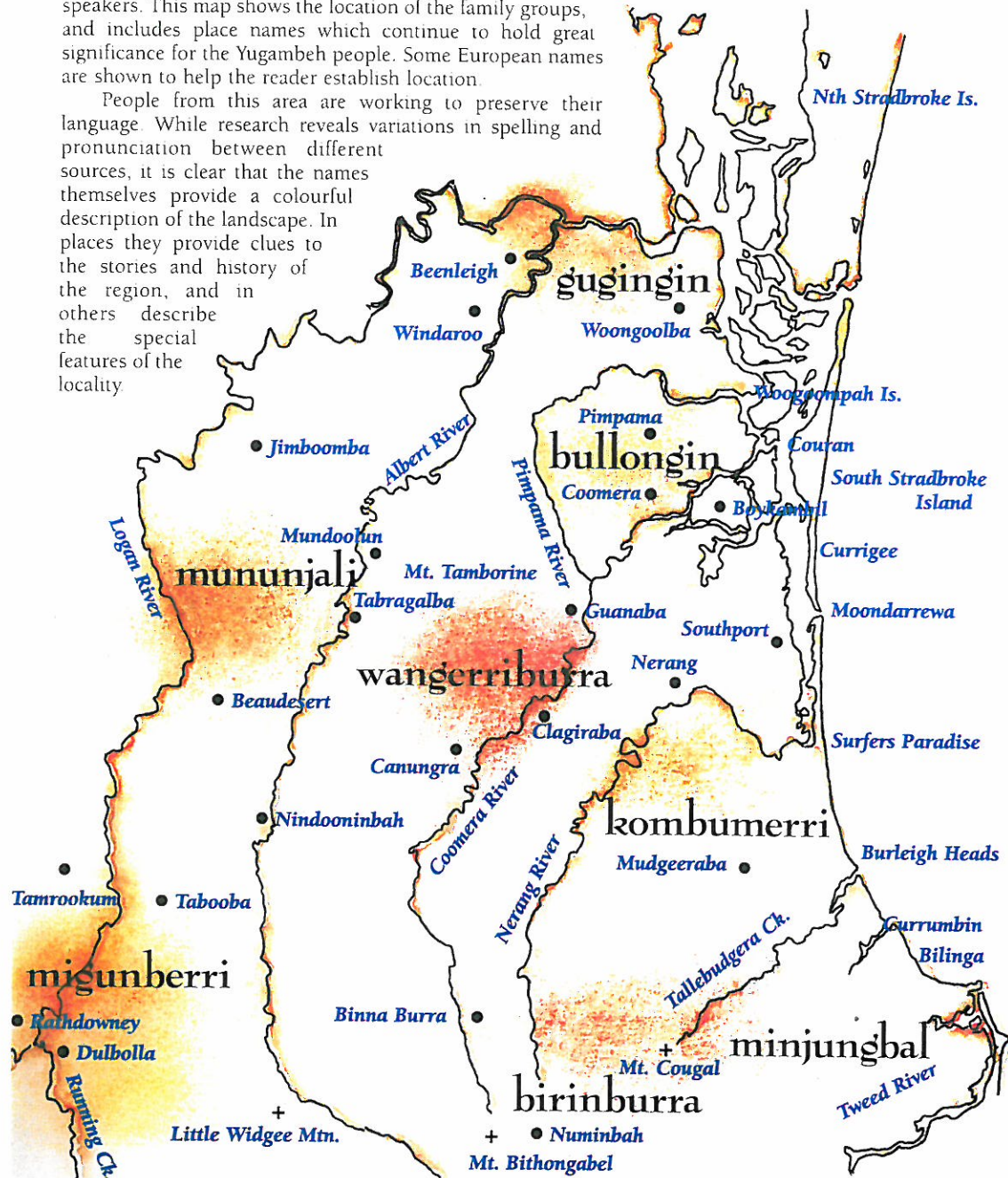


# yugambeh language region

**Y**ugambeh (yu-gum-bear) is the name of the language spoken by Aboriginal family groups within the area roughly bordered by the Logan and Tweed rivers. The Kombumerri (kom-bum-merry) were Yugambeh speakers. This map shows the location of the family groups, and includes place names which continue to hold great significance for the Yugambeh people. Some European names are shown to help the reader establish location.

People from this area are working to preserve their language. While research reveals variations in spelling and pronunciation between different sources, it is clear that the names themselves provide a colourful description of the landscape. In places they provide clues to the stories and history of the region, and in others describe the special features of the locality.



The word Numinbah, meaning shelter or cover, was the name given to the southern area's rainforest valley. Coomera – blood or vein – was the name of a river, life source of the surrounding lands. Currumbin on the coastline was named for a species of pine tree, and Moondarrewa, the

southern end of Stradbroke Island and known for mosquitoes, has a name which means place of itching.

Original Artwork: Faith Baisden  
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Aboriginal Corporation for Culture.





# a portrait

The Kombumerri Aboriginal people live in one of Australia's most scenic and fertile regions - the Gold Coast and surrounding hinterland. The area is acclaimed world-wide for its beautiful surf beaches, rainforests, freshwater creeks and streams, open forests and swamplands. The Kombumerri people have lived here for thousands of years. Their homelands extend along the Nerang River and include Tallebudgera and Currumbin Creeks. The area is bounded by the Tweed River to the south and the Coomera River to the north.

Their traditional lifestyle was in an environment abundant with seafood and wildlife. They understood the seasons, the ocean tides and how to use the plants and animals to provide a comfortable life. They trained the dolphins to help them catch fish and trained dingoes to help them herd wallabies and kangaroos. Corroborees and other social gatherings attracted clans from hundreds of kilometres - from as far south as Grafton and

They trained dolphins to help them catch fish and dingoes to help them herd wallabies and kangaroos.

Tenterfield and as far north as Maryborough. Trading systems with other Aboriginal groups were well established.



Aboriginal women at Southport, 1890. (Photo: John Oxley Library)

The Kombumerri were one of a number of clans collectively called the Yugambah people. Besides the Kombumerri, the Yugambah group included clans known as the Mununjali, Wangerriburra, Birinburra, Minjungbal, Gugingin, Migunberri and Bullongin. Their lands extended through the south-east corner of Queensland. The name Yugambah came from the name of the language they all shared. United by their language, the Yugambah clans lived closely and generally harmoniously.

## TIMES OF CHANGE

Surveyor General John Oxley led the first party of Britons into the territory of the Kombumerri when he landed on the banks of the Tweed River in 1823. In 1844 timber cutters became the first Europeans to take up permanent residence in the region when they set up a camp in the same area Oxley had visited. Their presence signalled a major change for the local Aborigines. A brief period of peaceful

coexistence ended after two timber cutters were killed by Aborigines. In revenge, timber cutters from the Tweed River and the Richmond River, 100 kilometres south, formed posses. Although they knew the identity of the alleged killers, they shot at scores of Aborigines from a number of different clans. This action, being inflicted on innocent Aborigines well known by the Kombumerri, must have had enormous repercussions on the way the Kombumerri saw their own relationship with the Europeans. It also showed that the Europeans had little respect for the local Aboriginal people.

The traditional life of the Kombumerri was greatly eroded during the following 60 years as the European population in the area grew. Large cattle runs were established along the banks of the Tallebudgera and Nerang Rivers. This was the first time Europeans had laid personal claim to large areas of Kombumerri land. The forests where the Aborigines hunted for thousands of years were destroyed. This made traditional hunting very difficult. It also made the passing-on of traditional hunting skills from one generation to the next irrelevant. The practices and rituals that were central to the culture began to disappear.





Traditional Aboriginal life also suffered at the hands of the Native Police Force, established in the Moreton Bay region in 1848. The Native Police Force was formed to protect European economic interests, specifically the interests of graziers who lost livestock to Aborigines. The Force comprised small groups of Aboriginal men, trained to act as trackers and soldiers.

The Force was led by a series of brutal European commandants, who instructed the troops to drive Aboriginal people off their land by attacking their camps whenever they caught them in groups.

Their attacks in the Kombumerri region were recalled by a number of witnesses, including Bullumm, a locally born Aboriginal man who survived at least one attack in the area of the Nerang River.

By the turn of the century the Native Police had driven many of the Kombumerri off their lands or into fringe areas such as the hinterlands of the Gold Coast and the Tweed River.

In the late 1890s the State Government decided that the interests of most Aboriginal people would be served best if they were relocated from their traditional lands and grouped on to large reserves. The Government appointed a Chief Protector of Aborigines, who worked under the Aborigines Protection and Restriction of Sales of Opium Act of 1897, to oversee Aboriginal welfare.

This Act gave the Government the authority, until well into the 1900s, to remove any Aborigine to a mission or reserve. The Act meant that during the first half of this century, Aboriginal people always lived under the threat of removal. Aborigines could be removed regardless of their age, sex, marital status or community position. This aspect of the Act saw families split, siblings taken from parents, and

husbands and wives separated. It was justified as part of a plan to protect Aborigines and encourage them to embrace the culture of European society. Many Aborigines were displaced from the Kombumerri region as a result of this legislation. Even during the 1920s and 1930s, Kombumerri people who were well integrated into the local community

*The act saw families split, siblings taken from parents, and husbands and wives separated.*



lived in the knowledge that the removal legislation could be applied to them.

One way to avoid the attacks of the Native Police and to escape being removed was to become part of the workforce. Thus during the latter part of the 1800s, local Aborigines



*The rich rainforests of the Gold Coast were the traditional hunting grounds of the Kombumerri. (Photo: QTTC Library)*





# T H E K O M B U M E R R I A P O R T R A I T



*The Kombumerri today. Lottie Eaton (nee Levinge) with a photograph of her people, who were living at Nerang in 1891. (Photo: Rory O'Connor)*

including Bahrumbin, Titto, Canungra Charlie, Bilin Bilin, Bullumm, Keendahn, Slab, Warru and others worked for the Europeans. After the turn of the century, when the Act was in force, Kombumerri people continued integrating with the European community, ever mindful of removal under the Aboriginals Protection Act of 1897. Despite these obstacles, many Kombumerri families managed to stay on their traditional lands. Most families lived close to each other on the banks of the Nerang River, at Southport, until the 1960s. Some married Aborigines from neighbouring areas and others married into the European community. Today most still live on



the Gold Coast and work in a variety of industries.

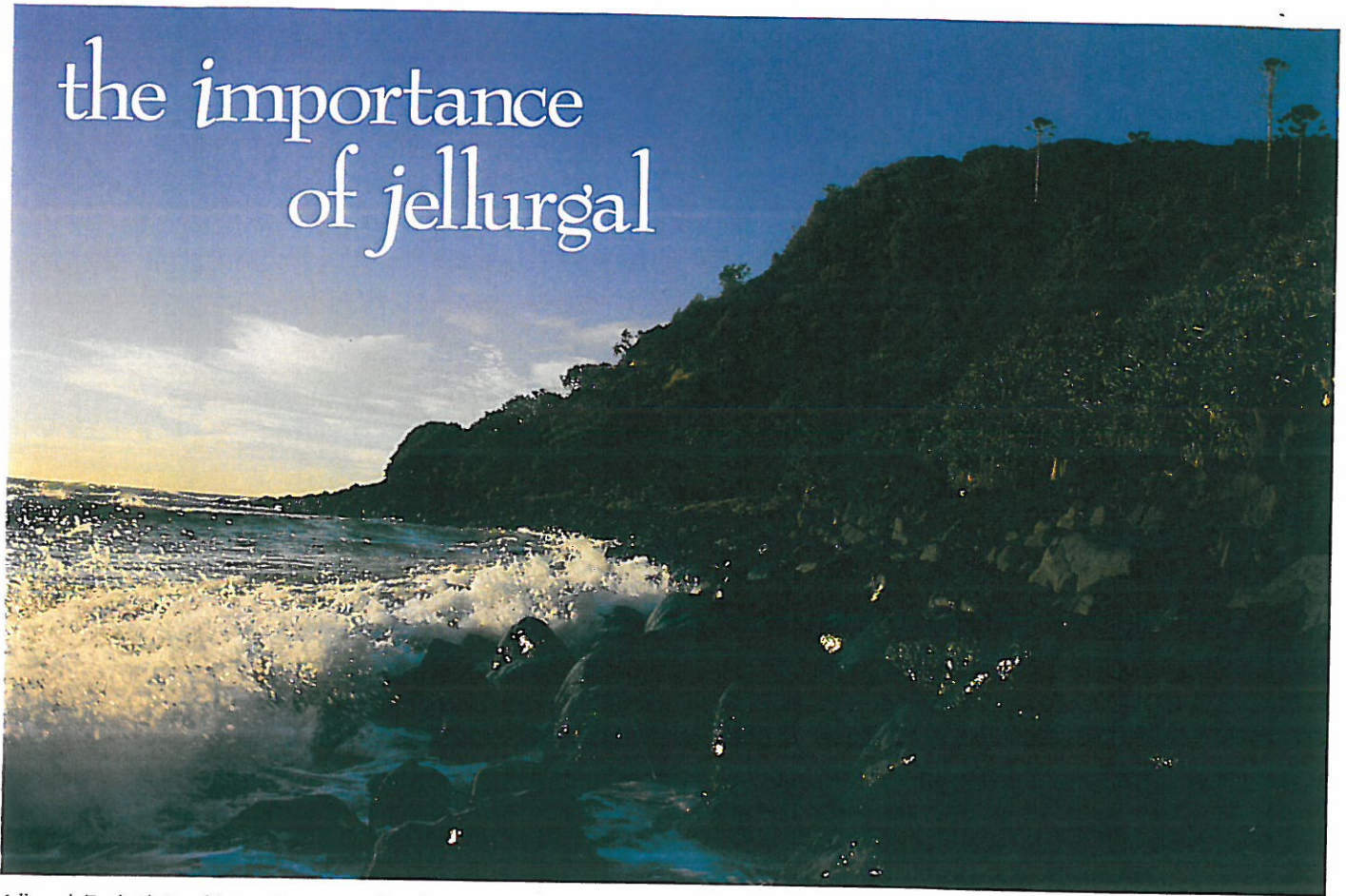
Today Kombumerri people are involved in a number of organisations that strive to promote better understanding of Aboriginal culture and heritage in the wider community. To formalise their unofficial family organisation, they formed the Kombumerri Aboriginal Corporation for Culture.

Through the corporation and other organisations, Kombumerri people have helped revitalise aspects of traditional culture and create greater understanding about the shared heritage of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people on the Gold Coast.





# the importance of jellurgal



*Jellurgal (Burleigh Heads) is an important place for the Kombumerri and a prominent feature of the Tallebudgera Greenspace. (Photo: Rory O'Connor)*

Towering above the sea and the surrounding lands, Jellurgal (Burleigh Heads) has always been a central feature in the lifestyle of the Kombumerri people. It was formed a long, long time ago when Jabreen the Creation Spirit stretched as he awoke. Jabreen was huge - as big as Jellurgal itself. His giant rocky fingers can still be seen protruding from the top of the headland, reaching up to the sky.

Jellurgal became a focal point in the daily traditional lives of the Kombumerri people. The area around the headland was witness to corroborees and dances, attracting Aboriginal people from throughout the region. Beside Jellurgal were Bora rings - raised earthen rings up to 30 metres across joined by well-worn walkways. Bora rings were central to traditional life, being used for initiation and celebration. To the Kombumerri, it was

a sacred place, protected by powerful Spirits. In the Legends section of this book, it is revealed how a young boy ignored the rules of the Jebbribillum Bora, with fatal results.

Jellurgal was also the place of more conventional physical danger, with a reputation for being infested with deadly black snakes and death adders.

In more recent times the significance of Jellurgal as a focal point for the Kombumerri has continued. The Jebbribillum Bora, a short walk from Jellurgal, is now the site of the Yugambeh Aboriginal War Memorial, which was unveiled in 1991. The Memorial pays tribute to Aboriginal people who defended their country, firstly against the Europeans and then against other nations during major wars. The Memorial is a large rock adorned with artwork which is retouched every year during a ceremony in which the community is invited to take part.

Burleigh Heads National Park which encompasses Jellurgal has an important educational element within it. Visitors to the park are introduced to traditional Kombumerri lifestyle through walking tracks around the headland and a self-guided walk brochure, produced by the Kombumerri people and the Department of Environment. The brochure explains the significance of Jabreen's Fingers, which can be seen protruding from the top of Jellurgal, and the shell mounds around the waterfront.

Adjoining the national park area is Fleays Wildlife Park, where guides talk to visitors about Aboriginal culture. Fleays Park is nestled along the banks of Tallebudgera Creek. Parts of the park give visitors an idea of the way the landscape might have appeared before the arrival of Europeans.

The park is themed to provide an awareness of the lifestyle of the



Kombumerri people. This is in no small way thanks to the ongoing efforts of Rosemary Thompson, who has been a treasured supporter of the local Kombumerri people. Rosemary's father, noted zoologist David Fleay, started the park as a wildlife reserve and brought it to fame through his efforts in successfully breeding rare and native animals.

The land and sea around Jellurgal was once rich with wildlife. Shell mounds found around Jellurgal are the remains of shellfish and other marine animals gathered for meals by the Kombumerri. Older Kombumerri people once described how the waters around the headland, including Tallebudgera Creek, at times were so full of fish one could walk across them.

This is illustrated by the following description, penned late last century, which described a line of mullet that stretched more than 10 kilometres through the surf from Jellurgal to Nerang Head.

*"I am not guilty of exaggeration when I say that we have seen a practically unbroken mob of these fish, extending from the old entrance to the Bay, (close to where*



*Surfside, Burleigh Heads, taken in 1872 by photographer William Boag. (Photo: John Oxley Library)*

*Jubilee Bridge now stands) to Burleigh Heads, perhaps a quarter mile wide and of incomputable depth, but every incoming wave a mountain of green water, was a mass of fish all heading north."*

Before the region around Jellurgal was developed for housing, the entire Gold Coast area was dominated by an extensive system of swamps. The swamps provided a fertile home for marine and bird life.

On a ridge within these swamps was a large burial ground used by the Kombumerri. The burial ground is still regarded as the largest known Aboriginal burial site in Australia, with more than 200 people buried here. It was estimated to have been used for more than

1000 years, with the last burials being as late as 1900.<sup>2</sup>

The swamps were also home to a huge, flesh-eating monster that the Kombumerri called Bunyip or Debil Debil. This beast was accredited with the gory deaths of humans, cattle and horses. At one stage a large reward was offered for its capture. The eventual destruction of the Bunyip is described later in this book.

Today the face of Jellurgal and much of the land traditionally used by the Kombumerri has been irreversibly changed by urban development. Many of the old landmarks have been reshaped, and the flora and fauna has been largely destroyed. Domestic dogs and cats are partly responsible for the lack of koalas, kangaroos and smaller marsupials and birds that once lived in great numbers.

But the magic of the area can never be completely destroyed. If you ever sit up in the high, rocky top of Jellurgal amongst Jabreen's fingers and watch the ocean, or spend a quiet morning on Tallebudgera Creek within Tallebudgera Greenspace, it is possible to understand why this area has always been a special place for the Kombumerri Aboriginal people.

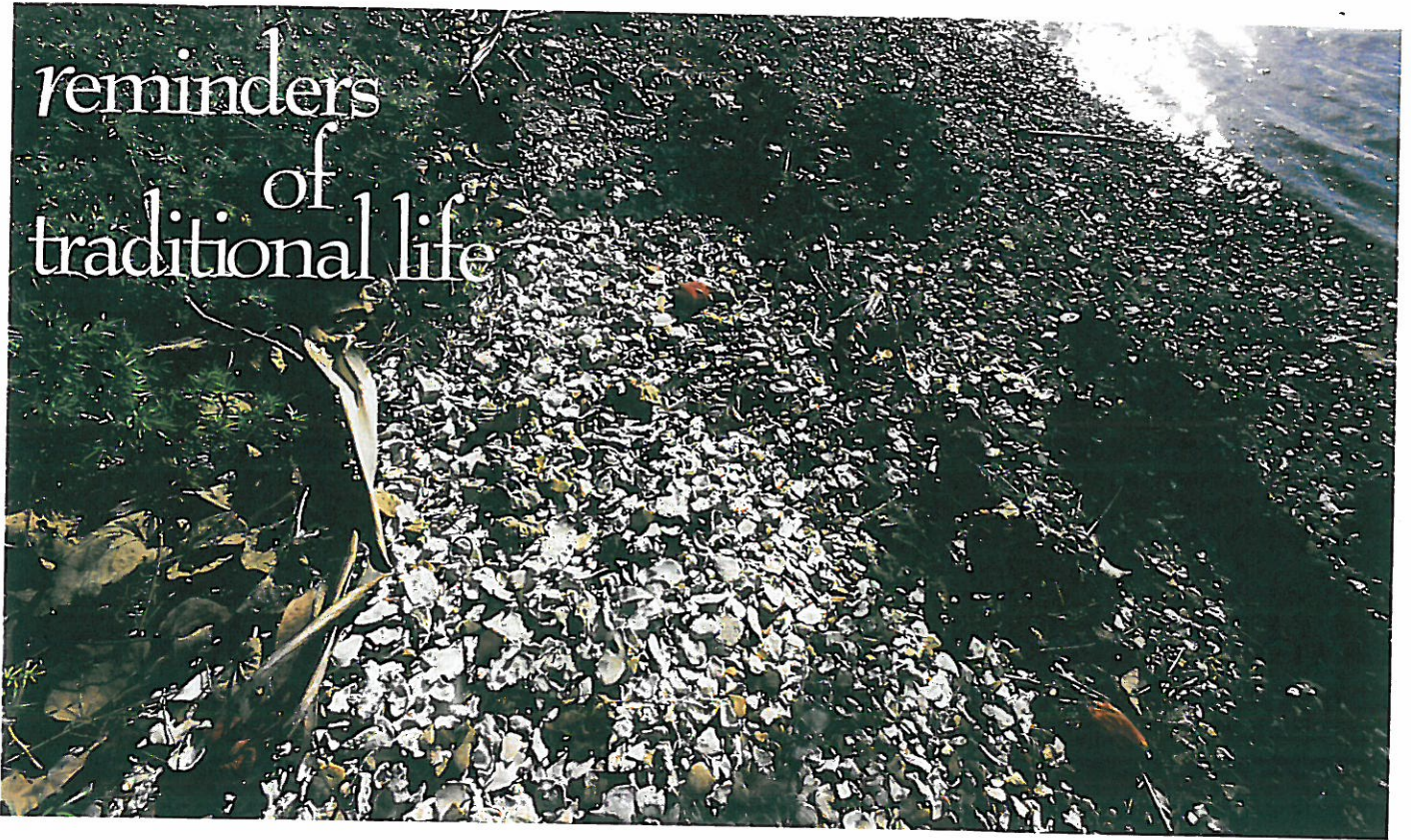


*The Yugambeh Aboriginal War Memorial, at Jebbribillum Bora Ring, Burleigh Heads. This memorial, unveiled in 1991, was Australia's first memorial dedicated to Aboriginal people in defence of their country. (Photo: Rory O'Connor)*





# reminders of traditional life



Shell remains left over from Aboriginal feasts can still be seen in many places along beaches and river banks on the the Gold Coast. (Photo: Rory O'Connor)

Throughout the Gold Coast, shell mounds remain as reminders of the long presence of Aborigines. The mounds can be seen close to surf beaches and near the banks of waterways. They are the remains of shellfish and other marine animals gathered for meals by Aboriginal people. After thousands of years

discarded shell and fish remains built up on the eating sites and some shell mounds are more than 50 metres wide and may be more than one metre deep.

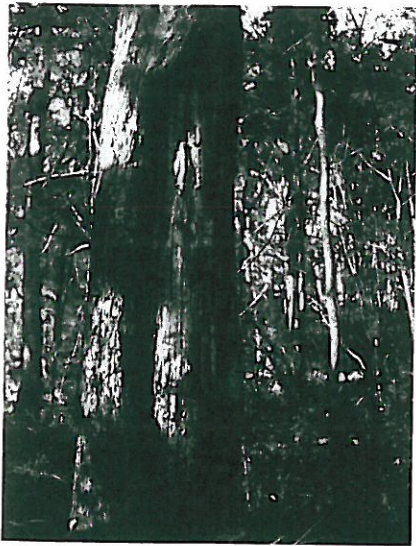
The material in shell mounds paints a picture of traditional Aboriginal lifestyle. By studying the material in these mounds, researchers can analyse the diet of Aborigines at specific locations. Oysters and eugarie could be eaten uncooked, but other shellfish were cooked in hot ashes. Some opened up after a short time in the fire, and cone shaped shells were snapped at the pointed end to break the vacuum that held the animal in. Fish were roasted whole in hot ashes.

There are many shell mounds around Jellurgal, and they have been found to contain the remains of bream (b'goolum), whiting (n'yeeahm), black trevally (junbeen), mullet (jeloom), and a wide variety of shellfish.

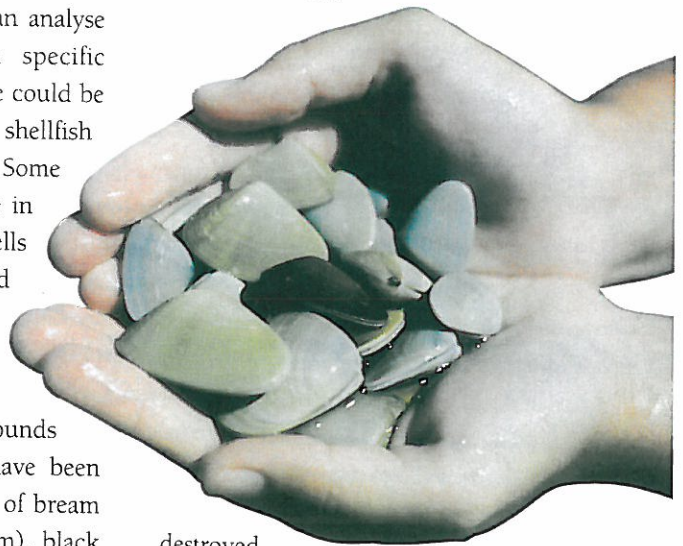
Scarred trees can also be seen on the Gold Coast. They are trees that have had sections of bark removed, typically

to construct canoes or shields. There is a scarred tree on the eastern side of Jellurgal that can be seen easily from the walking track.

Unfortunately most shell mounds and many scarred trees on the Gold Coast have been



Some trees still carry scars from where Aboriginal people cut bark away, probably for canoes. (Photo: Michael Aird)



destroyed to make way for urban development. But shell mounds and scarred trees are irreplaceable features of Aboriginal culture and every effort should be made to preserve them.





# daily life & social gatherings



Social gatherings and dances were a celebrated part of traditional lifestyle. (Photo: Queensland Museum)

The Kombumerri lived in extended family groups and moved between a series of permanent camps within their region. They linked their

Mununjali men would walk from Beaudesert to visit their Kombumerri relatives at Southport in the 1930s.

returned to the area. It was taboo to disturb these stockpiles, although this rule was typically ignored by the whites. Captain Patrick Logan and his men based themselves in an empty Aboriginal camp in 1826 for two nights while Logan attempted to climb Mount Barney.<sup>26</sup>

travels with the different food sources that the seasons brought into abundance. Their camps comprised huts of bark, wood or grass, big enough to hold up to 12 people. At their camps they stored weapons, tools and nets for use when they

The Kombumerri had close links with neighbouring clans, who shared the Yugambeh language. Travel between different Yugambeh clans was widespread and there were many examples of this. William Andrews, dubbed King Billy, lived south of the Tweed River, where he died in 1904, but was born on the

Nerang River in the Kombumerri region in the 1830s. Billy Drumley was also born in the land of the Kombumerri, though he spent most of his adult years with the Mununjali clan near Beaudesert. Bullumm was a Wangerriburra man (Albert River) but spent much of his childhood with the Kombumerri. Keendahn, a Kombumerri, returned from months away and celebrated with his family, who were camped on the banks of the Coomera River, before continuing on to his own camp on the Nerang River. In the 1890s Bilin Bilin visited his daughter in the lands of the Mununjali while he travelled widely through the whole Yugambeh region. As a further example of the close relationship of the Yugambeh clans, Mununjali men would walk from Beaudesert to visit





their Kombumerri relatives at Southport in the 1930s. This was a hike of more than 60 kilometres through some mountainous country. The Kombumerri were also visited by many Aborigines from southern areas including the Richmond and Clarence Rivers. This relationship may have been strengthened by the arrival of cedar cutters, who moved from the Richmond to the Tweed River and brought the Aborigines as workers.

### CORROBOREES AND GATHERINGS

Social gatherings for dances, initiations, feasts, fights and tournaments were collectively called corroborees. They were a celebrated part of traditional lifestyle. Keendahn recalled that he was the focus of a special corroboree called to celebrate the safe return of a group of children thought to be lost to the tribe. Bilin Bilin was said to have organised a corroboree after the death of Wongawallan and a big gathering after the death of his wife. Bahrumbin was an old man when he lost his eye in a corroboree at Nerang in the 1880s or 1890s. Perhaps fights, ceremonial or serious, were something that men of all ages were invited into. In 1871 there was a series of corroborees in the lead up to a huge fight at Jellurgal (Burleigh Heads) which left one warrior dead and several wounded. An estimated 600 people attended, coming from as far south as the Bellingen River, 300 kilometres away (Tweed Daily, 14 February 1922). Corroborees were sometimes annual events, such as the Kalabar corroborees held around Christmas near Washpool at Boonah. The Bunya Festival corroborees in the Bunya Mountains were held every three years (Tom Petrie, before the Select

Committee on the Native Police Force, 1861, p112). The size of a corroboree varied from a few people up to perhaps a thousand, as in the case of the Bunya Festival. The Beaudesert Times described a corroboree that took place near Mudgeeraba in the 1870s.

*When the evening of the day comes round everything is in readiness, a good supply of wood stacked, it is left for the women folk, not in the show, to keep the fire in order. Those that are to take part are busily engaged*

*behind fires. The elder and married [women] beat time with the palms of their hands on possums skins folded and held between their thighs representative of drums; whilst the younger ones beat time on their naked thighs. Each holds the other's left wrist with the right hand and keeping time excellently. A pair of men in full dress stand up in front, between the [women] and the fire, who beat two boomerangs together and give the time, tune and first words of the songs and chants. Two others with torches stand as sentinels whilst the others dance on the opposite side of the fires. There are always "a few funny men" amongst the dancers who cause mirth by their antics, similar to the clown in a pantomime. These pantomime galas are kept up until towards morning, the company being well exhausted at conclusion (Beaudesert Times, 10 August 1907).*

Corroboree songs and dances were usually composed and choreographed by a few men who would re-teach them to participants. Dances performed at the corroborees could be designed to pay tribute to current events, but some were ageless - for example the kangaroo and goanna dances. The goanna dance was a favourite amongst some white audiences. A large goanna was carved out of wood and was dragged into the group by a man who was supposed to be invisible. The hunters stalked the goanna and tried to lasso it. There were many attempts with the goanna trying to outwit the hunters. The performance reached a climax when the hunters finally pounced on the goanna.

The following piece appeared in the Fassifern Centenary Book, 1944, under the title, *Kangaroo Dance*. It described an incident that happened about 60 kilometres outside the traditional lands of the Kombumerri, but it can be assumed that the dances would have



*Boomerangs and jabrees of the type used by the Kombumerri. (Photo: Queensland Museum)*

*during the afternoon fixing up and decorating their bodies with red, white and yellow ochre, in every conceivable and fantastic device in skeletons, animals and birds, in accordance with the traditions of the tribes to which they belong. And in decorating and wearing of numerous and pretty adornments each individual tries to outstrip the other, both in an artistic and grotesque manner as far as possible. About an hour or two after dusk the fires are set going and the [women] sit in a row or semi circle as many deep as circumstances allow*



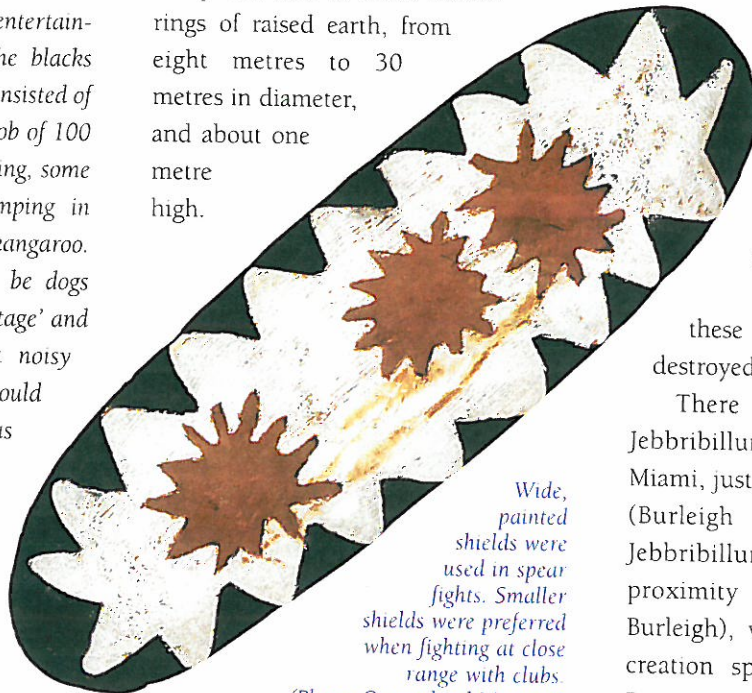
been similar throughout the area.

...was a boy at the time, said Mr Hooper, but I and my people never missed a single corroboree. It was great entertainment. I well remember what the blacks called the 'Kangaroo Dance'. It consisted of an imitation of kangaroos in a mob of 100 or more - some in the act of grazing, some looking about them, others jumping in imitation of the spring of the kangaroo. Other Aborigines, purporting to be dogs and huntsman would enter the 'stage' and surround the 'kangaroos' in a noisy dance. The primitive drama would rise to the crescendo of its action as the cordon closed, and the hills would ring with the barking and general shouts, jingle and mimic clatter of a grand finale.<sup>27</sup>

### BORA GROUNDS

Bora grounds were areas set aside for initiation ceremonies and also for

dances, corroborees and other inter-tribal gatherings. Bora grounds comprised two or three circular rings of raised earth, from eight metres to 30 metres in diameter, and about one metre high.



Wide, painted shields were used in spear fights. Smaller shields were preferred when fighting at close range with clubs.

(Photo: Queensland Museum)

The rings were sometimes hundreds of metres apart, and were joined by distinct paths.

In 1910 there were least five Bora grounds in the country of the Kombumerri and Wanggeriburra people. Four of these were documented by John Shirley, who spoke before the Royal Society of Queensland in this year.<sup>29</sup>

Unfortunately only one of these Boras has not been totally destroyed.

There also exists another—the Jebbribillum Bora at Sixth Avenue Miami, just a short walk from Jellurgal (Burleigh Heads). It is called Jebbribillum Bora because of its proximity to Jebbribillum (Little Burleigh), which was formed by the creation spirit Jabreen. Jebbribillum Bora is under the control of the Kombumerri Aboriginal Corporation for Culture. The second ring of this Bora ground was near the Burleigh State Primary School and was destroyed sometime during the 1950s or 1960s. Bora rings also survive at Tweed Heads, Rathdowney, Tamborine Village and at the southern end of North Stradbroke Island.

Although Bora grounds were easily destroyed by land developers, in traditional culture they were protected by legends that maintained them as sacred sites.

Punishment was severe for those who disrespected the rules of the Bora. Jebbribillum Bora was protected by a story that carried the penalty of death, as told in the Legends section of this book.

Ceremonial and social gatherings of the Kombumerri declined towards the late 1800s, as they were denied access to much of their land and therefore had fewer forums for ceremonies. Corroborees continued to be performed on traditional sites into the 1900s, perhaps as late as 1910.

### BAHRUMBIN'S CORROBOREE WOUND

The following is an interesting aside about the end result of a night at a corroboree. Bahrumbin (called Mr Wilson by his peers) was in the employ of the Hanlon family at Southport from about 1880 to 1900. Willie Hanlon later recalled this event, whereby an injured Bahrumbin has trouble during a shooting trip.

I took my black henchman, (Mr Wilson) - (if the Mr was omitted in speaking to him he contemptuously ignored the speaker) - with me. I got tired of shooting and handed my gun to my Abo. He had lately taken a weekend off to be present at a corroboree at Nerang... Mr Wilson, who

would not confess to any belligerent action on his part - though I guess from my long knowledge of him that he would be in the thickest of it - anyhow, in the dark he stepped in the way of a whizzing boomerang, which caught him in the right eye, squashing the ball and permanently ruining the beauty of the optic, and utterly destroying its utility as an organ of sight. It would have been a long hospital case for you or me, but all he did to cure it was to bind a dirty old rag over the mutilation and without further 'medical aid' it healed up successfully though it became an almost empty socket... Heretofore he had been a righteye shooter but as

vision of this eye had been dissipated he had to put the gun to his left shoulder and sight with his left optic. Being the first time he attempted such a uni-optical stunt he was slow in getting set, and before he could properly get a bead on his birds and pull the trigger, Mr Gallway, who had the next tree, some 20 or 30 yards off, let drive at the bunch of birds Mr Wilson was trying to sight. This happened three times, then the Abo turned to me and asked "who tha' feller bin tchootim over there?" "That feller bin Mr Gallway" I replied. Gutteral grunt and "tha feller Misser, him bin all same pluddy fool" and he refused to take up the gun again.<sup>28</sup>





Men from Cherbourg Aboriginal Mission preparing for a dance at the Brisbane Showgrounds in the 1920s. (Photo: Queensland Museum).

In 1927, a corroboree was performed by Yugambah people when the Duke and Duchess of York visited Beaudesert, indicating that knowledge of traditional life was still strong.

By the 1940s, traditional songs and dances of the Kombumerri had fallen into disuse. Older Aborigines usually only performed amongst each other. Many songs and traditions disappeared as the older generation died out.

The gradual loss of Aboriginal heritage has slowed during the past few decades because public interest in Aboriginal culture has increased. Aboriginal people are at last getting real support in their bid to revitalise their traditional heritage. The Kombumerri Aboriginal Corporation for Culture is an example of an organisation dedicated to doing just that.

## JEWELLERY AND BODY DECORATIONS

Corroborees were often occasions for ornate body decorations to be worn. Feathers, paints, leaves, flowers, animal skins and tails formed the wardrobe of the Aboriginal dancer. Personal jewellery for everyday use and special occasions included necklaces, hair bands and arm bands. Jewellery was made from bird feathers, animal bones, shells, bird claws and woven string bands. Animal skins were dyed with pigments from plants and decorated with designs or drawings. After contact with Europeans, Aborigines extended their wardrobe to include coloured scarves and other bright material. Ornamental goods were often traded between Aboriginal groups.

Body scars were another form of decoration for both men and women, although they also carried a strong ritual element. Scars were formed by cutting the flesh and inserting charcoal into the wound so it would heal leaving an elevated mark. The exact pattern of these scars varied through different areas of Australia.

Scars were formed by cutting the flesh and inserting charcoal into the wound...

Some evidence exists to show Aborigines would try to avoid injuring the shoulders of adversaries which were decoratively scarred.





# the kombumerri today

Patricia O'Connor, at the Yugambeh Museum, Beenleigh. Through the museum, research continues into the Yugambeh language, which was the traditional language of the Kombumerri.

In 1984 the original Aboriginal families of the Gold Coast were called together by Kombumerri Graham Dillon, who sought consensus on the reburial of an entire Aboriginal burial ground, unearthed at Broadbeach from 1965 to 1968. The material excavated from the site, which represented the remains of more than 200 people, had been stored at the Queensland University, where it was extensively studied. It was concluded that the site had been used over a 1000-year period, with the last burials in the 1900s. The burial ground is still regarded as the largest Aboriginal burial ground in Australia. During discussions about the reburial, it became obvious that the families of the Kombumerri needed a more formal organisation to handle

cultural issues and the Kombumerri Aboriginal Corporation for Culture was formed. In 1987 the remains were finally reburied at Kombumerri Park, Broadbeach, just a short distance from their original resting site.



Kombumerri Park, Broadbeach. (Photo: Rory O'Connor)

The Kombumerri Aboriginal Corporation for Culture was instrumental in establishing Australia's first war memorial for Aboriginal service people. In 1991

they erected the Yugambeh Aboriginal War Memorial at Jebbribillum Bora ground, Burleigh Heads to honour the men and women of the Yugambeh region who served in the defence of their country. The Memorial is a large rock adorned with artwork which is retouched every year during a ceremony in which the community is invited to take part. The memorial was unveiled by Kombumerri Sam Levinge, who served with the Australian Army in Far North Queensland during World War Two. There are more than 60 names on the Yugambeh Roll of Honour. The Kombumerri Corporation was also heavily involved in the first Anzac Day Parade to see Aboriginal and Islander people march under their own flags.





Graham Dillon, (far left) who helped found the Kombumerri Aboriginal Corporation for Culture in 1985, continues to promote understanding of Aboriginal culture in the wider community. (Photo: Rory O'Connor)

The idea for the 1993 march contingent came from Korean war veteran Aboriginal Cecil Fisher, who was inspired by the unveiling of the Yugambeh Memorial. Cecil called on the Corporation to help coordinate the highly successful march.

The history of Aboriginals at war is just one of the aspects of local Aboriginal history that Kombumerri people have worked to highlight.

Today Kombumerri people are involved with a number of organisations that help educate the general community about traditional Aboriginal lifestyle and the shared heritage of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the Gold Coast area.

Education is regarded as the key to better understanding between cultures and many projects focus on making information about Aboriginal

history accessible to local schools, educational institutions and tourists.

### RECAPTURING THE YUGAMBEH LANGUAGE

Ten years ago language experts told the Kombumerri Aboriginal people that their traditional language, the Yugambeh language, was dead. Undaunted, a small group of women started organising lectures and meetings involving Aboriginal people from Kombumerri and neighbouring clans, who collectively made up the Yugambeh Aboriginal group. Their aim was to capture the ancient language before it disappeared forever. They soon discovered knowledge of the language was still strong within the community. Today the Yugambeh language has been revitalised to the extent that it can be taught in schools.

Patricia O'Connor, who worked with her sister Ysola Best and niece Christine Morris to coordinate the first meetings, recalled there were a lot of people who still remembered the way the language was spoken.

*Many people came along and did not think they could contribute, but as time went by it was obvious they remembered more than they realised,* Patricia said.

Research into the Yugambeh language continues today at the Yugambeh Museum - Language and Heritage Research Centre, which was south-east Queensland's first Aboriginal museum when started in 1996.

The museum, at Beenleigh, presents ongoing displays relating to the Yugambeh region and is used by many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who want to know more about their local heritage.