

***Caloundra and Duck Holes***  
***Aboriginal Sites and History:***

***Some Historical Conclusions***

**Dr Ray Kerkhove**

**February 2018**



# 1. Duck Holes: Historic Camp

Duck Holes camp (today's Rotary Park near the Nicklan Way/ Caloundra Road roundabout) is an important Aboriginal site. It mostly operated between the 1920s and 1950s. It seems to have already been functioning in 1928, when there were complaints by the Lands Administration Board to Landsborough Council about Aboriginals camping in the "reserve" (see excerpt).<sup>1</sup> In the same Landsborough Council report, 10 acres of Reserve 120 of Caloundra were requested to be set aside for sanitary purposes.<sup>2</sup> Presumably, this is the same block. Certainly, in, 1938, J W Bleakley Protector of Aboriginals, visited Caloundra as part of his tour of Aboriginal settlements.<sup>3</sup> During that same decade, there are several accounts of an Aboriginal called "Jackey of north Bribie," said to have his "camps on the northern end of Bribie Island."<sup>4</sup> It seems this same man is referred to at Caloundra, commenting on the rainy weather in 1933,<sup>5</sup> thus presumably Jackey was an occasional resident here.

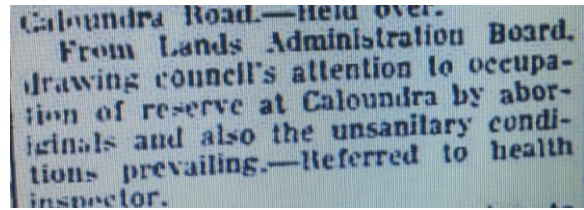


Figure 2: 1928 reference to Caloundra camp (Nambour Chronicle & North Coast Advertiser 24 August 1928: 4)

During World War 2, Aboriginal and European residents of Bribie Island and Pumicestone Passage were removed from their former homes, to enable the US forces to establish extensive defences here (there was also a very large US army camp at Caloundra). Local Aboriginal families –by this time mostly working in fishing and oystering camps along Bribie Passage – were taken to the Duck Holes, as local residents recalled: "These people had been out on Bribie, but the Military had placed them back on the mainland."<sup>6</sup> The recognised connection with Bribie Island was such that in 1949 there were requests to return the Aboriginal residents to Bribie Island, as there was the perception that the families had been "dumped" here.<sup>7</sup>



Figure 3: getting bogged at Sugar Bag Road near the Duck Holes, 1930 (nla TROVE)

Duck Holes throughout this period was not a very favourable location. It was rather inconvenient for getting to and from Caloundra, Bribie Passage and other areas. Sugar Bag Road was the main road into Caloundra. Caloundra Road – closer to the camp - had many boggy patches including Duck Holes Creek and other streams which crossed the Wallum country and marshes. This was the reason Sugar Bag Road was more commonly used. Worse, there was no safe

drinking water, meaning residents had to beg from neighbours.



Figure 4: Mr Dalton and McEvoy collecting pips at Kings Beach Caloundra 1950 (nla TROVE)

<sup>1</sup> Nambour Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser, 24 August 1928: 4.

<sup>2</sup> Nambour Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser, 24 August 1928: 4.

<sup>3</sup> The Telegraph 2 Dec 1938: 13

<sup>4</sup> Queensland Times, 3 January 1933: 3

<sup>5</sup> Maryborough Chronicle, 18 June 1932: 6

<sup>6</sup> Nambour Chronicle 26 August 1949: 1

<sup>7</sup> Nambour Chronicle 26 Aug 1949:1

Families would ride on the infrequent buses to move about, but found themselves unwelcome, despised, isolated and segregated. White residents of nearby Caloundra used the area as their unofficial dump, adding disease and filth to the living areas.<sup>8</sup> There were reports of alcohol abuse, nudity, and attempted rape of children, hookworm epidemics and generally unsanitary conditions.<sup>9</sup> In 1951, both the local Council and police were called in to address the sanitation and a blow-fly epidemic at “the Aboriginal camp.”<sup>10</sup> Eventually the camp was dismantled.

Despite so many obstacles, the Duck Holes were an important living area for Aboriginal people on the Sunshine Coast during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It was one of very few that remained into this period, and thus formed a hub for the local community. Many Aboriginal families feel a strong connection to the history of this camp. They recall fishing and similar pursuits around the Duck Ponds and Caloundra. It also seems some partook in Easter celebrations in the town.



Figure 5: Aboriginal float, Easter Parade, Bulcock Street Caloundra 1959 (nla TROVE)

## 2. Aboriginal Sites of the Duck Holes Vicinity

### *Living areas?*

There are several indications that the area both at and near Duck Holes had considerable Aboriginal use before the 1920s, especially for hunting-gathering and camping. Certainly Aboriginal people were still in this area throughout the later 19<sup>th</sup> century. We have an account from Alex King that

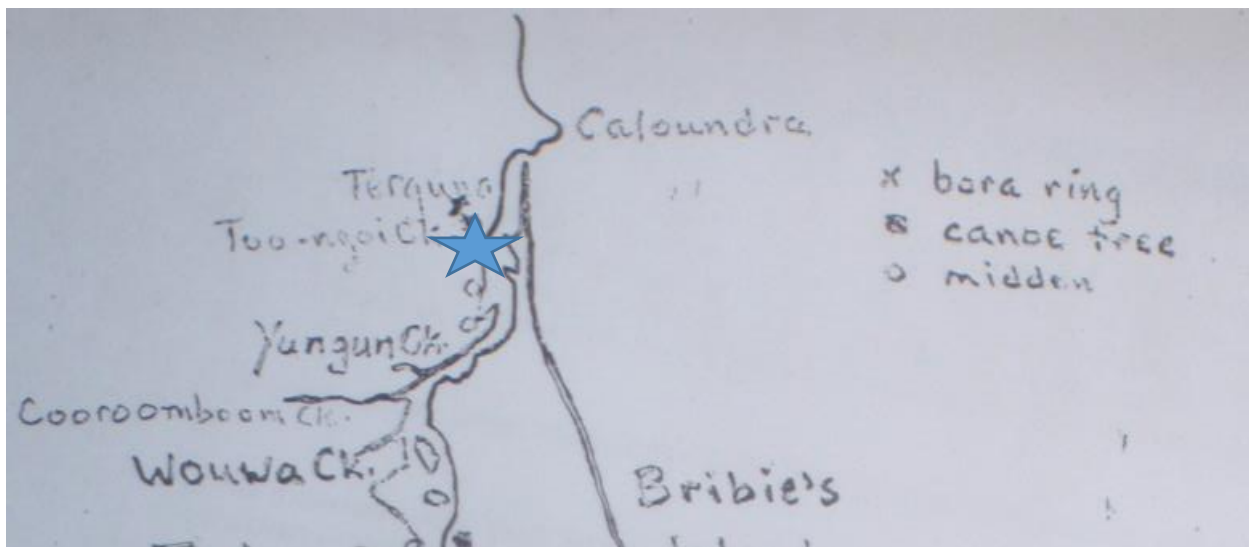


Figure 6: Neale Draper's sketch of major sites near Duckhole Creek (marked with a star), from his BA Honours Anthropology Thesis (UQ 1978) Figure 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Nambour Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser*, 23 October 1953 p 1

<sup>9</sup> *Nambour Chronicle* 26 August 1949:1; *Nambour Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser* 11 November 1949 p 7; *Courier Mail*, 20 November 1953: 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Nambour Chronicle & North Coast Advertiser* 9 March 1951: 1

King Johnny Boat was hunting and cooking a bit south of here in 1898,<sup>11</sup> and in 1886, the Aboriginal Adam Cleft was arrested at the top end of Bribie for the manslaughter of his wife and brought in by Samuel Leach, who ran a fishery from Bells Creek (close to Duck Ponds).<sup>12</sup> In 1863, the castaways from “Queen of the Colonies” shipwreck at Moffatt Beach survived partly from fish Aborigines fed them.<sup>13</sup>

### **Sugar Bag Road**

*Sugar Bag Road* near the Duck Holes was named an Aboriginal term for the many native beehives here and it seems that Sugar Bag Road was an original Aboriginal pathway leading to the Pacific Ocean.

### **Resource Areas**

Duck Holes was evidently one place local Aboriginal people camped in earlier times, as it had fresh water and plentiful food from the waterways, including of course waterfowl and ducks. The area between here, Bells Creek and Golden Beach was once very rich – regularly seeing hundreds of black swans, sea curlew, snipes, and pelicans, and other birdlife.<sup>14</sup> The sea life was even richer, with once ample evidence of Aboriginal use:

Many huge ancient piles of oyster shells and fish bones along its shores are an indication of the fish wealth of Bribie Passage... There are scores of these piles of shells and bones, which are relics of aboriginal feasts of the early days. One... was approximately eight feet in height and about twenty yards in circumference, and, judging by its size, the spot must have been a popular feeding ground of the natives for many years. At different times stone axe-heads and other interesting aboriginal relics have been found in and near these piles. The Passage is still one of the finest all weather fishing grounds off the Queensland coast. Huge whiting, flathead, and bream are there in abundance, as well as crabs and oysters, and at the southern mouth of

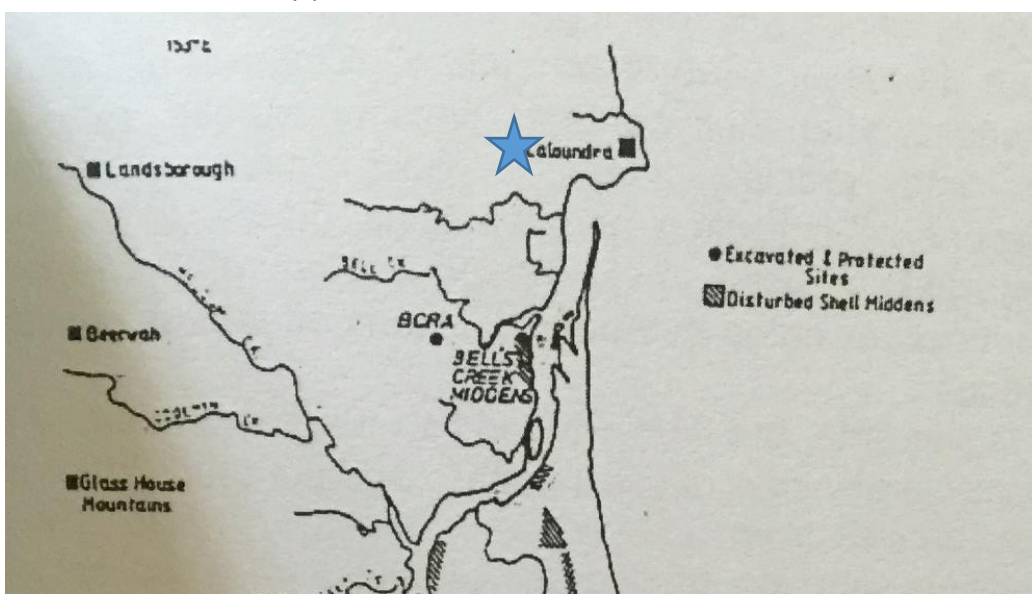


Figure 7: middens and other features near the Duck Holes (star) – Environmental Impact Study Bribie Island 1991: Figure 15.

<sup>11</sup> Stan Tutt, 1974, *Pioneer Days: Stories and Photographs of European Settlement Between the Pine and Noosa Rivers*, Queensland Caboolture Historical Society 1974 95

<sup>12</sup> *The Week* 5 June 1886: 14; *Brisbane Courier*, 27 May 1886 p 6.

<sup>13</sup> *Brisbane Courier*, 6 Dec 1924: 18

<sup>14</sup> Caloundra, *The Brisbane Courier*, 2 October 1883 p 3



the Passage huge snapper, coral cod, emperor bream, mackerel, sweetlip, and kingfish are frequently caught.<sup>15</sup>



Figure 8: grinding slab and mortar, found south of Bells Creek in 1966 (nla TROVE)

### **Scar trees, Boras and Burial Grounds**

Several important sites are known to have been in the general area of Bells Creek, Golden Beach and Caloundra: middens and canoe scar trees at Bells Creek;<sup>16</sup> bora grounds at Bells Creek; at Cooma and Leeding Terrace corner (Caloundra, behind Woolworths)<sup>17</sup> and on the property of R Cannon (probably north of Caloundra, or nearer Sippy Downs: said to be “about 140 feet across.”<sup>18</sup> There was also once a burial ground amongst a grove of figs near an oyster camp on the north of Bribie Island (perhaps past Mission Point?),<sup>19</sup> and a women’s fighting ring somewhere “near Caloundra.”<sup>20</sup>

## **3. Caloundra - the ‘Beautiful Place’**

The earliest spelling of Caloundra was ‘*Cullowundoor*,’ which early maps (1840s-1860s) place variously as referring to Wickham Point,<sup>21</sup> or the entire Caloundra headland.<sup>22</sup> An 1865 map has “*Calowndra*” marked at the bottom end of Caloundra Headland, and *Taryune* as the placename for the Golden Beach area.<sup>23</sup> Historian Kathleen McArthur speculates the original name may have been closer to *Kaluda* or *Kalooda*.<sup>24</sup>

Sydney May (the first official place name authority) states the word is a corruption of “place of beech trees.”<sup>25</sup> This has become the common translation, though it

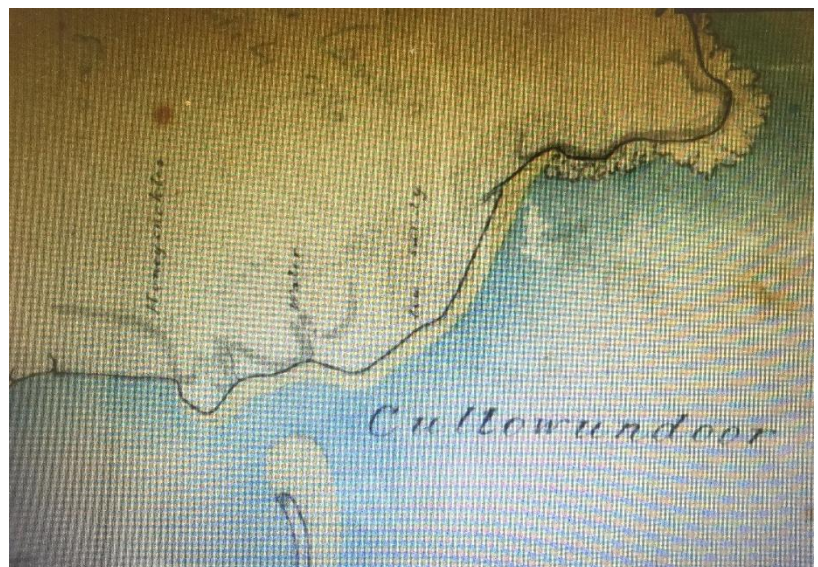


Figure 9: Dixon 1845 map showing ‘Cullowundoor’ and some of the area’s features (water, and honeysuckle = banksia scrub)

<sup>15</sup> E. Bribie Passage, *Queensland Sydney Mail*, 10 June 1936 p 27

<sup>16</sup> Anne Wensley, 1977, *An Introduction to the History of Caloundra* 2nd Edition Landsborough: Landsborough Historical Society 1

<sup>17</sup> Anne Wensley, 1977, *An Introduction to the History of Caloundra* 2nd Edition Landsborough: Landsborough Historical Society 2.

<sup>18</sup> Late News Flash, *Truth*, 18 May 1941 p 16 Article

<sup>19</sup> The Human Remains at Bribie, *The Brisbane Courier*, 23 April 1884 p 5

<sup>20</sup> The Qldr 9 Dec 1916: 8

<sup>21</sup> Archibald Meston, ‘Bribie Island,’ *The Brisbane Courier*, 21 September 1891 p 3

<sup>22</sup> JOL, Fred Watson, ‘Some Notes on the Manners and Customs of the Aborigines of South-east Queensland.’

<sup>23</sup> JOL RBM 841 00253 E C1

<sup>24</sup> JOL Box 18287 E G Heap Manuscript and Correspondence 20 Feb 1967 Kathleen McArthur

<sup>25</sup> JOL 7607 - Sydney May, ‘Sydney May’s Collection of Papers, Correspondence and Newspaper Clippings Box 5, 444/1 (Item 33 p.3)

seems to only feature in May's work. May's informant – linguist Fred Watson – stated the “origin and meaning” of Caloundra is unknown.<sup>26</sup>

Caloundra's first major historian, Kathleen McArthur, informed Heap (another scholar of this region) that translating Caloundra as ‘place of beech trees’ is problematic, as no beech trees grow in or near Caloundra. Heap and McArthur postulated that this could be due to their removal through heavy logging, or because – according to Fred Watson, who knew many of the early families - Caloundra originally related to Black Flat, considerably south of Caloundra. This area may have had more of a tropic growth.<sup>27</sup> Certainly Tom Tripcony (an early local settler) recalled rainforest trees towards Pumicestone Creek and Black Flat.<sup>28</sup>

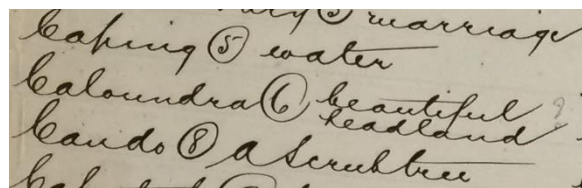


Figure 10: May's 1915 note on the meaning of Caloundra (JOL) '6' refers to Landsborough Station where the Aboriginal informant was contacted.

However, Landsborough – one of the first settlers of the area – offers “beautiful headland’ as the closest translation as early as 1865.<sup>29</sup> In 1915, Aboriginal informants at Landsborough Police Station gave the meaning of Caloundra as “beautiful headland.”<sup>30</sup> Accounts from 1907 and 1932 indicate that Aboriginal people themselves mostly used this translation and not ‘place of beech trees’:

...the word Caloundra means -in aboriginal parlance, "beautiful" or "beautiful headlands." Possibly that is not the exact meaning, but when **I asked an aboriginal what the word meant** he said: "Well, look!"—and he waved his hand around towards the headlands.<sup>31</sup>

Note that in the 1907 account, the writer clarified that Aboriginals had told him specifically that the reference was to “place” rather than ‘headland:’

Caloundra in the blacks' (Bribie and Caloundra) language means "beautiful place," and not "beautiful headland" (Kalo'n, Kaloun, Greek for beautiful — strange coincidence). **This was told to the writer by a blackfellow** as follows: —I asked him what Caloundra meant in his lingo, and he replied, "Cabon fellow, beautiful place cabon ocean, cabon beach (on Bribie Island), cabon lake or passage, cabon Glass Mountains, cabon Blackall Range, cabon sun go down, cabon plains, cabon beach (Mooloolah), cabon ocean."<sup>32</sup>

<sup>26</sup> JOL 7582 - Watson in 'Sydney May's Collection of Papers, Correspondence and Newspaper Clippings' (ID 489481 Qld State Archives) “origin and meaning not known” p 13

<sup>27</sup> JOL Box 18287 E G Heap Manuscript and Correspondence

<sup>28</sup> JOL Box 18287 E G Heap Manuscript and Correspondence (20 Feb 1967 Kathleen McArthur)

<sup>29</sup> QSA 'W.C.', Correspondence re/ Glasshouse Mountains from Director of Intelligence and Tourists Bureau - see 17 12 9/ 25 BD10/17.

<sup>30</sup> JOL 7497 - Sydney May, 'Sydney May's Collection of Papers, Correspondence and Newspaper Clippings Box 1, 444.

<sup>31</sup> *The Queenslander*, 30 June 1932: 5.

<sup>32</sup> Letter to the Editor, *The Queenslander*, 19 October 1907 p 34

## 4. Aboriginal Oysterers, Lime-burners and Boatmen

Aboriginal people did not disappear despite the inroads of settlement. They are recorded actively working in this area from the 1840s into current times. The hub of available employment for Aboriginal people during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century all lay on the northern end of Bribie Passage close to Duck Holes: Mr Samuel Leach's fishing and timber-getting where Bells Creek joined Bribie Passage: Landsborough's sheep and goat farm;<sup>33</sup> and Mr Bulcock's fishing and boat trips.<sup>34</sup> Charles Chilton's hauling of cedar from the Blackall Ranges, mostly taken to Bell's Creek, then rafted to Caloundra.<sup>35</sup> Mr Landsborough's home and grave was towards 'Black Flat' beach which curves round to the Golden Beach.<sup>36</sup>

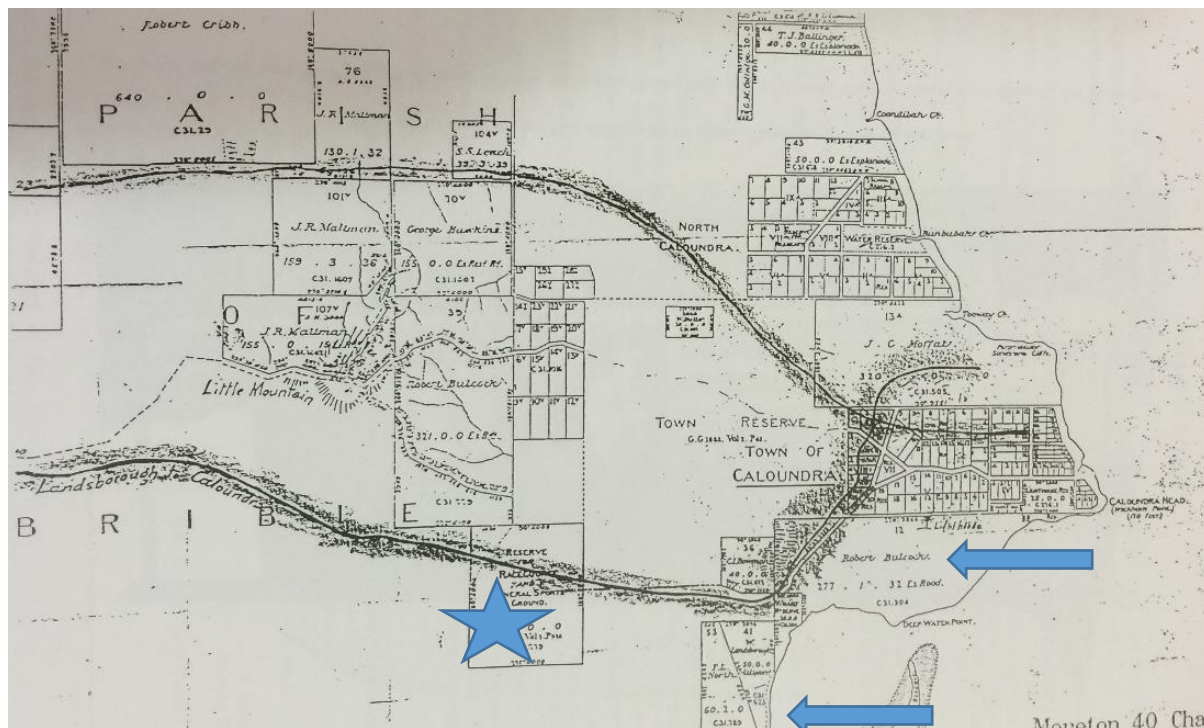


Figure 11: early map, showing the close proximity of the Duck Holes area (star) to the properties of Landsborough and Bulcock - shown with arrows.

Throughout the decades between the 1840s and 1880s, Brisbane's oyster and fish supply (especially mullet)<sup>37</sup> largely came from Pumicestone Passage.<sup>38</sup> Since the 1840s, Aboriginal people in this area had gathered and traded fish and oysters (including oyster shell from middens) for bully beef and pork.<sup>39</sup> Oyster shell was especially important, being burnt to make lime for much of the colony's mortar. Thus there was a constant stream of boats full of shells shovelled from the once-extensive

<sup>33</sup> Caloundra the Beautiful: Early History Traced, *The Courier-Mail*, 22 November 1937 p 23.

<sup>34</sup> *The Queenslander*, 21 June 1890 p 1157; To the Glass Mountains and Caloundra. II, *The Queenslander*, 9 May 1885 p 759.

<sup>35</sup> Passing of Pioneer *Daily Mercury*, 23 June 1941 p 4.

<sup>36</sup> *The Telegraph*, 23 September 1935 p 16

<sup>37</sup> E. Bribie Passage, *Queensland Sydney Mail*, 10 June 1936 p 27

<sup>38</sup> The Story of Bribie Passage. (Concluded from last week.), *The Queenslander*, 16 June 1932 p 4

<sup>39</sup> James Lergessner, 2012, *Oysterers of Moreton Bay* Woorim: James Lergessner: 31.



middens that ran from Toorbul to Golden Beach.<sup>40</sup> Boatmen carried the shell loads to cutters and steamers that took the shells to lime-burning sites such as Russell Island.<sup>41</sup>

In 1875, some 100 Aboriginals were living around Bribie Passage, following various blends of traditional lifestyle and seasonal work. As James Largessner noted, sixteen “mixed camps” emerged—Aboriginal-settler fishing/ oystering camps. When not trading or assisting with the fishing and oystering, these Aboriginal families still lived on local dugong, mullet, whiting, bream, tailor, stingray, crab, oyster, swan, pelican, pandanus, bungwall, and crab.



Figure 13: Alexander Archer's pen sketch of a Bribie Passage oyster camp 1860s (Largessner).

The oyster camps of the 1850s-1880s were quite famous, attracting ‘tourists’ who joined the camps simply for the experience. One major camp was just opposite Glasshouse Mountains Creek, and another at old Woorim (3 kms south of Caloundra) near Mission Point. Both of these covered several acres.<sup>42</sup> Pleasure trips involving oystering and fishing excursions were mostly conducted through Mr Leach at Bell’s Creek, often with several

Aboriginal attendants, pilots or guides.<sup>43</sup>

Commercial fishing and oystering spread north towards Caloundra once Charles Goodwin opened a fish cannery in Toorbul,<sup>44</sup> and the Tripconys established themselves at Hussey Creek in 1877.<sup>45</sup> By 1900, the oystering/fishing industry became more mechanised and better organised, but it may be noted that the ‘professional’ oysters and fishers of Pumicestone Channel were persons of Aboriginal descent – the Palins, Daltons, Bensons, the Tripconys and others.<sup>46</sup> They represented an intermarriage of local Kabi Kabi people, white fishers, and Aboriginals from other parts of Moreton Bay.

After the late 1880s, as oysters and fish began to decline and greater restrictions were imposed on their harvest, many Aboriginal families became malnourished and impoverished, especially as these

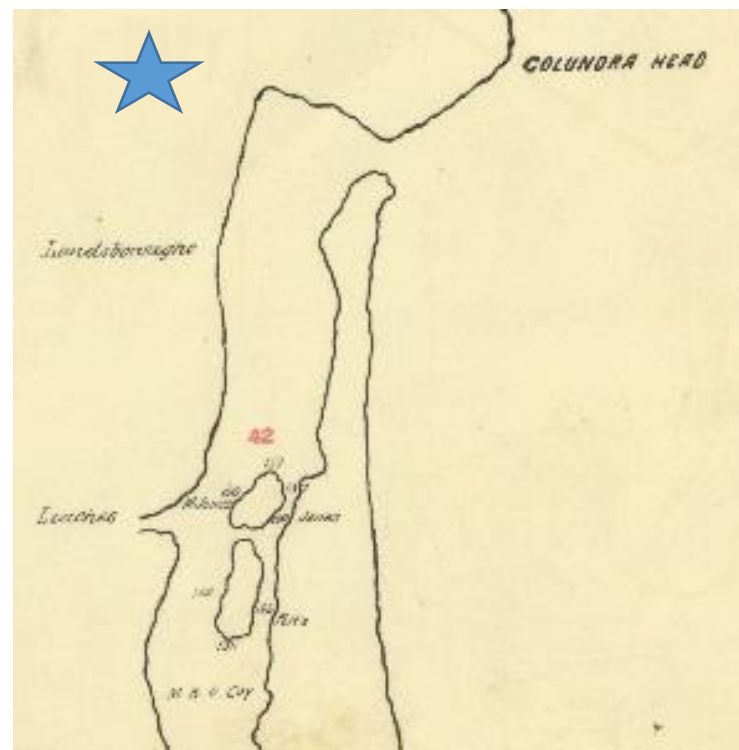


Figure 12: 1884 oyster leases showing position of Landsborough's and Leaches' properties in relation to the Duck Holes (marked by a star - John Oxley Library)

<sup>40</sup> James Largessner, 2012, *Oysterers of Moreton Bay* Woorim: James Largessner: 32.

<sup>41</sup> James Largessner, 2012, *Oysterers of Moreton Bay* Woorim: James Largessner: 87.

<sup>42</sup> James Largessner, 2012, *Oysterers of Moreton Bay* Woorim: James Largessner: 38.

<sup>43</sup> Our Holiday at Caloundra, *The Brisbane Courier*, 6 December 1883 p 3

<sup>44</sup> Leonard Shannon Green, 1999, *Caloundra State School Centenary History 1899-1999*, Caloundra: Caloundra State School: 5.

<sup>45</sup> Leonard Shannon Green, 1999, 5

<sup>46</sup> James Largessner, 2012, *Oysterers of Moreton Bay* Woorim: James Largessner: 51.

items were their own main diet.<sup>47</sup> Into the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, this led to greater dependency on the charity of the white community.

## 5. Aboriginal Timbermen in the Duck Holes Vicinity

The first timber work in this vicinity occurred during the 1850s-1860s around the Maroochy River and what is now Landsborough. The latter became renowned for its “grog shanties” serving “men of all colours.”<sup>48</sup> Most of the original Petrie/Pettigrew team that first worked the Maroochy timbers and then began dragging logs from the Blackall Ranges were Aboriginal men under headmen like Kerwalli (King Sandy). Since 1879, beech, bunya and hoop log hardwoods were taken down the creeks from the Blackall Ranges and around Landsborough into Bribie Passage.<sup>49</sup> This included the Bells and Coochin Creek systems, not far south of the Duck Holes.<sup>50</sup> The first rafting ground here was at the Mellum/Coochin Creeks junction, quickly followed by Campbell raising a sawmill (1880s) and small town (Campbellville).<sup>51</sup>

## 6. Caloundra’s First House/ Resort: Aboriginal-built

Timber work meant that Aboriginal people became quite adept with wood. Tripcony recalls they were often working in land-clearing and bark-stripping (the latter being the procuring of sheets of bark used in building). Probably on account of such work, “blacks were numerous” around Caloundra in the 1870s and cleared



Figure 14: Bulcocks' Homestead, the first Caloundra residence (Courier Mail 1937).

the first land for the Bulcocks – a block adjoining the Duck Holes. Here they also built the Bulcocks' home. In other words, the first house of Caloundra was Aboriginal-built.<sup>52</sup> It operated as a type of guest house and resort for the surrounding area, with Aboriginal people being the Bulcocks' main “tour operators.”<sup>53</sup> The Bulcocks' Homestead stood near the current (historic) Caloundra Lighthouse.

<sup>47</sup> Caloundra, *The Brisbane Courier*, 2 October 1883 p 3

<sup>48</sup> Edgar Foreman, 1928, *The History and Adventures of a Queensland Pioneer*, Brisbane; Exchange Printing: 34.

<sup>49</sup> A C Gubby, Jan 1976 *Campbellville and the Cedar Days* Brisbane: Dept of Forestry: 5.

<sup>50</sup> Leonard Shannon Green, 1999, *Caloundra State School Centenary History 1899-1999*, Caloundra: Caloundra State School: 5.

<sup>51</sup> Leonard Shannon Green, 1999: 5.

<sup>52</sup> Queensland Notes: Well Named, *Sydney Mail*, 24 August 1938 p 4

<sup>53</sup> *Courier Mail*, 21 Dec 1937: 21

Bulcocks was the centre of Caloundra. It seems that Aboriginal people were also involved with manning the beacon near here and keeping a lookout to prevent shipwrecks.

## 7. Missions and Reserves

The existence of a considerable Aboriginal population in the vicinity of Bribie Island and Caloundra with viable means of support prompted the establishment of Aboriginal Reserves a number of times in the area:

There have been two aboriginal settlements on the Bribie Island side of the passage. The first was established at the White Patch in 1877, during the regime of the Douglas Ministry with Tom Petrie as visiting supervisor, and Father McNab, a Scotch priest, lived there for a good while; but with a change of Government in 1879 the whole thing was done away with. This was the first mission in Queensland. The next settlement for aboriginals was further up, at Sydney Camp, opposite Tripconny's Island, and was started in 1890. Mr. Tyson was superintendent, Mrs. Kerr matron, and Mr. Ballister the schoolmaster to about 40 youngsters. The mission cutter Dayspring plied back and forth to Brisbane, but the whole outfit was shifted to Myora, on Stradbroke Island, in 1892, and still is in existence.<sup>54</sup>



Figure 15: Lithograph of the Sydney Camp Mission (*The Queenslander* 3 October 1891: 648).

The second, Sydney Camp was by Mission Point – an island towards the north of Bribie, thus not far from the Duck Holes. The positioning of these Missions beside the Bribie Passage reflects the importance of oystering and fishing to the local population. By 1890 a school was organised at Mission Point.<sup>55</sup>

## 8. Spirit Rocks and Fishing Paradise

Gaiarbau (Willie MacKenzie) recalled the following “corroboree song.” Here he explains the wording of the song: it concerns a man who walks up the Headland and recounts the Caloundra Dreaming:

---

<sup>54</sup> The Story of Bribie Passage. (Concluded from last week.) *The Queenslander*, 16 June 1932 p 4

<sup>55</sup> *The Queenslander*, 21 June 1890 p 1157



Walking up Caloundra Headland, the man felt very tired and while looking out to sea he saw two rocks and remarked that those must be the two boys that were placed there by Carpet Snake. The story is that two boys were left in a camp by their parents and told not to wander. After a time, however, they got restless and strayed, as children will, and went to the sand hills - over 1 and 2 and 3 until they came to the forth. Here they saw the great carpet snake which was feared and avoided by the tribe of Aborigines as an evil spirit called rainbow serpent... the boys, however, decided it would be good for food and therefore to kill it and take it home. Instead the snake got its tail around them and took them out to sea and turned them into these two rocks.<sup>56</sup>

This is almost certainly a reference to the two Bray Rocks (see map below), off Wickham Point.



Figure 16: 1860s map showing Bray Rocks (arrow).

Gaiarabau visited Caloundra in 1962 (see photo) and presumably earlier. He was knowledgeable of many groups' customs and stories.

<sup>56</sup> S Winterbotham & Gaiarabau, #25700 *Recording Made for the Ethnological Committee of Queensland*, Sept 1950, p.180-3.





Figure 17: Willie MacKenzie at Currimundi in 1962, demonstrating spear throwing as part of a botanical excursion (nla TROVE)

Bray Rocks were favoured for fishing but not reachable except in fine weather. They were the scene of shipwrecks, thus the Dreaming tales probably encapsulate the mixed blessing of seafood bounty and perilous waters, as reported in 1907: "Bray Rock lies just in front of Caloundra, and in fine weather it is easy to run out with a gutter and get snapper on its edges."<sup>57</sup> We have similar reports from 1889 about the area being (at that time) a "superior" site for fishing,<sup>58</sup> and even in 1937, it was possible to obtain "fine hauls" of tailor, bream, whiting and mullet, and "a jewfish weighing 35 lbs" from the Caloundra area."<sup>59</sup>

Colonial awareness of this rich fishing spot came directly from Aboriginal people:

Almost every week-end the "boys" return home with many fine specimens of fish. The big fish are apparently caught off Caloundra and Bribie. Some few years ago a veteran aboriginal, to wit, Sam Bell, informed the writer that the best fishing grounds on the coast were just outside the Bribie leading lights.<sup>60</sup>

It should be noted that Sam (Boama) Bell identified here – along with Margaret Catchpenny, Johnny Tracker and Kerwalli (King Sandy) – was one of the last persons to live a traditional lifestyle in this area. He was usually based at Redcliffe, but was nevertheless one of the main oystermen and fishers in the early history of Bribie Passage.<sup>61</sup> In the 1930s, archaeologist Jackson talked to Mr W Potts – "an old pioneer" who could recall Aboriginals diving for oysters at Caloundra, and middens in the area that were once 7 feet high.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Caloundra, *Brisbane Courier*, 5 Oct 1907: 13

<sup>58</sup> Caloundra .*The Week*, 14 December 1889 p 16

<sup>59</sup> Caloundra— New And Old *Sunday Mail (Brisbane)* 7 November 1937 p 23

<sup>60</sup> *Queensland Figaro* 1 July 1916: 6

<sup>61</sup> *The Queenslander* 16 June 1932: 4

<sup>62</sup> G K Jackson, Aboriginal Middens of Point Cartwright District, *Annals of Qld Museum* 11 (1936-1939), pp.289-295

## 9. Sacred Caves

It seems that Dreaming stories of Caloundra all pivot around one or two children swept out to sea, and caves or rocks by the shore.

Petrie's tale of the Dreaming Sisters' journey up from Bribie to Mudjimba Island involves the death of an infant on the Bribie shore, followed by the two sisters staying in a Caloundra cave (the sisters were following a fish they had caught which had transformed into the moon):

Next morning these sisters went out on to the main beach (of Bribie) to gather yugaries there. The elder sister, by the way, had a little son with her — just a baby — and this child they left on the beach when the yugaries were gathered, covered with a possum-rug, while they went to get some more *bangwal*, meaning not to be long away. However, during their absence, the tide came up, **and the child was washed over by the waves and covered with sand, and on the women's return they only found him by one little foot sticking up. Of course, they were in a great way at this, and digging the little dead thing out, they carefully buried him beyond the water's reach.** Then, feeling restless, they travelled on and away along the main beach till they came opposite to Caloundra, where they swam the channel. **Here on the mainland they found some fine caves, and camped in one of these for the night — this very same cave is still in existence.** Next day, travelling on again, they camped in another cave, and so they journeyed along the beach, till at length they came to Mooloolah Heads.<sup>63</sup>

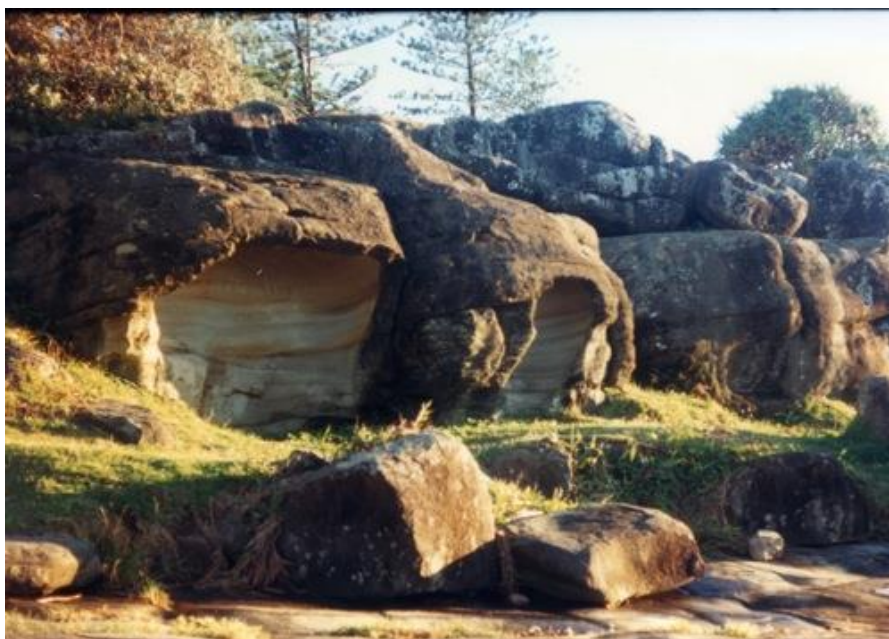


Figure 18: rock overhangs at Moffat Head which may be the 'Caloundra caves' (apparently somewhat eroded). Photograph and find by Brian Warner, Kabi Kabi Applicant (October 2016)

The Dreaming Women kept walking up the beach as far as Mudjimba Island. Echoes of both the Petrie account and Gaiarbau's story can be seen in this an 1885 account:

...the bold headland upon the top of which Mr Moffatt's house is (now) situated (Moffatt's Head) is looked upon with awe by the original inhabitants of this pretty seaside spot. **The gins are not allowed to go there at all, and no blacks will camp here at night. The place is invested with supernatural terrors, inasmuch as two *picaninies* are said to appear and disappear from out of the rocky cliff.**<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> C C Petrie, *Aboriginal Fairy Tales*, *The Queenslander* 27 September 1902 p 682

<sup>64</sup> To the Glass Mountains and Caloundra. III. *The Queenslander*, 16 May 1885 p 800

Another visitor a year before similarly recorded that Aboriginals would not camp at Caloundra, though it is not specified whether this is Caloundra Headland (the Bullocks' home), Moffatt's Head, or the whole area:

Mr Moffatt and Mr Bullock divide this glorious spot (Caloundra) between them... By the way, there is a legend concerning this headland current amongst the blacks. The shore is eminently suited for camping, abounding, as the waters do, with fish of many kinds, and the adjacent forest well supplied with game; grassy nooks inviting to repose and salt water lagoons protected from the extreme violence of the open sea. Still **no black will venture to camp there. "Baal" they say, "blackfellow camp 'longa Caloundra." The tradition is that two monsters came out of a cave in the rocks and devoured some blacks who had camped there, and that, ever since, the "ghost walks"—not in a theatrical sense.**<sup>65</sup>

The exact Caloundra (or near-Caloundra) location of the one or two beachside caves (the other may be north of Caloundra) is not specified in Petrie. However, the mention in the 1880s accounts of a 'cave in the rocks' and children coming 'out of the cliff' (presumably from a cave) suggest either Moffatt Headland or Caloundra Headland as the likely spots.

Kabi Kabi applicants have asked their families and themselves investigated possible sites. Brian Warner believes he may have found the caves (see above). It seems that surf erosion and rock fall has probably meant that today, the caves are less obvious.

Note that in each case, there are two spirit boys, two monsters or two sisters in these stories. There is a notable similarity between the story of Bray Rocks and the creation of Noosa Heads. There too, the narrative concerns a boy who disobeyed, left camp, crossed a distance to the sea, tried to kill and eat a snake, and was devoured and spat out as a rock by the Rainbow Serpent.

Jackson found "at least one" human footprint etched into the engravings at Moffatt Head.<sup>66</sup> Elsewhere in Australia, such *mundos* (footprints) indicated the track of important Dreaming Ancestors. It is possible that this engraving related to either the Dreaming Sisters or the boys who became rocks.

## 10. Caloundra: Totemic/ Ceremonial Sanctuary?

Despite having these areas of no camping, Caloundra was specifically named a "beautiful place" by Aboriginal people. They expressed great awe and pride over its natural bounty.<sup>67</sup> Many early European visitors were similarly enthused over the scenic qualities of the headland, its diverse flora, delightful birdlife, and great stocks of fish:

There are fine stretches of beach, on some of which surf bathing can be engaged in without risk. There are rocky headlands, and sheltered gullies where wild flowers grow. There is above all else good fishing.<sup>68</sup>

One remembers the Caloundra of yesterday, with its fragrant bush, and maidenhair gullies, its acres of golden wattle, and banksia trees laden with their curious bottle brushes – spiky

---

<sup>65</sup> *The Telegraph* 9 February 1884: 2

<sup>66</sup> G K Jackson, Aboriginal Middens of Point Cartwright District, *Annals of Qld Museum* 11 (1936-1939), pp.289-295

<sup>67</sup> Letter to the Editor, *The Queenslander*, 19 October 1907 p 34; *The Queenslander*, 30 June 1932: 5.

<sup>68</sup> *The Queenslander*, 1 Feb 1913: 29

without, and softest brown velvet at the core. Among the darker green of the wattle groves, the delicate but arresting green of the geebung trees delighted the eye. .... The beautiful hillsides, softly wooded...<sup>69</sup>

...the crossing of the great flower plains at the entrance to Caloundra, where pink and purple boronia is mingled with masses of white heath and ground orchids, and where, on the ridges, myriads of quaint grass trees meet the eye. On the paddymelon country, Christmas bells flourish<sup>70</sup>

More than other areas of the Sunshine Coast, Caloundra had groves of pandanus,<sup>71</sup> favoured as a food, drink and fibre. Indeed, in summer when pandanus fruited, there were pilgrimages from Gherrulla near Kenilworth to enjoy the pandanus.<sup>72</sup>

MacArthur's historic house (now gone) at 22 Orvieto Terrace Caloundra (above Kings Beach) was given the name "Midyim" by local Aboriginals, apparently in the 1920s.<sup>73</sup> This described the profusion of another food: midyim (a wallum berry) in this area, some of which still remained in the 1960s. Presumably, thus, the area also had plenty of berries.

Given such diverse abundance of beauty and food, why would so much of Caloundra have been relegated as a non-camping zone? The answer may lie in similar areas: Noosa Headlands and the Bunya Mountains. Both these were also beauty spots, diverse and scenic environments, and cornucopias of medicines, foods and useful plants. Both Noosa Headlands and the Bunya Mountains were largely retained as places of ceremonial and medicinal use, lookouts/ signalling stations, and 'food stores' – sanctified resource areas. They had various ceremonial grounds in the vicinity, much like Caloundra.

In south-eastern Queensland, hills and headlands were often believed to be mythic Creator Spirits from which water and game were thought to originate (e.g. the 'mother's milk' of the Bunya Mountains). It is probable that Caloundra was reserved not only as a major resource area (to obtain fish, oyster, pandanus, midyim, bungwall, fibres, medicines etc) but as a centre for totemic increase ceremonies dedicated to these resources and their totemic kin. This would explain the several areas of engravings here, which were pecked tracks of a "variety of smaller birds"<sup>74</sup> – once common in this area on account of the varied, berry-and-flower rich wallum scrub – and tracks of important game such as kangaroo and emu. It is notable that these engravings were placed just above some of the richest fishing sites, amidst groves of another useful item – the pandanus.<sup>75</sup>

The 'sacrosanct' nature of Caloundra Headland may also account for the fact that living sites were generally just a bit south, west and north of the main headland. For instance, Jackson,

---

<sup>69</sup> New And Old *Sunday Mail* 7 November 1937 p 23

<sup>70</sup> *The Telegraph*, 23 September 1935 p 16

<sup>71</sup> Special North Coast Supplement Sea-Girt Playground By Mountain and Sea Beautiful North Coast *The Queenslander* 9 November 1938 p 31; Caloundra – Some of Its Attractions; Episodes of the Early Days, *The Brisbane Courier*, 5 October 1907 p 13.

<sup>72</sup> E.G. Heap, 1980, In the wake of the raftsmen: a survey of early settlement in the Maroochy District up to the passing of "the Crown Lands Alienation Act, 1868" [Part 111], *John Oxley journal: a bulletin for historical research in Queensland*, 1 5: 8, p.24.

<sup>73</sup> JOL, Box 18287 E G Heap Manuscript and Correspondence (letter 20 Feb 1967 Kathleen McArthur).

<sup>74</sup> G K Jackson, Aboriginal Middens of Point Cartwright District, *Annals of Qld Museum* 11 (1936-1939), pp.289-295

<sup>75</sup> *The Telegraph*, 23 September 1935 p 16



who undertook the earliest archaeological survey of this region, found that folds of sand dunes between Currimundi and Mooloolaba had middens indicating living sites, whereas these seemed less evident around Caloundra.<sup>76</sup> Currimundi was considered a major camp, where numerous “Aboriginal choppers” were found, indicating considerable plant processing.<sup>77</sup> The name refers to flying fox that lived here, doubtless another source of food, but interestingly the area was remembered as a “sanctuary... when Caloundra became too civilized.”<sup>78</sup> Equally, the great bulk of living areas, stone tools, middens and scar trees occur a bit south and west of Caloundra towards Bell’s Creek.

## **11. Caloundra’s Engravings: Relics of an ancient land bridge?**

According to some accounts, Caloundra and Bribie were once joined, and had an abundance of kangaroo and emu:

There are still old aborigines living in the locality who can remember when the island (Bribie) at this point was joined to the mainland by a narrow land-bridge, which was a popular hunting spot. Large numbers of kangaroos and emus and other marsupials used to cross the bridge to reach the island, and many were killed by natives who hid in the bushes to await their coming.<sup>79</sup>

This is not as unlikely as it may sound. A narrow land bridge similarly joined North and South Stradbroke as late as 1894 (until destroyed by the flood of that year), and the history of the sand masses of Cooloola and Moreton Island were similarly marked by sudden break throughs or buildups. Moreover, the pecked engravings at Wickham Point and Moffat Head focussed on land animals - emu and kangaroo tracks, and dingo track engravings were especially common.<sup>80</sup> This is surprising given the dominant fauna of this area today is either marine life or scrub birds. It could date these engravings to the time of this ancient ‘land bridge’ hunting ground. Today, Caloundra is not a favourable environment for emus, kangaroos and dingos.

However, the current break in the top of the passage between Bribie and Caloundra seems to have existed a very long time. It appears on maps from at least 1845. Thus it is unlikely any Aboriginal elder alive in the 1930s would “still remember” this land bridge from their childhood, though perhaps they were heirs to the story.

---

<sup>76</sup> G K Jackson, ‘Aboriginal Middens of Point Cartwright District’, *Annals of Qld Museum* 11 (1936-1939), pp.289-295

<sup>77</sup> *Courier Mail* 22 July 1939:10

<sup>78</sup> B.P. Governor’s Seaside Residence, *Sydney Mail*, 5 January 1938 p 4

<sup>79</sup> E. , ‘Bribie Passage, Queensland,’ *Sydney Mail*, 10 June 1936 p 27

<sup>80</sup> G K Jackson, Aboriginal Middens of Point Cartwright District, *Annals of Qld Museum* 11 (1936-1939), pp.289-295



*Figure 19: Engrave boulder discovered about a decade ago near Caloundra. This may give some idea of the pecked engravings that once decorated the sandstone outcrops at Moffatt Head, Wickham Point and Caloundra Head.*