

**First Nations People
of
Fraser Island
(K'Gari)
And their dingoes**

**By Jennifer Parkhurst
(‘Naibar Wongari Yeeran –
Our Sister Dingo Woman’)**



Welcome to Country!

**‘Galangoor djali! Galangoor.
Butchulla bilam, midiru K’gari galangoor nyin djaa.
Ngalmu galangoor Biral and Biralgan bula nyin djali!
Wanya nyin yangu, wanai djinang djaa.’**

This message was written by Butchulla Elder Uncle Malcolm Burns and translates as: ‘Good day. Welcome! Butchulla people, Traditional Owners of K’gari, welcome you to country. May all our good spirits be around you throughout the day. Wherever you go leave only footprints.’¹

Thousands of years before Europeans even knew Australia existed, a noble race of people were living in this country, conserving it, communing with nature, enjoying what seemed to be an idyllic life style. When did the Aboriginal First Nations People first come to Fraser Island, known to them as K'Gari, meaning 'Paradise'? Was it 5,000 years ago, 30,000 years ago – historians and archaeologists are divided and still searching for answers. Based on the presence of artefacts discovered during excavations in the 1970's, which had been compared to artefacts of known antiquity found in other areas of Australia, Dr Peter K Lauer (then curator and Director of the Anthropology Museum Queensland, now deceased) ventured that the Aboriginal people might have occupied Fraser Island for 30,000 years.²

However based on more recent excavations carried out at certain sites on the Island, the archaeologist, Professor Ian Mc Niven, believes the earliest occupation on Fraser Island was 1,550 years ago, with archaeological evidence pointing to a significant growth in the occupation of Fraser Island some 900 years ago. He does state that further research may reveal that the inhabitation of the Island could date back to 10,000 years ago.³

Certainly Aboriginal people were living on the Cooloola Coast (Cooloola comes from the Aboriginal name for the cypress pine, called kululu or kululoi⁴) and possibly Fraser Island when Mount Vesuvius exploded and destroyed Pompeii, when the first pyramids were constructed, when Stonehenge was erected; during the Trojan War, the foundation of Japan, the collapse of the Assyrian Empire, the foundation of Buddhism, the foundation of Confucianism, and the birth of Jesus Christ. According to the Badtjala (Butchulla) people, they occupied the Island since Creation.

Fraser Island was a sacred site to the Aboriginal people of the whole Cooloola area.⁵

The creation story of Fraser Island as told by Olga Miller [Aboriginal writer, Community worker, government consultant, Environmentalist, Illustrator and Storyteller (1920 – 2003)] is as follows:

'Way back in the First Time, Beeral the God who lived in the sky – the Rainbow God – sent down his messenger Yindingie to make the land, and with him he had a helper, and she was a beautiful white spirit, and her name was K'gari (pronounced 'Gurri'). She worked very hard with Yindingie and they made all the beautiful land coming down the coast, from as far as you can see up that way, to as far as you can see down the other way. When they reached Hervey Bay, Yindingie said to K'gari, 'Oh you've been working very hard'. He said, 'I think you should go and have a rest, otherwise you'll get too tired.' He said, 'Go and lie on those rocks over there, in the water.' So she did. She lay down on those rocks and soon she went to sleep. And when she woke up, Yindingie had finished making all this beautiful land of lovely, lovely white beaches and little islands. In the distance there was a beautiful mountain range and a big river. K'gari woke up and said to Yindingie, 'Oh what a beautiful place, I think it is the nicest place you've made so far.' She said, 'I'd like to stay here.' He said, 'you can't do that... because you are a spirit, you've got to go back to the spirit world.' Anyway, she had really fallen in love with this area. So she pleaded and coaxed, and at last Yindingie relented. He said, 'All right ... but you can't stay here as a spirit... I'll have to change you into something else... you go down and lie on those rocks again.' So she did... And he changed her into a beautiful island. He covered her with trees and shrubs, beautiful flowers and ferns. He gave her some lakes to be her

eyes, and as she lay there she could look up and see her friends. And then he made some creatures, animals and birds. And lastly he made some people. And he gathered them all at a place called Moonen, which is today known as Moon Point. He took them all around the island; showed them where they could live; brought them back again; ... and he gave them three laws, which are: 1/ what is good for the land comes first; 2/ do not touch or take anything that does not belong to you; and 3/ if you have plenty you must share.⁶

What a wonderful way to live in harmony with this world – if only that harmony had lasted!

Indeed, the Aboriginal people lived by those creation rules, and were in tune with their environment, the landscape, the spirit world, and all living things and beings, within this specific cultural context. Their connection with the non-physical world was just as important as their connection with nature and the tangible things of this world. They lived by the credo 'What we do affects all that surrounds us.... Our relationship with the land and sea is perfect. Our law is embodied in our culture and vested in our people since time immemorial'.⁷

It was an island of plenty, for its people and for their companion dog, the dingo. Under Aboriginal ownership, K'Gari was preserved in the best possible way. Mr James Currie, whose Butchulla grandfather came from Fraser Island says: 'I think non-Aboriginal people could learn something from all Aboriginal people of this world, because they would have to be one of the best conservationists in the world. Their life and culture depend on it.'⁸

Lewis Walker, of Bundjalung Nation, explains: 'We live here in our country. From the eyes of animals, through the eyes of an eagle, through an eye of a kangaroo, the feeling of the water, understanding the trees, and seeing the beauty in what lives among the trees. We smell the essence and aroma of the sacred animals. We belong to them animals; we are story tellers of them animals. We dance them. We believe one time ago we was a kangaroo, we was a bird, we was a flying fox, we was a bat, we was a possum, we was an eagle, we was a fish, we was everything because we was part of the universe. The universe is very, very sacred to us because we are the balance to maintain each other's energy, feeling, emotions, and most of all, the sharing, caring, loving and giving. What we call our culture. Our love for what we do every day of our life is culture.'

'This [nature] is the Garden of Eden, the outdoor university, was promising food and medicine to heal those who thirst for healing. The animals teach us how to find water, we look and we find, and we seek, and we find abundance.'⁹

Before European settlement, Fraser Island was populated by three dominant tribes of Aborigines, taking up approximately one third of the Island each. The Ngulungbara to the north; the Badtjala (Butchulla) in the centre, and the Dulungbara to the south. Butchulla territory also extended to the mainland and the region of the Mary River, half way between Maryborough and Gympie, and up to Pialba in Hervey Bay. Dulungbara territory extended from the Island across to Inskip Point, to Tinana Creek, and down to Noosa.

The names of the tribes reflected aspects of the areas from which they came. Dulungbara people were known for their use of the nautilus shell, or 'Dalung', which they collected and traded with other clans. The shells were a valuable commodity. Due to the colourful 'rainbow' surface, they had a close tie to the Rainbow Serpent, 'Thugine', and had a sacred link with many tribal stories and songs.¹⁰ 'Bara' is a suffix meaning 'folk'.

The name Badtjala is said to mean 'sea people' or 'saltwater people', as the Butchulla territory extended predominantly along the coast lines of both Fraser Island and Hervey Bay. The Butchulla people and Dulungbara freely associated and also socialised with the Kabi Kabi people.

The Ngulungbara people to the north were known for their elaborate head dress, 'Ngulung' meaning head. The Ngulungbara people were kinsmen to the Dulungbara and intermarried. Both groups shared the use of Woongoolba creek as a place of giving birth. It was a place known as a women's sacred place. Despite their alliance, they still required permission to enter each-other's tribal areas.¹¹

They all spoke the Cabee-Cabee (Kabi-Kabi, Gubbi Gubbi) language, with variants for different locations.

Butchulla Elder Aunty Marie tells us: 'The boundaries and areas are pretty well defined. There were walkways where you could walk through an area. You could go right across Australia [and Fraser Island], top, bottom centre, and there were Aboriginal walkways. While you were on a walkway it was a law between all Aboriginals that other Aboriginals could not attack or do any harm to you; you were respected as travellers, unless you stepped onto their land or speared one of their animals. A lot of the highways in Australia now are built on Aboriginal walkways, including the Bruce Highway. The waterholes were included in this free access walkway system.

'If you weren't on the walkway you had to ask the people's permission to enter their territory. To protect resources, so that they couldn't come in and kill animals on your land and deplete your resources, or your 'country'. You have to respect other people's land. I've been to other territories to speak to the old people there, and I won't sit down unless they ask me to. It wouldn't matter which territory I went to, I have to show respect.

'The dingoes have a similar territory and boundary structure. This also protects resources. They had a higher wisdom governing them, intuition.'¹²

Having observed dingoes for many years, I know this to be true. The dingoes, like the Aboriginal people, had 'territorial entry ceremonies' if they wished to enter another dingo's territory. Interestingly, the dingoes' ceremony was similar to the Aboriginal ritual. The dingoes enter the area they wish to traverse and wait to be noticed by its occupants. The owners of that territory approach the intruders, and wait for their next move. The intruders step forward, with their body language submissive; tail down, ears back, body hunched. A sign is given by the owners for one of the visitors to come forward. This is done haltingly with much submissive posturing. The dingo approaches the local representatives and continues to behave submissively while the locals sniff it all over. Sometimes the visiting dingo is forced to the ground to reveal its delicate stomach area, and can be nipped on the stomach or neck. After some ritualised 'attacking', the local dingo is eventually

satisfied that the visitor is there to do no harm and allows it and its pack passage through the territory.

Obviously the Aboriginal people did not sniff each-other's beliefs, but they did go through a similar series of posturing and waiting for permission to enter, to talk to Elders and make their request to pass through the territory.

Aunty Marie says, 'They [the dingoes] are like the Aboriginal people, they have their own territories or 'countries', they have their laws, they don't trespass into other dingoes' country because they know the food and water is for the other dingoes in their area. It's a matter of survival, same as the Aboriginal people. We lived by nature and nature governed us, and we lived in harmony with nature. We learned to live with nature not against it.'

Food availability

According to Olga Miller there were approximately 500 permanent residents on the Island. However during the Feast of the Tailor fish, and the Feast of the Winter Mullet, there could be as many as 4,000 people on the Island, who had travelled across from the mainland in bark canoes. Miller says: 'This explains the number 3 law [if you have plenty you must share]', because 'no one was refused admittance to come and share in the harvest of the fish.'¹³

The feast of the fish was reciprocated by the mainland Aborigines during the Bunyah Festival. Every third year in January - March the bunya trees in the mountains west of Gympie and in the Blackall ranges produced a large harvest of Bunya nuts, and the local people sent out invites to surrounding tribes to come and join in the feast.

The invitations were sent out according to how big the harvest was each year. Tribes from all over were invited, and some travelled up to 250 kilometres to participate. The nuts were gathered by the local Aborigines, pounded into meal and made into cakes which were roasted in a fire.

The people would not have only eaten Bunya nuts, but would also have hunted the local resources, such as kangaroos, wallabies, and possums, and so after the feast each year, to rest the land and let it rejuvenate, visitors would return to their own lands and the hosts of the bunya festival would proceed to Fraser Island for the Feast of the Fish.

No doubt this would have been a time of harvest and plenty for the dingoes as well, and a time when dingoes were swapped between mainland residents and Island residents, thus keeping the dingo gene pool strong and healthy. For example, the Bunya festival was a good opportunity for people to trade goods. They traded ochre, Dalung (nautilus) shells, weapons, blankets made of possum skins, dilly bags, and pet dingoes.¹⁴

The fine physique of the Island's Aboriginal people has been often recorded. They were always naked, except for the decoration of ochre, charcoal or grease; they wore beads, shells or feathers, and exhibited cicatrices (intentional scars on the chest and arms denoting one's status in the tribe) and nose piercings. Ebenezer Thorne, one of the first Europeans to come into contact with the Dulungbara people, describes them as 'a fine race of men, among whom are as finely-formed and well-developed specimens of the race as are to be found elsewhere. When seen in this primitive

condition... the native has a dignity of gesture, a firmness of tread, a litheness and gracefulness of motion...'¹⁵

Their health and vitality was due to the abundance of food that the coast afforded them, including fish, dugong, turtles, whales, mud crab, birds, bandicoots goannas and echidnas (the past and present diet of the dingoes as well). They were conservationists; although turtles were abundant, they never caught females and didn't take many eggs. Animals that were breeding were off-limits and this was strictly enforced as another means of conservation.

Kangaroos and wallabies were apparently plentiful on the Island at that time and were hunted by the Aborigines with the help of 'kangaroo dogs' [dingoes]. Dingoes were at that time 'very numerous' in the wild, but also commonly domesticated.¹⁶

Aboriginal people also gathered 'vegetables', and fruits, including midyim berry, small, white currants, wild raspberry, wild cherry, quandong, and pigface. The rainforest afforded food such as a kind of cabbage from the buds of the piccabeen palms,¹⁷ as well as fern roots and macrozamia cycads. Some of these foods were poisonous and had to be specially prepared in order to make them edible. It is a testament to the thousands of years the Aboriginal people lived on the Island that they had learned how to prepare certain foods so that they were safe. Likewise, they knew which plants were good medicine and helpful for certain ailments.

Aunty Marie tells us: 'From what I've heard from the old people, and the stories handed down to them, the Island was a living place, a beautiful place, it was bountiful, they could get eugaries or wongs, they cooked fish, they lived with the dingoes, they worked and lived with the Island in harmony. There were different ceremonies for different seasons. It was paradise for them and their dogs. The dogs were part of family life. People who love their dogs will I hope understand the Aboriginal attachment to the dingoes. There was a lot of food here and the Aboriginal people when they fished, they left the fish out for the dingoes. They always left food and share it for the dingoes. The aboriginal people shared their food with other people, living in harmony. Even now I always leave fish on the beach for the dingoes. Now they don't let dingoes eat fish, but it was a part of the dingoes food supply.'

Butchulla Elder Aunty Francis tells a similar story: 'The dingo also shared knowledge about nature. They weren't just an animal to us they were our friends and part of the family. We didn't control them, whatever we ate they ate that's why they were healthy.'¹⁸

Mr James Curry discusses the abundance of sea-life he witnessed on Fraser Island in his youth: 'We used to see dugong plenty, everywhere. Round Island was just smothered in them. Turtles we saw everywhere. Every time we went fishing... we used to grab a turtle and they was plentiful, and you wouldn't have to dive or spear for them. You walked up a narrow gutter creek and it's just laying there and so you pick up the one you want. We used to eat the oysters, the *bingus* and the catch we used to bring home. There were mud crabs everywhere. You walk in the little gutters in the mangroves and they would just be laying there. You probably get half-a-dozen, in an hour.'¹⁹

People predominantly lived on the east coast (over 200 middens have been found there, mainly comprising eugarie or pippie shells – but very few fish frames or animal bones, indicating that these

were possibly given to the dingoes), but also moved to the west coast according to what foods were in season (middens have also been found on the west coast mostly comprising oyster shells).

Aboriginal knowledge of the environment and what each season would bring enabled them to move from place to place to take advantage of food resources, and rest areas that they had been using. Aunty Francis says: 'We took our information from the formation of the clouds or the constellations of the stars at night, the colour of the horizons, all meant something to our people. Their lives evolved around nature. We had a traditional role as caretaker of the land and the dingo. Every other animal that lived there too was the same.'

Way of Life

Aunty Marie explains: 'Tribes do have different laws, but 90% of them would be similar. The different 'country' requires different laws in some cases, but mostly it's the same. Each tribal area is 'Country' all of its own. I live in a modern world but I believe in Aboriginal law right down to the last thing and I follow it.'

'There were places that were sacred to men and women. Lake Wabby here was a sacred men's place and I've never been there. Eli Creek was a special place for women to after they had their babies. The water is so cold and it so fresh, and it was a tradition to bring the babies and dip them in the water like a christening rite. I bet the babies used to have a little yell about it! It was like a mothers club. Now there are too many people at Eli Creek, there's too much stress, and the creek is telling us that it doesn't like it. Overnight it changed direction and all of the walkways had to be pulled down. Unfortunately we can't protect this land; we can't protect it from tourism and money.'

The Aboriginal people had a totem system, a totem being a plant or animal that was sacred to them and could not be harmed or hunted and eaten by men. Relatives were also not allowed to eat each other's totems. Regular food supply items such as fish and certain species of plants were not totemic, but variable food sources like dugong were. Dingoes and dolphins were specifically sacred to the Aboriginal people of Fraser Island and were never eaten, possibly because of their significance in the people's lives. Dingoes were their camp dogs and friends, and dolphins helped them herd fish into the shallows. On page 51 of the text: 'Langevad, Some Original Views', it says that, 'porpoises were addressed by coastal people as though they were human beings'.

When Matthew Flinders made first contact with the Ngulungbara people of Sandy Cape in 1802, he offered them porpoise meat as a gift. It is surprising they did not express horror and confusion, and it was lucky he wasn't murdered, as the killing of a dolphin often resulted in punishment of death.

'Nobody ever, ever touched a dolphin because that was a totem for us,' Aunty Marie explains. 'The totem is a spirit thing that looks after you, you don't eat it and don't touch it. Each tribe or family had a different totem. It could be a kangaroo –they couldn't eat that meat. The dingo was also a tribal totem.'

The totemic system as well as having symbolic and spiritual aspects conceivably helped to preserve resources.

Fire was an essential part of life. It was made by rubbing two pieces of wood together, predominantly satinay and black fig. A flat piece of timber with a hole in it was laid on the ground and the other stick was placed perpendicular to that, and rubbed between the palms of the hands till enough friction generated sparks. These fell down onto dried grass and eventually ignited. Because the process of making fire was quite time consuming, coals were carried on walkabout, or taken in canoes in a bed of sand if travelling across water in canoes.

Aunty Marie says, 'Our people went back and forward from the mainland to the Island, the mainland being another part of our territory, using canoes from the canoe trees. The easiest access was from the southern end, where they island-hopped on low tides. They'd go to different islands and stay overnight there because it's a long way across from there [to Hervey Bay]. Our area also goes to Tin Can Bay which is at the bottom end, and Rainbow Beach; it was a short hop cross there.'

Canoes were made by cutting large pieces of bark from certain trees, either turpentine, or swamp mahogany, and binding them together with vines. Sticks were used to spread the canoe and keep it stable. While the canoes looked frail, they carried half a dozen people safely.²⁰ 'Canoe' Scars on some trees can still be found on the Island.

Their tools were mostly made of timber hardened in the fire; however they also used stone for things like axes, cutters, and chisels. The stone for these would have been sourced on the mainland, or traded during festivals and gatherings. They made intricate fishing nets out of bark which was twisted into a sort of twine and had handles attached. The handles, when used, rubbed on the outer knuckle of the fisherman's wrist and thus formed a callus. This callus was noticed by the first non-Aboriginal observers of the Fraser Island people and was seen as particular to this area of the country.

Another local peculiarity was the removal of the top joint of a woman's left finger. It was never ascertained whether this was to represent that the woman was married, or whether it served another purpose.

Camps had to be quite portable and easy to erect. People left camps to go in search of food in another area, or if someone died. If a person died, the camp was vacated immediately. (I have found the same behaviour with dingoes – if a pack member dies, they vacate that area for a certain period of time.) Tents or huts were made from saplings covered in paperbark, and formed a circle around the centre point of camp life, the fire.

Aboriginal belief in the existence of evil spirits was so profound that they would not leave their camps after dark. The dingo played a vital role in this instance, as it was believed to be able to discern evil spirits and keep them away.

The Aboriginal people had a code of morals that governed their conduct and behaviour. A nice example of this is the great respect with which older people were treated. Ebenezer Thorne

compared the idyllic life of an old woman to that of his 'civilised' country, and found his own country lacking: 'A very old lady bent nearly double and blind was handed a roasted bream as she lay basking in the midday sun Evident respect and affection was evinced by the men and younger women to these old people...' he also found that: 'As with their children so with their sick, great kindness is shown. If a man or woman fall sick, all the tribe come and condole with them; every attention is paid, kind words and sympathizing sighs are uttered, in a way that teaches the observer how much kindness and love there is in the race.'²¹

Aunty Marie explains, 'We had to look after our old people. They are the ones with the knowledge. They are the people that came before you, nurtured and looked after you. That's where we learnt a lot of our lore. In some areas they [the elders] are still initiating young people [with cicatrices] they take them out to County, set up camp, show them things like how to fish, and really talk to them.'

'Paradise' was not without its difficulties or imperfections. John Graham, a convict who successfully escaped the Moreton Bay penal settlement, lived with the Cooloola Aborigines for 6 years. He was eventually re-captured and volunteered to go in search of the survivors of the Stirling Castle shipwreck, specifically Eliza Fraser. When visiting the Island to complete this mission in August, he found John Baxter (Second Mate) amongst a group of Aborigines at Hook Point that were starving. The rest of the family groups had left the Island for the mainland.²² It is interesting that Hook Point did not have enough apparent sustenance for the Aborigines to survive at that point in time. Hook Point is known in this present day as a place that does not have a good availability of food for the dingoes that live there.

The people did fight when necessary. They used nullah nullahs (small clubs), hatchets, spears and shields. The spears and nullah were hardened by fire, and the hatchet and knives were made of stone. The beach was generally the scene of battle and the females were required to move away to the sand banks. The battle began with verbal abuse, and then men singled out an opponent and hurled first his boomerangs and then his spears. Waddies or nullahs were either used as clubs or thrown. After this, knives were used. 'Here we must notice a very humane and singular provision. Although these men meet in deadly strife, no man is allowed to strike or cut his antagonist in any vital part. The only places they were allowed to attack were the arms, shoulders, buttocks, and thighs. No stabbing was resorted to in any circumstances.'²³

It was a rule that as soon as one death occurred the fighting ceased, the side to which the dead man belonged being conquered.

It often happened that when the men were fighting the women became agitated and started to fight. After using yam sticks they ran at each other and pulled at each other's hair. This is believed to be the reason most Aboriginal women's hair was short, much shorter than the men's.²⁴

Dingoes

According to the Aboriginal people humans and dogs have a common origin and destiny.²⁵

'They reckon we're the oldest race in the world, so the dingoes must be the oldest dog,' says Butchulla Elder Aunty Mallee.²⁶

Deborah Bird Rose describes the companionship between Aboriginal people and dingoes as something humans have done for thousands of years... 'They were forming close, loving bonds of mutual care and solidarity with uniquely interactive companions.'²⁷

When moving from camp to camp, or walkabouts, the people carried all their worldly belongings, and obviously took their dingoes with them. One account of an observation of a walkabout from 1876 described the ratio of dingo puppies to piccaninnies (babies) as 5 to 1.²⁸ Aunty Francis says: 'Our people have been there for over 10,000 years or more; they knew every inch of the Island. They weren't there alone, they had the dingo as their companion, they travelled everywhere with them. The dingo was part of who they were. They always worked in harmony with us, our people used to travel from FI to the mainland. The dingo jumped in a canoe and came over with us.'

Aunty Marie recalls her grandmother's story about how dingoes were raised. 'Dingo pups were taken when they were very small and they were still drinking milk from their mothers. So when the Aboriginal did take them, they had to find one of the women who was breast feeding and they would feed those pups on human breast milk. That's real bonding. That's why the dingoes stayed with the people. The dingoes never harmed the children. There were no dingo attacks on children in my stories and history and I've asked a lot of the Aboriginal people. It was never – ever known in history where a dingo attacked a child.'²⁹

The Aboriginal people without doubt had deep affection for their dingoes. Ebenezer Thorne, noted that greater sorrow seemed to be felt and shown at the death of a 'dog'[dingo] than at the death of a person. An enchanting story is told of one of the dingoes being left behind after a bee-hunting expedition on the other side of a river. When the people got back to camp and noticed that the dingo was not with them, they re-crossed the river to search for him. At nightfall, they returned, sorrowful and tired, without him. The women were crying and the men were dejected. During the night there was no singing in the camp, and everyone seemed dull and listless.

Early the next morning, they crossed the river again, but the day was spent in a fruitless search for the dingo. That night there was 'crying for the dead', with people lacerating themselves and tearing their hair, commonly practiced when a relative died. When Thorne asked them about this practice, he was told, 'That very good dog, that always eat up everything, plenty that eat gilda and bee, and possum and kangaroo. That very good dog belonging to sleep along blanket.'

The next day all hands were again looking for the dingo in the daytime and crying all night.

The following morning Thorne heard a great shout in the bush which was taken up at the camp, and directly the whole tribe was in a state of the 'wildest excitement'. Running out to learn the reason of this great outcry, Thorne was told that the dingo had come home. This scene of joy and congratulation apparently could not have been exceeded if a long-lost relative had turned up, and Thorne looked on with astonishment at seeing so much feeling exhibited over a 'mangy dog'. After that time the dingo, who had before been valued for his willingness to eat everything and to sleep in the blankets, was looked upon as an embodiment of intelligence equal to that of any other person in the camp.³⁰

Many convicts escaped from the Moreton Bay penal settlement and lived with the Aborigines. One of the most notorious was James Davis, originally from Glasgow, who was convicted of theft at the age of 14 and sent to Botany Bay with other convicts. I mention him because an incident he was involved in featured a dingo. Davis was transferred to Moreton Bay penal settlement but escaped. He was accepted into a local tribe (the Doomgalbara) near Wide Bay River who believed he was the reincarnation of a tribal member and given the name Durrumboi and adopted, treated kindly and regularly supplied with provisions.

By some accidental means he killed the pet dog of his adoptive mother, who was so enraged at this loss that she insisted that her husband murder him in accordance with their tribal customs. But Davis 'turned to and gave the old savage such a merciless drubbing with his fists that he not only subdued his murderous intentions but induced him to forgive the death of his pet dog.'³¹

Aunty Marie says: 'Dingoes experience deep bonds and deep loyalty and they are capable of extending that loyalty and love to humans and accepting them as part of their habitat and trusting them. The dogs are attached to the people and defend those people. They have their own pack and laws and system and it's wonderful to watch them and learn about them. They bond between themselves and they will bond to you. They are very sensitive very intelligent.'

'The dingoes and Aborigines are part and parcel of this country. The dingoes and the people have worked together to handle the environment. They were an important part of my ancestors life and still are important to my people. Fraser Island is the dingoes' country like its our country. They had us leave this country, removed us, and it looks like they want to remove the dingoes. It is history repeating itself, only it is the dingoes, which is part of our life. When the dingo is endangered we feel like part of our culture is endangered. The dingo is part and parcel of the family. There's corroboree songs and dances made about the dingo in our history, and we tell the children stories about the dingoes.'

Legends are still passed down to the younger generation orally, as in ancient times. Aunty Francis tells a story about a legendary white dingo. 'There is a white dingo in our stories. We had a great tragedy on Fraser Island concerning one of our uncles. He went overboard and got drowned and my other uncle went to get help. When he got back there was no sign of my uncle. He didn't know which way to go to look for our uncle, so he stood there. And here he came, the white dingo. The dingo came along and walked along the beach and led him right to where he [the body] was laying on the beach.'

'He always appeared to help us in our time of need. If anyone or anything was lost, if that dingo came along they knew that they would find what they were looking for. We believe in him. So if we get lost over there and see the white dingo we'd follow it.'³²

It is entirely feasible that a white dingo could have been on the Island, as Rainbow Beach used to have a population of pure white dingoes until very recently (2005), when they were all destroyed. A white dingo was seen at Indian Head in the 1930's.³³

End Times

The sighting of the Endeavour in 1770 by the Aborigines was so significant that it was recorded in a song and handed down from generation to generation:

'The ship rose up out of the sea like cloud,
And kept near the land for three or four days
One day it came very close at Takky Wooroo (Indian Head)
And they saw many men walking about on it.
They asked each other who are these strangers?
And where are they going?'³⁴

The first recorded interaction between Europeans and Aborigines was near Sandy Cape in 1802. Matthew Flinders sent a botanist from his ship the Investigator ashore to examine the local flora. The Aborigines withdrew on this occasion. The following day, three parties were dispatched to the shore. Flinders was able to make the acquaintance of 20 Aborigines, who went to the boats and ate the porpoises that Flinders had brought for them. He referred to them as his 'new friends'.³⁵

In 1824 the Moreton Bay penal settlement was established, and many convicts escaped and were able to successfully live with the Aboriginal people.

The shipwreck of the Stirling Castle in 1836 and the subsequent 'rescue' by the Aborigines of the survivors would have also had a profound impact on Aboriginal life. They told stories about it amongst the various tribes, and soon saw white men as evil invaders. They may have been able to return to some semblance of life before 'the white ghosts' reappeared, but it was not long-lived. It was the start of the end of this once noble race.

It is easy to see how rapidly the Europeans infiltrated Cooloola and Fraser Island to exploit their various enterprises, ie, timber-getting, farming, sand-mining, and quickly altered the once harmonious interaction that the Aboriginal people had with their environment. The Aboriginal people were seen as pests. They were poisoned, shot, massacred, and eventually the few remaining people were placed in a 'reserve' at White Cliffs in 1870. These people could not cope with forced captivity and rapidly died.

In 1879, three Aboriginal people from Fraser Island were taken to Victoria to help track the notorious Kelly Gang. The Kelly Gang went to ground, but the trackers were able to help with successfully tracking two bank robbers, who were then brought to justice.³⁶

By 1905 there were fewer than 30 Aboriginal people left on the Island, and these were shipped off to other reserves on the mainland. Their confusion, devastation and distress is something we can only imagine.

It was genocide; genocide of a people, their culture, and of their Paradise.

'In genocide, people are killed for what they are, not for what they have done' says Deborah Bird Rose, and that was certainly the case with the Aboriginal people of Fraser Island. 'First the victim is harmed, and then the victim is deprived of the capacity to assert that his harm matters.'³⁷

Nowadays the Aboriginal people feel that their sacred dog, the dingo, is facing the same genocide. Aunty Malle says, 'The dingoes were with us on the Island from day one. There are only a handful of Aboriginal people on the Island now, and the same with the dingoes. If I go for a walk along the beach I'd be lucky to see one poor thing walking along. Used to see heaps of them on the beach once. I don't know what they eat now, must be fresh air. There'll be no more dingoes left soon.'

Aunty Francis agrees: 'They look at them as a wild dog, but we believe they've got feelings, they hurt, they have got to be looked after. Our solution always will be that you treat them well, you feed them, like our people were. Even just throwing something to them on the beach is all it takes.'

And a final word from Aunty Marie: 'The dingo was here before the tourist. They belong here. Let our dingo be. Look after the dingo, don't destroy him. The dingoes would say *Let's share the country.*'

The Aboriginal people and their dingoes are much more forgiving than we might be in the same circumstance.

¹ <http://www.npsr.qld.gov.au/parks/fraser/butchulla/index.html>

² Lauer, P.K. 1975 Ethnohistorical observations on Fraser Island. Manuscript submitted to the Fraser Island Environmental Inquiry, Exhibit No. 543. Australian Archives, Canberra, A3911 Series.

Lauer, P.K. 1977 Report on a preliminary ethnohistorical and archaeological survey of Fraser Island. University of Queensland, Anthropology Museum, Occasional Papers in Anthropology 1:1-38.

Lauer, P.K. 1979 The museum's role in fieldwork: The Fraser Island study. University of Queensland, Anthropology Museum, Occasional Papers in Anthropology 9:31-72.

³ Fraser Island Archaeological Project (FIAP): Background, Aims and Preliminary Results of Excavations at Waddy Point 1 Rockshelter. Ian J. McNiven¹, Ian Thomas² and Ugo Zoppi

⁴ 'Cooloola Coast' Elaine Brown University of Queensland Press p 13

⁵ Commission of Inquiry into the Conservation, Management and Use of Fraser Island, Supplementary Volume, Volume 1; Part 1, p.155.

⁶ 'Constructions of Colonialism' edited by Ian J McNiven, Lynette Russell, Kay Schaffer A&C Black, 1999 Chapter 2 'K'Gari, Mrs Fraser and Butchulla Oral traditon' by Olga Miller

⁷ The Badtjala people – a cultural environmental interpretation of Fraser island' Thoorgine Educational Centre and Cultural Centre Aboriginal Corporation, 1994

⁸ The Badtjala people – a cultural environmental interpretation of Fraser island' Thoorgine Educational Centre and Cultural Centre Aboriginal Corporation, 1994 p 20

⁹ interview with Lewis xxx

¹⁰ John Dalungdalee Jones in 'In the tracks of a rainbow' by Robin Wells, Gullirae Books, 2003 px

¹¹ John Dalungdalee Jones in 'In the tracks of a rainbow' by Robin Wells, Gullirae Books, 2003 pxiv.

¹² Interview with Aunty Marie with thanks to Supreme Master Television, in collection of author.

¹³ 'Constructions of Colonialism' edited by Ian J McNiven, Lynette Russell, Kay Schaffer A&C Black, 1999 Chapter 2 'K'Gari, Mrs Fraser and Butchulla Oral tradition'

¹⁴ 'In the tracks of a rainbow' by Robin Wells, Gullirae Books, 2003 p26

¹⁵ Ebenezer Thorne: 'The Queen of the colonies; or, Queensland as I knew it. By an eight years' resident. Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, Crown Buildings, 188 Fleet Street, 1876 p 308.

¹⁶ Fraser Island Occasional papers in anthropology Number 8 1977 p17

¹⁷ Nineteenth century Cooloola, A History of Human Contact and Environmental Change. A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of Queensland. By Elaine Brown, University of Queensland 1995 p133

¹⁸ Interview with Aunty Francis with thanks to Supreme Master Television, in collection of author.

¹⁹ The Badtjala people – a cultural environmental interpretation of Fraser island' Thoorgine Educational Centre and Cultural Centre Aboriginal Corporation, 1994 p 20

²⁰ 'Written in Sand, a history of Fraser Island', Fred Williams, Jacaranda Press 1982 p 17

²¹ Ebenezer Thorne: 'The Queen of the colonies; or, Queensland as I knew it. By an eight years' resident. Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, Crown Buildings, 188 Fleet Street, 1876. p334-5.

²² Nineteenth century Cooloola A History of Human Contact and Environmental Change A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of Queensland. by Elaine Brown University of Queensland' 1995p 119

²³ Ebenezer Thorne: 'The Queen of the colonies; or, Queensland as I knew it. By an eight years' resident. Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, Crown Buildings, 188 Fleet Street, 1876. 312

²⁴ Ebenezer Thorne: 'The Queen of the colonies; or, Queensland as I knew it. By an eight years' resident. Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, Crown Buildings, 188 Fleet Street, 1876.p314

²⁵ Wild dog dreaming. Love and extinciton. Deborah Bird Rose university of visiginal press 2011 p7

²⁶ Interview with Aunty Mallee with thanks to Supreme Master Television, in collection of author.

²⁷ Wild dog dreaming. Love and extinciton. Deborah Bird Rose university of visiginal press 2011 p 63.

²⁸ Ebenezer Thorne: 'The Queen of the colonies; or, Queensland as I knew it. By an eight years' resident.' Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, Crown Buildings, 188 Fleet Street, 1876. p339

²⁹ Interview Aunty Marie Wilkinson March 2010, in collection of author.

³⁰ Ebenezer Thorne: 'The Queen of the colonies; or, Queensland as I knew it. By an eight years' resident. Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, Crown Buildings, 188 Fleet Street, 1876. p337

³¹ Biography of James Davis, Transcribed from newspaper article in *The Australian*, 14 June 1842, p.3

³² Interview Aunty Marie Wilkinson March 2010, in collection of author.

³³ Princess K'Gari's Fraser Island, Fraser Island's definitive history, Fred Williams 2002 p 159

³⁴ Written in sand, Fred Williams, Jacaranda Press, 1982 p 23

³⁵ Written in sand, Fred Williams, Jacaranda Press, 1982 p 27

³⁶ In the tracks of a Rainbow, Robin Wells, Gullirae Books 2003 p xxv

³⁷ Wild dog dreaming. Love and extinction. Deborah Bird Rose university of Virginia press 2011 p98