

Brisbane's Local Aborigines: the Turrbal People

The **Turrbal** people of North Brisbane were the original owners of the country around the Boondall Wetlands. The suburb now known as Sandgate was originally known as Cabbage Tree Creek. The Turrbal people called the area **Warra** which means a stretch or expanse of water.

Tom Petrie, an Australian explorer, grazier and friend of Aborigines, indicated that the Turrbal language was spoken as far north as North Pine, west to Moggil and south to the Logan. Petrie marked out many of the roads in the district along existing Aboriginal tracks. These include what are now Old Northern Road, Sandgate Road and Gympie Road.

Prior to the European settlement there were about **5,000 aborigines** in the Brisbane area. The first Europeans to meet and live with the friendly local Aborigines were the lost ex-convicts, Parsons, Pamphlet and Finnigan. European explorer John Oxley rescued them in 1823. Oxley camped near the mouth of Cabbage Tree Creek, which the aborigines called '**Taigum**'. Oxley was searching for a large river the Bural people called '**Maiwah**'. It is now known as the Brisbane River.

The real European impact on the Turrbal people came with the establishment of the convict settlement in 1824 at Redcliffe which the Aborigines called '**Umpi-bong**' – meaning dead houses, and then 1825 in Brisbane – referred to by the Turrbals as '**Umpi kurumba**' – meaning many houses. The coming and going of ships brought diseases for which the Aborigines had no immunity, and whole communities died out.

When John Petrie was looking for a place to start a cattle grazing property, he went into the area we now know as Petrie. He was accompanied by an **Aboriginal elder, Dalapai**. One of the first things he noticed about the local Aborigines was the smallpox scars on their bodies, and the fact that there were few old people. Disease was taking its toll.

Petrie chose a site for his cattle homestead, which he named '**Murrumba**' an aboriginal word meaning good. The Petrie Shire suburb of Murrumba Downs takes its name from this original homestead.

A popular camping and corroboree spot for the Turrbal people was Breakfast Creek. They called it '**Yowoggera**' meaning 'corroboree place'. The main encampment of the Turrbal clan was where the Royal National Association Showgrounds at Bowen Hills are now situated. Another popular campsite was '**Buyuba**' at Newmarket near Bancroft Park on Enoggera Creek. Enoggera is derived from the word Yowoggera.

Local Aborigines visited other groups to share in times of plenty. The inland people visited the coast when the mullet and tailor were running, and to catch turtles and dugong. Coastal people moved, when invited, to the hills and mountains to feast with their neighbours on pademelons, macadamias and rainforest fruits.

Before European settlement, the land, the river and its tributaries were the source and support of life. The river's abundant supply of food included fish, shellfish, crabs and shrimps. The good fishing places became campsites and the focus of group activities.

The staple foods of the Turrbal people included: **ku-mang** (pademelons); **murri** (kangaroos); **bugwal** (wallabies); **barrun** (rat kangaroos); **yaggo-i** (bandicoots); **kupi** - possums; **graman** (fruit bats); **gi-wer** (goanna); **du-wir** (quail); **ngurun** (emu); **kaggarr** (echidnas); **yuwun** (snakes); **ngau-u** (ducks).

The aborigines of this area also ate **yimbun** (bulrushes) and **bungwal** (swamp water fern). These were major sources of carbohydrate. They gathered these from the Nudgee Waterholes, Zillmere Waterholes and the lagoons at Sandgate. These waterholes were major camping and ceremonial grounds for the Turrbal people.

The Turrbal people made their own medicines using the plants in their environment. Juice of the bracken fern, found in abundance at Bracken Ridge, was rubbed on to stop the itch of scrub ticks. Juice from the leaves of the river lily was rubbed onto stings to relieve pain. Muscular aches and pains were relieved by crushing the leaves of the soap bush plant '**meeamee**' and rubbing it in to the sore area.