

# History of South Stradbroke Island

South Stradbroke Island is a place rich in culture, natural beauty and has a vast history. It is considered to be a young island, only 10,000 years old.

It is believed that Moreton Island, North Stradbroke, South Stradbroke Island and the Southport Spit were all connected at one time. The formation of the sand islands off South-East Queensland has been mainly attributed to northerly longshore ocean currents bringing sand from northern NSW and then regular south-easterly winds moving the sand particles up from the beaches. While this is partially true, it is now generally recognised that the continental shelf is actually the potential source of the sand on these islands.

The south-eastern winds cause a swell wave system (which is from the south-east) to bring up sand from the shelf under the ocean.

Rocky headlands act as pivot points for the winds and waves to drop sand. One such pivot point is Point Lookout on North Stradbroke Island. These rocky outcrops proved to be the ruin of many whaling and cargo ships, but one in particular had great significance to South Stradbroke.

In the spring of 1896 North and South Stradbroke were separated due to a combination of factors:

1. The narrow bridge of land between the two islands was less than 40 metres wide.
2. On September 3 1894, the Scottish ship *Cambus Wallace*, ran aground and sank only 200 metres off shore, directly adjacent to this narrow spit, causing considerable damage including:
  - a) Human impact (rescue & salvage operations)
  - b) Depletion of vegetation (due to erosion)
  - c) Detonation of explosives aboard the ship

## Aboriginal History & Culture

Aborigines have occupied the islands of this region for thousands of years. Recent Archaeological evidence indicates that this area has been inhabited for at least 18,000 years.

There may, in fact, have been much longer occupation, but some of the earlier sites have been destroyed due to changes in the coastline.

Many tribes travelled great distances, from as far as Mt Tamborine and Beaudesert in the west to Brisbane in the north and Tweed Heads in the south, to use the island's vast resources.

First descriptions of the aborigines came from John Uniacke travelling with Oxley in 1823, "The strength and obvious good health of these people is due to the quality of natural foods on the island." Fish, shellfish and other seafood supplied their basic diet and this was supplemented by turtles, wallabies, snakes, lizards, spiny anteaters, bandicoots and dugong, as well as fruity roots and native honey.

The barter system was used with other tribes for articles not available on the island (ie. shells and reed necklaces were exchanged for knives, axes, grindstones & spears). The aborigines appreciated their surrounding vegetation for aesthetic, spiritual & practical reasons.

**Flour** was made by grinding roasted fern root (bungwal) into a powder before making a kind of damper.

**Honey** was obtained from flowers of the banksia as well as nests of bees.

**Berries** from plants.

**Shields & Boomerangs** made from buttress roots.

**Fishing nets** made from cottonwood tree bark.

**Dilly bags** made from tree palms & beach spinifex.

## European Influence

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the traditional way of life changed significantly. Aborigines began to rely on medicine more than traditional ways, but populations were decimated by tuberculosis, smallpox, consumption and flues, until only 65 people from three tribes remained.

From 1859 land was for "Auction Lease" and cattle were swum across from Southport in 1880, but did not thrive on the island.

Land was cleared for farming with vegetables such as onions, strawberries and carrots grown for sale on the mainland.

In 1870, the Moreton Bay Oyster Company started and flourished in the sheltered waters. The break through of Jumpinpin had disastrous effects and local oysterman petitioned repeatedly to close off the entrance by dumping derelict boats or by building barriers. The Department of Harbours and Marine eventually rejected this idea.

Sand mining began in 1951, involving the extraction of high-grade mineral deposits from the beach and sand dunes. This process moved from Tipplers, north of Couran Cove Island Resort down to Currigee, at the southern end and by 1970 was moved to North Stradbroke.

Attempts were made for revegetation, but the dunes proved to be unstable and wild cattle destroyed plantings. The Beach Protection Authority commenced a research station on the island in 1971 in order to develop improved approaches to revegetation and dune stabilisation.

The resort site has been the subject of numerous proposals for tourist development since the 1950s.

#### **South Stradbroke Island Today**

On South Stradbroke Island you can view many endangered species of plants, such as the Swamp Orchid, the Cabbage Palm and the Pink Smart Weed. Many of the endangered species on the island are undergoing propagation programs to increase their numbers and to ensure their survival.

South Stradbroke Island has excellent water quality. The sand acts as a sponge, catching and storing rain in its lens shaped reservoir underground.

The island is 20km long and 2.5km wide and managed by the Gold Coast City Council.

#### **Vegetation**

The vegetation on South Stradbroke Island can be grouped into distinct ecological groups by habitat types.

#### **Littoral Vegetation**

Mangroves, Swamp Oak, Salt Bush

#### **Strand & Beach Ridge Communities**

Beach Spinifex, Goats Foot Morning Glory, Banksia and Horsetail Oak.

#### **Eucalypt Woodland**

Pink Bloodwood, Corkwood, Moreton Bay Ash, Forest Red Gum and Paperbark.

#### **Cabbage Palm Rainforest & Melaleuca Wetland**

Cabbage Palm, Sandpaper Fig, Willow Bottlebrush, Paperbark Tea Tree, Swamp Mahogany.