



CHARLIE "KING MURRI"...

One of the Hastings most prominent aboriginals was Charlie Murray, born at Walgett in 1864. More commonly known as "King Murri" he married Nellie Dungay a member of the Thungutti tribe at Rollands Plains on the 18th October, 1891. His son, also Charlie, passed away on the 13th August, 1983. The senior Murray was nominated as "King" by the white settlers, however, he was never heard to be referred to as "King" by his fellow aborigines. It is reported that Bunyah Jimmy "King of the Hastings River" would never allow his photograph to be taken.

(Koree-Koree - Naabe Boongang.)
It was one hundred years ago when the word went out... "The blacks are back"... "They are making their way now across "Yeppen". It was true and the group must have comprised 60 or 70 in all with women and children and the warriors leading the way, trailing spear and weapons, surrounded by their hunting dogs who relentlessly sniffed the grass for game. They called the animals "Mirree" and as they crossed the "Bit-tay" (Creek) the women and picannins brought up the rear, splashing and laughing their way across in single file with the "Mirree" pups that had to be carried if the going was too heavy for them in the water.

Earlier a farmer had sent word to the tribe that he could use a couple of men for some tree-felling and fencing and maybe a couple of months work... it didn't matter at all, the whole tribe came along for it was time to shift anyway. Their previous campsite was starting to stink-up with decaying food not burnt and human excrement. The "Housekeepers of the Australian Bush" would now take over...

Some of the elders were distant and aloof with the whites and only spoke in their own tongue for they did not want to understand the ways of the white strangers with their weapons used for hunting and "Boongar-Bongalar"... (shot when fighting.) The natives had their "Nulla-Nulla" and "Heliman" and they were the weapons that had been theirs for countless generations so they talked about it as they sat in front of the "Kooyah" (Fire) taking in the heat from the burnt log as the lubras busied themselves cooking them a meal of roasting flesh.

They reflected on strangeness of the white man's ways. There were never any starving blacks, but always, it seemed, there were starving whites when the droughts came, and they asked them for help. The younger bucks in the tribe approaching manhood were more affable with the whites for they were the new generation and the smaller picanniny laughed and played with the "white picanniny" in the creek, for they had a curiosity about one another with the colour of their skins on their naked bodies. The Gins were Gunyahs now that were springing up everywhere with their sparse skin and bark coverings as a shelter from wind, sun or rain. A wandering tribe from

When you came to visit, you always brought food in abundance, and left without taking any, for that was the rule. With a bit of luck a white-man may be persuaded to hand over a beast for a Corroboree as a kind of rent for the land that was used and the white flour was much sought after if the settlers could be prevailed upon.

In other times hates erupted in some spiteful jealousies that burst into open quarrels over a young and comely gin. When that happened it was never safe to set foot outside your own territory. If it was time to move into new hunting

country then you kept a wary eye out for unfriendly faces until it quietened down and always avoided the old camp sites unless you had the safety in numbers that made of risky to throw a hissing spear.

The men rose and went out to "read" the country for game and the hunt. From now on it would be the job of the women and children to keep the forest floor clean and clear of sucker growth and dead wood so the warriors could hunt with more speed and stealth. The gins would climb the trees and rob the nest of the "Kuppine" (wild bee) for his honey. It was an easy task for the men to catch the wild bee in flight. They just plucked him out of the air between forefinger and thumb which was a practice that amazed the whites for their reflexes had long been dulled with the easiness of their living. Once held, the "Kuppine" was pricked with a small soft feather and released. It was the gins job to follow the flight back to the hive. They climbed the trees looping a vine around their waists and jumped up with amazing speed sometimes dislodging a "Coola" (Koala) or the "Whattoo" (Possum) for those on the ground with their killing sticks.

When the wild yams showed yellow leaf it was time to use the digging stick and then replant new vine so it would bear again. Over by "Bulkara" which the whites called (Bago) there was always a prolific growth of these.

Sometimes a woman would be "Cast for death" and that got everyone talking and other times it was a newly initiated man who had broken tribal law. Even if this happened accidentally, and he had run far away, to escape, it did not matter at all for it was always the end for him. Everyone just seemed to know when he died and went about with down-cast eyes, wishing to forget, as they searched for food and wild fruits of the Australian bush. The Burrawang was much sought after for its nuts, which were crushed, placed in a paper bark then leached in running water for a week. It could poison if this was not done. Then it was roasted and became known to the whiteman as "Brown Flour", highly valued by them too.

Along the coast this area was known as "Ulitarra" which meant bountiful land. For the "Koree-Koree" it was also known as "Touris" and that meant their spiritual territory and the tribe roamed their monadic life freely in the land which stretched from the Manning River in the south up to the Wilson River in the north. Generally the Hastings Tribes were called "Ngamba" and the dialect was "Biripi."

Tribal friends today and enemies tomorrow, for that was the way it was. Especially with the young wild ones growing with their lusts and passions and found it hard to be contained when an "Elder" took a more desirable lubra for himself. The more eager ones tried to filch them away from the visiting tribes and then, passions exploded. "Big Peter" over with the Rollands Plains tribe attacked his own lubra in a jealous fit of anger and "Dungay Billy" came to her assistance for he liked her. That led to a fight watched by the whole tribe as they tore at each other with stone axes. "Dungay" slashed "Peter" on the neck and in the weeks that followed, he seemed to recover a little, but he could never again completely lift his head. "Big Peter" had to even the score when he swung a murderous blow that caught "Dungay" on the hip and he had a terrible limp after that. In a few years both men had died as a result of these wounds which restricted their hunting stealth for survival.

The gins always carried a tomahawk, mainly to cleft the water-logged trees lying in the stream for they were in constant search of the Cobra worm which was chopped from under the bark. It was a delicacy as also was the sweetness of the yellow back-fat strips of "Tarroke" and known to the whites as the black goanna.

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