

The Chepara people of Sandgate

The Aboriginals who lived around Sandgate when Cook arrived belonged to the Chepara (meaning “coast”) people who spoke the Yugarabul language. The names of Aboriginal languages were often based on a commonly-used identifier word that referred to something that was named differently in adjacent languages. In this case it was based on the word for “no”, being “Yuggara” in the Yugarabul language.

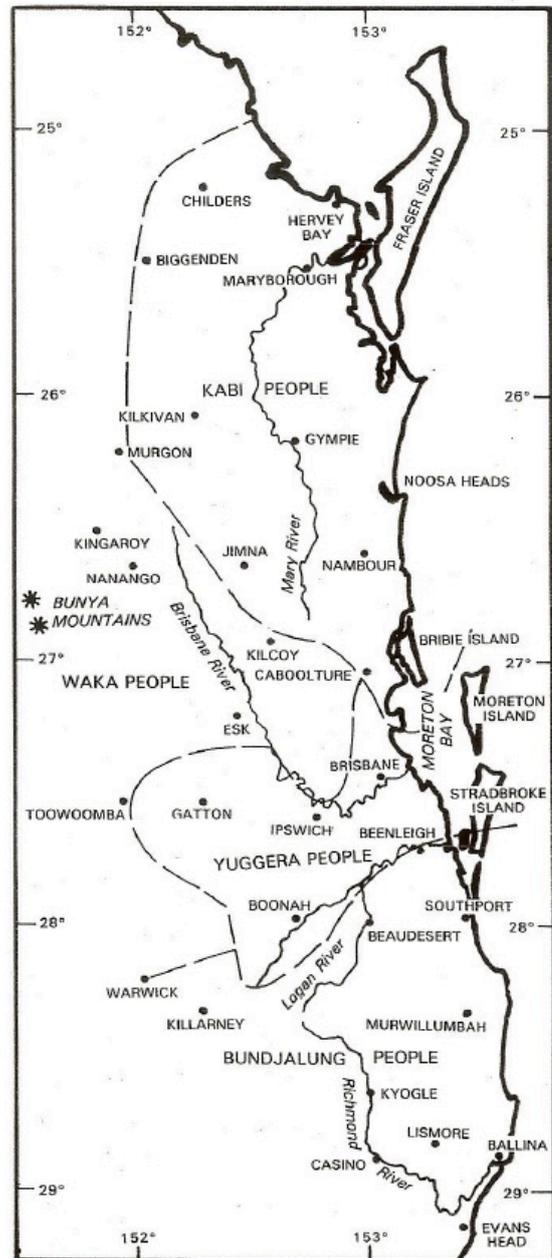
The Yugarabul language was spoken over a wide area (refer Steele 1983 Fig.1 approximate map extract below). The Chepara tribe territory extends from the Pine Rivers south to the Macpherson Range and Logan River and traditionally it was said to also include territory further east along the coast to the Tweed River (which incorporated other language groups) until internal feuds led to fragmentation into smaller clan groups and then after a time the clans became friendly again. In 1880, the oldest of the Aboriginal informants said the Chepara people were regarded as the principal clan (Howitt, 1904, p86).

Being coastal people, the Chepara were predominantly fishermen.

It is impossible to know how many people lived in this area but it must have been a considerable number. Kerkhove (2015, p38) believes there were 4 main campsites: 1) at Mosquito Creek near Brighton Park, 2) in the vicinity of the old Baptist Church, 3) on the ridge between Einbunpin and Dowse Lagoons and 4) beside the Sandgate Golf Club grounds. The latter campsite was just a short distance from a bora ring on the banks of Cabbage Tree Creek, while on the other side of the creek, Dinah Island was a sacred burial ground last used for the burial of King Johnny in 1892.

Some of these campsites must have been large because they had to cater for the complex kinship arrangements within aboriginal societies. These included avoidance relationships (unable to look at or speak to) and supporting relationships (obligatory sharing of food) (Mermott, 2007, p48). For example, consider the following description of settlements on Bribie Island:

“Unlike most of the natives of Australia as yet discovered, they have fixed habitations, dwelling in little villages of six or seven huts in a cluster. Some of them are of great length, extending upwards of eighty feet, and covering a considerable space of ground One of [the dwellings] was in the form of a passage, with two apartments



at the end. The arches were beautifully turned, and executed with a degree of skill which would not have disgraced an [sic] European architect” (Strange, 1848).

The dwelling described was one used for semi-permanent sites and could hold up to 12 people (from Steele, 1983, p94). A second common structure was much smaller and used for short term stays (Petrie, 1904, chap XIII).

The adjacent sketch of another large dwelling was drawn by members of HMS Rattlesnake, who saw it on Moreton Island in 1845 (Mermott, 2007, p98).



As well as being remarkably similar to the structure described on Bribie Island, it is also similar to the adjacent photo of a domed dwelling from the west side of Cape York, photographed in 1937 (Mermott, 2007, p98).



Free settlers began to move into the Sandgate area in 1853 and were met with strong resistance. In fact, when the Qld Government established the Native Mounted Police Force under the notorious Lieutenant Frederick Wheeler in 1848, their base camp, for the whole state, was located at Sandgate in the middle of the aboriginal camp between Einbunpin and Dowse Lagoons.

The arrival of the Europeans had a far reaching impact on the Indigenous way of life. Despite the conflict between the Aborigines and the settlers, disease, loss of land, restriction of traditional food and resources, a small number of Aborigines survived by moving elsewhere to camp or work or into Missions under the 1897 Act. Today their descendants still live throughout the area.

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