

Source

Camden Haven Estuary Processes Study //

History

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Historical Demographics and Land Use

The pre-European history of Aboriginal tribes in the area has been summarised by Archaeologist Jacqui Collins, in a report she is about to submit to Patterson Britton & Partners Pty Ltd related to an upgrade of the Dunbogen sewerage scheme (Collins, pers. com.). She has advised that it will be available sometime in June 98, and the relevant historical information could be extracted from that report.

Griffith (1992) summarised past land uses in the Crowdy Bay National Park. He notes that Aborigines of the Namba (or Ngamba) and Birpai (or Birripai) tribes formerly occupied lands in the vicinity of the Park. The Namba territory comprised coastal and sub-coastal lands north of the Manning River into the Hastings Valley. Territory of the Birpai tribe included coastal, sub-coastal and mountain lands south of the Manning River, as well as inland extensions north of the Manning River, as reported by Tindale, 1974.

The boundary or degree of overlap between the traditional lands of the Namba and Bunyah tribes is unknown at this time, but it is hoped that the historical information to be supplied by Collins will help in that regard.

The two main seasons, summer and winter, apparently regulated the Namba and Birpai tribes' annual land use patterns. In summer they lived in the lowlands of their territory near river and sea where they took full advantage of seasonally abundant fish and shellfish, and fruits such as figs. The lowland forests also contained abundant koala, possum, emu, kangaroo, pademelon, and wallaby. At the close of summer, the Birpai migrated to the mountain lands to hunt game and fowl, and gather wild vegetables. However, the Namba people had little in the way of mountain lands into which to migrate during the winter months.

Griffith summarised Cribb and Cribb (1982) in describing many of the plant species occurring in the area which are edible, and points out that these were probably utilised by the Namba and Birpai people. Examples given are the fruits of *Bilardiera scandens* (Common Apple Berry), *Carpobrotus glaucescens* (Coast Noonflower), and *Syzygium oleosum* (Blue Lilly Pilly), the shoots or leaves of *Apium prostratum* (Sea Celery), *Flagellaria indica* (Whip Vine), and *Suaeda australis* (Austral Sea-blite), the seeds of *Acacia sophorae* (Beach Sally Wattle), *Avicennia marina* (Grey Mangrove), and *Alpinia caerulea* (Wild Ginger), and the tubers or roots of *Blechnum indicum* (Swamp Water Fern), *Burchardia umbellata* (Milkmaids), *Dioscorea transversa* (Native Yam), *Eustrephus latifolius* (Wombat Berry), and *Trachymene incisa* (Native Carrot). Nectar was also collected from the flowers of *Banksia*, *Eucalyptus*, *Melaleuca* and *Xanthorrhoea* species, often by steeping in water to make a sweet drink.

Apart from being a source of foodstuffs, plants provided the Namba and Birpai people with a wide range of raw materials. One example is the manufacture of dilly-bags from the tough leaves of *Lomandra* species (mat rush). Another example is the construction of shields from the bark of *Avicennia marina* (Grey Mangrove).

Known Aboriginal Sites

Rich (1990) surveyed part of the Dunbogen area which was nominated for development as a proposed residential canal estate. Three small areas were surveyed, resulting in six sites being

♦ **70,000 to 20,000 years BP - Figure 7B**

With the onset of the last (*Wurm or Wisconsin*) glaciation, c. 70,000 BP sea level fell, and the Inner Barrier was partially dissected and modified by subaerial processes. Dissection of the stranded river deltas left the relict elevated river terraces which occur at Rossglen on the Camden Haven and in the vicinity of Johns River township on the Stewarts River.

Cliff top dunes at the Camden Head Perpendicular Point were formed as a result of exposure of eroded barrier sands to westerly winds, associated with a shift in climatic conditions.

♦ **20,000 to 6,000 years BP - Figure 8A**

This period marks the beginning of the most recent geological epoch ie the Holocene. Sea level again began to rise at approximately 20 to 16,000 years BP with the melting of the northern continental ice sheets. The Holocene transgression continued until approximately 6,000 BP at which time the sea attained its present level. The Outer Barrier was formed adjacent to the Inner Barrier after the culmination of the Holocene transgression.

♦ **6,000 years to Present - Figure 8B**

Over the last 6,000 years, sea level has remained relatively stable. Continued supplies of marine sand caused the Outer Barrier to prograde up until approx 2,000 years BP. The Camden Haven embayment, however, was largely filled by the Inner Barrier and supplies of marine sand throughout the later periods of the Holocene would have been transported out of the embayment by longshore transport. As a consequence, the Outer Barrier was not able to develop an extensive beach ridge plain.

Through the Holocene epoch, the mud basins of Watson Taylors Lake and Queens Lake slowly infilled with fine catchment runoff. The progradation of digitate deltas was the more graphic manifestation of this sedimentation. However, the overall floor of the mud basins would have been filling with mud probably at the lower end of published Holocene infilling rates ie. approx 1 mm/yr (*Roy, 1984*).

The tidal deltas would have developed relatively quickly during the Holocene stillstand (*ie. period of constant sea level*) and they are no longer a major source of infilling.

2.2 ABORIGINAL HISTORY

We contacted both the Port Macquarie and Taree Aboriginal Land Councils regarding historical information and details of aboriginal sites of significance. Neither Land Council were able to provide any specific information. We then contacted the Bunyah Local Aboriginal Land Council at Wauchope, who are the local tribe which inhabited the lower Camden Haven estuary. They recommended we speak to Jacqui Collins, an archaeologist and member of their council, from Dunbogen.

identified. One shell midden (Site 1) is an *in situ* stratified shell lens. The other sites were also shell middens, consisting of low-density scatters of shells, with stone artefacts found at two of the sites. Sites 3-6 may have been damaged by sand mining. **Appendix H** [map 3] is extracted from Rich's 1990 report, and shows the location of the sites identified in her survey.

According to Rich (1990), four archaeological investigations had been carried out in the Dunbogen-Laurieton area prior to her survey. The following information has been extracted from her 1990 report.

In 1979 a shell midden was uncovered on the south side of Gogleys Lagoon during construction of a house. This site, number 30-6-27 of NSW NPWS, was subsequently investigated by Hughes (described below).

In 1981 Coleman carried out an archaeological survey around the southern side of Gogleys Lagoon. She re-recorded site 30-6-27 and found a scarred tree (site 30-6-26) and another midden (site 30-6-28) around the edge of the Lagoon.

In 1983 Bell carried out a survey of part of the Camden Shores canal development area. He inspected much of the flat low-lying land west of the sand dune, and inspected the southern end of the dune. He found a few shell fragments which were too small to be identified positively as being an Aboriginal site, but were within 50m of site 1 recorded by Rich (1990), so it is likely they were part of the same site.

More recently (no date given by Rich), Bonhomme carried out a small survey at Deauville, which is on the foot slope of North Brother Mountain on the west side of Camden Haven Inlet, opposite Rich's survey. No sites were found. It should be noted that North Brother Mountain is a natural mythological site (30-6-23).

According to Rich (1990), seven Aboriginal sites had previously been recorded in the Dunbogen-Laurieton area. Six of these sites are open middens, and the other is a scarred (toehold) tree.

Four of the shell middens occur around Gogleys Lagoon and along Camden Haven Inlet. These sites have both beach and estuarine shellfish species present; usually pipi, whelk, oyster and cockle shells.

The midden near Gogleys Lagoon investigated by Hughes (1979) was dominated by pipi shell, with the estuarine shells noted above also present. A small number of limpets and cartrut shells from rock platform habitats were also present. Artefacts of silcrete, volcanic chert quartzite, and 'hornfels' were recovered. The contents of the site indicated that a range of environmental zones were exploited: beach, estuary, and rock platforms near the headland.

One shell midden occurs on an eroded foredune along Dunbogen Beach. It is predominantly pipi shells (99%) with some charcoal, fish or bird bone, and stone artefacts (NPWS site 30-6-25).

An open site has also been reported north-west of Dicks Hill (Bell, 1983:2) but information for this site (30-6-37) was missing from the NPWS Site Register.

The seventh site is a scarred tree which leans out over Gogleys Lagoon. This has toeholds cut into it with a steel axe and is thought to be an Aboriginal historic site (30-6-26).

Collins (pers. com.) has advised that since Rich's report a significant Aboriginal relic site (30-6-10) has been identified and excavated by her at North Haven (Ostler Park, at the eastern side of the entrance to Stingray Creek). Although analyses are not yet completed, test excavations of a large mounded midden in Ostler Park "have revealed an 80cm deep occupation deposit dominated by oyster shells, but also containing significant components of whelk, cockle and pipi shells along with animal bones and stone artefacts. Vertebrate faunal remains recovered from the site indicate the operation of a broad-based economy which included both fishing and the hunting of terrestrial animals. Stone artefacts had been manufactured on a wide range of raw stone materials, including chert, jasper, quartz, quartzite, indurated siltstone and fine-grained volcanic stones. Most of these are available in pebble form within river gravels fronting the site" (Collins, in prep.).

Radiocarbon dating suggests an occupation of the site spanning from approximately 3,485 years ago to approximately 2,080 years ago. Collins suggests that, "despite the age of the upper layer, the midden is more likely to have continued in use until at least the time of first European settlement of the Camden Haven. There have been several independent oral reports to suggest that the original surface layer of shell was removed, probably by limeburners in the early years and later by locals collecting grit for their fowl.

The southern section of the midden has been severely eroded and undercut by floodwater and, in consultation with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Bunyah Local Aboriginal Land Council and Hastings Council undertook stabilisation work in 1995 which, to date, has been successful in preventing further degradation. This work consisted of packing the undercut void with sand and sand bags and stabilising the exposed bank section with bags containing a sand and cement mixture. However, there has been no significant flood since 1995 and it is likely that more comprehensive and expensive work would be necessary to ensure the midden's permanent preservation" (Collins, in prep.).

Rich (1990) concluded that the information available to her suggested that open middens between the Manning and Hastings Rivers tend to be concentrated along coastal dunes, headlands and river mouths. Known sites are clearly clustered around Gogleys Lagoon, Camden Haven Inlet and Dunbogen Beach. Jacqui Collins has provided a map showing the location of all known Aboriginal relic sites in the lower Camden Haven estuary, and this is reproduced in **Appendix H**. She considers that the fact that no other sites have been recorded around Queens Lake or Watson Tayors Lake is most probably because these areas have never been surveyed, rather than not being present.

Aboriginal Land Claim

According to Griffith (1994), parts of vacant Crown Lands between Queens Lake and Grants Beach, and stretching between North Haven and Bonny Hills are the subject of Aboriginal Land Claims lodged with the Taree Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM). These areas, which are shown in **Appendix H**, are detailed as follows:

Land Claim 4055

Portion 118

Land Claim 4056	Portion 11
Land Claim 4057	Refused in 1993
Land Claim 4058	Portion 25
Land Claim 4059	Portions 91,241 and 235

Griffith (1994) stated that the claims were being processed by CALM at Taree prior to being forwarded to Head Office for determination. Enquiry to CALM head office in Sydney reveals that the CALM regional reports have been lodged with them and their investigations are at an advanced stage. When their recommendations are completed, they will be forwarded to the Minister for his determination to be made at some future date.

2.3 EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT

Although the Camden Haven River and lakes system was not officially “discovered” by Europeans until after the settlement of New South Wales, Captain James Cook on his voyage north along the east coast of Australia, travelled past the region and named Point Perpendicular of the site of the entrance to the estuary (*southern headland*). Cook travelled past the Camden Haven region on Saturday May 12th 1770, and observed ‘three remarkable large hills lying continuance to each other and not far from the shore’. As these hills bore some resemblance to each other, Cook called them The Three Brothers. This name has endured, and The Three Brothers have remained a distinctive topographic characteristic of the Camden Haven area.

Surveyor-General, John Oxley is credited with having ‘discovered’ the Camden Haven River. Oxley had set-out from Bathurst in search of an inland sea. The Expedition was held up by the flooded Macquarie Marshes, and so turned eastward, eventually reaching the coast and discovering and naming Port Macquarie on 8th October, 1818. Travelling south to Sydney, Oxley discovered the Camden Haven River on 15th October, 1818, which he named in honour of Charles Pratt, 1st Earl Camden (*Camden Haven Historical Society, 1991*).