

BONGIL BONGIL NATIONAL PARK

EUROPEAN IMPACTS ON THE PARK

The earliest known European visitors to the Bonville area were probably escaped convicts from the Moreton Bay Penal Settlement at Brisbane, making their way to larger settlements such as Port Macquarie or Sydney. In 1845 runaway convicts ambushed two policemen at Bonville Creek, stealing their horses, weapons and boots, forcing them to walk to Kempsey barefoot.

The first settlers in the area were cedar getters. They drew cedar logs from the upper reaches of Bonville Creek and floated them down in rafts to the junction of Pine and Bonville Creeks. As the tide rose they were floated up Pine Creek to where they were loaded onto carts and transported to what is now Repton, from where they were shipped to Sydney.



Bitou bush infesting dune areas in the 1990s.

With the coming of Europeans coastal forests underwent dramatic change. Logging, cattle grazing, burning and clearing for settlement led to massive disruption to the natural ecology of the district. The vegetation, landforms and soils of the national park show the impacts of European settlement and industry, although structures such as fences and farmhouses no longer exist within the national park.

In the 1960s and 1970s much of the dune area of the park was strip mined for rutile. This activity led to devastation of the native vegetation of the coastline and left a legacy of bitou bush, one of the worst weeds in eastern Australia. The sand miners planted this native of South Africa to stabilise sand dunes after mining operations.

Between 1970 and 1973 Australian Paper Mills began an extensive tree planting program in the region. About 25% of what is now national park was ploughed up and planted with flooded Gum and blackbutt for paper manufacture. Some of this country was later purchased by a local investment company, Bongil Beach Hardwoods.

Recreational use led to holiday cabins being built near the western edge of the peninsular. These have since been removed and bush regeneration is well underway.



Flooded gum plantation.

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EUROPEAN ASSOCIATIONS

THE WILLIAMS FARM 1885 - 1962

In 1885 300 acres of "virgin" land was taken up as a selection by Charles Reuben Williams and his brother Henry William Williams. They were the first European settlers to own and live on this land.

With the simple tools available to them Charles and Henry set about clearing the forest so that the grass could grow to feed cattle, and they established a dairy farm. A small slab house with hessian dividing walls was built between the road and Bonville Creek. A well was dug in down towards the creek and this was the source of all water until about 1913.

During this time Charles and Henry decided to drain the swamp (wetland) further back from the creek by digging many drains between the swamp and the creek. These drains were dug by hand and the large one was also used by Charles in his later years to teach his children to swim. He did this by tying a rope around them and getting them to swim in the water while he walked along the bank. The large drain now looks like a small natural creek.

In 1900, Charles married Martha Hales and they had four children: William Charles (Bill), Reginald, Dorothy May and Esme Bernice. They all received their education at Bonville Public School.



Henry left the partnership and Charles and Martha continued with the dairy farm. Their cream had to be taken by horse and slide/cart to the main road, where it was picked up and taken to the butter factory. They grew fruit for preserves and jam-making, as well as vegetables for the table, and in this way produced much of their own food.

In 1913 they built a new house (with rainwater tank) near the old one and moved the farm buildings (also with tanks) to the other side of the road. During these years there were many koalas living in the forests but many of them died out when a disease went through them and they went blind.

Another problem emerged when the entrance to Bongil Creek to the ocean closed and the lower land was inundated with brackish water for many months. Very high tides also caused flooding of the lowest land.

In 1962 the farm was sold to Mr Lester Woods who also ran cattle, and then in the 1970s it was sold to Australian Paper Manufacturers.

From Esme's account of life on the farm.

