenth-century runs on the east side of the range extending to the coast in the southern part of what is now Yuraygir National Park: Bookram and Barungary stations.<sup>169</sup> In turn, all the timber on Crown lease land on which twentieth-century families grazed their cattle was subject to the control of the state forestry authorities. Many families worked in both the timber and cattle industries.



Rosemary Waugh-Allcock, 2006. Photo: J. Kijas.

From the last part of the nineteenth century, WN Reeve Waugh, and then his youngest son Alexander Stanley Johnstone Waugh (Stan), of Taloumbi Station ran cattle on the eastern side of the Coast Range from Yamba to the Sandon River. When Reeve and his brother John (known as Jack) bought Taloumbi Station from the Smalls in 1888, it had seemed such green and promising country compared to the drought-ridden country they had left in the west, and the cattle looked so fat.

However, according to Waugh history, the previous owners had imported the stock in from other districts and much of the station was 'unsound country'. 'It took years of hard work and worry to clear the scrub and drain the swamps, but these two brothers did have their reward in turning Taloumbi into a fine property'.<sup>170</sup> John Waugh later bought another property, selling his share of Taloumbi Station to his brother Reeve.

Stan's daughter, Rosemary Waugh-Allcock, grew up on Taloumbi Station when the station was run by her father. She remembers his stories and documentation of the 1902 drought when 15,000 sheep were shepherded to the area from around Moree. Of these, 5000 stayed on Taloumbi, 5000 went north to the valley area on the eastern side of Lake Wooloweyah and 5000 went down to the Bookram/Fantail Flat/Candole area. The two latter areas are now in Yuraygir National Park. Fred Casson, who worked for the Waughs, told Rosemary that until the 1940s one could still see the remains of the huge wooden wool presses at Hanna's Camp where the sheep had been shorn.<sup>171</sup>

The Waughs were the only large landholders in the study area, with all the accompanying aspects of social class related to the pastoralist. Following the early 1900s, large landowners in NSW such as the Waughs were officially excluded from purchasing vast areas to benefit small landholders. In response, large landholders carried out the process of 'dummying'. A relative or stockworker would be the supposed purchaser or dummy, with the deposit

<sup>167</sup> Moy M 1994, Bill Niland interview, 25 May 2006

<sup>168</sup> Blackmore & Associates 1993

<sup>169</sup> Bawden T 1997

<sup>170</sup> Honeyman C 1996, p. 65

<sup>171</sup> Rosemary Waugh Allcock interview, 24 May 2006

being provided by the real purchaser. Once the land was in the name of the dummy, the mortgage was also paid by the real purchaser.<sup>172</sup> All the coastal leases in the far north of the park, which became Angourie National Park in the mid 1970s, were dummied for WN Reeve Waugh. In the central section of the park from Sandon River to south of Minnie Water, Stan's oldest brother, William Napier Schrader Waugh (known as Napier), purchased the land through dummies.

From the early twentieth century, the central and southern parts of the park were taken up by small farming families from the neighbouring hinterland. They ran their cattle on Crown land leases and freehold land. In the central section were Len Bailey and his daughter's family the Jeffries, and the Nilands, Johnsons and Taylors. In the south were the Franklins, Fallons, Taylors, Kratzs and Buchanans, and the Lawrence Downs Pastoral Company. Throughout this period of grazing in what is now the park, very little forest was cleared although fears of clear-felling were raised from the late 1960s as park proposals were under discussion. The clearing that did occur was on heath and swamp land in the southern parts of the park, discussed below. Otherwise, previous land managers' burning practices, which encouraged native grasses, had the most impact on the landscape.

Grazing on the eastern side of the Coast Range spread across the entire area, from the forests to heathlands to the coastal dunes. However, it was sporadic and often very thinly spread, and never a year-round activity. As local historian Roy Bowling, born and bred at Tucabia just west of the Coast Range, explained:

You mostly only ran the cattle through the winter. If they stayed into the summer too long, there was deficiency in the grass that was there and that affected their bones, and they would get what was commonly known as 'coast disease'. If they got real bad, they'd get that they couldn't walk. And they'd be all humped up and bent over, and their hair would sort of turn back the opposite way, and they looked real crook. If you could get them before they got too bad, and got them home and got them onto the good grass here – well, it'd still take them a long time to get over it.<sup>173</sup>

The coastal section of Taloumbi Station, which is now part of the national park, was called 'the run'. It was used to graze a few hundred of the Waugh's own cattle during the winter or when the cows were dry. In 1900, the 'family tutor' wrote a poem 'The Waughs of Wild Taloumbi' which provides a romantic idea of a coastal cattle station:

... I think of misty mornings, when, anear the ocean shore,  
Out riding in wet saddles mustering kine,  
Ere sunrise tinged the surges, we hear the brooding roar  
Portending stormy weather o'er the brine.  
When nearer yet the seabord in the hazy light we stirred  
The startled coast-bred cattle that had lain  
Amid the stunted heather, 'mid haunts of bee and bird;  
And in mine ear the stockwhips ring again  
As when thro' the oak-boughs crackling, the wild-eyed  
cattle rushed,  
And madly thro' the scrub line to the west,  
Talboumbi's ga'lant stockmen, with wild excitement  
flushed,  
Each steed and every rider at his best...<sup>174</sup>

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172 Moy M 1994

173 Roy Bowling interview, 7 March 2006

174 McAlister G (family tutor) in Maloney N 1996

Taloumbi Station also agisted cattle from outside the region. Prior to World War I, before there was pasture improvement on the New England Tablelands, cattle were walked down to the run for winter feeding or drought relief. Rosemary Waugh-Allcock remembers one example of a family from Glen Innes who brought their working bullocks down each winter for a 'holiday' to fatten them up before returning them to work through the summer.<sup>175</sup>

Once improved pasture was introduced on the Tablelands, the agisted cattle on the run came predominantly from the Waugh's inland properties and other properties around Nymboida. In times of drought, Marie Preston remembers starving cattle moving through the stock route near Tucabia headed for the coastal run, entering it through Taloumbi Station to the north, or along the Wooli Road and through Len Bailey's and other coastal leases.<sup>176</sup> Through to the late 1940s, during the occasional high times of agistment such as drought, it is thought that up to 2000 cattle might be scattered along what is now the national park from Angourie south to the lakes. They would wander into Brooms Head and the Sandon area, around the freshwater springs and up into the base of the coastal range.<sup>177</sup>

Stan Waugh and the Cassons were known for their fire management practices. Rosemary recalled that in times of drought, her father and Fred Casson would go looking for places that had not been burnt for a long time. Such places included the 'melon hole' or swamp country, the black soil Christmas Bells country, and gullies. They would burn the land, then wait for the coastal showers to bring up new grass. She said that such small pockets of land could keep 20 cows alive.

Rosemary worked beside her father, following on her horse as they rode out for a day's muster. She says he would always drop a match, any time of year, and it would burn to the next section which might have been burnt six months before. This practice was specific to the coastal areas and occurred on both the heath and grasslands and through the forests. These were the 'ordinary fires – little and often'. The fishermen out to sea would see the smoke and say, 'that's Freddy Casson or Mr Waugh'. The smoke would obscure their navigation landmarks.<sup>178</sup>

This patchwork burning, where some areas might not be burnt for up to three years and others burnt much more regularly, produced the grassy pasture which sustained the cattle.<sup>179</sup> The Waughs always called the area to the west of the Sandon Road along Toumbaal Creek, Toumbaal Plain. They pronounced it 'Tumbal' where most other locals say 'Toombal'. Rosemary recalled it as 'beautiful grass country, wallaby and kangaroo grass. It was special cattle country; they loved it'.<sup>180</sup>

In 1945, WN Reeve Waugh died. Taloumbi Station had to be sold to pay for the probate. The grazing country with the homestead on the western side of the Coast Range, known as 'the station', was bought by Reeve's son Stan. The coastal leases north of Shelley Beach to the shores of Lake Wooloweyah were bought by Percy Dwyer. The other coastal leases to around Sandon were bought by Dey Waugh, Rosemary's uncle. He owned the inland river property, Nymboida Station, and bought the coastal run mainly for drought feeding for his Hereford breeding cattle. He called the property East Taloumbi. Dey died in 1953 and his land passed to his son, Reeve, who sold most of it to Max Carson in the late 1950s. Carson ran cattle and later started cane farming before selling part of the land in 1976 to the NPWS for Angourie National Park, and the rest of the land was resumed by the NPWS in the 1980s.

Reeve also returned a 435-acre block near the Sandon River to his cousin Rosemary. Half this land, the ocean frontage block, was resumed by NPWS in 1996, while 200 acres is still owned by Rosemary's son, Alec, who has built a house on the land (see section 4.2.3).<sup>181</sup>

175 Rosemary Waugh-Allcock interview, 24 April 2006

176 Marie Preston interview, 10 April 2006, Roy Bowling interview, 7 March 2006

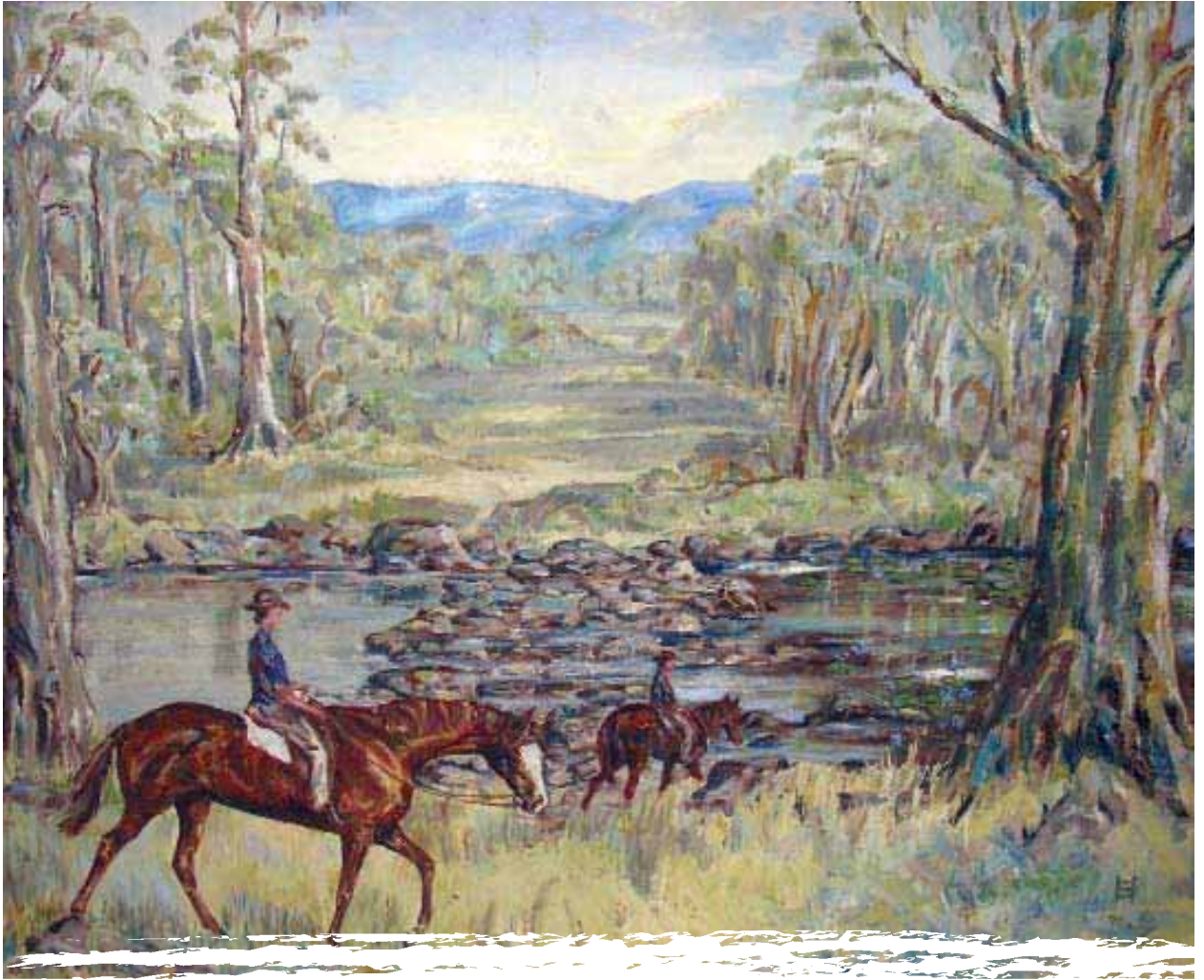
177 Rosemary Waugh-Allcock interview, 24 April 2006, Marie Preston interview, 10 April 2006

178 Allen Johnson interview with Rosemary Waugh-Allcock, 6 May 2006

179 Rosemary Waugh-Allcock interview, 24 April 2006

180 *ibid*

181 Honeyman C 1996, Rosemary Waugh-Allcock interview, 24 April 2006



The crossing on Candole Creek near the Sandon River, as remembered by Rosemary Waugh-Allcock in her recent 'memory painting' of herself and her father Stan. Courtesy Rosemary Waugh-Allcock, April 2006.

As previously noted, in the central section of what is now the park, hinterland farmers held the coastal leases for winter grazing and flood relief. Among them, the Nilands had owned the lease to a block on the western side of Minnie Water since 1928. They always transported their cattle on foot from their main property behind Ulmarra down the Wooli Road until it became too busy with traffic, and then they transported the cattle by truck. The last time they walked with the cattle was in 1977. Bill Niland thinks that: 'at one time or another, there were cattle here, there and everywhere'.<sup>182</sup>

Rosemary's uncle, Napier Waugh, ran cattle from the Sandon River all the way down the coast to south of Minnie Water. Pat Skinner ran 20 or 30 cows on Napier's property around Minnie Water, and Bill Niland remembers Jim Towns of Nymboida running cattle on the coastal land between Sandon and Minnie Water in the 1957 drought. Bill's guess at the winter number of cattle between the Sandon River and Wooli stands at around 100 to 200. During drought, when the Upper Clarence and Tablelands pastoralists brought their cattle in, he remembers a claim that they were 'dying like flies' at 'Everinghams' on the west side of Lake Hiawatha one year. But on the whole, Bill believes that most of the cattle that made it to the coast survived.<sup>183</sup>

In the southern part of the national park, the Lawrence Downs Pastoral Company bought a 4792-acre lease of predominantly grassy wet heath on the eastern side of Barcoongere Pine Plantation, stretching from the Red Rock River in the south and north nearly to Wooli (portions 21, 17 and 19). Buying in 1969 and 1970 on land that the Sim Committee had already recommended should be designated as national park, the pastoral company

<sup>182</sup> Bill Niland interview, 25 May 2006

<sup>183</sup> *ibid*

became embroiled in a drawn-out battle with the NPWS throughout the first three years of the 1970s (see section 4.2.2).

Almost immediately, they began legally clearing the heath country in portions 21 and 17 to plant pasture for cattle. Some of the land in portion 21 was in one of the Sim Committee's 'scientific areas', protected from mining but not from other activities.<sup>184</sup> Field Officer Dave McFarlane, who began working at Yuraygir National Park in 1981, remembers the NPWS harvesting semi-trailer loads of the pasture during the 1980s for drought-stricken cattle in the hinterland.



Setaria grass at Station Creek. Remnant landscape from the Lawrence Downs Pastoral Company's planting. May 2006. Photo: J. Kijas

In 1972, the Lands Board in Grafton conducted a final valuation of the three portions before selling them to the NPWS for the proposed Red Rock National Park which was gazetted in 1975. The type and extent of the pasture is recorded in the following valuation:

Improved Pasture: 420 acres of established pasture (north west) of siratro, setaria, green panic, red and white clovers – good stands @ \$20 per acre: value \$8,400. 300 acres of partly established pastures (south) comprising some paspalum in conjunction with red and white clover – these stands are of a very sparse nature but should respond in the ensuing years upon successive applications of fertiliser – @ \$12. = \$36,00.00. 250 acres of well established pastures (east) comprising red and white clovers mainly in conjunction with a little siratro, setaria and green panic... @ \$15 = \$3,750. Also a landing strip, properly built - \$800. Total value of all improvements \$5,3996.<sup>185</sup>

### 3.3.4 Other agricultural pursuits: bananas, dairy farming, bees and sugar

On a high wooded hill, above the swamp areas ploughed for pasture in portion 21, was an established banana plantation of 45 acres. Clarence (Clarrie) Moller had procured this sublease from the grazier Barry Richards in 1962, well before any suggestion of a national park in the region was discussed.<sup>186</sup> A Woolgoolga man, Moller had successfully re-established this plantation on the steep slopes overlooking Station Creek where he lived part-time in a small shack and had his packing and poultry sheds. According to Clarrie Winkler, Moller had already been forced to move his plantation from state forest land to the south-west, after a change of policy in the Forestry Commission which had previously encouraged such activity.<sup>187</sup> Clarrie remembers there was much disgust with the NPWS in Woolgoolga when Moller was yet again forced to abandon the plantation after park gazettal.<sup>188</sup>

On the northern banks of Red Rock River, land had been reserved for public recreation in 1942 (R57037) and later leased for grazing to the Fallons. The Cheals subleased land in 1970 on the western edge of R57037 from the Lawrence Downs Pastoral Company and built a cottage, piggery and fowl yards on it. The cottage, which was rapidly erected, was dismantled again by the mid-1970s with the gazettal of the park.

<sup>184</sup> NPWS Director Michael DF 1971, 'Information to the Minister: Proposed Red Rock State Park' in National Parks and Wildlife Service undated a

<sup>185</sup> Report of Lands Board Grafton 1972 in National Parks and Wildlife Service undated a

<sup>186</sup> The sublease was transferred to Lawrence Downs Pastoral Company when they bought the land from Richards in 1969

<sup>187</sup> Blackman & Associates 1993

<sup>188</sup> National Parks and Wildlife Service undated a



'Banana Hill' revegetated in the late 1970s under the supervision of ranger Jos Davies.  
May 2006. Photo: J. Kijas

This land was near the area known as Green Hills where the Martins had lived for many years. Ossie Martin told Roy Bowling that he remembers visiting family there in the 1920s.<sup>189</sup> They were a large family with two or three houses. Some family members worked at the Barcoongere Pine Plantation. Ossie said of the area:

When I came back from the war, I bought a bullock team. We were driving over on the north side of the river... We cleared a patch of ground and I snigged away a lot of logs and stumps and got sand and gravel. Old Tommy Richards did the cementing for a cricket pitch. The cricket pitch at Red Rock was never a real success, but the one at Green Hills was a beauty and we played a lot of cricket there.<sup>190</sup>

Red Rock and Corindi locals would come across to Green Hills on a barge to play cricket. Gumbaingirr man Paul Taylor talked about playing on the cricket pitch at the Martins' place: 'Yeah, actually we did, not that they were any good at cricket, they were very bad cricketers...'<sup>191</sup> Green Hills was the closest settlement to the large plantation camp which supported two shops supplying goods. Retailers were the Martins and Mrs Haynes.

In the central section of what is now the national park, on a rough track to the north-east of Minnie Water Lake on Len Bailey's lease, 'Blue Gum', a small dairy farm, had been kept by the Fisher family for a short time in the 1930s. Arthur Fisher took the cream out to Pillar Valley three times a week – an all day event. It was very poor dairy country and the venture was not a success. After the family moved to Ulmarra, Arthur's daughter Lola returned to marry Lyal Fuller and live at Minnie Water (then known as Wire Fence).<sup>192</sup>

Roy Bowling and Bill Niland remember another dairy farm in the 1950s on the road into Wooli. This was run by Alf Lloyd who provided the village with dairy products.

In the late 1950s, a small crop of bananas and pineapples was grown on the south-western side of the Wooli/ Minnie Water junction opposite Lake Hiawatha. Setaria grass was planted in the park area in the central section above Lake Minnie Water. Sandy Colquhoun bought the extensive lease previously owned by Napier Waugh in the late 1960s and planted the grass in 1970, just before selling the land to the NPWS for the Greater Angourie/ Minnie Water National Park.

Beekeeping has also had a long history in the park, from at least the 1920s. The heathland, and open and accessible parts of the forests, were used for wintering the bees as the flowering heath was suitable for honey production when other food sources in the region were low. There were beekeeping sites around each village from Wooli to Angourie. Allen Johnson from Sandon remembers stories of a beekeeper who owned an old army

189 Roy Bowling interview, 7 March 2006

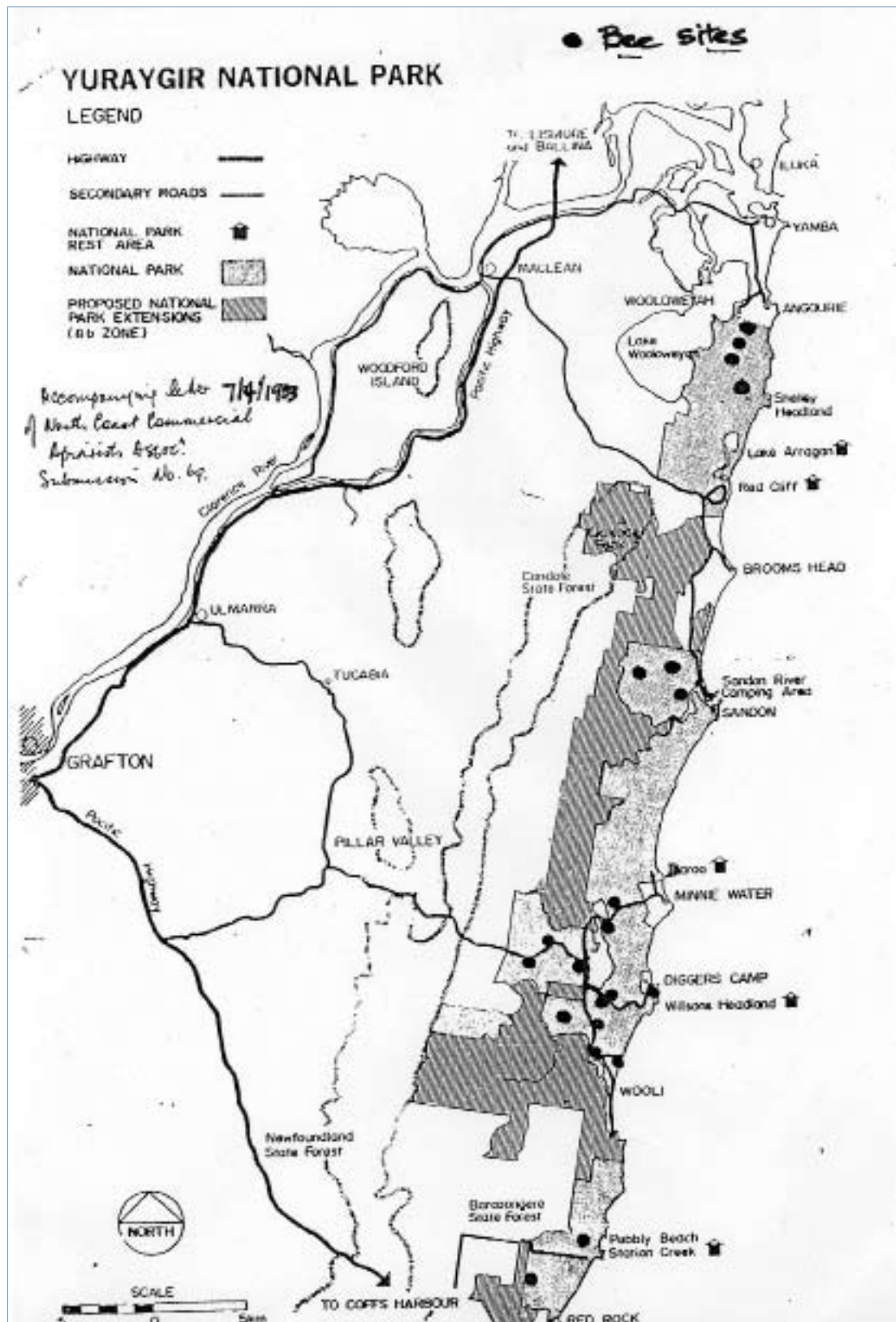
190 Ossie Martin in Campey and Cochrane 1997 in Brown I and Murphy D 2001, p. 82

191 Uncle Paul Taylor in Brown I and Murphy D 2001, p. 82

192 Recollections of daughter Lola Fuller in Diggers Headland Ratepayers & Friends Association Inc 2002, Godbee L 2002



Map 7: Sites of bees in Yuraygir National Park, 1983



'half track' vehicle with tracks like a tank. He could bulldoze his way through all the swamp country to the south of the Sandon River to reach the coastal heath, and therefore was able to take his bees into country inaccessible to others.<sup>193</sup> Beekeepers who were active in the national park before its gazettal were licensed to retain their sites.<sup>194</sup>

Sugar cane was the most recent farming activity to be undertaken in what is now the national park. Blocks for cane were cleared in the mid-1970s along the Brooms Head to Sandon Road. Cane sold for a good price, although it never grew in big tonnage in this area and took a lot of fertiliser. Rosemary Waugh-Allcock planted the first crop with the assistance of a share farmer. Cattle prices were low and the cane harvest went towards paying for her son Alec's school fees. The two neighbouring properties, Fanning to the south and Carson to the north, quickly turned to cane. Rosemary said that once she put her crop in, it made sense to have Carson's and Fanning's crops too, as the mills would send transport out to carry all the crops to Maclean.

### 3.3.5 From the sea and the sand: fishing and beach worming

Fishing has been a major industry in the study area since the late nineteenth century. Despite the problems of transport on the terrible roads, which severely impeded the commercial fishing industry in the park, there were a few commercial fishers at each coastal village of Wooli, Diggers Camp, Minnie Water, Sandon and Brooms Head. Lake Wooloweyah was also commercially fished from this time.

The Clarence River fishing industry was one of the largest providers of seafood to the Sydney market from the early twentieth century, once refrigerated steamers enabled seafood to be successfully transported to the city. Not only fish but oysters, lobsters and prawns, were sold, and Clarence River oysters were prized in Sydney from as early as 1868. Commercial oyster leases were first granted at Wooli in 1885 to the Park brothers from Italy, who established an oyster salon in Grafton (and a vineyard about four miles from the coast).<sup>195</sup> By 1909, commercial oyster leases were operating on Sandon River.

Like most industries in the region, the fishing industry was generally small-scale, made up of small family businesses with marginal earnings.<sup>196</sup>

Wooli developed the most substantial fishing industry on the Yuraygir coastline, establishing a small co-op which closed in November 2002 after the declaration of the Solitary Island Marine Park and the subsequent professional fishing licence buy-back scheme. This scheme halted most commercial fishing along the Yuraygir estuaries and headlands.

Wooli supplied snapper to the Sydney markets from the 1920s, lobsters and leather jackets from the 1940s and later, prawns. The fish hauls were 'huge', all done by handline off the fishing vessels which sheltered on the Wooli River. In one period of four days at sea, two tons of snapper were caught. The 1940s lobster hauls and annual sea mullet catch off the beach were also described as 'huge'.<sup>197</sup>

The first draft of the Yuraygir Plan of Management in 1982 reported Wooli's output of fish and other seafood in 1976–77 as 80,435 kg and Sandon River's output as 66,700 kg. These were small amounts compared to the Clarence Fishermen's Co-operative based at Maclean, Iluka and Yamba, which had an output of 1,923,416 kg of fish, but these amounts need to be considered in relation to the small numbers of people fishing.<sup>198</sup>

People had started coming for fishing holidays to Sandon River from the late nineteenth century, but only three permanent families were involved in commercial fishing when Ray Black started fishing there in the 1940s.<sup>199</sup> Allen Johnson took up professional fishing on the Sandon River in 1969. By that time, 12 boats were fishing there.

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193 Allen Johnson interview with Rosemary Waugh-Allcock, 6 May 2006

194 National Parks and Wildlife Service 2003a

195 Davidson H 1992

196 Maclean District Historical Society 2004, Wilkinson J 2004

197 Davidson H 1992

198 National Parks and Wildlife Service 1982

199 Biddle B 2001, pp. 86–87

Allen and his brother started coming to the river in the early 1960s, and his father's family had been coming across from Woodford Island since the 1890s. When first taking up professional fishing, he lived in Sandon village on the south side before moving to the north side where he, his wife and family still live today. Over the years, Allen said the fishing industry 'just dwindled away until eventually I was the last one left, and I went out of business when the marine park was formed'.

I mostly worked the winter months at sea, mainly for snapper and leather jackets and trapping and I'd spend the summer months in the river [Sandon River estuary] catching mud crabs and a few black fish and mullet and whatever... It wasn't economical for me to work at sea without the river for the summer months. So, when they stopped me working on the river, well, I couldn't exist on just working out at sea.<sup>200</sup>

When the Solitary Islands Marine Park Zoning Plan commenced in August 2002, much of the Sandon River estuary was zoned as a sanctuary and the taking of all marine life was banned. The state government bought the fishing licenses from Allen and about 30 other professional fishers along the coast between Coffs Harbour and Plovers Point.<sup>201</sup>



Allen Johnson, 2006. Photo: J. Kijas.

While the fishing industry was concentrated in Woolli and Sandon, a few families also made their living from fishing at the sheltered spots of Brooms Head, Diggers Camp and Minnie Water. In the late 1930s, Arthur Fuller moved his extended family a few kilometres north from Diggers Camp to Wire Fence (Minnie Water) to fish. Lola Fuller, married to Arthur's son Lyle, had already spent a couple of years on her family's dairy farm at Blue Gum south of Minnie Water. As a married woman, she lived with her husband's family in tents on the beachfront. There were no other permanent residents in the area until sand miners arrived (see section 3.3.6).

The Fullers fished from open timber vessels 16 to 20 feet (five to seven metres) long, powered by inboard marine motors. 'They would go 20 miles out to sea in them. There were no radios, no weather forecasters. No lifejackets, most of the time', recalls Lola's son Ron. 'If the weather looked okay, they went to sea. They couldn't afford not to.'<sup>202</sup>

Many years later, Barbara Knox, her husband Keith and their young family came to Minnie Water to begin their lives as professional fishers. They had come from out west for their annual holidays between 1952 and 1957, and settled permanently in Minnie Water in Easter 1958. There were only a handful of permanent people, most houses being holiday homes. In those days, there seemed to be a cyclone every year. 'Life was pretty primitive when we first came here. There was no power or water laid on – very rough gravel roads. It was quite a trip to go to Grafton and back.'<sup>203</sup>

200 Allen Johnson interview, 6 May 2006

201 For Solitary Islands Marine Park zoning map, see [www.mpa.nsw.gov.au/simp/maps/simp-maps.htm](http://www.mpa.nsw.gov.au/simp/maps/simp-maps.htm), accessed 15 May 2006

202 Lola Fuller interview with Godbee L, *Daily Examiner* 4 June 2002 in Diggers Headland Ratepayers & Friends Association Inc 2002

203 Barbara Knox interview with Gina Hart n.d.

Fishing was the only industry in Minnie Water, and Barbara remembers 11 commercial fishing boats being anchored in the bay at that time. As elsewhere along that coast, the main catch was snapper. As the years went by and the bad weather continued, fishers undertook beach hauling as well as going out in boats. The old fishing legend was that the mullet always started running on Anzac Day. After the mullet finished, the bream started, then the blackfish. Then all the fishers would go to sea and catch lobsters.

The industry provided ancillary employment beyond catching fish. When Barbara and Keith first arrived, they sold their fish through the ice works in Minnie Water, and the catch would be transported to the train at Grafton and sent south. Later, when the ice works closed, they bought shares in the co-op at Woolli and sold their fish through them. A licensed fisher, Barbara began volunteering at the Woolli Co-op because it was a seven-day-a-week job for the woman running it, and her wage was very low. Sometimes, when times were bad, she did not even take a wage. So Barbara started working one day a week. When the co-op did not have a filleter, Barbara decided to do that job too. 'People would be mad to fillet fish for 10 cents a kilo, but anyway Keith would take the catch in and go and play bowls, and I'd go and fillet fish and pack them'.

One day, she decided to go into business for herself, so she learnt how to catch worms. She ran a bait business and sold her worms live to her customers, to the co-op who froze them, and to other shops in Woolli. She caught a variety of worms: there were the 'hairy heads', the 'king worms', the 'high-tidies' which Barbara always thought were probably the young king worms and then the 'slimies'. 'I used to sell them three for fifty cents – now you pay two dollars for a piece!'<sup>204</sup>

As previously noted, beach worming was also a main source of income for many coastal Aboriginal people from Yamba to Corindi. Fox Laurie, who grew up in Yamba, said they were taught to worm from a very young age. When they were children they would have to bring their worms home, where they were packed up and sold to assist with the family income. When they became teenagers, they packed the worms themselves on the beach and sold them in town. The proceeds were 'their picture and other spending money'.

You'd always try to be the best wormer of the day. If you missed a worm you were kicked off the sand spit... There was no room for missing a worm.<sup>205</sup>

The whole family often wormed together, and a number of men earned their family's income through worming.

### 3.3.6 From the beaches: sand mining

Sand mining provided Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal local men, as well as a transient population, with a living along the Yuraygir coastline from the early twentieth century. Most of the mining that changed the coastal landscape in the second half of the twentieth century was for black sand minerals. However, before that, mining for gold, tin and platinum from southern Queensland to NSW's far north coast was undertaken from the late nineteenth century.

Gold was mined from the beaches around Evans Head, north of the study area, from about 1877. During the 1890s depression, up to 5000 people worked McAuley's Lead at Jerusalem Creek (now part of Bundjalung National Park).<sup>206</sup> German and Chinese people mined gold near Diggers Camp. According to Val McConnel, in 1905 or 1906 the Lion Gold Mining Company was formed by Gallagher, See and Dowling to mine for gold at the Sandon River's south beach. The Lang family also mined there.<sup>207</sup>

In the north section of the park, coal was reported to be hacked straight off the clearly visible coal strata in the red cliffs of the area by passing ships, and the remains of a coal shaft are visible on the headland at Red Cliff. Mining of platinum is reported to have taken place in the same vicinity around Plumbago Headland.<sup>208</sup>

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204 Barbara Knox interview with Gina Hart n.d.

205 Fox Laurie interview, 8 May 2007

206 Kijas J 2004

207 Val McConnel in Biddle B 2001

208 Matt Clark, Yuraygir National Park Northern Section Ranger, pers. com.

Map 8: Sand mining map of the Yuraygir coastline



Courtesy of DECC's North Coast Region May 2006

From 1913 to 1917, the North Coast Gold and Platinum Co Ltd, formed at Grafton, obtained leases for the coastline south of Yamba to about the area of Sandon village.<sup>209</sup>

Mining in this period was labour-intensive with shovels and horse-drawn carts used to transport the minerals for drying, bagging and shipment. Some mechanical work was done through sluicing and pumping. At this time, the black sand minerals, which would become so important in the post-World War I period, were just seen as tailings.<sup>210</sup>

A sand mining treatment plant operated on Angourie's south beach between 1920 and 1937.<sup>211</sup> The Titanium Allow Manufacturing Company (TAMCO) began operating at Yamba in the mid-1930s and down at Minnie Water/Wire Fence in 1939. Lola Fuller remembers about 50 employees and many of their families moving to the beachfront at Minnie Water at the time. She remembers them either working the heavy mining machinery or sorting sand in a large shed near where the Minnie Water Hall is today. After the miners and their families left in 1940, when the company moved its operations to the Queensland border at Cudgen,<sup>212</sup> Lola and Lyal moved into the shed; it was better than the tent they had been living in for the past two years.<sup>213</sup>

During and after World War II, when the black sand minerals of rutile, zircon and ilmenite were in high demand on the international market, sand mining became a major industry on the economically poor North Coast. The beaches north of Tweed Heads were the first to be heavily mined during the 1940s, and some mining was carried out at Byron Bay, Yamba and Angourie. Further south, permission to mine Coffs Harbour's beaches was given in 1953, although it was held off until 1956 because of caution expressed by the shire's engineer over the damage which mining wrought to the 'natural beauty' of the area.<sup>214</sup>

In the late 1960s, when University of New England researcher Barbara Hannah produced extensive reports on the state of the North Coast economy, land use and environment, no sand mining was recorded on the Yuraygir coastline.<sup>215</sup> All this changed at the same time that the Angourie and Red Rock national park proposals were being discussed by the government.

As noted in section 2.3.2, while the Sim Committee nominated nearly all the coastline from Angourie to Red Rock as significant enough to warrant immediate protection through reservation, they recommended that all but the small 'scientific areas' be mined. Until the Labor government reversed the Sim decision in 1977, mining was carried out along two sections of the beach and dunal systems between Angourie and Brooms Head: north and south of Brooms Head, and from Pebbly Beach to the mouth of Station Creek. The 1977 decision stopped imminent mining between Red Rock and Station Creek, and on other lease sites. However, mining that was already in progress south of Angourie was continued until the lease expired in 1979.

A number of companies mined in the area, including Cudgen R-Z Ltd around Angourie. The company most affected in the study area by the 1977 decision was the multinational company Dillingham Mining (DM Minerals), which had been working titles at Cudgen, Broadwater, Woodburn and Yamba. They also had a workforce of around 80 people at Brooms Head. They were about to move to their mining leases in Red Rock National Park between Woolli and Red Rock, as well as Hat Head National Park to the south, when, as a consequence of the 1977 decision, they had to close down all their mines in NSW. They sold some of their equipment and their leases in 1978 to a local company, McGeary Brothers Contractors Pty Ltd from Woodburn. The 1977 decision did not stop mining outside current or proposed national parks, so it went ahead on Crown land around Brooms Head. The McGeary brothers had a team of about 50 miners working at Brooms Head through to the late 1970s.<sup>216</sup> Sustained anti-mining campaigning, however, stopped proposed mining on the village foreshore.<sup>217</sup>

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209 Morley IW 1981

210 *ibid*

211 Switzer M undated

212 *ibid*

213 Godbee L 2002

214 Yeates N 1993

215 Hannah B 1968a

216 Morley IW 1981

217 Plater J and Committee 1990

Whereas a proliferation of tracks across the hinterland landscape had been created by the timber workers, graziers and beekeepers from the late nineteenth century, from the late 1960s the sand miners opened up the headlands and beaches of the region to more fishers, family campers and surfers. The area in the new national parks where this greater access to beaches would become most controversial was between Angourie and Brooms Head.



Erosion of the sand mining tracks in the far north of the park.  
Photo: DECC's North Coast Region

Shirley Causley had been travelling to Shelley Beach, south of Angourie, with her husband for fishing and recreation since the 1950s. However, at that time vehicle access to the beach meant driving across the trackless heath and along the tops of the headlands. The Causleys were cane farmers and were one of only a few families who owned a four-wheel drive vehicle that could access the beach. In 1969–70, a substantial mining road was built into Shelley Beach from the north (known as the Shelley Track), constructed from the gravel quarries developed at One Man Bluff and Cassons Knob. This road opened up Shelley Beach to a wider range of vehicles.

At the same time, to the south, a gravel road was built from Red Cliff to the mine site at Buchanans Head. This left only a small section between the two roads that could only be accessed by four-wheel drives and trail-bikes (although stories abound of the Holden and Ford drivers who considered this no obstacle for their cars). There was now direct road access between Angourie and Brooms Head.

As the road deteriorated, the increased traffic created more and more tracks to divert around problem areas. By the late 1970s, DA Manson of the Soil Conservation Service noted that the maze of tracks across the swamps and dunes had become heavily eroded, forming gullies, wearing away dunes and threatening the swamps by lowering the water table.<sup>218</sup> Eventual closure of these tracks by the NPWS in the 1980s is discussed in section 4.5.2.

### 3.3.7 Army use: mustard gas and the odd artillery shell

The final activity to be noted in this part of the publication occurred during World War II in country known as the Black Swamps, north of Lake Minnie Water. The 'Grafton Range' was leased by the Australian military for a single series of live artillery firings conducted between 10 and 17 April 1943. This was part of a series of east coast chemical trials that were held to assess the level of incapacitation of troops in or near an area which had been 'engaged' with chemical shells filled with sulphur mustard, mustard gas and a tear agent, bromobenzylcyanide.<sup>219</sup>

<sup>218</sup> Manson DA 1980

<sup>219</sup> Tilbrook J 1998

## Mustard gas trial target sites

Type of site	Description	Approximate location
Military camp		Wooli: c. GR 258965 Bare Point (BP) Map
Artillery firing point to Target Area 1		Guns sited north side of track adjacent to quarry: c. GR 265008 BP map
Target Area 1	601 artillery rounds fired onto site, of which 4 or 5 mustard gas shells were set for 'air burst'.	c.3km SSE of Lake Hiawatha centred at c. GR 278008 BP Map
Probable artillery firing point to Target Area 3		Guns sited north side of Woolli Road: c. GR238032 BP Map
Target Area 3 (Site 2 not used)	585 artillery rounds fired onto site, of which about 10 failed mustard gas shells were set for 'ground burst'.	c.5 km NNE of Minnie Water centred at c. GR 270105 BP Map

Information: Tilbrook J 1998

The military record summarised the process:

After the first shoot, six volunteers were posted on the downwind edge of the area for 30 minutes. No casualties resulted. After the second shoot, eight observers marched across the area and then marched back to camp, with no casualties resulting from this traversing party. A further fourteen other volunteers remained on the downwind edge of the area for at least two hours following the shoot. In the case of this occupying party, three certain and one possible casualties resulted...<sup>220</sup>

The total number of 'casualties' was 15. All had minor injuries, receiving blisters, burns and skin lesions. Luckily for the 'volunteers', the trials proved the mustard gas to be ineffective for military purposes as the product which had been manufactured in Britain did not work well in the warmer Australian climate.<sup>221</sup>

Roy Bowling remembers a beekeeper from Tyndale whose bees were in the middle of the firing range. Roy said: 'He thought all his bees would have been dead. But although they were down in numbers, he said it didn't kill them out, and the whole area was black.'<sup>222</sup>

During the war years and the tick eradication program, few travelled to their regular beach holiday spots and cattle farmers were not wintering their stock. The isolation of the region, with its sparse population across the coastal landscape, presumably attracted the military to the site. Only a few locals knew of the trials until recent years when debris from the testing was found, causing residents and visitors to fear for the safety of their favourite coastal haunts. This prompted the commission of Tilbrook's 1998 report which 'hypothesised' that there is no imminent danger from unexploded shells or contamination to the lakes.

## 3.4 Everyone knew everyone: coastal holidays and fishing

### 3.4.1 Introduction

In the 1970s, when other North Coast beach towns were packed with strangers during summer holidays, the caravan parks in the villages between Red Rock and Brooms Head housed the same families who had been

<sup>220</sup> *ibid*, p6

<sup>221</sup> *The Daily Examiner* 1998a and 1998b. The subsequent trials in northern Queensland that used American-made mustard gas, already tested in tropical climates, had devastating results on volunteer troops

<sup>222</sup> Roy Bowling interview, 7 March 2006. Also see *The Daily Examiner* 1998a



coming each Christmas for generations. The 15–30 kilometre stretch from the Pacific Highway to each section of the Yuraygir coastline always meant that a trip to its beaches was a deliberate decision, rather than a casual visit. This meant that while some Sydneysiders, families from the New England Tablelands and the occasional Queenslander came to the Yuraygir coast, holidaymakers in the study area were predominantly local.

River fishing, forest exploration (including hunting and bird watching) and exploration of the heath and swamps have always attracted some people to the coastal hinterland. However, since the late nineteenth century, the beaches, estuaries and ocean have attracted most holidaymakers.

This section contains a brief history of the villages which are surrounded by the national park, favourite camping places and recreational activities before the national park was gazetted. People's stories provide a glimpse of their various attachments to the area.

### 3.4.2 The coastal villages

The only permanent houses in the study area have been in the coastal villages and settlements, except for the cottages at Green Hills and the Waughs' cottage at Red Cliff, which were removed after park gazettal. These villages, which are surrounded by Yuraygir National Park, are Red Rock in the south; Wooli, Diggers Camp and Minnie Water in the central section; Sandon and Brooms Head in the north; and Angourie and Wooloweyah in the far north. The tracks to each village used to be notoriously difficult to traverse and impassable during wet spells. Until recently, they were all predominantly holiday places, almost deserted in off-peak periods. However, each has had small populations of permanent fishers and their families, and the occasional early retirees.

The Yuraygir coastline is distinctive with its undeveloped headlands, intact coastal strip of heath and swamp, and lagoons and rivers, all backed by the forested Coast Range. All the coastal villages are approached across heath or swamp country, except Angourie and Wooloweyah where the road cuts through coastal rainforest with the heath country of the national park behind.

One consistent memory of the pre-park landscape is of the sulky tracks and, later, car tracks that were 'everywhere', especially the tracks accessing each village. This evidence of a socialised landscape is etched into the ground. While there were always exceptions, people from each inland regional centre and farming community frequented particular villages, with neighbours from town often camping next to each other at the beach.

The Yuraygir coastline contains much diversity, with each village having a unique setting. Red Rock's rocks provide its name, as it is set between the large shallow estuary and sand islands. Two rivers meet in the west of the village, and the headland and long ocean beach meet in the east. The heathland to the south of Red Rock was gazetted into the national park in 2007, and to the north the national park stretches over 60 kilometres to Angourie. Coffs Harbour and Grafton people started making their way out to Red Rock to camp from the late nineteenth century, and it was a favourite holiday place for Gumbaingirr people who lived at Corindi and further away.

Wooli is in the central section of the park. Located on a long thin sand peninsula between the ocean and the Wooli River estuary, it was the most substantial village at the time of park gazettal. The estuary was deep enough for a harbour for commercial fishing vessels from the 1930s. Farmers from around Tucabia and Pillar Valley, as well as townspeople from Grafton and Ulmarra, made the trek to Wooli as early as the 1860s. It was large enough to be declared a village in 1923, and had a hall and 55 cottages by 1934. At Christmas time that year, between 700 and 800 people camped there, many of them school teachers from the south.<sup>223</sup>

Some of the farmers, timber workers and townspeople in the same area went to Diggers Camp for holidays from the early twentieth century. Local holidaymakers built a track into the little settlement which sits on the edge of a sand plateau east of Lake Hiawatha. Stories about German miners preceded them.

Minnie Water, known as Wire Fence before the 1960s and built right onto the beach front facing north, was populated much later than the other villages in the region. Regulars came from Grafton and further afield.

223 Davidson H 1992

Farmers from Tyndale, Shark Creek and Woodford Island, and professionals from Grafton and Sydney, began travelling to Sandon River from the late nineteenth century. Residents of Maclean and farmers from the Lower Clarence Valley camped at Brooms Head from the 1880s. One landscape feature of this area is the low heath, noted as a 'treeless plain', which lies between Sandon and Brooms Head. Beside the salt water lagoon at the entrance to Brooms Head (Lake Cakora), a line of freshwater springs, which used to be full of freshwater mullet, spread along the coast towards Sandon.

Before nineteenth-century settlement of the Sandon River area, archaeological and oral evidence shows that the estuary, headland and beach were favourite meeting and camping places for Yaegl people and their visitors.<sup>224</sup> The area's fishing fame carried over into settler-colonial history.

Bill Biddle's lively book of oral histories provides an excellent account of the Sandon community from the late nineteenth century.<sup>225</sup> While the first bark hut to be built in the area was on the southern headland in 1901, Biddle notes that the first house was built by Jack Gallagher on the north side in 1914 for fishing holidays. Gallagher took out a mining lease which allowed him a title to build.

The first permanent family to live on Sandon River were Ann and Henry Burchell and their two sons. Henry worked Percy Judd's oyster leases and they lived on the north side of the river from 1926–1931. (The first oyster growers arrived in the early 1900s.) The Judds eventually sold their land to the Franklins in the late 1960s (see section 4.2). Also on the north side, from 1932 to the 1960s, cabins were built under Permissive Occupancy (PO) in two areas, a line of eight along the road and another five at the river entrance. POs were part of the State Planning Authority's early attempts to control burgeoning and out-of-control coastal developments, especially near Sydney.

In November 1983, the land on the north side of Sandon River was included in the park, taking in the cabins and also the camping reserve which had been run by the Maclean Shire Council since the late 1950s with a permanent caretaker. The NPWS terminated the POs in December 1983, and protracted negotiations between occupiers and the NPWS over their legal status has been ongoing.

Houses were also built on the southern side of Sandon River. Ownership of houses in Sandon Village changed through the 1950s and 1960s from predominantly local fishing families to professionals from Grafton and Sydney. Sandon village residents were able to take out freehold title through the 1960s. These houses remain outside the park today.<sup>226</sup> The two PO huts on the south side were brought into the park after gazettal in the 1980s.

In the far north of the study area, Grafton residents travelled to Yamba by steamer from the late nineteenth century, and Bundjalung people from Casino through to Lismore joined Yaegl relatives at Yamba each Christmas.

Cane farmers from Harwood, Palmers Island and other parts of the Lower Clarence River went to Angourie. Unlike other villages where various tracks meandered around the trees, Angourie had a straight road, even if the deep sand holes sometimes slowed progress. This was because Angourie village originated from the opening of a quarry in 1892, which supplied stone for the Clarence Entrance harbour wall at Yamba. By 1895, a tramline through the littoral rainforest transported the rocks and the 300 villagers and workers living in Angourie. After the quarry closed in 1900, the village population diminished but there were still enough people for a village to be declared in 1917. The Harwood Sugar Mill built holiday cottages there for its workers around 1936.<sup>227</sup>

As tourism became a viable industry in the 1950s and early 1960s, there were repeated calls for the state government to open up Crown land all along the North Coast for tourism. A series of displacements followed. The beach front shacks that had grown up under Permissive Occupancies on each camping reserve in the villages from Red Rock to Yamba were removed. For the locals in the villages with long histories of attachment,

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224 Collins J 2002

225 Biddle B 2001

226 National Parks and Wildlife Service 1993a

227 Switzer M undated



Some Sandon River huts (north side) in the national park, March 2006. Photo: J. Kijas.

where hardly any impact from outsiders had taken place, the removal of these dwellings was bitterly felt. It was at this time, as their Diggers Camp cottage was under orders to be removed from the beach front, that the Prestons surrendered their occupancy and started heading out west for their holidays.<sup>228</sup> It was also an era in which Aboriginal people were further displaced as coastal areas were 'tidied up'. For example, Heather Goodall notes that during 1958, due to the demand for better tourist access to the foreshores at Yamba, 180 acres of Aboriginal reserve land were revoked.<sup>229</sup>

Some village populations have closely guarded their isolation; for example, Red Rock residents opposed sewage works, Diggers Camp lobbied the council against 'flash' housing, doctors with holiday houses in Sandon Village argued against phone services being provided and Angourie residents challenged a series of developments.

While always contested within communities, big plans were also afoot through the 1960s and 1970s for large-scale housing estates and resort developments on land purchased by companies and individuals between Woolli and Minnie Water, and Minnie Water and the Sandon River. These were proposed on areas of higher ground, surrounded by low lying heath and swamp, which would have required substantial filling.

By 1975, the state government had quashed a plan for a residential estate around Lake Hiawatha which would have housed 20,000 people, much to the disgust of the local council. Grafton-based Hiawatha Park Estate Pty Ltd was still proposing a \$50 million city in 1978. An article in *The Daily Examiner* said that the company was pleased that 10% of signatures in support of their proposal had come from people in the Woolli area.<sup>230</sup> Other proposals by developers such as Brambles and Little Bloomfield were all eventually quashed. Their land was acquired under the Coastal Lands Protection Scheme for Yuraygir National Park (see section 4.2.3).<sup>231</sup>

Relative to the rest of the North Coast, the establishment of the national park and subsequent limitation of the growth of coastal villages and new resort developments have meant that patterns of holiday activities have been maintained in the study area.

228 Marie Preston interview, 10 April 2006

229 Goodall H 1996

230 *The Daily Examiner* 1978, p. 2

231 Ashton N 1977, Wigham F 1975



The Waugh's camp at Brooms Head late 1880s, courtesy of Rosemary Waugh-Allcock. Christian's mother had a separate tent (the men travelled back and forth from the station). There was a kitchen tent, a dining awning in the middle, tents to the side for the governess or tutor and other workers, and the children's tents. For the farming families of the district there were often two tents – one for the kitchen and eating, and one for all the family to sleep in. Campers brought bunk beds and no doubt some did bring the kitchen sink.

### 3.4.3 Anticipation and arrival

The delight of anticipation of holiday activities has surely not changed for children over time. From the late nineteenth century Christian Honeyman, nee Waugh, accompanied her large family each year from Taloumbi Station to Brooms Head for the summer holidays. As the Waughs were the social elite of the area, their camp was set up for them by their workpeople. After Christmas dinner with up to 30 people at the homestead, they would set off for the beach in sulkies and buggies and on horseback.

Some sense of the pre-sand mining landscape can be imagined from her memories of the joyous trip to the coast:

'Tumble out', Father [Reeve Waugh] would say, which meant all of us except Mother, who remained beside him to 'go over the Gap' in the buggy. We had come to the foot of the high barricading sand hills which ran between the deep-rutted wheel track and the sea. We ripped off shoes and socks to get the feel of the hot sand, and not again until we recrossed the Gap six weeks later, would we prison our holiday feet. We could hear, but not yet see, the long green rollers curling over on the beach. The low continuous murmur kept swelling with our mounting excitement and anticipation as we ploughed up, up to the top, where it seemed to burst into a roar of welcome simultaneously with our shouts of 'I see the sea-e, I see the sea-e!' The buggy and the following sulkies sank deep into the sand, white as flour and fine as table salt... The horses having stubbornly got their loads onto the hard, wet sand, bowled along smartly... All along that spanking three-mile run, the sea-horses kept pace too, rearing up and tossing white manes as they raced each other over the surf. At the end of the beach, before the headland which flung its rocky boulders far into the sea, was the camping ground, a flat strip of springy buffalo grass rising comfortably into a sofa-back of long green hill from the side of which came sweet spring water.<sup>232</sup>

The Platers may well have helped set up the large camping site for the Waughs and then acted as their cooks over the six-week holiday period. Thomas Plater, who had selected at Taloumbi in 1860, had also been bringing his large family to Brooms Head from the late nineteenth century. Great grandson Trevor remembered his childhood excitement of the 'long awaited trip to the Broom at Christmas time' in the early 1950s:

Families did not necessarily have a car and usually one of the carriers with a truck was booked for the 'transhumance' to the Broom... The excitement of loading the truck with enough gear for six weeks, clambering onto the load in the back and heading up the hill remains fresh in the memory... Campsites did not alter much, and in fact galvanised iron galleys were of a semi-permanent nature; the fuel stove remained from year to year. On arrival, the corrugated iron sheet nailed over the front at the end of the previous year was simply removed and a fresh start made.<sup>233</sup>

Hazel Davidson in her book on Wooli reminds people who did all the hard work before, during, and after the annual camping trip. 'Any woman who went camping in those early days was surely entitled to a medal. After days of cooking, packing and getting the kids organised, usually with little help from the male side of the family, they were off loaded to the hilt with tents, beds, tables, cooking utensils etc.'<sup>234</sup>

Reminiscing about their 1960s Diggers Camp holidays, author Gillian Mears' father commented that he and the other men would go back to work on Monday leaving the women wading through the washing and cleaning for a week.<sup>235</sup>

For those who already lived at the beach, the anticipation of the yearly influx of friends and relatives was also great. Della Walker, who came to live at Yamba after leaving Ulgundahi Island (see section 3.2.5), eagerly awaited the arrival of all the Casino people who came down each Christmas. The Aboriginal Reserve would fill up with people she had not seen all year, and a new set of playmates would end up at the beach. Aunt Della would wait for her mate, Patti:

We'd go to the beach gathering pippies and oysters. We thought that it was lovely. When our friends came from Casino, we were overjoyed to see them. And it was there that I came to know the friends I have now. I had a mate, Patti, she was my good friend. Now today, she's gone. She died at a young age. I always think about the times when we used to go playing and hunting. They were good times, us girls had fun.<sup>236</sup>

#### 3.4.4 Bush camping and shacks

The villages were not the only focus for recreation – people camped all along the Yuraygir coastline. In the early 1900s, Ned and Julia Plater, their children, and members of the Casson family travelled in horse and sulky from their small farms at Taloumbi to spend each holiday camping at Shelley Beach.<sup>237</sup> Local families each had their favourite beaches.

In her childhood, when they would ride their horses to the beach, Rosemary Waugh-Allcock vaguely remembers the remains of two slab huts at Red Cliff which she believes belonged to the Moloney family of Shark Creek. In the 1940s, her mother felt that Brooms Head had become too busy so they moved out, building a substantial cottage on the headland at Red Cliff (which they knew as Red Rock) under Permissive Occupancy. Rosemary remembers perhaps 12 family groups who regularly camped at the beaches between Brooms Head and Shelley Beach. Those that chose to make the adventurous trek out to the Sandon River also shunned village life.

Shirley Causley does not remember a lot of campers at Shelley Beach but there were always some. Others remember it getting quite busy on weekends with families, fishermen and surfers from the early 1970s after the

233 Plater T in Plater J and Committee 1990, p. 69

234 Davidson H 1992, p. 68

235 Mears G and Edwards S 1997

236 Walker D and Coutts T 1989, p. 22

237 Plater history 1996

substantial sand mining road had gone through from Angourie. By the 1960s and 1970s, surfers were building shacks of tin, plastic and timber around Lake Arragan and in the sheltered spots around Red Cliff. Allen Johnson from Sandon estimates there were about 30 such camps.<sup>238</sup> Brooms Head regular, Stewart, remembered the camps on their annual walk through the area between Brooms Head and Angourie. He thought that people only stayed for a week or so in these camps, then left them intact for the next group.<sup>239</sup>

On the eastern edge of Lake Arragan in the vicinity of Plumbago (Buchanans) Headland, Yaegl people, predominantly from Maclean, used to set up their regular holiday camp around Christmas time. Such camping sites were usually chosen as 'good food places' where people could get away from town.<sup>240</sup>

Throughout his childhood in the 1960s and early 1970s, Michael Randall and his family regularly camped for a couple of weeks during the Christmas holidays at Plumbago:

We camped pretty much where the little camping area is now, on the edge of the lagoon. It used to be real bushy and shrubby. So you'd make your own shelters. Mainly just black fellas there. The Herons... Kapeens – they wouldn't be there as long as we used to. But it was pretty much a big get together. The Mercys. When some families went home, you'd have different family members want to stay, so they'd come into our camp. We'd swim around in the lagoon, all the kids, and on the camping side of the lagoon we'd be diving round in the deep, quite near the edge, and we'd always find a heap of artefacts. You'd have carved rock with turtles on 'em – made us curious, you know. Mum and Dad'd say: 'You're not bringing them home, you're leaving them there', and so we did. Since then, whenever I go out there with my kids and have a bit of a look around in case I do see 'em, but no, the sand's shifted that much now.<sup>241</sup>

In the early 1960s, Dave McFarlane, who has been a field officer with Yuraygir National Park since 1981, used to ride his horses out from Grafton during the weekend to camp on the beach north of Minnie Water and introduce the horses to the ocean. It was a beautiful place to ride across the plains and dunes and camp: 'You were always on your own – no-one out there.'<sup>242</sup>

Clarrie and Shirley Winkler took daytrips out to the Pebbly Beach area in the 1960s when they lived at the Barcoongere Pine Plantation, and through the 1970s after they had returned to Woolgoolga. On a special occasion, they would take a bottle of champagne for breakfast on the beach, and they usually went in via the back road from the north-western side of the plantation. Their sense of the area was that it was all theirs – no one else around. But they might see the odd group and there were sometimes camps at Station Creek. But that was the joy of it, of course – having the place to yourself.<sup>243</sup>

There were a few shacks around Station Creek where early European families holidayed, fished and grazed cattle. Northern Gumbaingirr people camped at Freshwater just to the north of Pebbly Beach before it became a national park. Jerry Flanders lived out there for 12 months: 'Wallabies everywhere, and the Freshwater... everyone would camp around there.'<sup>244</sup>

Ian Brown (Brownie), a northern Gumbaingirr man, has been heading out to Station Creek and to Freshwater with family and friends since he was young. He remembers that if you walked to the beach from Station Creek, it felt like you were walking for miles because of the very high sand dunes which you had to climb up and down. 'It was like a desert out there'.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, the track from Pebbly Beach to Freshwater was corduroyed through the swampy areas. (A corduroyed road is constructed with planks of wood to form ridges above the swampy or sandy area over which a vehicle can travel.) People used to head out on the bonnet of a car, towed along the track by

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238 Allen Johnson interview with Rosemary Waugh-Allcock, 6 May 2006

239 *ibid*, Stewart pers. com. 7 May 2006

240 Godwin L and Creamer H 1984, Thelma Kapeen interview, 14 May 2007

241 Michael Randall interview, 24 April 2007

242 Dave McFarlane pers. com. 15 May 2006

243 Clarrie and Shirley Winkler interview, 1 May 2006

244 Uncle Jerry Flanders (17 May 2001) in Brown I and Murphy D 2001, p. 20

either a Land Rover or tractor. Only a few people could fit inside a Land Rover, but by squeezing people onto the upturned bonnet there was no need to make two trips. However, they never camped overnight at either Pebbly Beach or Station Creek because the Elders warned that these were sad and potentially dangerous places. They only fished in those areas during the day.<sup>245</sup>

Gumbaingirr and Yaegl people based at regional centres such as Coffs Harbour, Corindi/Yarrowarra, Grafton, Maclean and Yamba have continued their association with the whole Yuraygir area even though it has changed. However, unlike non-Aboriginal people who have no cultural restrictions on where they camp in the bush, respect of traditional practices which stipulate avoidance of certain sacred and significant historical places mean that Aboriginal people are often not free to camp anywhere. As noted above, some camping places were, and still are, chosen as 'good food places' which can be visited by all, while other places either need to be avoided or only visited with someone who knows the place.

Station Creek is one example, being a place of sadness and bitter contact due to its history of killings. Garby Elder Tony Perkins says:

Oh, how can I explain Station Creek? I think... there's too much wrong's been done at Station Creek... I suppose all we can remember it now like, is a, is a graveyard, you know, for what happened... I even sorta disagree a bit with even the campers being there. Because of a night, this is goin' back... in even the 50s and 60s, truly, you could, of a night time, you could hear the kids crying, you could still hear them crying.<sup>246</sup>

Another Garby Elder, Paul Taylor, said that they used to go out to Station Creek and do a lot of fishing. Sometimes they camped up there, although: 'Ah, we'd only camp till midnight and then we'd go home... We didn't sleep there all night'. He said that they did not know why they should not, but because they had been told not to by the Elders, they did not. 'Nobody ever told us much about anything like that, they just said to us "you don't go there"'.<sup>247</sup>

In the northern section of the national park, Elder Ron Heron spent many holidays with family at Yamba. He relates a similar story:

When we were young, whenever we wanted to go out, we weren't allowed to go out towards Angourie unless we had an older person with us, say an uncle or aunt, usually on my mother's side. These were people who belonged to the area. You just couldn't take some adult that didn't come from the area.<sup>248</sup>

In his teens, Ron and his friends camped and fished along the beaches south of Angourie in what is now the national park. But they did not camp on the headland where there were nice sheltered spots, as the old people just said: 'You won't get no peace'. Later, he discovered these headlands were all sites of 'old tribal camps'. He also says that since sand mining destroyed the area in the 1970s, his people have stopped camping there.<sup>249</sup>

### 3.4.5 Holiday activities

'Everyone fished'. While this commonly heard statement was not actually true, the most often repeated stories related in interviews for this publication were about fishing, and fishing was the subject of many holiday 'snaps' in the local history books of the area. Joyce Plater, who first began her regular holidays in Brooms Head in 1947, said that if you wanted to fish you went to 'the Sandon', and if you wanted family swimming holidays you came to 'the Broom'.<sup>250</sup>

245 Ian Brown phone interview, 22 May 2006

246 Uncle Tony Perkins (25 May 2002) in Brown I and Murphy D 2001, p. 80

247 Uncle Paul Taylor (11 May 2001) in ibid

248 Heron R 1993, p. 23, Ron Heron interview, 28 February 2007

249 ibid

250 Joyce Plater interview, 1 May 2006

Bill Biddle's book on the Sandon River is predominantly made up of fishing stories, but there are many fishing stories in *Brooms Head Revisited* too.<sup>251</sup> Fishing on the North Coast has a long and continuing history of passionate dedication which has not always been understood by newcomers. When a local builder turned up late to an appointment and was scolded by the client, his response was: 'Ah, you're new here. You didn't know the fish was runnin'.<sup>252</sup>

A favourite fishing spot in the far northern part of the park was the Shelley Beach area, including Little Shelley, Shelley Point and the headland. Shirley Causley remembered the Mendie brothers from Brooms Head who fixed an iron bar into the rocks at Shelley Point, which they hung onto in the big surf while fishing. She first started going out there in the 1950s. Her husband always bought fresh bait from local Aboriginal families, such as the Lauries and Mercys, who had worked for them pea picking or harvesting cane. The men would bring the bait to the house or meet her husband and brothers on the beach and 'would sometimes go fishing with them'.<sup>253</sup> Eileen McLeay (nee Mercy) remembers the Causley men as her uncles, as her father considered them close enough to be 'brothers'.<sup>254</sup>

Down at Red Rock, Garby Elder Marie Edwards of Yarrowarra remembered the influx of visitors over summer who were keen to fish:

We went down to Red Rock for holidays at Christmas time when the people came. Like, my father'd say: 'We'll go down 'cause we'll make a bit of money with the worms'. We used to walk right up to Station Creek! Big bloody tins like that, and the milk tin we used to only get a shilling off, that was a lot of money in them days, though... Five o'clock in the morning, we'd be up the beach. All the people that would come down camping, soon as they seen you come off the beach, they'd race over there waitin' for you. They used to have fresh worms all the time.<sup>255</sup>

In all the villages, the fishing tallies were enormous. In 1937, one Red Rock camper recorded the catch of a party of 13. In the space of two-and-a-half weeks, they caught 35 jewfish (mulloway), 129 tailer fish and 73 sea bream, being a total of 236 fish weighing over 19 hundredweight.<sup>256</sup> Jewfish were the most prized catch, one family history describing the return to the hinterland farms with jewfish tied to their horses' saddles, their tails reaching to the ground.<sup>257</sup> In 1956, on Tom Robertson's return to Sandon village, they were 'fishing for jew, big jew and nothing but jew'. That night, he caught two in consecutive throws; one 60 lb in weight and the other 50 lb.<sup>258</sup> In the southern part of the park, the place to fish for jewfish was Freshwater. Ann Blackadder's husband, Stewart, and his friends often went out there from Corindi to fish twice a week, and always on a Friday night.<sup>259</sup>

In the 1930s and 1940s, Roy Bowling used to travel down from Tucabia with friends to fish at Minnie Water, Diggers Camp and Wooli. Their best catches were from the rock holes during the winter on dark nights at low tide:

And you'd get up to 100, 120 fish in a night just with scoops and spears and a torch each and a spotlight to put in to the holes. Small landing nets; you knew where the outlets were that run back into the sea, and someone would get in there and put a landing net in at the top to stop them from getting out... you'd get bream, black fish, black drummer, silver drummer.<sup>260</sup>

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251 Biddle B 2001, Plater J and Committee 1990

252 Pers. com. 16 May 2006

253 Shirley Causley interview, 6 May 2006

254 Eileen McLeay interview, 17 May 2006

255 Marie Edwards in Yarrowarra Place Stories 2000, p. 25

256 T. Richards in *ibid.*, p. 23

257 Plater History 1996

258 Tom Robertson 'Good night's fishing' in Biddle B 2001, p. 122

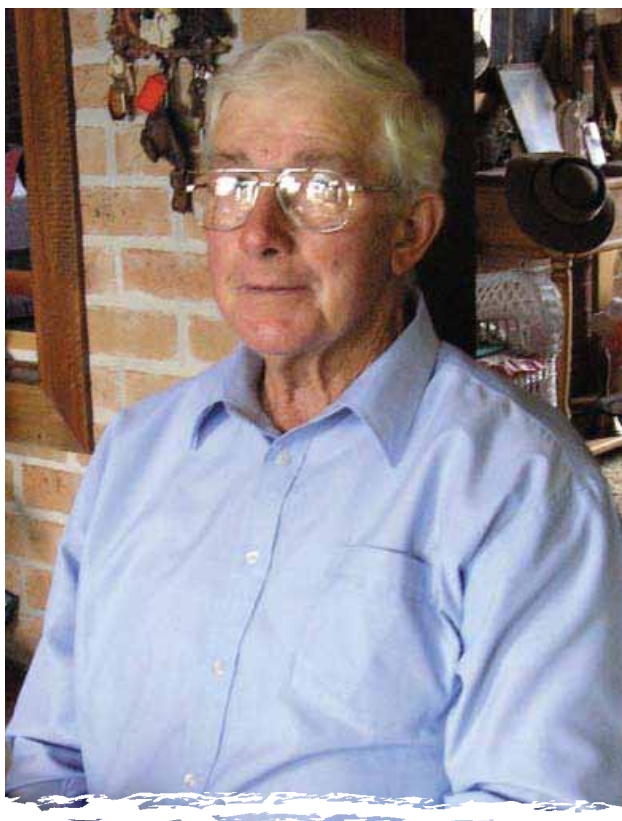
259 Ann Blackadder pers. com.

260 Roy Bowling interview, 7 March 2006



Even through to the 1970s, as fish numbers were dwindling (which locals had been aware of for a decade), southern newcomers remember the seas teeming with fish. The huge mullet hauls through April and May were a communal activity at Brooms Head, with people visiting specifically to be part of the activity of dragging in the nets and collecting the fish off the beach. Allan Smith remembers the tradition starting in 1942 and continuing until the 1980s. By the 1980s, the catch had dropped from around 600 to 100 boxes.<sup>261</sup>

Often, if one looks closely at the tales of fishing, it would seem that 'everyone' only included men. However, some women were just as passionate about fishing as the men, but were often also busy with other things. At Diggers Camp, Marie Preston was as keen as any of the men to fish. Among all the congratulatory stories of men's fishing exploits in Bill Biddle's Sandon book, a note is made of Tom Robertson's wife, Betty, who brought home a jewfish one morning when the men were looking after the children.<sup>262</sup> In Brooms Head, Stewart said 'everyone went fishing'. There used to be a 'seat' out in the 'lagoon' (Lake Cakora) and someone would be on watch for the schools of fish. When one was sighted, everyone on the beach or in the caravan park – men, women and children – were called on to help with the nets. That night, there would be a huge hungi in the caravan park; a hole was dug into the sand with hot stones in the bottom of it on which the feast was cooked. Everyone would come because 'everyone knew everyone'.<sup>263</sup>



Local historian Roy Bowling, 2006. Photo: J. Kijas.

Lake Arragan, like Lake Cakora, would only break its banks into the sea at certain times after heavy rain. When that happened, people would put nets across the lake mouth, and Joyce Plater remembered that it was always fun catching fish at those times. But if you wanted to get to Lake Arragan, you would have to hurry and you would not always get there in time – it took about an hour to walk there from Brooms Head. People would run up on hearing that the lake had 'broken'. People would hear the news through word of mouth or would go and have a look after heavy rain.<sup>264</sup>

However, everyone did not fish. While Margaret Switzer's father fished along the beach or on One Man Rock south of Angourie, her mother sketched.<sup>265</sup> Joyce said that no Plater women fished when she was on holiday at Brooms Head, although she knows many women today who are keen fishers. While her two sons and the men went off on fishing expeditions, she usually sat under a tree and read.

Shirley Causley also did not fish, although she went with her husband Gerard on most of his trips. The family would pack up and go out for the day to Shelley Beach. She baited the hooks, read her book for hours in the shade, collected cowrie shells, swam in the pools and explored the caves and rock pools with the children. She described Shelley Beach as a special place, because of all the different colours in the cliffs and the caves. The diversity of rock pools, caves and cliffs, and the beach itself, were what attracted her.<sup>266</sup>

261 Allan Smith 'Mullet time at the Broom' in Plater J and Committee 1990

262 Biddle B 2001

263 Stewart pers. com. 7 May 2006

264 Joyce Plater pers. com. 3 June 2006

265 Switzer M undated

266 Shirley Causley interview, 6 May 2006

Shell collecting was a rewarding pastime along all the Yuraygir beaches. The Grafton-based author Gillian Mears spent many of her childhood holidays camping on the beach at Diggers Camp, her relationship with the beaches of the Yuraygir coastline stretching into adulthood. In 1997, as moves were afoot to stop people taking live or dead shells from the Diggers Camp beach and rock-shelves, she reflected back on her old cowrie collection. 'There are hundreds of them, their surfaces flecked with colours found in human eyes... I remember how I used to pack cowries in my sewing case, tucking them into samplers and failed pincushions.'<sup>267</sup> Rae Glassick from Coffs Harbour, who has holidayed at Minnie Water each year since the 1960s, said that you had to get up really early, at dawn, to get the best shells. 'Nowadays, if you can be bothered, you need to take your torch out in the summer if [you] want to find anything decent'. She was always the shell collector in her family, but if her husband headed out in the early morning with her, he always frustrated her by competing to find the biggest and the best shells.<sup>268</sup>

Margaret Switzer spent her childhood holidays through the 1940s at the beaches surrounding Angourie, including areas now in the national park:

Several times we walked to Shelley over the heath to shell hunt. A long way for three little children... We'd walk across the heath on a track that started near the galvanised iron amenities blocks on the flat above the Blue Pools, for all-day excursions to Back Beach [north into the park] or Pippie Beach [south]. We spent hours trying to stop Mara Creek [where the Angourie walking track now starts] overflowing, by building huge sand walls to stop the brown water from flowing. We'd go up to the rainforest area on the edge of Mara Creek to have our picnic lunches and see the birds nest ferns, elkhorns and other interesting flora in the bush.<sup>269</sup>

A few locals have commented on the loss of the rainforest in the area. Margaret Switzer said it disappeared after the boardwalk was built across Mara Creek by the NPWS.

Shelley Beach is a very special place for Yaegl people. It was related in the interviews in section 3.2.8 that if Yaegl people take visitors from another area to the beach, or if children go unaccompanied by knowledgeable elders, it will always rain.

Swimming and walking were major pastimes across age, class and culture. However, not everyone could swim. Gillian Mears prayed for the lagoon at Diggers Camp to be at low tide so she could take her mother, who could not swim, out to 'the endless rocks and shells of the southern end.'<sup>270</sup> Marie Preston's brothers, having spent most of their time in the forests cutting timber, could not swim.

Ned Plater took the grandchildren on long walks from Brooms Head to Red Cliff and up to Shelley Beach, and down to the Sandon River. He taught them about the nature around them.<sup>271</sup> The next generation of Joyce Plater's extended family always walked from Brooms Head to Red Cliff at least once each holiday, and the boys sometimes paddled the whole way on their surfboards. They rarely ventured up onto the headland as the Waughs had a cottage there, and cattle.

Joyce loved the cliffs; they were rather 'mystical' because of their distinctive red colour (ochre) and there was not anything else like them along the entire coastline. They also always walked south to the Sandon River and back, and the boys and their friends rode horses along the beach there and back.<sup>272</sup> Gillian Mears nearly walked to Angourie once from Diggers Camp, when life had taken a difficult turn.

Group social activities were the order of the day. Each village had its hall for dances, and organised events such as picnic days, and horse and later motorbike races took place on the beach at Brooms Head and Minnie Water. Families played cards and board games during rainy periods, and the adults played games well into the

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267 Mears G and Edwards S 1997, p. 27

268 Rae Glassick, pers. com. 3 May 2006

269 Switzer M undated

270 Mears G and Edwards S 1997

271 Plater history 1996

272 Joyce Plater interview, 1 May 2006, Stewart pers. com. 7 May 06



The view from above Red Cliff, also known to locals as Red Rock, March 2006. Photo: J. Kijas

night under the lanterns in the communal tent. Children ‘ran themselves ragged’ every day and fell into bed exhausted each night.<sup>273</sup> Marie Preston said of their days at Diggers Camp through to the 1960s:

Well, there was dances at Wooli; we used to ride horses down to the dances. We had a sportsground thing that we’d made near our house and they’d be all the young people; there’d be high jumping and pole vaulting and all this sort of thing... They were quite annoyed there, because one lot come up and set up on one part of it, and had a church service in it, and they couldn’t go pole vaulting while that was on!<sup>274</sup>

The Red Rock Band, made up of members from the Corindi-based Aboriginal community, entertained the Christmas campers at Red Rock with the harmonica, dulcimer, tea box bass, guitar, kero pump whistle and gum leaves, occasionally playing in the hall for dances and regularly playing for one group’s Christmas–New Year parties. Marie Edwards also remembered:

Pa Lardner and my brother and Jimmy Runner and Uncle ‘Erbie use to play the leaf and sing. And they’d go tent to tent, them days. My father used to play the leaf. They’d go tent to tent and they’d be waitin’ a piece of cake and wine. By the time he got to the last one, they’d be pretty ripe! They’d be cooeeing and singin’, everybody, even the men an’ all in the tents. Oh, the good old days!<sup>275</sup>

Lester Mercy remembered the annual Boxing Day picnic at Brooms Head throughout the 1960s. Reverend Gaden would organise a bus and bring the Aboriginal communities from Maclean and Yamba together. Lester noted that this tradition had recently been reintroduced. ‘We missed our game of cricket on the beach; swimming you know; the men used to go fishing; ladies just sit around and talk. As kids we used to play all day.’<sup>276</sup>

273 See Trevor Plater’s exuberant descriptions of childhood in Plater J and Committee 1990

274 Marie Preston interview, 10 April 2006

275 Marie Edwards 1 September 1997 in Yarrowarra Place Stories 2000, p. 24

276 Lester Mercy interview, 24 March 2007

The Scottish heritage of many early holidaymakers at Brooms Head is still a vivid memory for Rosemary Waugh-Allcock because of the bagpipes. Her aunt Christian Honeyman wrote:

And then (oh, pure romance) on New Year's Day the Highland Bagpipe Band from Maclean would come to Broomeshead and march up and down in their kilts. If you've never heard the sound of bagpipes in your childhood played by the seashore, you've never been stirred to the depths by music and the man that twirls the mace.<sup>277</sup>

Nearly 100 years on from the first Brooms Head holidaymakers, Sydney-based Stewart, now an Angourie resident, visited for six weeks each holiday in the 1970s. He stayed with local boys he knew from boarding school, who came from cane farming families who spent each summer at Brooms Head. As they became teenagers, they moved onto the headland while parents and smaller children stayed in the caravan park. Not unlike the Waugh's camp nearly a century before, their set-up of perhaps 15 people would consist of a large open community tent with annexes, a gas fridge, maybe six sets of bunks, a kitchen area, lots of old chairs and an open fireplace at the front. There would be a few similar camps spread out over the headland.

Stewart does not remember much of what the hinterland landscape looked like because they spent most of their time on the coast. They did go to Clarence Peak, driving to its cleared top through all the gates (he remembers closing them). They would sit up there with all the car doors open and the music on. He thinks the heath looks pretty much the same; still treeless. They always wondered why there were no trees and thought it was probably due to the landscape being so windswept. It was often very smoky when they drove out to Brooms Head and they could not see the hills for the graziers' fires. For Stewart, the most noticeable change in the landscape is that sand mining is no longer occurring on Back Beach. He also said there were a lot more emus in the 1970s.<sup>278</sup>

For them, surfing was the central focus of each day. At least twice each holiday, they would walk to Red Cliff with their surfboards and sleeping bags and sleep out there. The next day, they would walk through to Angourie where someone's parents would pick them up. They walked along the beach, along the top of the cliffs or along the track. If there were some good waves along the way, they would stop and surf.<sup>279</sup>

The international surfers began arriving in the 1960s. Angourie became internationally famous when American world champion, Joey Cabell, endorsed the superior surf at Angourie Point in 1964.<sup>280</sup> But southern and local surfers were already exploring the breaks along the Yuraygir coastline. John Farrell, now a stockbroker in Sydney, remembers driving into all the little villages on the Yuraygir coastline in search of waves. They travelled in packs, sleeping in the shelter sheds or under their Holdens. They parked their cars all over the top of the headlands that Nigel Ashton of the State Planning Authority was keen to close off to stop the erosion caused by intense vehicle traffic.<sup>281</sup>

The Causleys had bought a block of land on the hill near the top of the headland at Angourie where they planned to retire, but by the early 1970s Shirley said she would not live there. She felt that things had changed so quickly since they bought it, with 'the surfies' moving in. Nothing got stolen or vandalised, but the area was now full of strange, long-haired, scruffy young people sleeping in their cars, and they scared her. Her family stopped going to the top beach and she remembers that the surfies seemed to control the headland.<sup>282</sup>

Barry Wilks grew up in Grafton and used to surf off Look-At-Me-Now Headland near Coffs Harbour in the early 1970s, when it felt like there were more surfers than residents. When it got too crowded, they would head for Wooli where there would be room for them. In 1999, when interviewed, Barry said there were many more surfers around in those days whereas he would not surf at Wooli now because 'it's too lonely and sharkey'.<sup>283</sup>

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277 Honeyman C 1996, p. 70

278 Stewart pers. com. 7 May 2006

279 Stewart pers.com. 7 May 2006

280 *The Surfing World*, July 1964, 'Internationals at Angourie', in Switzer M undated

281 John Farrell, pers. com. 2 May 2006, Ashton N 1977

282 Shirley Causley interview, 6 May 2006

283 Barry Wilks in Kijas J 2001

### 3.4.6 Hinterland recreation

Early surveys of visitors' interests in Yuraygir National Park showed that most people focused on the coast.<sup>284</sup> However, particularly when workers still moved through the hinterland, a number of leisure activities took place away from the beach. For example plantation workers had favourite fishing holes in the river at Station and Saltwater creeks. Nearby Fallons Hut, according to Clarrie Winkler, was a good spot to stay overnight for those who had drunk too much to get home in one piece.<sup>285</sup>

Despite the Bird and Animal Sanctuary which had been gazetted over the whole area in 1940, prohibiting the shooting of native birds and animals, hunting parties enjoyed weekends in the bush shooting parrots, ducks and kangaroos. Many people remembered eating a good parrot pie.

Weekend hunting parties from Grafton, Coffs Harbour and the New England Tablelands also roamed the hinterland. Clarrie remembered a group of pig hunters he came across one day. He was returning from Woolli River when he heard an old vehicle approaching. Clarrie had been told by the Forestry Commission to give pig hunters 'the heave-ho' due to a scare over foot and mouth disease. When the vehicle appeared, it was an old jeep with no top. A big black boar lay over the bonnet and there were four guys in combat gear. Clarrie decided to just wave them on.<sup>286</sup>

Farmers tell stories of aggressive encounters with pig hunters. Different people believe they can name the individuals who first brought wild pigs to the area to hunt them. These animals are now a major pest in the southern and central parts of the park.

Don Wall grew up at Halfway Creek and worked all through the region's state forests before joining the NPWS as a field officer. He remembers the horse races held in different places around the area, including near Green Hills. A favourite meeting place was Newfoundland Forest at Melbourne Plains: 'They were wild old days!'<sup>287</sup>

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Sydney members of the National Parks Association thoroughly explored the hinterland and wrote detailed reports about the flora and geography, which they used in their arguments for protection of the area.<sup>288</sup> Many Grafton and Maclean residents tell stories of bushwalking, bird watching and regular floral expeditions into the hinterland.<sup>289</sup> These accounts, local histories and people's memories often note the profusion of wildflowers of the heath, with mention most often made of the Christmas bells and boronia. The diversity and glory of the heath is captured in Alan Fairley's description:

There is an unbelievable number of different plants within a few square metres. Yellow Donkey Orchids (*Diuris* spp.), white-flowered Wedding Bush (*Ricinocarpos pinifolius*) and White Beard (*Leucopogon virgatus*), pink Black-eyed Susan (*Tetratheca thymifolia*), green-flowered Banksia *aspleniifolia*, purple Patersonia and the yellow pea flowers of Glory Pea (*Gompholobium* sp.), *Aotus lanigera* and *Jacksonia stackhousii*, all combine to make the heath a profusion of colour, shapes and smells.<sup>290</sup>

This was the landscape that had particularly interested the Sim Committee in 1966 and had the endorsement of the NPWS Scientific Committee.<sup>291</sup>

284 Hattie J and Fitzgerald I 1985

285 Clarrie Winkler interview, 1 May 2006

286 *ibid*

287 Don Wall field trip, 24 May 2006

288 National Parks Association of NSW 1972 and 1973

289 For example Roy Bowling 7 March 2006, discussions with members of the Maclean Historical Society, Peter Morgan interview, 17 February 2006

290 Fairley A 1978, pp. 56–57

291 Recher H 1970, pp. 22–31

This landscape captivates some people and bewilders others who see nothing of interest in it. Shirley Winkler described the heath and swamp on the way into Station Creek before the area was ploughed for pasture in 1970. 'It was just a picture... it'd be boronia and little orchids and that – they'd just come up and it was an absolute picture down there.'

Clarrie said: 'Shirley and I would go on a picnic somewhere, and we could sit down beside the car, and there's all this grass and stuff around there, and I just see it as rubbish and she'll find orchid flowers!'<sup>292</sup>

# Section 4: Yuraygir National Park from the 1970s



Pandanus in northern Yuraygir National Park. Photo: J. Kijas

## 4.1 Section overview

Yuraygir National Park holds within it a myriad of diverse and competing memories and philosophical and political opinions, which as a consequence have led to many management challenges. The same landscape is viewed in many different ways which has produced and will produce different physical outcomes for the place. The last section of this report explores attachments to the Yuraygir landscape and ways in which these have affected its gazettal as a national park.

Section 4.2 provides a brief overview of the complex history of land acquisitions in creating Yuraygir National Park. Section 4.3 describes shifts in the consultative processes with Aboriginal communities that have occurred. Section 4.4 is a case study of attachments to Pebbly Beach, and examines the coastal recreational focus of the national park. Section 4.5 gives a brief overview of 'hot' management issues which the NPWS faced in the first decade of the national park's history.

## 4.2 The creation of the park

### 4.2.1 Introduction

Yuraygir National Park was one of six national parks gazetted on the north coast of NSW after the Sim Committee Report reported on the conflicts between sand mining and conservation. During the 1970s, Myall Lakes, Crowdy Head, Hat Head, Red Rock, Angourie and Broadwater national parks were gazetted. Red Rock and Angourie were amalgamated into Yuraygir National Park in 1980, in the same year that Bundjalung National Park was gazetted just to the north.

Red Rock National Park was finally gazetted in September 1975 after much controversy over the first land acquisition, discussed below. In the same month, Angourie National Park was declared in the north, with gazettal of land finalised in 1976. Angourie was purchased in part by funds raised by the NPA's National Parks and Wildlife Foundation through their annual door-knock appeal.

Now stretching along more than 60 kilometres of coast and hinterland, Yuraygir National Park is by far the largest NSW coastal national park. While some land has been added to each of the above coastal parks, Yuraygir's history of land acquisitions has been a continuing process since its inception over 28 years ago.

This section outlines acquisition and zoning issues in the 1970s leading up to the establishment of Yuraygir National Park, and the pattern of acquisition since its gazettal. Yuraygir National Park has more acquisition files than most other national parks, and its intricate and complex history is only touched on here.

#### **4.2.2 Acquisition and zoning before the commencement of Yuraygir National Park**

Most of the land which has been acquired for Yuraygir National Park was held under Crown lease. However, negotiations over the sale of a Crown lease are potentially as fraught as those over freehold land. By 1969, locals with any connections to the Ulmarra and Maclean Shire councils knew that the NPWS was planning to purchase leases and freehold to establish three national parks in the area: Angourie in the north, Minnie Water in the centre and Red Rock in the south.

In 1968, Bill Niland's father Andrew Niland requested information from the NPWS about his portion 14 (Parish of Scope) near Minnie Water, and was sent a letter dated 16 January 1969 stating that the NPWS was planning the parks, with an accompanying set of parish plans outlining the Sim Committee's proposed boundaries.<sup>293</sup>

The first acquisition for what would eventually become Yuraygir National Park was beset by conflict. In December 1969 and February 1970, a Sydney-owned syndicate called the Lawrence Downs Pastoral Company purchased two Crown leases in perpetuity of 4792 acres on portions 17, 21 and 19 in the Parish of Red Rock. Their stated reasons in August 1969 for buying the leases were for 'sowing down pastures and undertaking a beef enterprise' to build on their enterprise already established on the Clarence River at Lawrence.<sup>294</sup> The leases covered the area recommended for a national park by the Sim Committee in 1968, which the new NPWS proposed to purchase for Red Rock National Park.

Within a few months of finalising their leases, the company began legally ploughing portions 17 and 21. Some of this land was in the scientific area which had been protected from sand mining by the Sim Committee due to its ecological significance (but not from agricultural or other disturbance). The company planted setaria and other exotic grasses across 670 acres in the vicinity of Station Creek, and partly planted another 300 acres with paspalum towards Red Rock River.

The tenants were Sydney solicitors and accountants David Evatt Landa, Charles Josef Berg and Robert Strauss. An internal NPWS memorandum in December 1970 outlined the situation:

Since the proposal to create the Park was formulated, the two Crown leases covering the major part of the proposed Park have been transferred and the new lessees have carried out extensive clearing and pasture improvement... Council has approved erection of two large houses on the area... It is interesting to note... that in April of this year, Messrs David Landa, Stewart and Co, Solicitors, wrote to the Service inquiring as to any proposals which the Service might have in respect of the two Crown leases within the proposed Park. These leases had recently been purchased by Mr Landa and others from the former lessees. Messrs David Landa, Stewart and Co were advised that the Service proposed to acquire the affected lands for the Red Rock State Park and would be approaching land owners for the purpose of negotiating purchase when negotiations with other land use authorities were finalised. This information was sent to them on 1st May 1970. The Service has been advised, through the District Surveyor at Grafton, that the present lessees are clearing the leases using several large

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293 Letter courtesy of Bill Niland

294 NPWS undated



bulldozers and it has been ascertained that such action is perfectly legal under the conditions of the lease and that no permits were necessary from either the District Surveyor or the District Forester.<sup>295</sup>

Intense negotiations proceeded between the parties from early 1971. David Landa negotiated with the NPWS over the acquisition of the company's lease. In later years, Paul Landa took over as Minister for Planning and Environment in the Wran government. Not surprisingly, some local people have confused the two Landas and many incorrectly believe that the Minister was an owner in the Lawrence Downs Pastoral Company and hence responsible for ploughing the land.

Negotiations included the company's suggestion that they hand over portion 19 to the NPWS, which remained in its natural state, in return for maintaining their ownership of portions 17 and 21 which had been ploughed and planted. Negotiations were made more complex by Clarrie Moller's pre-existing banana sublease (1962) and the Cheal family's new sublease on the banks of Red Rock River. In 1970, the Cheal family built a cottage, a machinery shed and a piggery near Green Hills, with water and power connected.

Valuations of the land exploded in the three-and-a-half years in which Lawrence Downs held the leases. The land was finally sold to the NPWS in June 1973 at a negotiated market price.

Much of the land in the southern and central sections of the national park was taken up with small family-held leases which had commenced in the early twentieth century. Some of these had been transferred over the years while many remained in the same ownership. See sections 3.3.2 and 3.3.3 for many of the family names associated with timber and grazing.

In the central section of the park, the exception to the smallholders included all the coastal leasehold land from south of the Sandon River to south of Minnie Water which was owned by Napier Waugh (although 'dummied' in the name of RH Green) until the late 1950s, when it was briefly held by timber local Brian Murphy who sold to Sandy Colquhoun. The other family who owned many pockets through the central section was Len Bailey's family. Most of this land came over to his daughter, Mrs Jeffries.

In the far north, in what became Angourie National Park, most of the land had previously been 'dummied' by the Waugh family in the names of Casson and others. Percy Dwyer had taken over most of that area when Taloumbi Station had to be sold in the mid 1940s (see section 3.3.3). He then sold the land to the NPWS. To the south, around Brooms Head, coastal leases which had once come under Taloumbi Station were eventually owned by Max Carson (see below).

Most leases were held under the relatively secure tenure of occupation in perpetuity, and some land was converted to freehold as late as the early 1970s. Between the late 1960s and early 1970s, some leases between Red Rock and Brooms Head changed hands from established local families to buyers from outside the region, in particular from Sydney. In the south they included the leases of the Richards and Franklins which were transferred to the Lawrence Downs Pastoral Company and the lease of the Falconers which was transferred to Tweed Valley Pastoral Company, and in the central section they included the leases of the Johnsons and Bailey/Jeffries which were transferred respectively to Margolin and Little Bloomfield. In the north, MJ Fanning bought Percy Judd's land and planted sugar cane.

Sandy Colquhoun bought the large lease from Sandon to Minnie Water (previously owned by Napier Waugh) in 1967, ploughing an area around Minnie Water in the early 1970s and planting it with seteria. As in the south, this was in another of the Sim Committee's scientific areas.<sup>296</sup>

Other local families held onto their leasehold and freehold titles, continuing their traditional agricultural pursuits. Much anxiety over security of tenure was generated in the region by the national park proposals.

In 1973, Nigel Ashton's long-term coastal planning efforts within the State Planning Authority (discussed in section 2.3.3) were backed up by the introduction of the Coastal Lands Protection Scheme. Much of the coastal land of Yuraygir came under the scheme. It provided for the right of the government to acquire land where

<sup>295</sup> NPWS 59E/1 'Proposed Red Rock State Park – Parish RR County Clarence', 31 Dec 1970 in National Parks and Wildlife Service undated a

<sup>296</sup> National Parks and Wildlife Service undated a

a change in use would threaten the scientific quality of the land or would result in a loss of public access or recreational opportunities.<sup>297</sup>

In December 1979, a second zoning mechanism was introduced throughout the local shires of the six North Coast national parks. This mechanism was 8b zoning 'Open Space – Protected Zone (proposed future National Park Extension Area)' which was gazetted as amendments to local shire council interim development orders. The zoning meant that leasehold and freehold owners could retain their land for as long as they wished or ask the government to purchase their land. In the meantime, they could continue the agricultural pursuits already established on their land with all their existing rights preserved, but would not have the right to future development beyond their current activities. While farm sheds could be erected, houses could not.

For Bill Niland, whose family had owned the Crown lease to portion 14 in the Parish of Scope since 1928, this was a welcome form of protection from the 'dispossession' that had previously been the fear of local landholders. Typical of the pastoral use of the land discussed in section 3.3.3, the Nilands used portion 14 for winter feeding of their cattle and flood refuge. For Bill, 8b zoning meant that he regained a measure of confidence and control over his land. He eventually sold the land to the NPWS in 2001. By this time, it was a relief to sell the land as people on motorbikes and in beach buggies who had no respect for gates, property or cattle, were trespassing on it.<sup>298</sup>

For others, 8b zoning was an affront to their rights as landowners, restricting their capacity to develop their land for uses other than agricultural pursuits. For example, in the northern section around Brooms Head, Max Carson planned to build a house, extend his cane cropping activities and build a caravan park. In the central section of the national park, a series of resort and other development proposals were planned by Little Bloomfield and other companies.

The complex negotiations in the government over the best way to handle the North Coast national park acquisitions is discussed in chapter 18 of Ian Charles' unpublished report.<sup>299</sup>

### 4.2.3 Plugging the gaps

As maps 1–3 in section one, and map 9 in this section show, in the years between the gazettal of Yuraygir National Park in 1980, and 2005, the three distinct islands of national park along the coast have been joined up and extended into and across the Coast Range. Although missing a few smaller acquisitions, the gazettal map (see map 9 on the next page) provides a clear picture of the major acquisitions and reflects certain patterns of land use on the North Coast over this time.

The 1975 and 1976 acquisitions created Red Rock and Angourie national parks and reflected the focus of the Sim Committee recommendations regarding sand mining. By the late 1970s, acquisitions under 8b zoning meant land was reserved that met a more diverse range of conservation and recreational needs.

The Coastal Lands Protection Scheme was invoked to help the NPWS buy back ten portions of land totalling over 7000 acres, west and north of Minnie Water, which had been bought by a development company called Little Bloomfield Pty Ltd and its associate Fortuna Holdings Pty Ltd. In the objections the companies lodged to acquisition, they stated that the purpose of buying the land was to develop a '... totally planned and fully serviced community which would include a hotel and commercial development and residential development...'<sup>300</sup> A large part of the 1980 gazettal for Yuraygir comprised this land along with Sandy Colquhoun's stretch south of Sandon.

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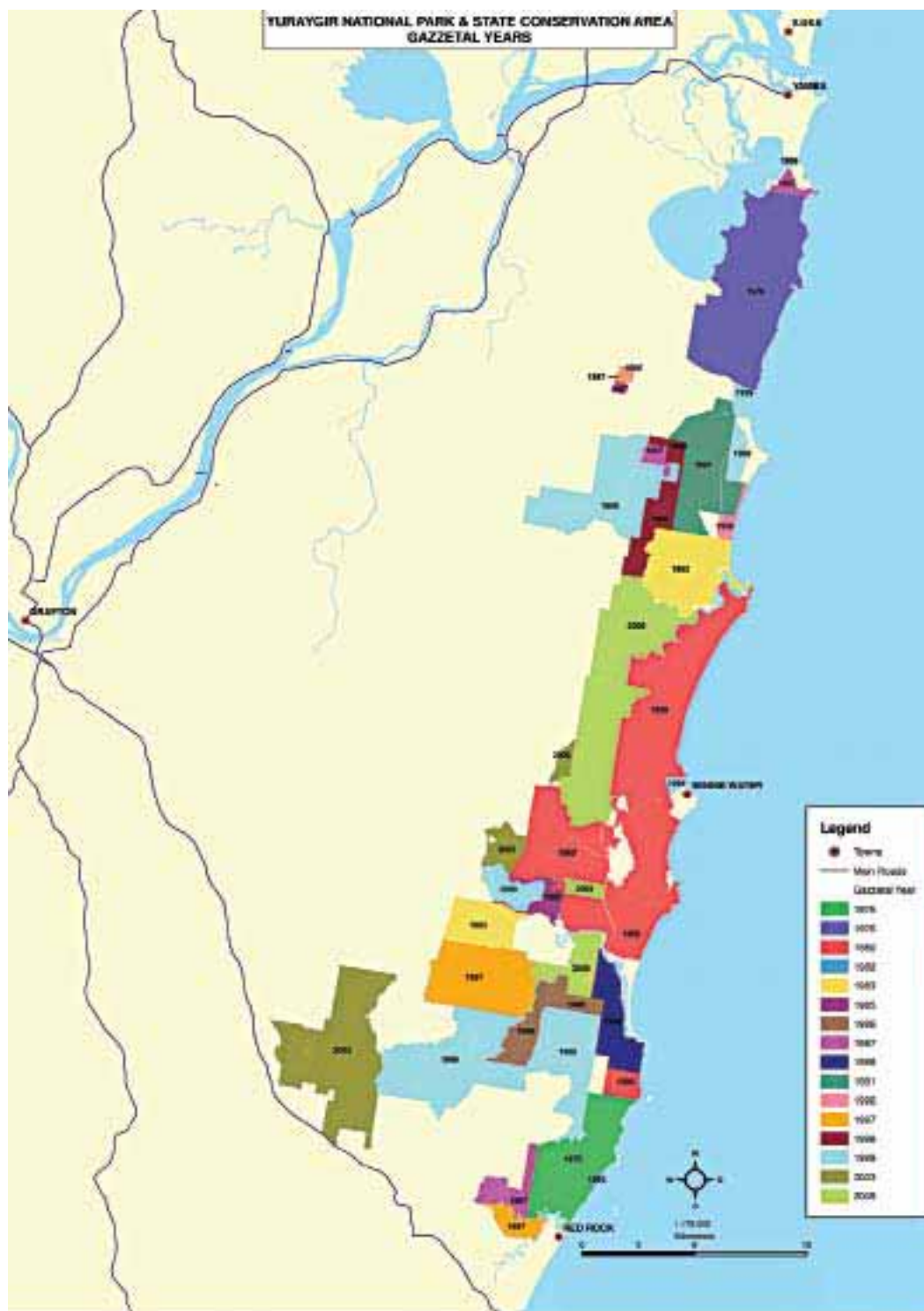
297 NSW Government 1990

298 Bill Niland interview, 25 May 2006

299 Charles I 1998b

300 State Planning Authority of NSW internal memorandum to the NPWS 'Coastal Lands Protection Scheme: Shire of Ulmarra' in National Parks and Wildlife Service undated b

Map 9: Gazettal map of Yuraygir National Park ]



Map showing gazettal years of Yuraygir National Park. Courtesy DECC North Coast Region

The most drawn out and controversial acquisition of land occurred in the northern section of the park over a large area owned by Max Carson (shown in dark green under 1991 on map 9). He bought the land in the late 1950s from Rosemary Waugh-Allcock's cousin Reeve Waugh and grazed cattle, ran a quarry and planted cane next to Rosemary Waugh-Allcock's property in the 1970s (see section 3.3.4). The land was seen as a significant purchase by the NPWS because it would join the previous Angourie National Park section in the north to the rest of the Yuraygir National Park, thereby helping to fill the gaps.

Due to 8b zoning, Carson could not develop the land for subdivision, tourism and farming as he planned. He therefore asked the NPWS to purchase his land, as provided for in the zoning scheme. He and the government (the NPWS and the Department of Environment and Planning) fought a long and bitter battle throughout the 1980s over the differences in valuations of his land. The land was resumed in 1987, without settlement on the compensation costs. After final arbitration in the Land and Environment Court, a large compensation package was eventually paid. In the interim, a large area of land was ploughed for cane on the western side of the Brooms Head–Sandon road.<sup>301</sup>

In the same area (Parish of Canoulam), Rosemary Waugh-Allcock and her son Alec Waugh were bogged down in negotiations during the early 1990s over the 453 acres of oceanfront land that cousin Reeve Waugh had returned to the family in the 1950s (see section 3.3.3), which had been converted to freehold. Rosemary and Alec did not want to sell because it had been in the family since WNR (Reeve) Waugh had bought Taloumbi Station in 1888. The land to the east of the Brooms Head–Sandon road was eventually resumed under the Coastal Lands Protection Scheme and gazetted in 1996 (shown in pink on map 9).

In 1994, the Prestons reluctantly decided to sell their freehold title to portions 14 and 15 in the Parish of Canoulam to the NPWS. They had used the land to winter their cattle and had been waiting until they had finished logging in the Candole State Forest to start taking timber off portions 14 and 15 which had never been logged. Their argument with the NPWS over valuation of the property lay mainly with the low value given to the timber on their land. The valuation was eventually increased and they sold to the NPWS in 1997.<sup>302</sup> Gazettal was in 1998. Their land, located on the western side of Max Carson's land, is shown in dark brown on map 9.

Map 9 shows other acquisitions gazetted in 1999 in the north-west and south-west of Yuraygir National Park. These parcels of land came into the national park as a result of the Comprehensive Regional Assessments (CRAs) conducted across the eastern NSW forests between 1995 and 2000. The process brought a greater balance of diverse fauna and flora habitats into the reserve system.<sup>303</sup> Parts of Candole (north) and Newfoundland (south) state forests are now incorporated into Yuraygir National Park. In 2003, a few other pockets of state forest which were no longer deemed commercially viable were included in the estate.

The other gazettals in the early 2000s have continued the acquisition of leasehold land and Crown leases. Only three areas of private 'inholdings' remain within the national park, which now stretches almost continuously from Angourie to Red Rock; two in the south and one in the north on the road to the Sandon River.

The most evident of these are the holdings on the western side of the Sandon River road. This land was not zoned 8b, and was owned by the Waughs, adjacent to the oceanfront land that was resumed in 1996. Alec Waugh sold two of the blocks and his family retain freehold title to 200 acres. They built an exclusive guesthouse on what they have always called 'Toumbaal Plains', which stands out on the heath beside the road to Sandon River.

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301 Carson acquisition files, F123 in National Parks and Wildlife Service undated b

302 Acquisition file F/576 in National Parks and Wildlife Service undated b

303 Resource and Conservation Assessment Council (RACAC) undated

In 2003, the guesthouse received the prestigious Wilkinson Award for residential architecture. The judgement reflected the strong sentiments held by the Waughs in retaining a visual marker of their history in the landscape.

The Toumbaal House is not so much a 'home' but an idea of a 'camping place' with a temporary sense of occupying space and creating a shelter in an extremely exposed environment. Located on Toumbaal Plains... continuing a family tradition of making camp on the edge of the property near the beach, the house is reminiscent of the old drover's hut that was used for shelter when the weather turned... This house is an experiment in romanticism in its evocation of memory and in its response to its setting. In its occupation of this open plain the shelter represents the taming of the wild, the wind and the fire.<sup>304</sup>

## 4.3 Caring for Country: Aboriginal involvement in park management

### 4.3.1 Introduction

The management of Aboriginal cultural heritage in national parks has not always included contemporary Aboriginal communities. As late as the 1970s, it was still generally held by the government and non-indigenous community that Aboriginal people in NSW had little knowledge of or interest in the Aboriginal cultural heritage of the state. Even after Aboriginal people challenged these assumptions and the meaning of Aboriginal cultural heritage in the NPWS was re-evaluated, cultural heritage management practices remained focused on the technical recording of material remains.<sup>305</sup>

This section of the publication briefly outlines some shifts which have occurred in Aboriginal cultural heritage management to develop greater consultation with and empowerment of interested Aboriginal communities in their national parks.

### 4.3.2 Shifting approaches to Aboriginal heritage

The management of Aboriginal cultural heritage first came under the auspices of the NPWS in 1969 with an amendment to the former *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1967* which aimed to protect Aboriginal 'relics'. The amendments formally established the Aboriginal Relics Advisory Committee whose role was to advise and report to the Director and the Minister on matters relating to conservation, excavation, removal and custody of relics. At the time, Aboriginal people of NSW were not acknowledged in the National Parks and Wildlife Act, represented on the Relics Committee, or understood to have any interest in these 'relics'. The impetus for legislative protection came from a belief that Aboriginal prehistoric objects and sites needed protection from mainly Anglo-Australian collectors for the benefits of archaeological investigation and their universal value to 'mankind'.<sup>306</sup>

It was not until a small band of dedicated people in the NPWS developed the Sites of Significance Survey from 1973 that there was a slow realisation that the Aboriginal population of NSW retained knowledge of, and a sense of deep importance in, a unique indigenous culture. Aboriginal demands for custodianship and control of their cultural material increased, leading to policy and structural changes in NPWS management of Aboriginal cultural heritage. In the 1974 amendments to the National Parks and Wildlife Act, a provision for the gazettal of Aboriginal Places was included. This marked a growing awareness of the inadequacy of the relics provision in the Act in protecting cultural heritage. Some recognised that to adequately conserve Aboriginal cultural heritage, spiritual places, wild resource places and historic places had to be protected, as well as material remains.

However, the pressures of rapid and indiscriminate development which have been discussed in this report in relation to the North Coast and establishment of Yuraygir National Park, escalating in the 1980s, affected the NPWS's management of Aboriginal cultural heritage. The introduction of the requirement to undertake environmental impact statements (EISs) before initiating any development meant that the archaeological focus

304 Blue Skies undated

305 English A 2002

306 Kijas J 2005

of site recording, survey work and impact assessment in a developmental context remained foremost in the NPWS's Aboriginal heritage work.<sup>307</sup>

It has been a slow journey in challenging the long-held, older anthropological assumptions about Aboriginal people as living in a time warp, in desert landscapes, at one with 'nature'. This static construction, portraying 'real' Aboriginal people as a homogenous grouping based on 'traditional' cultures, infused the academic, bureaucratic, legal and popular communities' perceptions of indigenous people.

Aboriginal people, however, still explain the world through stories embedded in the land. Historian Heather Goodall refers to this as 'the practice of "tradition" as process,' where 'the continuation of the expectation that land would be meaningful' is carried through.

This understanding of tradition as process is quite different from the frequent definition of 'tradition' as content, as a fixed body of knowledge or a set of unchanging closed narratives, which are both unchanging and separated from the past.<sup>308</sup>

Giving greater attention to the ways that Aboriginal people in settled Australia have adapted and sustained their cultural identity has meant shifts in ways in which cultural heritage management in the Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC) is understood and undertaken. In 2003, the Cultural Heritage Division noted that managing Aboriginal cultural heritage has again been linked to the work of the Sites of Significance Team in the 1970s and early 1980s:

The work of the Sites of Significance Survey Team is increasingly relevant today as its work confirms the direction that DEC [now DECC] is taking with the management of Aboriginal cultural heritage. The body of work painstakingly gathered by team members continues to inform priority work around Aboriginal Places, repatriation and site conservation. It confirms the importance of post contact contemporary places to Aboriginal communities, an area that has often been neglected when a literal interpretation is taken of the relics provision in Part 6 of the National Parks and Wildlife Act. The work of the team emphasises the importance of working closely with Aboriginal communities and gaining their trust in identifying and then managing important places in partnership.<sup>309</sup>

These shifts are reflected in the way in which DECC now conveys its understanding of, and responsibilities for, Aboriginal cultural heritage to the general public on its website:

Aboriginal people have lived in NSW for more than 40,000 years. There's evidence of this everywhere, in rock art, stone artefacts and other sites across the state. But if you thought Aboriginal heritage was just about rock art, think again. Aboriginal culture is much bigger than this, and it's a living, ongoing thing. It's deeply linked to our entire environment – plants, animals and landscapes. The land and waterways are associated with dreaming stories and cultural learning that is still passed on today. It is this cultural learning that links Aboriginal people with who they are, and where they belong. So to protect Aboriginal heritage, we can't just look after sites in parks, or artefacts in museums. Aboriginal people need to be able to access land, to renew their cultural learning. And they have to be involved and consulted in the conservation of our natural environment<sup>310</sup>

### **4.3.3 Recognising wild resource places and continuity through subsistence lifestyles**

One area of recent DECC work has been to further its understanding of contemporary Aboriginal attachments to Country. In his work with the Garby Elders at Yarrawarra (Corindi) in managing wild resource places, DECC researcher Anthony English noted that:

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307 Byrne D et al 2001

308 Goodall H 2000, p. 32

309 Department of Environment and Conservation 2004a

310 Department of Environment and Climate Change website, 'Aboriginal People and Cultural Life'

Today we are beginning to acknowledge that Aboriginal people's links with the land and sea have continued to be expressed through story, descent, occupation and use. These developments have important ramifications for cultural heritage management. They prompt us to consider how planning systems might account for the cultural and social values that Aboriginal people continue to associate with the environment.<sup>311</sup>

Documentary and oral evidence demonstrates the historical and ongoing significance of fishing, worming, shellfish and bush food collecting in some twentieth and twenty-first century coastal Aboriginal communities.<sup>312</sup> Such activities can be integral to Aboriginal people's identity in settled Australia. Subsistence is a central theme in explaining the ways in which wild resource use links Aboriginal social, cultural and economic issues in places managed by DECC.

Barry Morris focused on the theme of subsistence in his anthropological work with the Dhangadi of the mid-north coast of NSW in the 1980s, and consultation with the Gumbaingirr and Yaegl community around Corindi in the 1990s.<sup>313</sup> At Corindi, Morris discussed the continuity of wild resource use into the late twentieth century.

The relative remoteness, the long and continuous association with the area, appear to be compelling factors in terms of cultural continuity of the Gumbaingirr people of Corindi Beach expressed through the maintenance of subsistence patterns and stories and events associated with specific places and sites in the landscape.<sup>314</sup>

In various places in North Coast NSW, including Corindi, Maclean and Yamba, Aboriginal people continued partial subsistence lifestyles where bush foods and cultural ways of dealing with food were maintained alongside the European economy and use of European foods. Morris referred to a 'mixed economy', which interviewees in the Yaegl Oral History Project provided further example of.<sup>315</sup> This 'mixed economy' applied to those growing up in Yamba in the pre and post-World War II era.<sup>316</sup> For example, Ron Heron's stories of fishing practices at Flat Rock, Pippie Beach, provides a range of reasons why people fished and collected pippies, periwinkles and worms. These were often significant social activities for which communities gathered. However, they also provided food and sometimes income in the lean times of unemployment between the cane-farming seasons.<sup>317</sup> These activities are therefore proudly remembered as a means of remaining independent from aspects of white welfare. In turn, unemployment also meant people had time to fish and socialise.<sup>318</sup>

In his work with the Garby Elders, Anthony English said:

Heritage values are linked to the concepts of community health and well being. As an example, the capacity to find and utilize wild foods has been described by informants during this project as being integral to their sense of identity, morale and cohesion as family or larger groups. This might include fishing, hunting, plant food collecting, camping, walking along pathways and seemingly innocuous activities like swimming or sitting round a camp fire. It is through these activities that people express and 'activate' their associations with place...<sup>319</sup>

The knowledge, pride and identity which came through a partially subsistence lifestyle based on aquatic and bush resources, both as a means of making money as well as a direct food source, were central aspects that emerged from the Yaegl Oral History Project.<sup>320</sup> These were expressed through the stories of the interviewees' activities and those of their parents. Interviewees hoped that national park managers could facilitate, support

311 English A 2002, p. 2. Also see the new approach to Aboriginal cultural heritage research and management explored in Byrne D and Nugent M 2004

312 Kijas J 2006

313 Morris B 1989 and 1994, English A 2002

314 Morris B 1994, p. 17

315 Kijas J 2007b (Part Two)

316 Morris B 1989 Ch 2, Kijas J 2007b

317 Ron Heron 1993 comments that they ate a narrower range of shell fish than archaeological evidence shows for earlier times

318 Heron R 1993

319 English A 2002, p. 4

320 Kijas J 2007b

and help re-educate future generations of Aboriginal young people, including through identifying and collecting such resources.

#### **4.3.4 Contemporary communities with an attachment to Yuraygir National Park**

There are four land councils, a number of local communities and Elders groups associated with Yuraygir National Park. The Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) with jurisdiction over some parts of the national park comprise the Birrigan–Gargle (northern), Yaegl (north western) Grafton–Ngerrie (southern and central) and Coffs Harbour (far southern portion) LALCs. Traditional custodian groups comprise the Yaegl Elders, Ulgundahi Elders and Wdajri Myiral Elders based in the Lower Clarence Valley from Maclean to Yamba, the Garby Elders based at Corindi Beach and the Gumbula Julipi group at Coffs Harbour.

The 2003 plan of management acknowledges that many Yaegl and Gumbaingirr Elders still live in the area, speaking their respective languages and retaining knowledge of the national park landscape, its resources, and the locations of places of mythological and spiritual significance. Evidence of past occupation includes open campsites, middens, scarred trees, and quarry sites principally situated along coastal headlands, bays and estuaries. The plan of management notes that many sites along this section of the North Coast have been disturbed or destroyed as a result of the sand mining activities of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>321</sup>

Until recently, most oral recordings and written documentation of Aboriginal attachment to Yuraygir National Park occurred in the southern section as the result of collaborative projects which have occurred between the Garby Elders of Yarrawarra Aboriginal Corporation based at Corindi Beach and the NPWS. Aboriginal people returned to the Corindi/Red Rock area in the early twentieth century after the disaster of, and dislocation resulting from, the Red Rock massacre. They found in the Corindi Beach area a refuge where they could rebuild their community and their attachment to the land. Under the auspices of the Yarrawarra Aboriginal Corporation, much collaborative research has been carried out over the past decade and beyond to produce a rich narrative of contemporary Aboriginal tradition connected with the landscape.<sup>322</sup>

Much less contemporary research and recording had occurred with Yaegl people regarding their attachment to other areas of the national park, before the Yaegl Oral History Project was conducted in 2007.

In the late 1970s, when the Sites of Significance Team suggested the name ‘Yuraygir’ for the national park, it was widely and mistakenly believed that there were very few remaining people who identified themselves as Yaegl. However, as Heather Goodall has noted:

It has now been conclusively and repeatedly demonstrated that Aboriginal cultural tradition is subject to change and creative reinterpretation, precisely because it has the vitality of any living culture in being able to engage with changing circumstances.<sup>323</sup>

Reflecting the broad shifts in understanding of Aboriginal cultural values and attachment, DECC has in recent years encouraged Yaegl and other Aboriginal people to re-establish and form new attachments to the historical and contemporary landscape of Yuraygir National Park. The relationship between Aboriginal people and the park has not always been an easy one. Lisa Appo, Aboriginal Heritage Conservation Officer (Northern Regions), noted that many Aboriginal people stopped visiting the park when the land became a national park, as they felt they were not welcome. Many have only begun camping in and visiting the region again recently.<sup>324</sup> Anger and frustration was expressed by some interviewees in the Yaegl Oral History Project over restrictions in the collection of wild resources, and track closures. Overall, however, interviewees were hopeful about a continuing good relationship with DECC. For example Rosie Vesper noted ‘respect’ for DECC: ‘It’s how we want to look after the land too’.

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321 National Parks and Wildlife Service 2003a, p. 30

322 See the Yarrawarra Place Stories 2000 and Brown I and Murphy D 2001, which contain material from Gumbaingirr and Yaegl stakeholders

323 Goodall H 2000, p. 32

324 Lisa Appo pers. com.

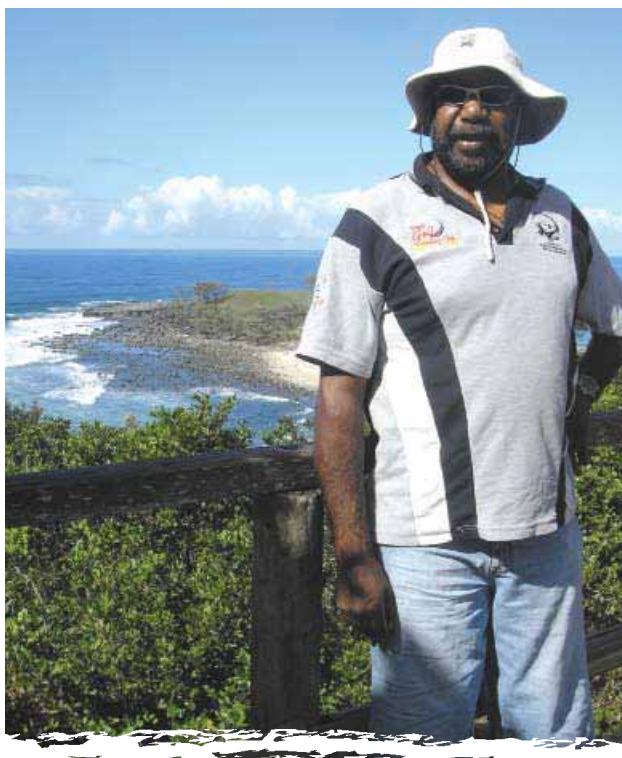


An Aboriginal Consultative Committee has been established and consultative processes have been developed.

Whenever major works, especially any works which include ground disturbance, are being planned, relevant Land Councils and Elders Councils are provided with information in advance of the work being done. Some Aboriginal cultural heritage officers in communities between Corindi Beach in the south and Yamba in the north have been trained in site identification, mapping and GPS reading, and report writing. The aim is to provide community members with greater scientific knowledge and understanding of issues of importance to national parks administration so communities can have a genuine input into the management of Yuraygir National Park.<sup>325</sup>

Archaeological investigation and oral history research has established that all the camping sites which Anglo-Australian people have frequented from the late nineteenth century in Yuraygir National Park have a long history of Aboriginal attachment. At Sandon River, for example, the area was heavily used, as seen in the high density of midden sites around the estuary and at the quarry site at Plover Island.<sup>326</sup> At the Station Creek camping area, a large midden located by the Garby Elders and Yarrowarra community has been radiometrically dated and found to contain material dated to 1650 years BP.<sup>327</sup> (BP means 'before present' where the 'present' is taken to be 1950.)

Aboriginal consultants have worked with DECC staff to identify and protect Aboriginal cultural values (including recent historical values) and material remains associated with campsites such as Sandon River and Station Creek. Across the park, protective measures include using 'floating bollards' and composting toilet complexes to avoid digging into and disturbing sites. At Sandon Camping Area, campsites have been turned into day picnic places to reduce the impact on midden sites, and cultural information about the quarry site on Plover Island has been provided so people will understand and respect the place.<sup>328</sup>



Fox Laurie at Angourie Headland 2007. He has been working intensively with DECC in Yuraygir National Park over the past ten years. Photo: J. Kijas



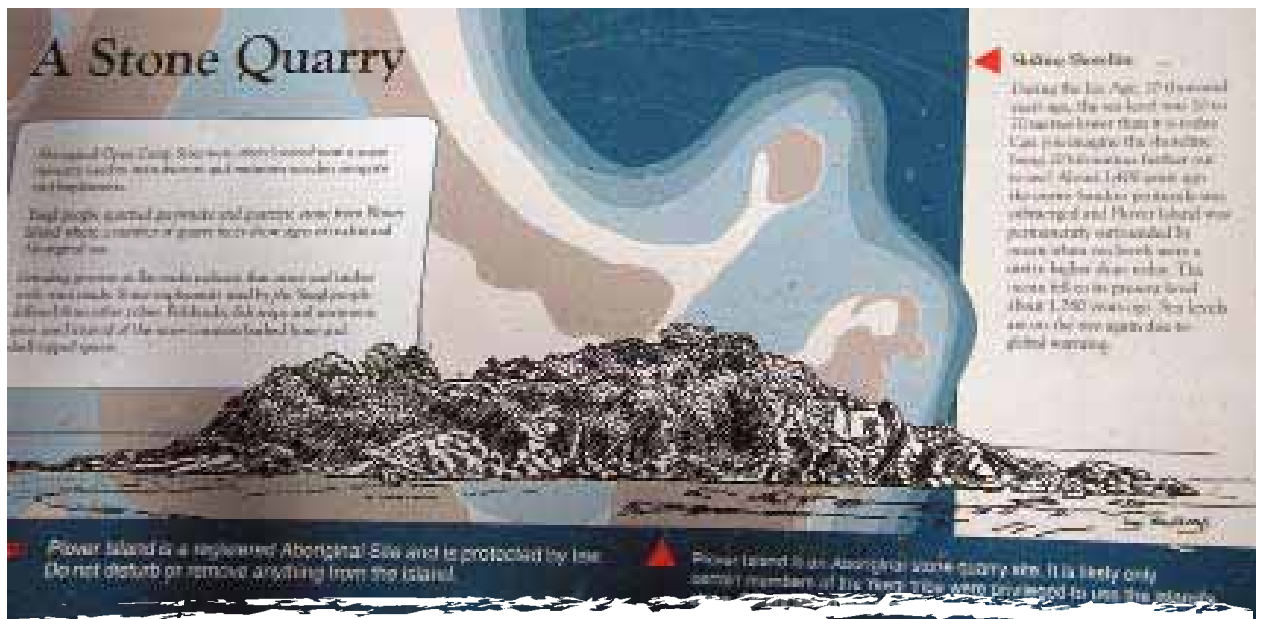
A midden site at Sandon River camping area which has been converted to a day-use picnic area. 'Floating bollards' mark boundaries without digging. March 2006. Photo: J. Kijas

<sup>325</sup> *ibid.* Also see the 'management principles specific to Aboriginal heritage places and landscapes' in National Parks and Wildlife Service 2003b, p. 18 and pp. 21–24 in particular

<sup>326</sup> Collins J 2002, Byrne D 1986

<sup>327</sup> Brown I and Murphy D 2001

<sup>328</sup> Andrew Lugg, Area Manager, Clarence South Parks & Wildlife Group, DECC, pers. com.



Plover Island Quarry interpretation sign at Sandon River camping area. March 2006. Photo: J. Kijas

As campsites in Yuraygir National Park and the national park landscape increase in popularity and visitation, managing the park in culturally appropriate ways with real input from Aboriginal people is an ongoing imperative.

## 4.4 Coastal recreation: a case study of Pebbly Beach

### 4.4.1 Introduction

At Pebbly Beach in the southern section of the national park, camping in large groups is the tradition. And while the fridges, 12-volt lighting systems and four-wheel drive campervans with fold-out beds might surprise the people who camped in the pre-park landscape, it is the technology rather than the idea of camping which has changed. People still congregate as they have been doing for generations (for up to 25 years at this particular campground), camping with family and friends who come from all directions for their weeks together at the beach. Many always camp in the same spot, even using the same fireplace, year after year.

They swim, fish, go on shell hunts, read, walk for miles, drink, play charades and chat around the communal centre at night, just as campers at Red Rock, Sandon, Brooms Head and other places have been doing from the late nineteenth century. The status of a national park has meant that management issues are not the same today at Pebbly Beach as in the pre-park landscape. However, as more people squash their way into the campground each peak holiday period, questions are raised about how not to destroy this loved place. Such questions are not entirely new regarding the holiday coastline of Yuraygir, where up to 600 people previously camped on the village foreshores.

In this landscape full of conflicts and compromise over national park management (for example, see section 4.5.3 with regard to the Shelley Beach track closure), Pebbly Beach has been an area of prolonged controversy as different groups have argued about whether to close the campground to vehicles. The 2003 plan of management included a negotiated settlement about Pebbly Beach, where four-wheel drive access was retained, although with greater regulations and closure of beach access to the south.

Pebble Beach campground is also an example of the effects of population pressure which are impacting on all the campsites in Yuraygir National Park, as other coastal haunts become overcrowded or closed to camping holidays. Some camping stories from Pebbly Beach are relayed below, where comparisons and contrasts might be made between the group-camping traditions in the pre-park landscape and current camping along the coastal strip. These stories are set within the context of camping across the national park.



Pebbly Beach and the Solitary Islands. May 2006. Photo: J. Kijas.

#### 4.4.2 The 'rest areas' of Yuraygir

When Yuraygir National Park was established, camping was restricted to designated areas. As noted in section 3.4, many settlers in the study area camped on the village foreshores, but there was also a long tradition of locals informally bush camping along the coastline since the nineteenth century. Camping in the north was concentrated around Shelley Beach and the Red Cliff area, and in the south around Station Creek. People had also been camping in a designated campground at Sandon River since the mid-twentieth century and informally since the late nineteenth century.

Gradually through the late 1970s and into the 1980s, the NPWS restricted vehicle-based camping to designated areas in the national park: the Lake Arragan and Red Cliff complex and Sandon River in the north, Illaroo near Minnie Water and Boorkoom near Diggers Camp in the central section of the park, and Station Creek (known as Lemon Trees by some) and Pebbly Beach in the south.

On the whole, these formal sites were developed in areas which already had a history of visitors. The NPWS also discovered that these locations had long been used by the region's traditional owners. Shell middens and other archaeological remains provided clear evidence that these places had been occupied by Yaegl and Gumbaingirr people before colonisation (as discussed in section 4.3.4).

Different campsites offer different experiences and attract different users. In the north, some park staff feel that the Red Cliff camping area has the least intense history of camping, and generally accommodates new visitors to the national park rather than groups or individuals with long traditions of attachment. Alternatively, the 'Plumbago' area around Lake Arragan has a sustained history of camping by Maclean Yaegl people and their visitors.

As noted in section 3.4.2, the northern side of Sandon River has been a dedicated campsite since the 1950s when it was managed by Maclean Shire Council. It came into Yuraygir National Park in November 1983. Regular campers there tend to be passionate about fishing and identify with the Sandon River rather than with the national park. To many campers, the Sandon River campsite does not even look like a national park with its defined campsites, many signs, developed toilet block facilities, cottages and sheds.

In the centre, Illaroo has had a lengthy tradition of hosting large family holidays before and after the development of the national park.

In the south, the two Station Creek campsites contain examples of different uses of the national park. Station Creek Camping Area (Lemon Trees) is situated in the angophora and banksia woodland beside Station Creek estuary. This campsite traditionally attracts people who are interested in bird watching, canoeing and small group activities centered on the natural environment. However, since 2006, field staff have noticed that a few large groups of unruly young people have started camping here, having been forced out of the more regulated Pebbly Beach campsite where a full-time caretaker now lives. Those with four-wheel drive vehicles who are more interested in recreational pursuits such as fishing, surfing and large family activities tend to go to Pebbly Beach campsite, which is tucked in behind the low dunes with direct access onto the beach.<sup>329</sup>

#### 4.4.3 Pebbly Beach campers

Numerous studies in Australia and America show that national park visitors are predominantly from English-speaking backgrounds, are well-educated, have higher status occupations than the general population and are often not locals.<sup>330</sup> National parks are often set within economically marginal areas, which is mainly why they have retained their natural ecosystems and warrant park gazettal. While Yuraygir National Park is located in an economically marginal area as outlined in section 1, and attracts most visitors from outside the region, its visitor profiles also indicate that it is the most 'emphatically local' of all the north-eastern NSW national parks.<sup>331</sup> The campgrounds of Pebbly Beach and Sandon River, in particular, have retained many local holidaymakers who maintain their traditional camping holidays.

The 2004 visitor survey of Pebbly Beach Camping Area indicates that many campers are regulars, coming from the immediate local area and southern Queensland, and are predominantly from English-speaking backgrounds. Most camp in large parties of family and friends. They are attracted by the site's isolation, the 'low key' camping experience and the direct access to the beach and ocean.<sup>332</sup>

Some tension has developed between NSW locals and Queenslanders as the camping area has grown in popularity in the past decade. In the past few years, some local residents feel aggrieved that Queenslanders, with their earlier school holidays, have taken the best campsites by the time the locals arrive. Others wait until the Queenslanders have gone home, then spend their last week of school holidays at Pebbly Beach.

#### 4.4.4 Telling stories

The 2003 plan of management (PoM) established a compromise between two entrenched and often passionately divergent positions on the recreational use of Pebbly Beach; between those who wished to keep it open to vehicles and those who wished to create a walk-in site only.<sup>333</sup> The PoM clarified that changes in circumstances, such as unsustainable use which might threaten the natural and cultural values of the area, could possibly still result in closure of the area to vehicles and, if necessary, closure of the campground. On the other hand, it explicitly recognised that in balancing conflicting community expectations, a range of recreational uses needed to be planned for, including regulated four-wheel drive access to certain areas.<sup>334</sup>

Among DECC staff, Pebbly Beach has had a reputation for being 'pretty wild'. During the 1990s, as the NPWS began to increase its regulation of Pebbly Beach, staff often chose not to go there after a certain time in the afternoon as the beer-infused, anti-park environment was hardly conducive to their visits. Large groups of young people congregated there at times, partying heavily through the night. One example of the 'yobbo'

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329 Hattie J and Fitzgerald I 1985, Geolink Environmental Management and Design 2004

330 Buultjens J and Luckie K 2002, Bateson P and Nyman S 1988

331 Buultjens J and Luckie K 2002, p. 27

332 Department of Environment and Conservation 2004b

333 Hattie J and Fitzgerald I 1985

334 National Parks and Wildlife Service 2003a



Campers at Pebbly Beach, enjoying Christmas lunch in the campsite (1990). Photo: Courtesy of Ken Teakle.

element is given of a couple of young men who arrived with a pig's head stuck to the front of their Ute and a keg of beer in the back.<sup>335</sup>

After DECC installed a full-time caretaker on-site, the 2004 visitor survey reported that regular campers were very satisfied with the friendly and safe environment that this action created.<sup>336</sup>

For many years, regular campers to Pebbly Beach have lobbied hard to have their favourite holiday place remain open to their style of camping.<sup>337</sup> The regulars have heard stories about or seen examples of unruly behaviour. However, all those who contributed to this project challenged the perception of Pebbly Beach as 'a wild place', arguing that those incidents were one-off examples of idiots' behaviour. Instead, each stressed the family-related activities which fill their days on the site. The following stories offer some ways in which people relate to the area.

Stewart Blackadder, approaching his mid forties, has been camping around the Station Creek area since he was about three months old. His parents, Joyce and Frank, cut sleepers with Jonaas Zilinkas at Yellow Cutting through the 1950s (see section 3.3.2) and fished in Station Creek while their children were young. Stewart always knew of Pebbly Beach as 'the Bay'. (Don Wall, Yuraygir Field Officer, who has fished at Pebbly Beach since he was about 15, always knew the area as 'Pebbly Beach').

335 NPWS staff pers. com. 13 April, 26 April, 8 May 2006

336 Department of Environment and Conservation 2004b

337 Hattie J and Fitzgerald I 1985

Stewart and his friends had a permanent camp at Pebbly Beach for about six years. It had big tarpaulins held down by 44-gallon drums to catch the rain water, a few tents, mattresses, an old freezer which could keep ice cold for weeks when closed up, the kerosene fridge and sofas. Anyone was welcome to use the campsite when they were not there. That was fine because 'everyone knew everyone'.

When the national park was first established, few rangers bothered them. However, in 1987–88, Stewart said the NPWS 'got heavy' and made them pull the camp down. He remembered it was around then as he had just bought his new Toyota Hilux four-wheel drive and they took that out to pull the camp down, much to their disgust.<sup>338</sup> Today, he continues to take his family to camp in the national park.

Ann Blackadder (Stewart's wife) and her friend Sandy Murphy grew up in Red Rock. They started going out to Pebbly Beach when they were 14 or 15. If their boyfriends had been at the camp for a few days, the guys would drive down the beach until they were opposite Red Rock, and they would cross the creek to meet them. Since Sandy has returned to the Corindi area to live, she and her family have camped at Pebbly Beach most holidays.

I asked why the place attracted them. Sandy said that they love being able to camp right down at the beach and not have to struggle through the hot sand hills to get to the beach as you do from Lemon Trees. At the southern end of Pebbly Beach, where they like to camp, the cove is safe for 'little kids' and you can sit at your camp and watch them from there. The camping area faces north-east and is sheltered from the southerlies which blast the coast, although it can get pretty nasty if a north-easterly wind is blowing. People can still light campfires and 'the kids just love the stars'. It is the children's favourite place and every holidays they start saying 'when can we go to Pebbly Beach?'. It is a big enough place for all their family and friends to camp in; anywhere 'between 11 people such as last week', to 20–30 people at other times. But nowadays they go in the off-peak season after the Queenslanders have headed home, as otherwise it is too crowded.<sup>339</sup>

Sandy and others say Pebbly Beach is a wonderful place for children. They run around all day and are exhausted at night. In the mornings they swim, surf and play in the sand for hours. In the afternoons, when the wind comes up, parents and children go and play in the creek.

Adults have time to read, surf, fish, dive and sunbathe, untroubled by bored children. They walk for miles along the beach and go shell collecting. Sandy says she always takes marshmallows for toasting on the campfire at night.<sup>340</sup>

Ken Teakle and his family are from southern Queensland. They have been going to Pebbly Beach for 25 years. They were introduced to Pebbly Beach by a surfer in Burleigh Heads who gave them directions written on the back of a beer coaster. In those days, it was not a straightforward drive to Pebbly Beach like it is today. There were a few different routes that could be taken, depending on the weather. When the track was wet, it could take three to four hours to winch vehicles in or out, and on a dry day, it would still take an hour because one had to wind through the trees.

Ken probably goes to Pebbly Beach four times a year, and there might be six camps in their group depending on who turns up. Their Christmas party camp can be made up of about 15 camps. One Christmas, there were between 35 and 40 people. There were the six original families who came on the first Christmas, plus friends who have come in later years. Nowadays, there are three generations and their ages range from around 58, to young adults and teenagers, all the way through to the one to four year olds. Ken arrives each year as early as 5 December with one or two other mates to set up the camp. They have the place all to themselves until everyone arrives for Christmas.

Many older Aboriginal people fish at Pebbly Beach and Station Creek but do not camp there overnight, as noted in previous sections. Ian Brown's Elders have said that they do not necessarily want to stop people camping at Pebbly Beach and Station Creek, but want them to respect, and act with great care in, the area as it is a highly significant place to the traditional owners.<sup>341</sup>

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338 Stewart Blackadder, phone interview, 16 May 2006

339 Sandy Murphy, phone interview, 15 May 2006

340 *ibid*

341 Brown I and Murphy D 2001



Pebbly Beach looking south towards Sandy Murphy's favourite spot, May 2006. Photo: J. Kijas

Ken Teakle considers that Pebbly Beach is a place where ordinary Australians who like to go camping can still follow that tradition; have a stunning array of coastal activities nearby; sit around the campfire at night chatting, and playing charades and monopoly; and, most importantly, be with family and friends in an informal way without hotel rooms and organised games to separate the children from the adults. A friend's ashes are scattered at the north end of the beach; she died of cancer. Ken goes up and has a chat with her. For Ken, Pebbly Beach is now part of his heritage. It is where, he says, his ashes will be scattered.<sup>342</sup>

Everyone I spoke to claimed a sense of responsibility for the area. For example, everyone including DECC staff noted a clean-up of the camping ground spearheaded by Ann Blackadder, who rallied a number of regular local campers to dig out the lantana which was choking the back section of the area. Some said they had helped corduroy the roads at times, and each noted their responsibility for clearing up rubbish. While they all have their arguments with DECC, they also feel that Pebbly Beach is now well-managed.<sup>343</sup>

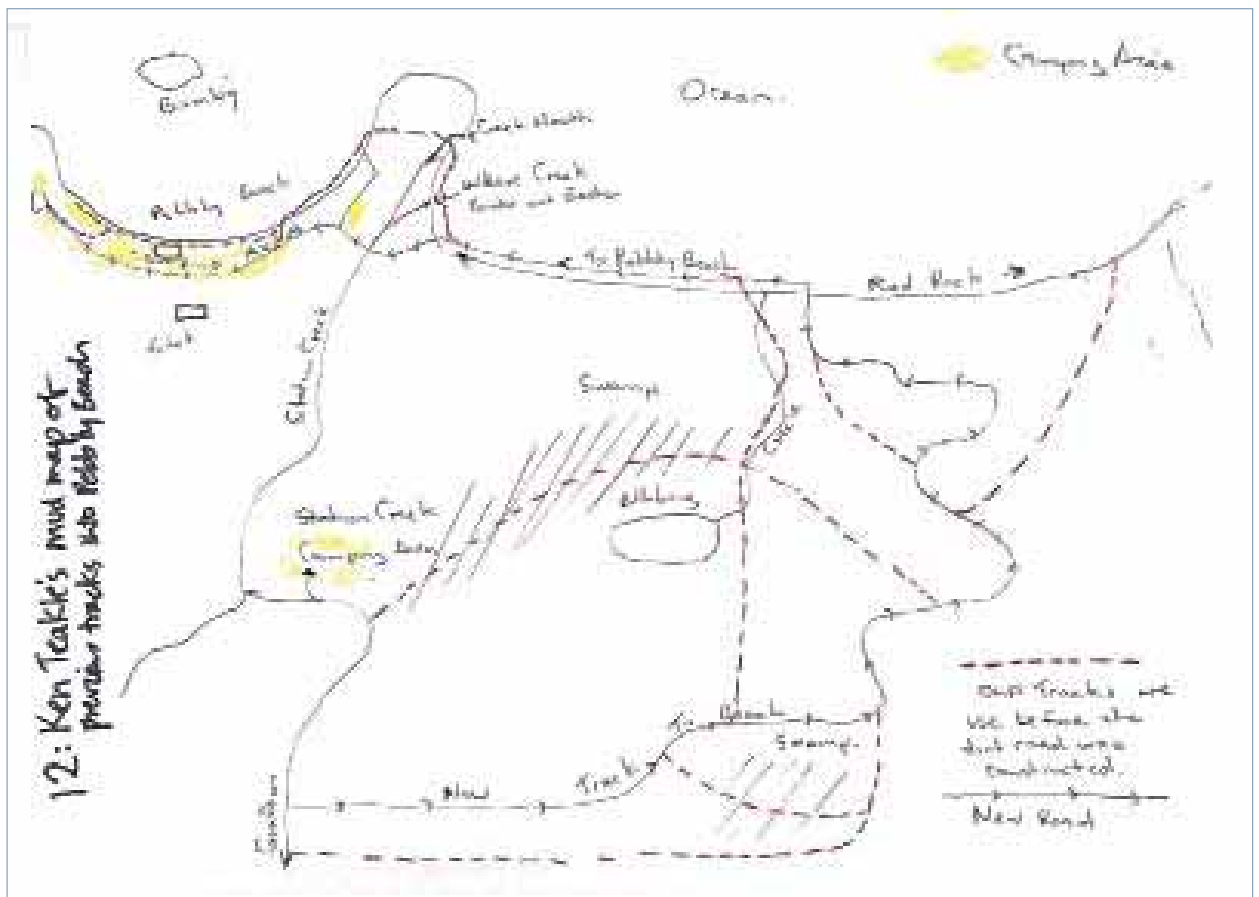
One interviewee regrets all the clearing up that has gone on over the years and thinks the area looks too much like a 'park' these days. On the other hand, Ken Teakle feels the place looks better now than it used to. Reminiscent of the caretakers of old at Brooms Head, who always prepared the sites ahead of the Christmas crowds, knowing whose site was whose, Ken just has to ring up a couple of days in advance and the caretaker mows 'his' site in readiness.

What the place should look like, how people wish to relate to it, who should camp in it and how it should be used will remain an area of contention, as the same place has different meanings for those who care about it.

<sup>342</sup> Ken Teakle, phone interview, 15 May 2006

<sup>343</sup> Sandy Murphy, phone interview, 15 May 2006; Ann Blackadder, phone discussion, 15 May 2006; Ken Teakle, phone interviews, 15 and 18 May 2006; Stewart Blackadder, phone interview, 16 May 2006; Dave McCleary, phone interview, 17 May 2006

**Map 11: Ken Teakle's mud map showing early tracks into Pebbly Beach**



Courtesy of Ken Teakle, 2006.

## 4.5 Tackling history and politics: 'hot issues' in park management

### 4.5.1 Introduction

During the last decades of the twentieth century, competing interests in the landscape boiled over into confrontation. While forest disputes have generated most publicity and academic analysis, the North Coast beaches and ocean have generated much local environmental tension and political agitation. Differences between state and local government interests, and tensions within the diversifying local population, all of which had been simmering since the 1960s, came to the fore in the 1980s (see section 2.2).

The history of the competing philosophies, uses and consequential management practices of NSW's North Coast national parks must be seen in this broader context. Local opinion about Yuraygir National Park and its predecessors has never been uniform. However, it has stirred strong and at times vitriolic opposition which persists amongst some groups.

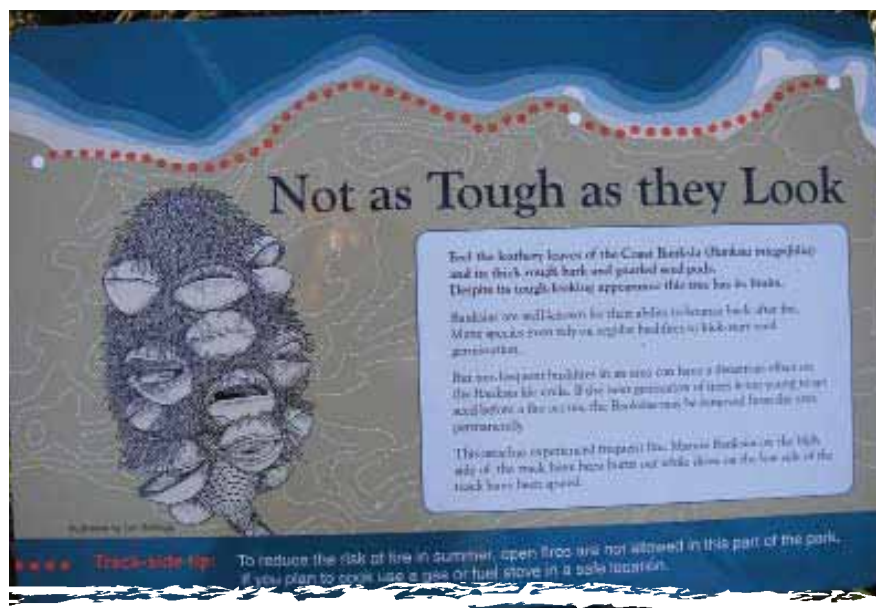
This section provides a brief overview of issues which NPWS managers were confronting in the 1980s regarding competing interests in the national park.

### 4.5.2 'Hot issues': fire, weeds and access

For some long-time locals in the region who remain bitter about the changes that the national parks system brought to their way of life, certain management issues always arise in any discussion about Yuraygir National Park. These are the management of fire, weeds and access; issues which also concern DECC managers and supporters.



Reflecting broader state and national tensions, fire management remains a subject of conflict between past and present land managers. The previous graziers, some timber workers and some recreational fishers across the park practiced regular patchwork burning, to keep the forest understorey grassy and clear for grazing stock and access, maintain the heathlands to encourage the native grasses for wintering or drought relief of cattle, and keep property safe from uncontrolled fire. These were what Rosemary Waugh-Allcock referred to as the 'ordinary fires: little and often' (see section 3.3.3). The cessation of this regular burning has brought about a shift in the forest undergrowth, increasing what many past land managers refer to as 'mongrel bush' or 'rubbish'. The destructive wildfires of the 1990s and early 2000s are blamed by some on the new management regimes.



Interpretative sign on the Shelley Beach walking track, 2007. Photo: J. Kijas

Fire control strategies are one of the foremost considerations of DECC in managing its national parks. The heathlands of Yuraygir are some of the national park's prime visual and ecological attractions, but are notoriously prone to burning. Scientists believe that control of fire is probably the single most important variable to consider in heathland management, and they are concerned that the frequency of fires on the heathland has been too high. High fire frequencies and some methods of fire suppression can lead to progressive changes in soil nutrient balance, and may also lead to selection against some plant and animal species in favour of others.<sup>344</sup>

Fire is also a great concern because of the proximity of the coastal villages to the national park. The worst fires which have raged through Yuraygir National Park 'nearly cooked' the villages of Minnie Water and Sandon in 1994, and Wooloweyah and Angourie in the Wallaby Lane Fire of Christmas 2001. DECC Field Officer Dave McFarlane remembers the 1994 fires as 'ballistic', and some of the worst he has ever fought in the area. In the 2001 fire, 100 firefighters with helicopter support eventually saved both villages without loss of life or property. A third of the park was heavily burnt.

DECC maintains that arson is virtually the only cause of fire in the national park. Forty-five fires were deliberately lit over the 1990–91 and 1991–92 seasons, which burnt almost all the park, and the park was heavily burnt again in the 2001–02 and 2002–03 seasons. The 2003 plan of management states that 'the overwhelming priority' is to reduce arson and only then 'can a practical, socially responsible and scientifically based fire regime be implemented.'<sup>345</sup>

Malcolm Gill provides a reminder that fire, like the landscape, is a matter of perception:

Whether we see fire as a hazard (putting something or someone at risk of injury or damage) or a tool (a necessary device for achieving a particular end) always depends on what the fire does... A fire's effect, then, is central to how we view it. The effects we see are diverse but observer-dependent. The fire captain, the beekeeper, the conservationist, the arsonist, the

344 Haigh C 1981

345 National Parks and Wildlife Service 2003a, p. 27

grazier or the ecologist may each have his or her own unique view of what has happened. Each observes the fire with preconceived ideas, particular personal attitudes and varying storehouses of knowledge.<sup>346</sup>

Regarding weeds, DECC managers are left with a legacy of past agricultural and sand mining activities. The furrowing of the land in preparation for cane farming and consequential weed infestation (particularly groundsel bush) in the central section of the national park, plus the exotic pastures of setaria and other grasses planted for cattle in the central and southern sections, are the most obvious examples.<sup>347</sup> Bitou bush, Western Australian wattle and other exotic plants remain in the wake of the area's sand mining history, though they are gradually being eradicated. Opinions on DECC's handling of these issues differs depending on perceptions of its involvement in the region.

The interrelated issues of access and recreation have been the subject of Yuraygir's hottest political controversies. During the early 1980s, while preparing the plan of management which was a requirement of every new national park in NSW, the Grafton office presented a series of options for public discussion where they noted that vehicle access and facilities for recreation were 'two of the more important issues'<sup>348</sup>

In 1983, submissions were received on these options and were discussed in a public brochure, *Planning Yuraygir National Park*, known within national parks at the time as the 'buff-coloured paper'. It identified the 'differing community aspirations' about how Yuraygir National Park should be managed. Some wanted unroaded areas 'opened up' with roads constructed to remote headlands, and beaches with camping areas provided. Others wanted to see walking tracks built instead. Many off-road vehicle owners, including vehicle-based recreational fishers, argued that these areas should remain unroaded but available for off-road use through maintenance of some current tracks.<sup>349</sup>

In the wake of the submissions, consultant AG Davey developed a planning strategy for the 'apparently irreconcilable' differences which had been flagged. In his report, he emphasised the lack of understanding amongst all parties about the escalating growth in four-wheel drive use and increased population pressure over the previous 20 years, and their potential environmental impacts. He stated no-one fully understood the extent of the conflicts to come. Divergent perceptions about the national park at a local and regional level, as against a state or national level, would become increasingly apparent as the national park area became a scarce spatial resource. He concluded that 'whoever wins does so at someone else's expense.'<sup>350</sup>

In 1985, quantitative and qualitative analyses were completed on the 1983 submissions. Those results showed two distinct patterns of opinion. Firstly, it was clear that each of the NPWS's preferred options relating to closure of access tracks, including the blocking of a through-road in the north section of the park, were supported in most submissions. In these submissions, most visitors from outside the area were keen to have off-road vehicles excluded from beaches and their access restricted to campsites that were only accessible on difficult tracks. Local opinion was clearly divided on access, with at least half arguing for a new approach to using the area through walking and closure of vehicle tracks. However, a substantial minority of local people strongly advocated the maintenance, and in some cases development, of vehicle track access to beaches and remote parts of the coast.<sup>351</sup>

### 4.5.3 The Shelley Track

Controversy over access to Yuraygir's beaches and coastline since the area's gazettal as a national park has been the hottest of all the hot management issues. The central concerns have included the history of four-wheel drive vehicles that could previously access all but one of Yuraygir's beaches; the 'back track' to Sandon; the tracks to Freshwater and Pebbly Beach and access to the Shelley Beach area.

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346 Gill M 1981, pp. 50–56

347 On the types of, and ongoing consequences of planting, the exotic semi-tropical pasture from the Lawrence Downs Pastoral Company in the south, see Howard T 1979

348 National Parks and Wildlife Service 1983c

349 *ibid*

350 Davey AG 1984, pp. 2–3

351 Hattie J and Fitzgerald I 1985



Aerial photo of the Shelley Beach Track and south to Lake Arragan. Photo: G. Biddle, courtesy DECC Northern Region

Peter Morgan was a member of the Clarence Valley Branch of the NPA and the Yuraygir National Park Advisory Committee, which was formed in 1980. Maclean born and bred, Peter was a maths teacher in Grafton when he became heavily involved in pursuing closure of tracks across the national park. He remembers:

Erosion was very severe at the Shelley Beach end of the Shelley Track, and it seemed the most urgent of all the tracks to pull vehicles out of, and also it had an interesting landscape along the coast through which to develop a walking track.<sup>352</sup>

As all sides agree, the issue of closing the 'Shelley Track' became fierce and prolonged. As noted in section 3.3.6, the track had been built in 1969 for sand mining access, and thus it had opened the traditional fishing and camping place of a few locals to the increased population of holidaymakers. The track joined up with another sand mining road from the south, allowing through-access between Brooms Head and Angourie.

Peter found that local supporters of the closure would not express their views in their social circles, especially at the pub. He felt that the aggressiveness, anger and loudness of the pro-Shelley Track contingent overwhelmed everyone else. Some years later, one person told Peter that at the time he was as 'cranky as billy-o' when the closure happened, but he now felt it was the best thing that could have occurred. 'But I won't say that when I'm having a beer at the pub!'<sup>353</sup>

Maclean Shire Council had long opposed state government efforts at coastal planning, and in particular the national park, as noted in section 2.3.3. Along with Ulmarra Council, it had long supported a coast road to open up the area to tourism.

The NPWS closed the Shelley Track in 1987. After a series of unsuccessful strategies to stop vehicles breaking through barriers, the track was blocked by very large bollards. These became known as 'the Friederich Line', named after Bob Friederich, NPWS's Planning Coordinator for the Northern Region and District Manager of the Grafton District, who initiated the closure of the track.<sup>354</sup>

However, the newly-elected Liberal Greiner government then wanted to reopen it. The NPWS had a number of studies done during the next couple of years, with some managers suggesting opening it again in the face of local and state political pressure.<sup>355</sup> All these studies were challenged by the NPA's Clarence Valley Branch. According to their mandate to protect the environment, they argued strongly against through-access and the increased visitation that this would bring to a fragile environment.

The issue was a dominant one in the local media, with supporters and opponents of re-opening the track voicing their opinions in the *Grafton Daily Examiner* and radio stations from Grafton to Lismore.<sup>356</sup> The local member Ian Causley and the Minister for the Environment Tim Moore took part in the debate in the media, arguing for the rebuilding of vehicular access to Shelley Beach. Peter Morgan 'did the spadework' when the NPA took the case to the Land and Environment Court. The NPA's case was won in 1992 and the track remained closed. Today, it is hardly visible in the landscape.<sup>357</sup>

## 4.6 Conclusion

Shirley Causley and her husband Gerard retired to Angourie where Gerard's family had been holidaying since the 1940s. Shirley and Gerard bought the block of land where she still lives around 1954, and they brought the family out every school holidays and often on weekends from their cane farm on Harwood Island. When Gerard became ill they decided to retire early so he could spend his time fishing at his favourite haunt at Shelley Beach.

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352 Peter Morgan, phone interview, 15 May 2006

353 *ibid*

354 A different project is needed to explore the institutional memories of this formative period of NSW National Park history

355 Rich E 1990

356 An archive of relevant newspaper clippings is held at the DECC Grafton office

357 Peter Morgan interview, 17 February 2006



Looking south to Shelley Headland and Yuraygir National Park, May 2006. Photo: J. Kijas.

Shirley says: 'That's why we came, so Gerard could fish'. He died in 2006. His protracted illness had long before prevented him from walking far. He never forgave the NPWS for blocking his access to his favourite fishing place.<sup>358</sup>

Across the road, 'Sally' has lived in Angourie all her 20 years of life and had never heard about the protests when the track was closed. She cannot imagine anyone in their section of the village wanting a vehicle track behind their houses; she loves it like it is. She walks the length of Back Beach to surf at One Mans Beach when Angourie Headland is too much of a crush, and her brother motors his new boat around the coast to Shelley Headland to snorkel and fish.<sup>359</sup>

It took 20 years for Yuraygir National Park's plan of management to be completed due to political controversies over access. Conflicting views about what the place should look like were deeply embedded in the complex historical intersections of place, time, politics and people discussed throughout this publication.

These days, some look out across the untracked expanse of heath and coastal views from the northern end of the national park and see a 'locked up' and unproductive landscape. Whether it should have had a road to favourite fishing and camping spots allowing access to people of all ancestry, age and health, or a road that would have enabled housing and tourist resorts to flourish, the vista is not necessarily pleasing. For others, it is potentially troubling. To them, the trackless vista anticipates the possibility of closure of Pebbly Beach to vehicles, one of the few places on the settled east coast of Australia which remains open to their four-wheel drives and related leisure activities that they have come to see as being part of their Australian heritage. For others, the same vista holds within it a precious and fragile ecological wonder in an overcrowded world, which needs their protection and vigilance.

358 Shirley Causley interview, 6 May 2006

359 Name changed, pers. com. 7 May 2006

# Afterword<sup>360</sup>

The vivid and diverse human history of Yuraygir National Park has been, and continues to be, dynamic. The management of this landscape continues to be challenged and contested, as was seen in Clarence Valley in early 2008 when residents protested about increased camping fees. A week-long protest camp was established outside the Station Creek/Pebbly Beach park entrance and a small demonstration was staged outside the DECC Office in Grafton.<sup>361</sup> At the demonstration, a petition was 'launched' by the Local Member for Clarence.

DECC defended the increase in fees, stating the increase was based on the costs of managing camping areas, the increase in the consumer price index and the need to avoid competition with local commercial operators (or maintaining 'competitive neutrality').

In May 2008, Buchanan's Hut, which was the only standing pastoral-period hut in Yuraygir National Park, burnt down. This tragic event may have been the result of an accident or it may have been deliberately set on fire by vandals. After some discussion, the park managers have decided not to rebuild the hut in case the new structure would be deliberately burnt down. However, as there are building plans and photographs of the hut, it could be reconstructed once the risk of destruction has lessened.

History, whether based on documents, images, told stories or physical remains, reveals people's attachments to and feelings for special places. Memories and oral histories give 'life' to landscapes and inform others of people's connections to their special places and landscapes.

The cultural values of Yuraygir National Park are connected to the experiences, identities and connections of past and present individuals and communities. For local Aboriginal groups, for those who have lived and worked there and for holidaymakers, Yuraygir National Park is part of a landscape, both real and imagined, of community identity and sense of place. That is, the cultural landscape is rich in social and historical meaning.

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<sup>360</sup> The afterword is added by the DECC, not the author.

<sup>361</sup> *Daily Examiner* (8,9 January 2008, 2,6 February 2008), *Advocate* (9 January 2008, 2 February 2008)

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# Interviewees

## 2006 Yuraygir National Park contextual history project

### Formal taped interviews

Bowling Roy, 7 March 2006 (Tucabia)

Causley Shirley, 6 May 2006 (Angourie)

Johnson Allen, 6 May 2006 (Taloumbi Station)

Knox Barbara, interview by Gina Hart, Ranger, Southern Yuraygir National Park, (Minnie Water)

Niland Bill, 25 May 2006 (Ulmurra)

Plater Joyce, 1 May 2006 (Brooms Head)

Preston Marie, 10 April 2006 (Tucabia)

Wagh-Allcock Rosemary, 24 April and 6 May 2006 (Taloumbi Station)

Winkler Clarrie and Winkler Shirley, with John Kennedy, 1 May 2006 (Woolgoolga)

### Phone interviews

Blackadder Ann, 15 May 2006

Blackadder Stewart, 16 May 2006

Brown Ian, 22 May 2006

McCleary Dave, 17 May 2006

Morgan Peter, 17 February 2006

Murphy Sandy, 15 May 2006

Teakle Ken, 15 and 18 May 2006

## 2007 Yaegl Oral History Project for Yuraygir National Park

Breckenridge Judith, 4 April 2007 (Maclean: taped)

Heron Ron, 14 Feb 2007 (not taped)

Heron Ron, 28 Feb 2007 (Ilarwill: taped)

Kapeen Thelma, 14 May 2007 (Maclean: taped)

Laurie Fox, 8 May 2007 (Yamba: not taped)

McLeay Eileen, 17 May 2007 (Townsend: taped)

McPhail Glenda, 17 May 2007 (Townsend: taped)

Mercy Lester, 24 April 2007 (Maclean: taped)

Pearce Veronica, 14 May 2007 (Maclean: taped)

Randall Michael, 24 April 2007, (Maclean: taped)

Roberts Annabelle, 8 May 2007 (Yamba: taped)

Vesper Rosemarie, 10 May 2007 (Yamba: taped)

Williams Lillian, 28 Feb 2007 (Yamba: taped)

# Appendix: place names

## Introduction

The following names and stories appear on today's maps of the national park. Names and naming are important ways of staking a claim, and reclaiming places, both within Aboriginal and settler history. The list of names that appear here is incomplete. Names either came up in conversation with interviewees or are already recorded in local histories. A more complete study of local names, aimed at detailing the ways in which Aboriginal and settler people conceptualised and occupied Yuraygir National Park, would assist in gaining a greater understanding of the landscape.

## North to south

**Red Cliff (far north section):** Until recently, many knew Red Cliff as Red Rock.<sup>360</sup> For example, Peter Morgan who grew up at Maclean and spent his childhood holidays at Brooms Head only remembers it being called Red Cliff after the national park was gazetted.

**Cassons Knob (far north section):** In the nineteenth century the Casson family worked for the Smalls, the previous owners of Taloumbi Station, as stock and domestic workers. They remained working for the Waughs when WN Reeve Waugh and John Waugh bought the property in 1888. In addition, members of the Casson family drove the first coaches on Ryan's Road from Bellingen to Grafton and Yamba (then called Wooli Wooli).

**Tailem Flat (north section):** Under Clarence Peak. Today it is spelt 'Tailem' on the map, but Rosemary Waugh-Allcock says this is incorrect and that it should be spelt 'Tailing Flat'. 'Tailing' is a bush term meaning to hold together a mob of cattle. After clearing the dense tea-tree forest in the late nineteenth century, using Sikh labour, Tailing Flat became the holding place for the large mobs of bullocks which Reeve Waugh of Taloumbi Station drove up to the New England Tablelands and down to the Hunter Valley to sell. However, it is spelt 'Tailem Flat' in Trevor Plater's recollections of Brooms Head, indicating the possible family origins of the change in spelling. In the 1950s, the Platers would stop there on their way to Brooms Head for their annual six-week camp to collect tea-tree poles for their tents, windbreaks and 'spares'<sup>361</sup>

**Hannas Camp (north):** spelt incorrectly on the new maps as 'Hannahs'. Jack Preston remembers George Hanna. He was a bullock driver who brought the first team over the Coast Range near Wild Dog Falls Road just after World War I. He hauled the timber to the Shark Creek Wharf to be transported by drogher to Fraser's Mill in Grafton.<sup>362</sup>

**Bosheys Water Hole (north):** Spelt 'Boshes' on the current maps. Boshey Roberts established a camp there in 1920. It was a good watering spot for his bullocks, and he built a holding yard for them where he would also break them in.<sup>363</sup> Plater family history tells of a relative in the early days of settlement said to have been living in Martin Place, Sydney, when he won Boshey's Water Hole in a land ballot. However, when he came to view his land he was so horrified he went home and let the claim lapse. For Rosemary Waugh-Allcock and her father, out on a muster, the waterhole was always a good place to 'boil the billy for smoko.'<sup>364</sup>

**Platers Flat (north):** The Prestons noted that a small bark hut was built on the flat in the 1930s, complete with a lemon tree. The Platers were a large family from around Maclean. Some worked on the cane farm, others worked the forests cutting sleepers, while Joyce Plater's husband became a school teacher.<sup>365</sup>

**Fishers Flat (north/central):** Another campsite named after the Fisher family.

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360 Plater J and Committee 1990, Rosemary Waugh-Allcock interview, 24 April 2006, Allen Johnson interview, 6 May 2006, Peter Morgan interview, 17 February 2006

361 Rosemary Waugh-Allcock interview, 24 April 2006, Trevor Plater in Plater J and Committee 1990, p. 69

362 Plater history 1996, Biddle B (compiler) 2001, Rosemary Waugh-Allcock interview, 24 April 2006

363 Memories of the Prestons in Biddle B (compiler) 2001

364 Joyce Plater interview, 1 May 2006, Rosemary Waugh-Allcock interview, 24 April 2006

365 Biddle B (compiler) 2001, Joyce Plater interview, 1 May 2006



**Testament Flat (north/central):** A camp set up at a spot where a bible was found.<sup>366</sup>

**Hayleys Flat/Hayleys River (north/central):** Hayley was Reeve Waugh's son-in-law. His name was one of many used in 'dummying' – he lived in Britain.<sup>367</sup>

**Cassons Camp (south):** Jack Casson ran the last team in the Newfoundland Forest well into the 1960s. His father set up Casson's Camp.<sup>368</sup>

**Pumpkin Plot (south):** This was one of the early experimental plots for the pine plantation in Barcoongere State Forest. Pumpkins were easy to propagate in the cleared burnt areas around the plantation. The timber workers often led an economically marginal life and any supplement to their diets was welcome. People often planted pumpkin, melon, passionfruit and citrus seeds in the bush.

**Lemon Tree (Station Creek campsite).** A number of locals from the Corindi area refer to the Station Creek Campsite as Lemon Trees – 'it's always been called that'. It is very common to find bush lemon trees near stockyards, huts and other regular smoko areas.

**Pebble Beach (south):** Some from Corindi always knew the area as 'The Bay'. Others have always known the area as Pebble Beach well before the national park was gazetted.

## Sandon landmarks: as noted in Bill Biddle's *The Sandon*<sup>369</sup>

**Archie's Hole:** A deep fishing hole in Toumball Creek, named after Archie McDonald who lived in a house nearby.

**Back Bay:** The bay behind 'The Point' and not 'Bat Bay' as indicated on recent maps.

**Black Rock:** The name given to the area along the river where the coffee-coloured rock is exposed.

**Candle Creek:** The main arm of the Sandon River, named by surveyor William Wilson.

**Plover Island:** Named by William Wilson in 1841 but appeared on navigational charts in 1838.

**Poverty Bay:** The shoreline between Back Bay and the Black Rock had several makeshift camps along it during the depression years, thus earning the name 'Poverty Bay'.

**Sandon River:** Named by William Wilson in 1841. It is also known as the South Arm or the Coastal Arm.

**Sandon Village:** The 35 dwellings on the southern bank of the river.

**Sandy's Flat:** Also known as 'Sandy's Crossing' after Sandy Davis who had a house just near the junction of Toumbaal Creek. The road crossed the sand flats in front of his house but was only accessible at low tide.

**South Beach:** The surf beach between Sandon and Minnie Water.

**The Anchorage:** A protected bay behind the current camping area. It is now land but it was a well-known anchorage before 1930.

**The Back Track:** A four-wheel drive track from Sandon to Minnie Water built in the 1960s.

**The Breakaway:** A low-lying narrow strip of land about 150 metres wide on the road into today's camp ground, which was often covered by the surf at low tide. Now the area is vegetated and 4–5 metres above sea level.

**The Flats:** The grassy flat behind the village where Dr Mulhearn used to land his plane.

**The Island:** The area of land where the camping area is today.

**The Oaks:** The name given to the area around Allen Johnson's house.

**Toumbaal Creek:** The northern arm of the Sandon River named by William Wilson

<sup>366</sup> Memories of the Prestons in Biddle B (compiler) 2001

<sup>367</sup> Rosemary Waugh-Allcock interview, 24 April 2006

<sup>368</sup> Clarrie Winkler interview, 1 May 2006

<sup>369</sup> Extract from Biddle B 2001, p. 46.