

BONGIL BONGIL

PLACE OF PLENTY FOR INDIGENOUS GUMBAYNGGIRR PEOPLE

Gumbaynggirr Aborigines knew this area of the north coast as Bongil Bongil - *a place of plenty*, where the estuaries, swamps, wetlands, woodlands and rainforests teemed with food and material for tools and shelter.

FOOD GATHERING



Pipis can be found by digging in the wet sand between the high and low tide level.



A bark canoe and a spear were helpful in getting fish for dinner in the shallow estuary.

These photos were taken of Birpai Aboriginal people near Port Macquarie by Thomas Dick in 1905. Their food hunting and gathering techniques were similar to those of the Gumbaynggirr people. (Images: State Library of NSW)

GUMBAYNGGIRR PEOPLE AND BONGIL BONGIL

The territory of the Gumbaynggirr people covers an area ranging from the Clarence River to a point south of the Nambucca River, and west to the eastern margin of the New England Tablelands.

Midden sites along the dunes show the use of the coast by Aboriginal people as both a food source and a meeting place.

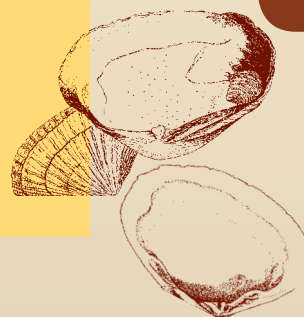
European estimates of the mid 1830s show that the indigenous population for the north coast was amongst the highest in Australia.

Around 1880 the area known as Bongil Bongil supported a group of about 180 people camping together in groups of about 30 individuals for the greater part of the year. At certain times of the year larger groups would gather to exploit the seasonal resources, such as the autumn-winter fish runs, and to hold ceremonies.

Food resources were abundant, major items being fish from the surf and estuaries, rock shellfish, estuarine shellfish, pipis, kangaroos, wallabies, bandicoots, goannas, snakes and ducks.

Shell middens at sites of day to day camps are located mainly in the swales of the dune-swale system. Dating of middens and campsites provides a record of activity around the beaches and estuaries for at least 1000 years.

Bundagen Headland, mouth of Bundageree Creek and Tuckers Rocks are still sites of significance to Gumbaynggirr people today.



FOOD GATHERING



Cooking pipis on the beach.



Home from the hunt

Gathering oysters



TOTEMS

There are different levels of totems. Personal totems are usually given to you at birth; family totems usually come from your mother, and tribal totems cover the whole tribal group.

If your totem was a goanna, it meant you were related to the goanna. The belief is that the first person in your family was born from the goanna, so all goannas are your relatives. You have to look after and protect your totem.

There was no hunting or eating your totem, because you would be eating a relative. If another family were hunting and killing too many, you could ask them to stop. This served to conserve a range of animal species, upon which the Aboriginal people relied for their survival.

The kinship and totem system not only relates to beliefs about the creation of country, but to the interdependence and responsibility that supported and sustained life.

Information from: A teacher's guide to Worimi history and culture.