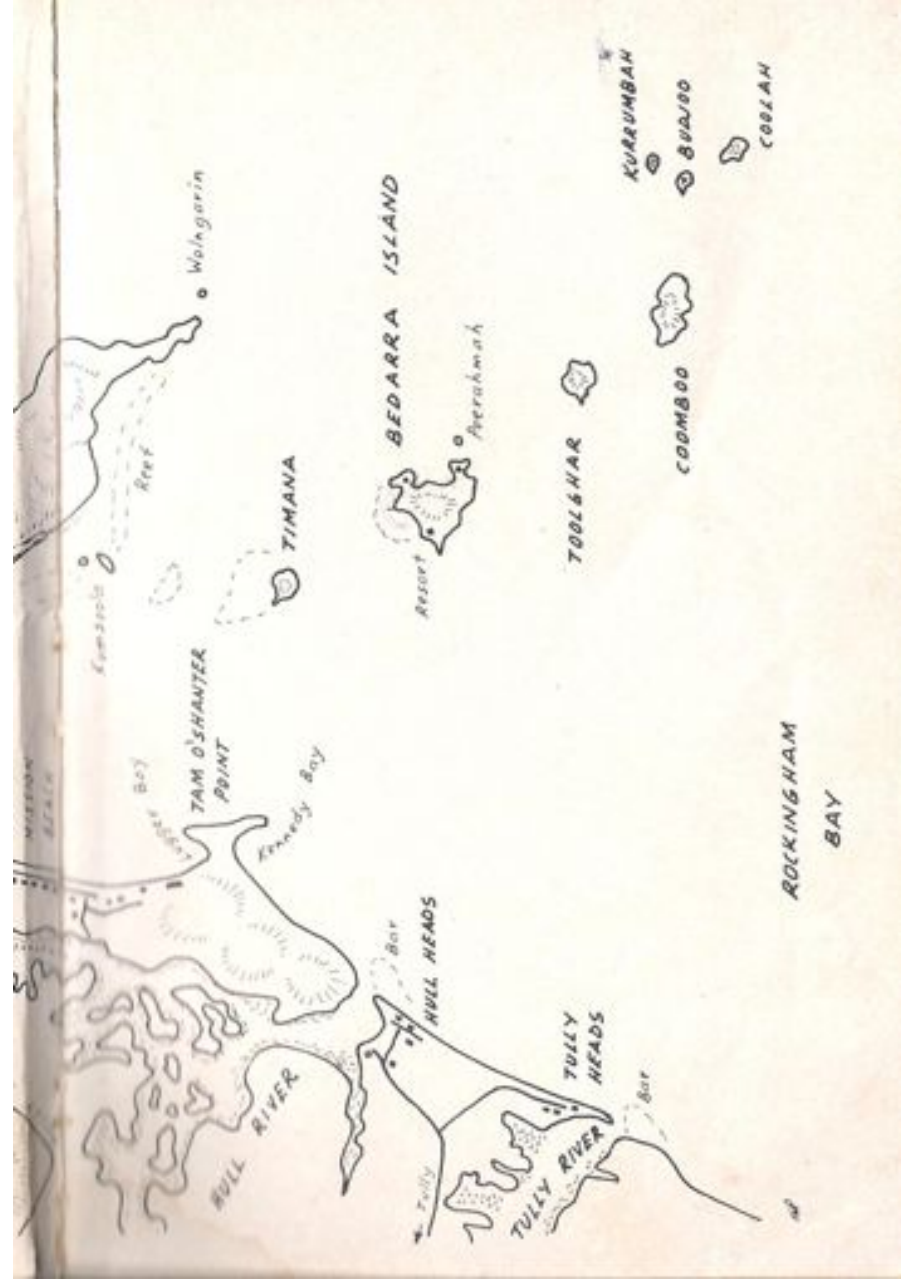
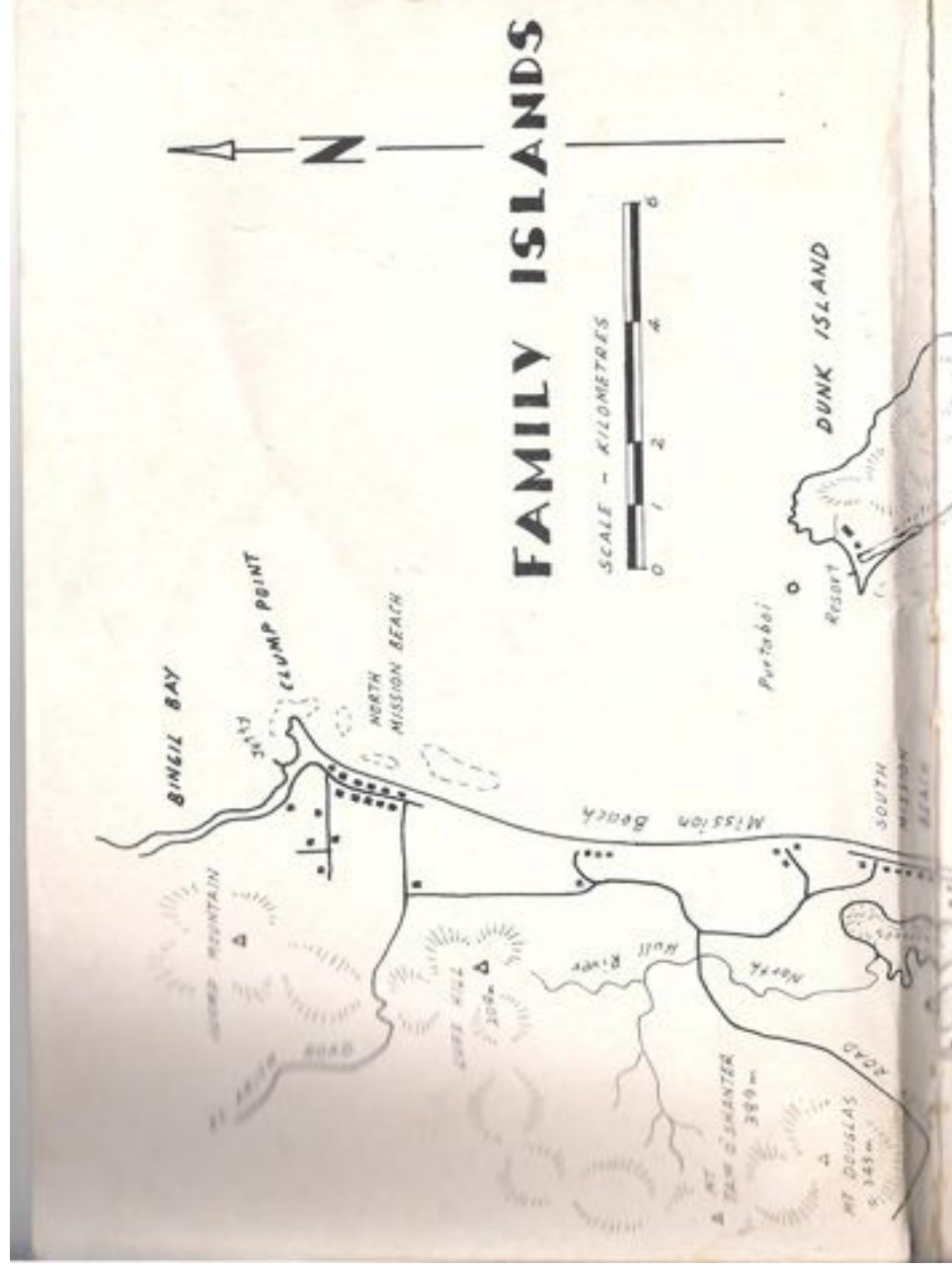




Discovering the FAMILY ISLANDS

A guide to the Bedarra and Dunk Island group,
North Queensland

James G. Porter



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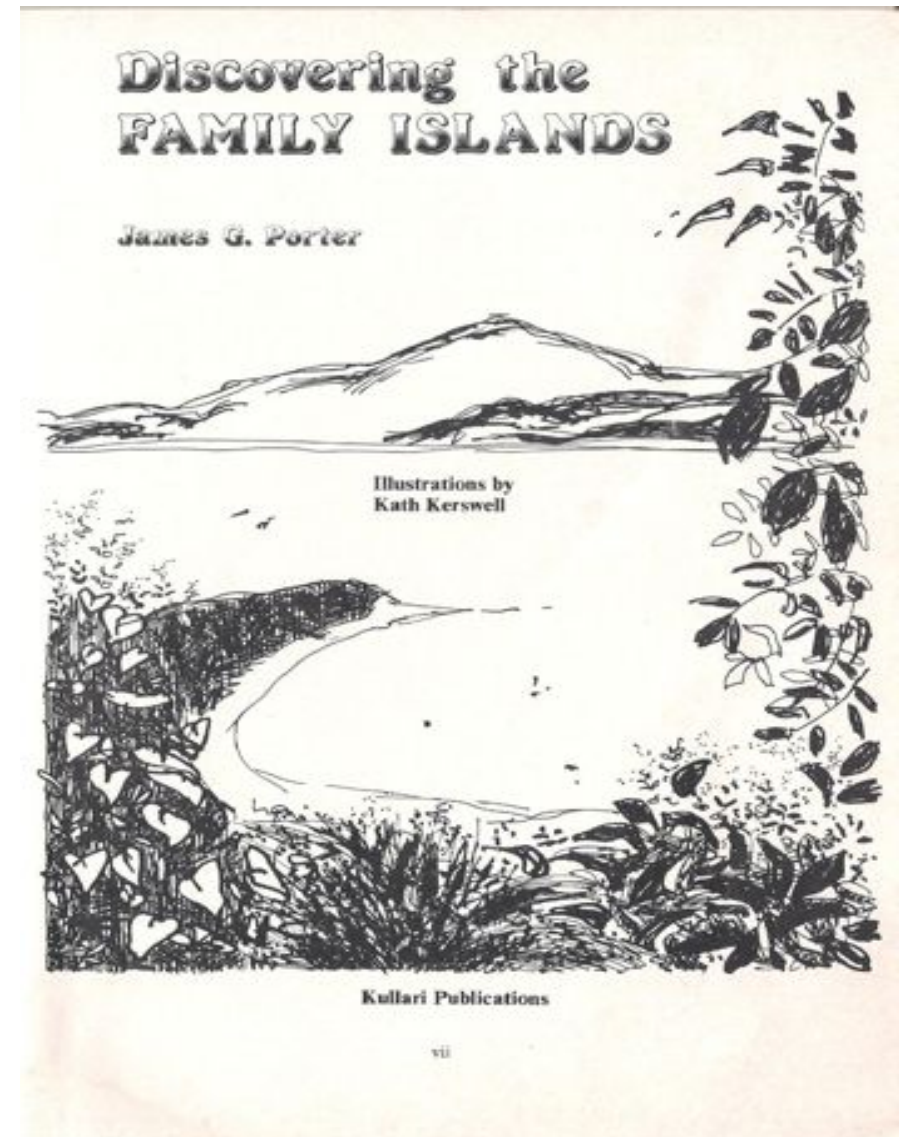
Other books by James Porter

Fiction

The Swiflet Isles
Warri of the Wind
The Kumul Feathers
Hapkas Girl
The Sacred Tree

Non-fiction

Discovering Magnetic Island
Further Confessions of the Beachcomber
(E. J. Banfield collection)
Beachcomber's Paradise
(E. J. Banfield collection)



Acknowledgements

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James G. Porter

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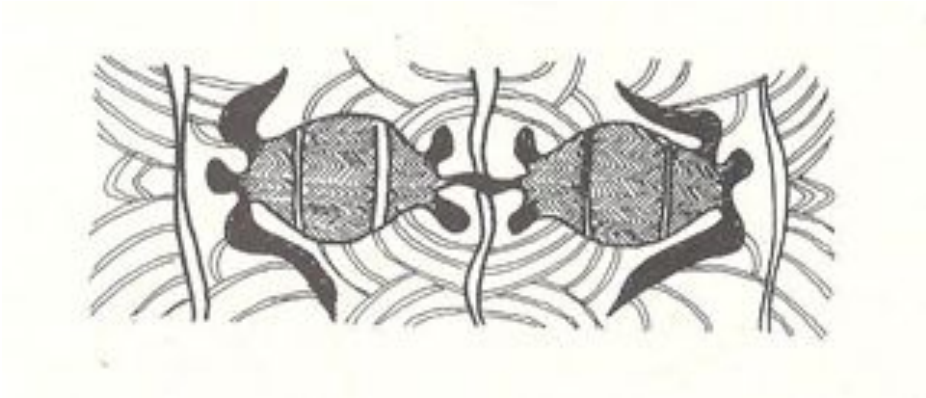
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**A little isle at the far south eastern end of the Family island chain –
The year 1770**

The tiny sunbird hovered like a humming-bird over the scarlet blossomed candelabra of an umbrella tree which jutted from a cleft in the granite rocks above the white coral sand beach. As the bird settled and probed for nectar with its slender curved bill, its shining deep blue throat and bright yellow breast seemed to become part of the giant flower stem itself – an exquisite composite bloom among the glossy green leaves.

A naked Aboriginal boy clambered on to the granite boulder, disturbing the sunbird which fluttered off to try the yellow beach hibiscus flowers instead. The boy had spied something unusual from the sandspit and sought the extra height of the rock to look out toward the southern horizon. Something white showed above the brilliant aquamarine ripple in the bright morning sunlight of this fine June day.

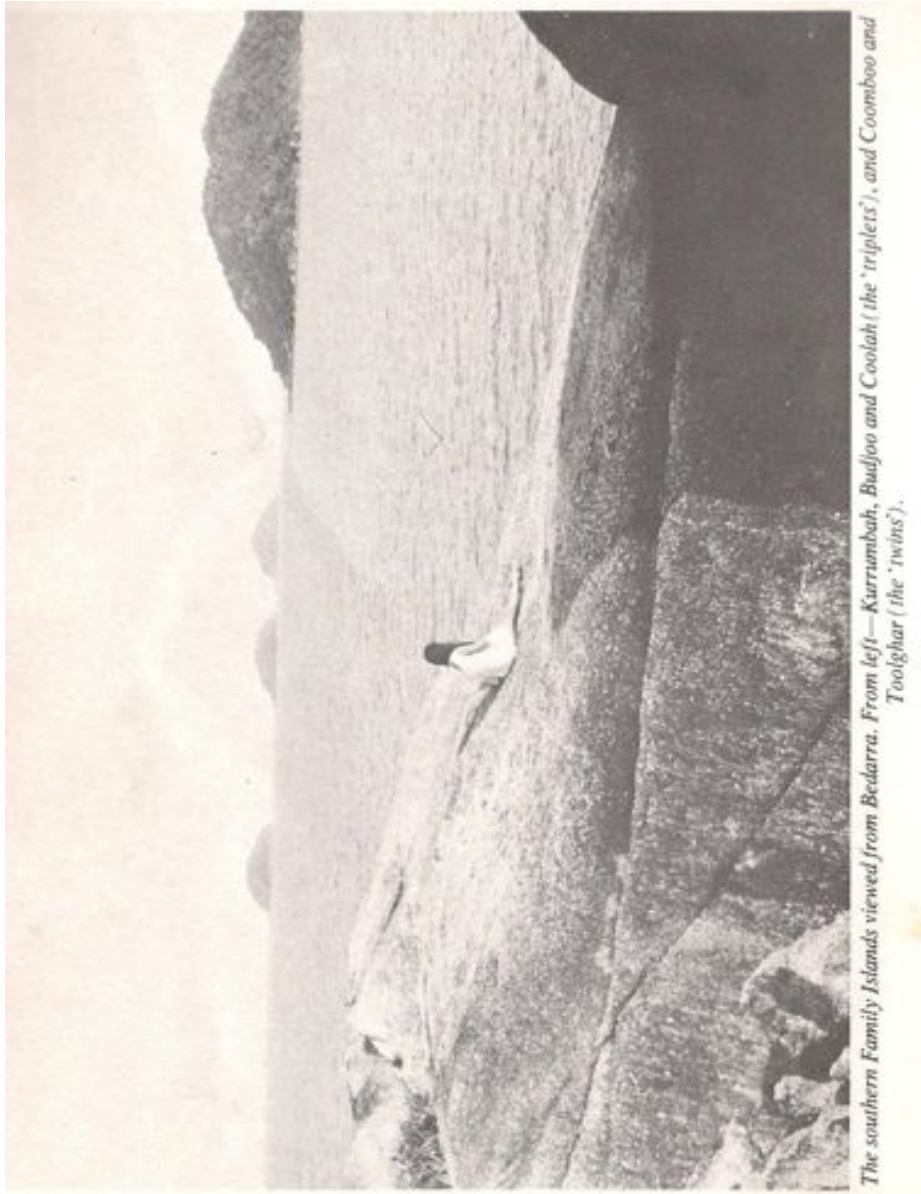
From his vantage point the boy saw it to be a made up of many smaller patches of white, like the petals of a flower ... A canoe! Those white petals billowing on the gentle sou'easter were part of a canoe – a canoe much bigger than the outriggers which sometimes came from the great blue-peaked island of Hinchinbrook bearing friendly tribespeople. The boy stared in amazement, pointing and calling excitedly to another boy and girl who joined him on the rock. It was the strangest canoe they had ever seen, sailing straight for their little granite isle, Budjoo, central one of the 'triplet' isles, farthest outposts of the group.

The children jumped down on to the sand and ran breathlessly to their parents at the other end of the long white beach. Several women and children squatted there under the shade of the casuarinas at the edge of the jungle, tending a fire and waiting for the menfolk to bring up the big green turtle speared earlier from the bark canoes they had paddled out across the narrow strait between Budjoo and the

even smaller islet, Kurrumbah, a few hundred metres northeast. During the past week the tribal group from the main isle of Coonanglebah had paddled in canoes on an island-hopping foraging expedition, first to camp on the sandspit at Bedarra, then to Toolghar, Coomboo, and now Budjoo.

The boys ran to their fathers on the beach, the girl to her mother, with the startling news. Within seconds every man, woman and child was running toward the sandspit. There, even closer now, was the great white-petalled canoe, already abreast of Coolah Island and entering the strait between the triplet isles and the larger Coomboo Island to the west.

The hearts in those many dark breasts thumped wildly – with fear, or mere excitement, even the warriors themselves could not be sure. The oldest man in the group recalled his father describing such a canoe (which white men would one day conjecture to be Spanish) long ago sailing these waters of the Great Barrier Reef. As the great canoe now sailed within half a kilometre of the spit, pale-faced men wearing head and body coverings stood on deck, one holding a shiny object to his eye ...



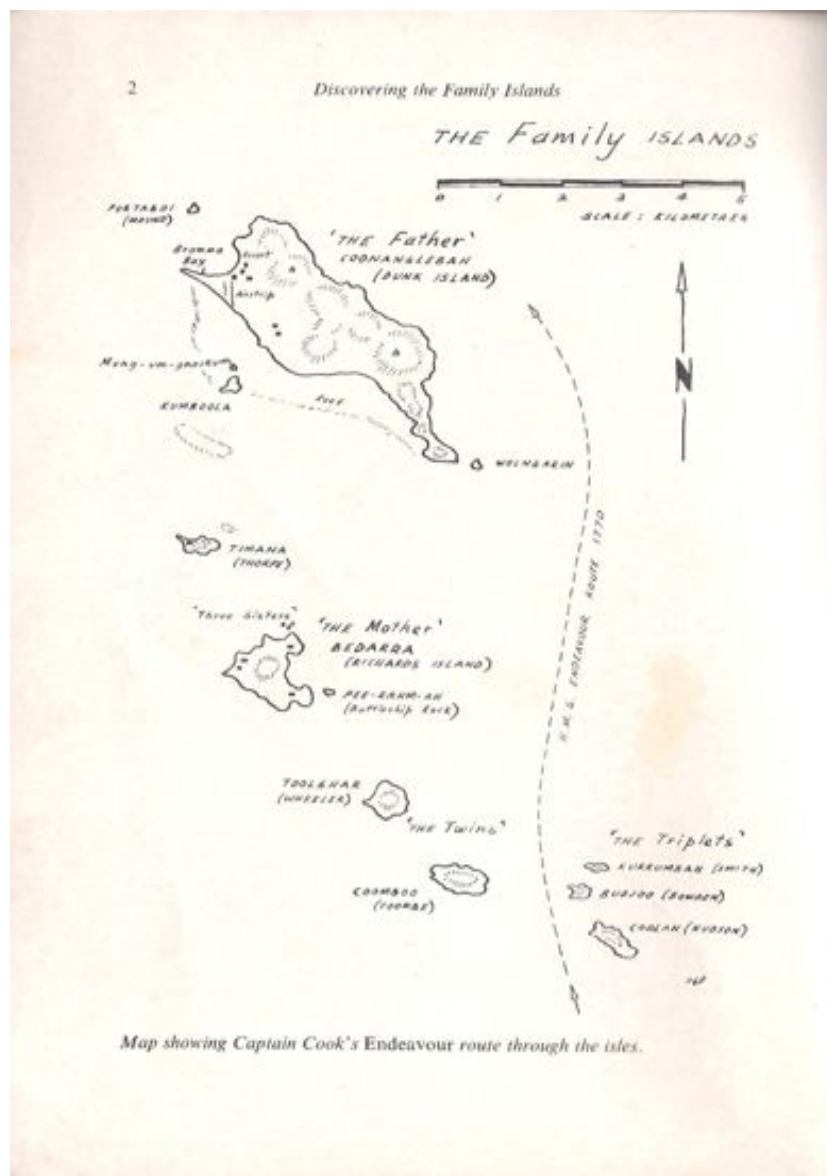
Discovery



On that sunny Friday morning, 8th June 1770, Captain James Cook sailed his *Endeavour* toward the group of small dome-shaped islands strung across the blue horizon like so many old-fashioned beehives, each one covered with green jungle from summit to sea edge of granite boulder and dazzling white sand. No outlying reefs endangered his navigation around these submerged mountain type islands unlike coral cays. He was able to sail the *Endeavour* to within a quarter of a mile of the nearest.

We take up the following extract from Cook's journal at a point soon after he left the Palm Islands, forty miles to the south, where Banks had gone ashore the previous evening:

"At 6am we were abreast of a point of Land which lies N. by W. $\frac{1}{2}$ W., 11 miles from Point Hillock; the land between them is very high, and of a craggy, barren surface (*Ed. Note: Hinchinbrook Island, which Cook did not realize was an island*). This point I named Cape Sandwich; it may not only be known by the high, craggy land over it, but by a small island which lies E. one Mile from it, and some others about 2 Leagues to the Northward of it. From Cape Sandwich the Land trends W., and afterwards N., and forms a fine, Large Bay, which I called Rockingham Bay; it is well Shelter'd, and affords good Anchorage; so it appear'd to me, for having met with so little encouragement by going ashore that I would not wait to land or examine it farther, but continued to range along Shore to the Northward for a parcel or Small Islands (*Ed. Note: named Family Islands on the chart*) laying off the Northern point of the Bay, and finding a Channel of a Mile broad between the 3 Outermost and those nearer the Shore, we pushed thro'. While we did this we saw on one of the nearest Islands a Number of the Natives collected together, who seem'd to look very attentively upon the Ship; they were quite naked, and of a very Dark Colour, with short hair. At noon we were by



Observation in the Lat. of $17^{\circ}59'$, and abreast of the N. point Rockingham Bay, which bore from us W. 2 Miles. This boundry of the Bay is form'd by a Tolerable high Island known in the Chart by the name of Dunk Isle; it lays so near the Shore as not to be distinguished from it unless you are well in the Land."

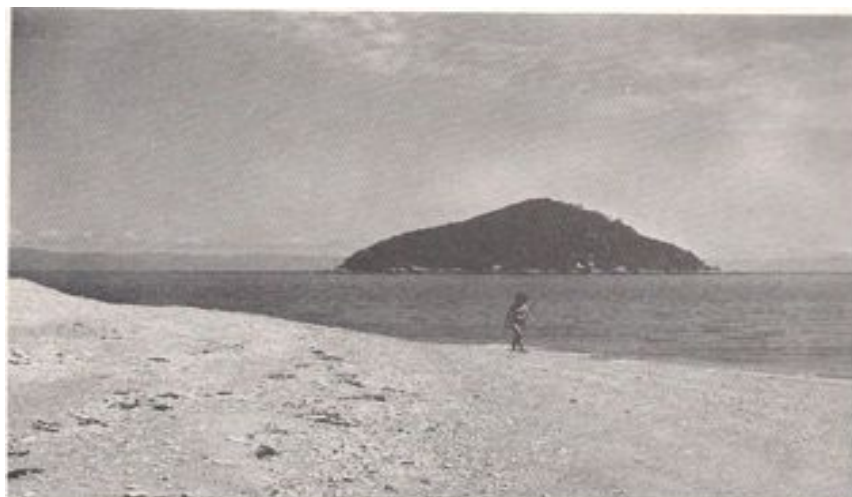
Joseph Banks' *Endeavour* journal also gives a description of the Family Islands:

"8th June: Still sailing between the Main and Islands; the former rocky and high look'd rather less barren than usual and by the number of fires seem'd to be better peopled. In the morn we pass'd within $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile of a small Islet or rock on which we saw with our glasses about 30 men women and children standing all together and looking attentively at us, the first people we have seen shew any signs of curiosity at the sight of the ship."

As an aside here, we note that only two days later, on 10th June, the *Endeavour* struck the coral reef (now named Endeavour Reef) where the Great Barrier Reefs sweeps in closer to mainland off Cooktown, and where Cook was forced to careen his ship at the river mouth for repairs after getting off the coral.

Now it seems fairly obvious from Cook's description of "... finding a Channel of a Mile broad between the 3 Outermost and those nearer the Shore," that he sailed between Coomboo and the triplets, Kurrumbah, Budjoo and Coolah. We can only speculate however, as to which of the islands it was, from where the thirty Aborigines gazed out at him. The eastern end of Coomboo is very steep and rocky, so it is unlikely that so many people would be standing there. Kurrumbah, the northernmost of the triplets has virtually no beach at all. Coolah, to the south, has a small beach on its northwestern corner, and it could have been there. But Budjoo (closest to Coomboo has a quite long northwesterly facing beach of deep coral sand terraced into high banks by the wave action during periods of heavy sou'easters sweeping through the narrow strait between it and Kurrumbah. It was very likely a good spot for fishing and shell fish gathering for the Aborigines.

Cook passed to seaward, or to the eastern side of Dunk Island; two miles east of its southern tip and Wolngarin Isle, to be precise from his journal references. We are not sure that Cook intended Dunk to be grouped with the Family Islands. Dunk was the only one he named individually – the others did not acquire their English names until 1886 when Lieutenant G. E. Richards R.N. surveyed them from his ship *HMS Paluma*, of which more in a moment. But having Cook's delightful group name (Family) as a basis, it seems fitting to call the greatest (Coonanglebah or Dunk), the



The coral terraces on Budjoo, from where it is thought 30 Aborigines stood gazing at Captain Cook's Endeavour as he sailed through the strait between Budjoo and Coomboo, seen here in the background.



Budjoo Island beach

'Father Isle'; the second largest and most beautiful with its life-giving spring waters (Bedarra), the 'Mother Isle'; and the rest, so many smaller children ranging in size from the 'twins' (Toolghar and Coomboo), the 'triplets' (Kurrumbah, Budjoo and Coolah), to the single islands, Timana, Kumboola, Purtaboi and Wolngarin nestling close to the Father Isle, with little Mungumgnackum sprawled right on the very edge of the Father's reef. In addition, Peerahmah clings close to one side of the Mother, while the tiniest infants of all, the three Sisters, rocks merely hang on her northeastern elbow. A Family of Mother, Father, and fourteen children.

It seems a pity that Lieutenant Richards had to come along in 1886 to bestow foreign names upon the group just before E. J. Banfield, the resident 'Beachcomber' and writer of Dunk Island, gave us their ancient Aboriginal ones. Banfield hinted at the 'family' resemblance with his mention of 'twins' and triplets' in the group. As it happens they all have that 'look alike' family streak, the N. W. sandspit on every isle.

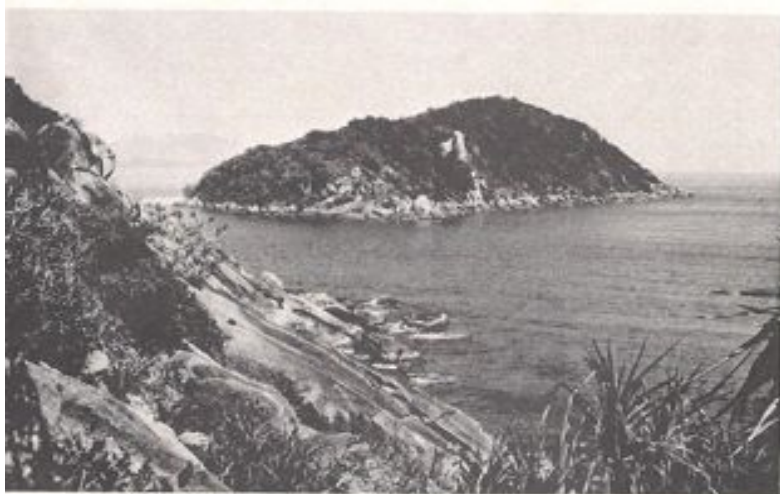
Lt. Richards named them in honour of officers aboard his survey vessel *Paluma*: Wheeler (Toolghar) Island after Lt. Francis Wheeler, Coombe (Coomboo) a misspelt version of Combe after Lt. James Coombe (one wonders whether Richards was aware of the Aboriginal name for this one, and chose it for the resemblance to his officer's name), Bowden (Budjoo) and Smith (Kurrumbah) after Lt., Francis Bowden-Smith, Hudson (Coolah) after Engineer William Hudson, Thorpe (Timana) after Surgeon Vidal Thorpe, and Richards (Bedarra) after Lt. Richards himself.

Bedarra has been known by no less than four different names. Richards Island became its official title on marine charts, and then early Lands Department maps called it Allison Island, a misspelt version of the original lessee's name – Captain Henry Allason – while the Aborigines knew it as Biagurra. The artist Noel Wood, resident for nearly fifty years on Bedarra, says that Banfield misconstrued the Aboriginal pronunciation of the word, which was actually a more guttural sounding 'Biagurra'. Banfield's title, Bedarra, has however remained in popular use. Wood also gives 'Timanoo' as the correct version of Timana, and 'Gumulga' for Peerahmah.

From the time of Cook's visit in June 1770, the Aborigines had no further cause for alarm until the year 1815, when Lieutenant Jeffereys sailed the armed brig *Kangaroo* through the islands en route from Sydney to Ceylon, calling at the then unnamed Goold Island just north of Hinchinbrook, about twenty miles south of the Family Islands. In June 1818 Captain Philip King sailed the cutter *Mermaid* on a coastal survey and named Goold Island. He also went ashore on Timana Island. Then in May 1848 the *Tam O'Shanter* landed the explorer Edmund Kennedy on the mainland opposite, to begin his expedition. HMS *Rattlesnake* under the command of Captain Owen Stanley was also on hand at that time to assist Kennedy. John



Budjoo Island from the strait where Captain Cook sailed.



Coolah Island from Budjoo, with Hinchinbrook beyond.

Macgillivray, the naturalist on board *Rattlesnake*, spent ten days in the area exploring the northern part of Dunk Island and meeting the natives, but trouble flared. Two young gentlemen of the party on a hunting trip approached too close to a native camp on Dunk Island containing women and children. When the Aborigines tried to prevent the white men, they were fired upon with shot, an incident much regretted by the expedition leaders. The Aborigines cleared out temporarily, but did not forget their treatment.

Thereafter, the Rockingham Bay area was visited fairly frequently and mistrust began to grow between black and white. Many shipwrecks occurred farther south on Hinchinbrook Island during the years when the town of Cardwell on the mainland nearby was first being settled. The big conical-shaped, thickly forested Goold Island, became a popular anchorage for ships seeking wood and water. The Aborigines there were at first friendly, but later attacked the crews of some small ships, and in 1872 murdered two fishermen.

The natives of Dunk Island too, had begun to earn a reputation for treachery. Always high-spirited and of an independent nature, all the island natives who had traditionally maintained little contact with mainland tribes, must have seen little advantage in welcoming the white man to their shores. They had always been well fed in this region of plentiful sea life and no doubt regarded the newcomers with a great deal of suspicion.

In September 1873 Dunk Island was visited by the Queensland North-East Coast Expedition led by G. E. Dalrymple. In 1874 the Reverend Fuller tried to establish a mission on Hinchinbrook. Against all local advice, he went out alone in March of that year to camp at a spot now known as Missionary Bay. Surprisingly, he was still alive in July when seen by a visiting party, and he reported that in all that time he had not seen a single Aboriginal. The wild men apparently had no wish to be saved and ignored the lone missionary who, in August, finally gave up in frustration.

Geography

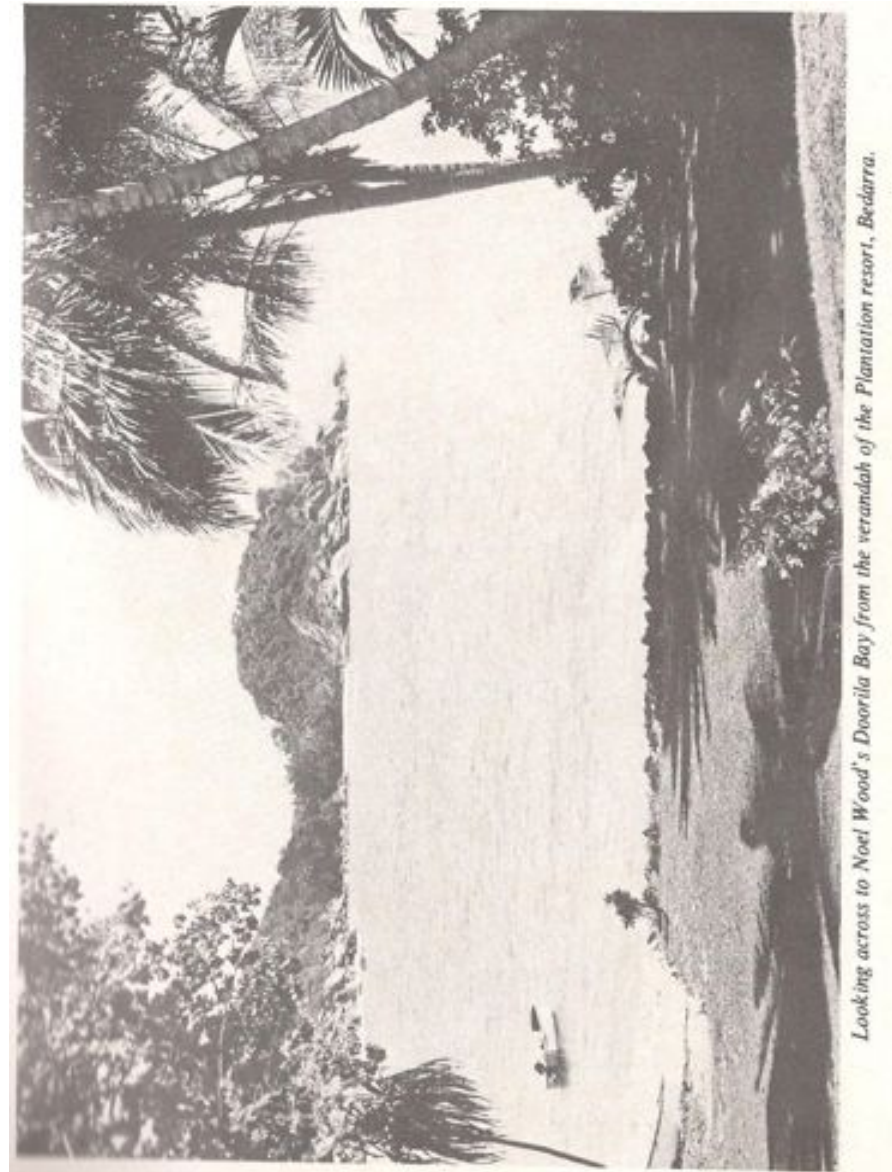


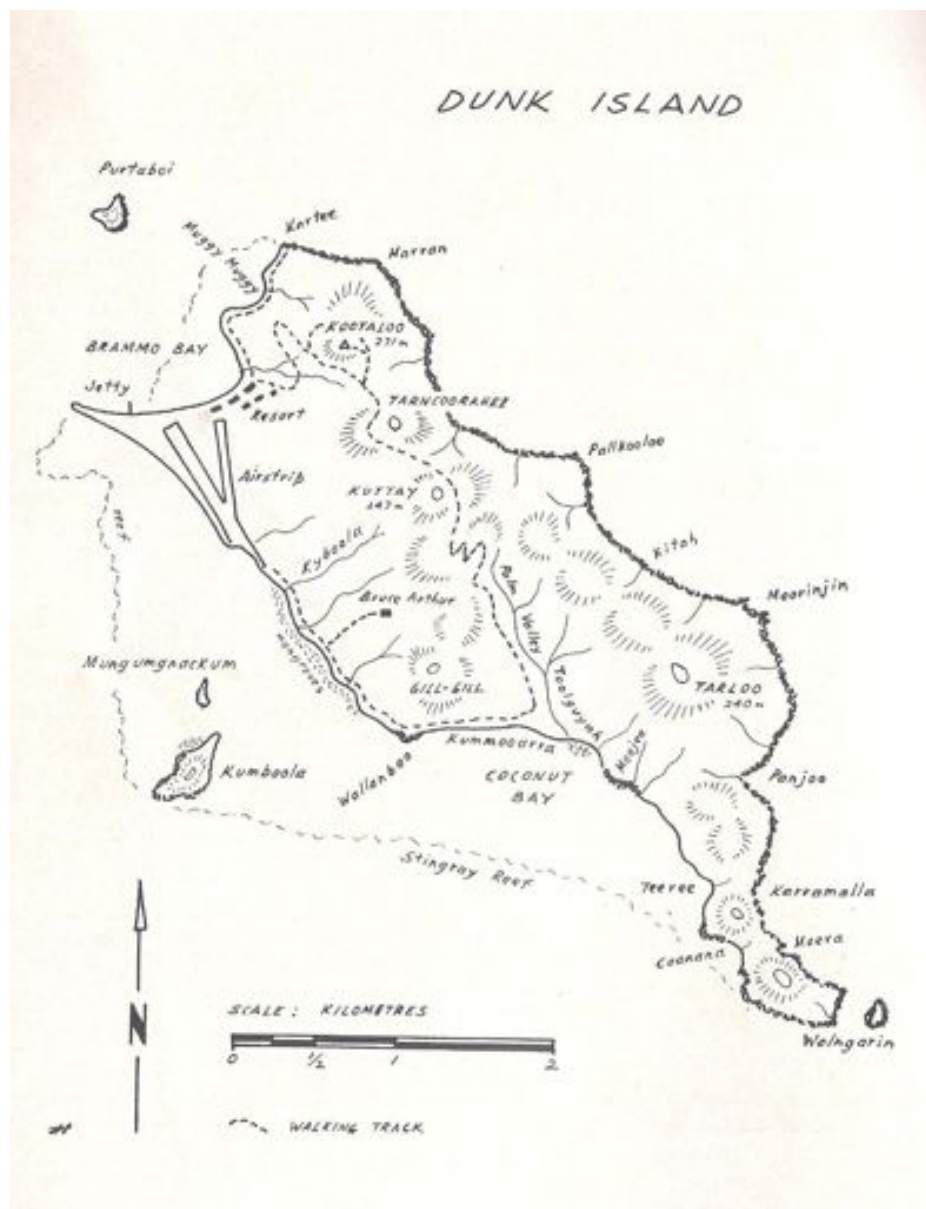
The Family Islands, at Latitude 18 degrees South, trend southeast – wards from Dunk Island in a chain extending for about 14 kilometres. Dunk itself is only 4 kilometres from South Mission Beach on the mainland, from where the nearest town, Tully, is 15 kilometres inland. Farthest offshore island of the chain is Coolah, one of the triplets, about 16 kilometres from the Tully River mouth. The Great Barrier Reef itself is a farther 28 kilometres east of Dunk.

The islands from Hinchinbrook to Dunk are more lush than those farther north and south, such as the Palm Islands, Magnetic and the Whitsunday group, and the scrubby isles along the northeastern coast of Cape York Peninsula. Rainforest growth is sustained by a heavier rainfall due to the proximity of high mountains; from the 1200 metre peaks of Hinchinbrook in the south, to the highest mountain in Queensland, Mt. Bartle Frere (1700 metres) on the edge of the highland plateau of the Atherton Tableland not far to the northwest. The nearby towns of Innisfail and Tully vie for the distinction of having the highest annual rainfall of 3704 mm, or roughly 150 inches per year.

The continental type islands are of granitic formation, with some schist slate. They rise to moderately high rocky peaks, with steep granite escarpments on the northeasterly and southeasterly aspects. Each island has a shelving sandspit at its northwestern corner. These characteristic sandspits are the most attractive features of the group, offering ideal sheltered boat landings and deep water swimming at the lowest of tides. The sand is drawn out into a narrow spit by the wave action and sea currents from the prevailing sou'easters and nor'easters. In fact, as already mentioned, these unique sandspit formations give to all the islands a pronounced 'family' resemblance.

Dunk Island, the largest, is 6 kilometres long by 2 kilometres wide, with its highest peak, Kootaloo, 271 metres. Bedarra is triangular in shape, roughly 1 ½ kilometres on each side, Toolghar and Coomboo are about 1 kilometre in diameter, and the rest are all less than half a kilometre across at the widest point. The peaks of these other isles are somewhat less than 100 metres above sea-level.





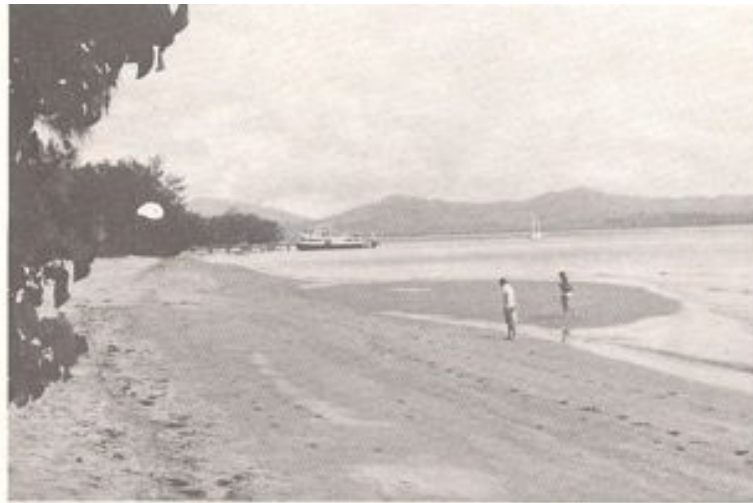
Dunk and Bedarra are the only two islands with any appreciable reef formations. The reef on Dunk is fairly extensive, running along its southwestern side from the sandspit out to the western tip of Kumboola Island, thence across to the southern tip of Dunk embracing the various beaches of Coconut Bay. Along the northern shores of Bedarra there are small areas of coral, particularly at the Mangroves, and in Coomool Bay. Another coral area extends over the approaches to Hernandia Bay, requiring care at low tide when approaching the Plantation resort on the southeastern corner of Bedarra. Between Kumboola and Timana lie two isolated reefs dangerous for navigation.

Dunk Island is large enough to have permanent freshwater streams which course down steep ravines to the sea, one running into Brammo Bay near the resort, the others on the Coconut Bay side. Bedarra has six perennial springs oozing from granite storage basins on various sides of the Island. All but two of these springs decrease to a mere dribble toward the end of a particularly long dry season in November and December, while the remaining springs near the northeast and northwest corners, seem to possess miraculous hidden reserves for an island the size of Bedarra. Toolghar is the only other island in the group to have a permanent spring.

The climate is typically monsoonal with a pronounced wet season from late December to April, the rest of the year being fairly dry apart from some mid-year rains with the sou'easters. Great variations in rainfall occur from year to year, but an average figure for the island group as a whole would be about 2500 mm, with slightly more for the mountainous Dunk. Temperatures average 21°C in winter and 26°C in summer, extremes being a minimum of 10°C and a maximum of 35°C.

Southeast winds predominate for six months of the year from May through to September, when the nor'easters begin. The latter are fairly unpredictable, varying from east-south-east, to east, and northeast, and are usually light, interspersed with days of calm. Westerly winds are rare. Cyclones hit any one area along the North Queensland coastline on an average about once every twenty years, but when the passes close, it can wreak great havoc with buildings and vegetation. These occur only during the wet season. The most serious cyclone to hit the islands since European settlement, occurred on 10th march 1918, and was described by Banfield in his posthumously published book, *Last Leaves from Dunk Island*.

Apart from variations in size, and the fact that only Dunk, Bedarra and Toolghar have permanent water, the islands are very similar in character. Vegetation and bird life differ little from island to Island. A typical clean coral beach in a cove formed by giant granite boulders, is fringed with lush green jungle. On the sandspit a line of sparse-foliaged sheoaks (*Casuarina*) and Beach hibiscus grow above high

*Brammo Bay and jetty on Dunk Island**Brammo Bay beach on Dunk Island, Mt Kootaloo above.**Beach on Coolah Island.**Dunk Isle sandspit from Mt Kootaloo with mainland beyond*

Water mark, with various ground creepers and orchids clinging to the rocks, and a few pandanus or perhaps a mangrove patch. White-trunked Moreton Bay ash (*Eucalyptus tessellaris*) and huge *Calophyllum* trees feature prominently along some sections of coastline. There is the beautiful umbrella tree, the flame tree, patches of paperbark (*Melaleuca*) trees, and of course introduced coconut palms.

Inland on each isle, the variety of growth is prodigious – spindly Alexandra palms, Fern of God (*Lygodium*) winding its way up tree trunks, clinging epiphytes, Fan palm, huge bloodwood trees, red stringybark, gin-gee trees with sunflower-like florets massed in a pear-shaped clump, wattles, swamp mahogany, big strangler-figs, and not forgetting the ‘wait-awhile’, the lawyer vine (*Calamus australis*), with its palm-like leaves and long, wispy (almost invisible in the jungle gloom) barbed tentacles dangling in front of an unwary walker’s nose ready to hook him like a fish.

Marine life there is aplenty, but terrestrial animal life is restricted to the many different kinds of lizards, bats including the flying-fox, the echidna, and two species of native rat – the white-tipped rat, and a brown rat discovered by Banfield and named after him – *Uromys banfieldi*. Many kinds of frog including the green tree frogs burp away the night hours; also that introduced pest, the cane toad. Several species of snake are present, of which the death-adder is the most dangerous, the others mostly harmless varieties of tree snakes and non-poisonous pythons. There are no kangaroos, wallabies, possums, koalas or tree-kangaroos, as found on the mainland.

Bird life, on the other hand, is as profuse and colourful as the vegetation. The family Islands are among the few places where there are known nesting caves of the grey swiftlet, a small, swallow like bird which builds tiny cup-shaped nests of congealed saliva and vegetable matter in inaccessible caverns around the most rugged of coastline of the islands. In the jungle are scrub turkeys and jungle fowl, the mound-building *megapode*, with its characteristic cackle. On the jungle fringes, the brilliant sunbird parades among the blossoms, the little mangrove-warbler whistles up and down the scales, the noisy pitta calls a cheery hello-and-wake-up in the mornings, varied honeyeaters, and metallic starlings with ruby red eyes squabble among themselves, the sulphur-crested cockatoos screech. In the evenings there is the never-ending chop of the long-tailed nightjar, nick-named the hammer-bird, and the soft ‘mopoke’ call of the boobook owl. Around the coastline are a large variety of sea birds, including the beautiful rufous-backed sea-eagle and the white breasted sea-eagle, soaring for prey with the osprey. The Torres Strait pigeon, a striking white bird, migrates to the islands each September. All these birds and others are described in more detail in a later chapter; similarly for the plants.

The brilliant Ulysses butterfly, which has become the emblem of Dunk Island, was first discovered there at the turn of the century. A vibrant blue flash against jungle green, as the Ulysses swiftly climbs, then dips to settle on some gorgeous tropic bloom. It is a swallowtail butterfly. The outer extremities of its wings and tail extension are a glossy black, with that eye-catching blue across the backs of the wings. When its wings are closed while feeding, the blue is no longer visible – only the brown undersides, and butterfly resembles nothing more than a dried leaf – protection from the birds while it sups.

Banfield thought it remarkable that no marsupials lived on Dunk Island, conserving its size and proximity to the mainland. Cave paintings by Aborigines on the Island depicted men, turtles, lizards, snakes, and the echidna, but no drawings of the kangaroo or wallaby, which would seem to indicate that they had never been present, in spite of being plentiful on the mainland only four kilometres away. The oldest Aborigines in the area during Banfield’s time confirmed that the animals had never existed on Dunk. Yet those same Aborigines maintained that wallabies were once present on the tiny island of Timana. The oldest surviving gin of the Dunk Island tribe, who died 1900, told Banfield of an incident she took part in as a child. A large number of the Island natives gathered together early one morning on the Timana sandspit to hunt for wallaby. Every warrior, gin and piccaninny, spread out in line, began marching up through the jungle, yelling, clashing nulla-nulla sticks, and screaming at their barking dogs. And every wallaby on the isle was promptly scared out of its wits, hopping in full flight ahead of the noisy line advancing rapidly up the steepening slope toward the peak, racing straight for the granite cliffs on the Island’s southeasterly end, where the terrified animals leapt to their death on the rocks below. Thus was the wallaby exterminated from Timana.

The Aboriginal islanders were well versed in the art of constructing bark canoes from the various suitable trees – the ‘gulgong’ (red stringybark), ‘weeree’ (*Calophyllum*), or the ‘carlee’ (*Acacia aulacocarpa*), according to Banfield. A single sheet of bark was stripped off the tree and sewn together at the ends using lawyer cane strips. The seams were caulked with the gum of the ‘arral’ tree (*Euodia elleryana*), which was pounded into powder in a stone depression moistened with water. This resinous mixture was melted by heat, then after solidifying, put through the same process again until it became pliable enough to be kneaded and applied to the canoe ends.

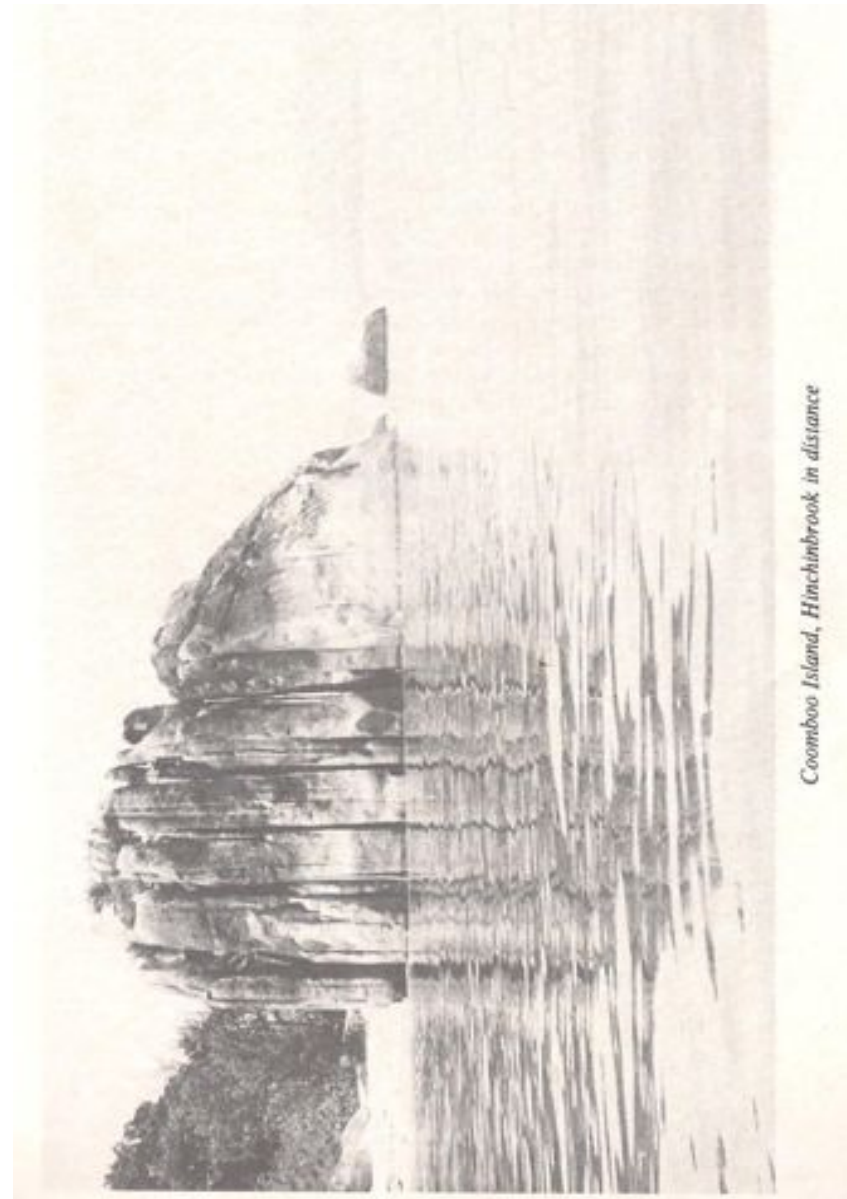
Banfield thought that outrigger canoes (hollowed out of solid logs and counter balanced with a smaller outrigger float) were never used by the natives of this area, although they were well known only twenty miles to the north. An Aboriginal

on Dunk told Banfield how, in his grandfather's day, they made such outrigger canoes both Hinchinbrook and on the islands of Rockingham Bay. But because the boy had travelled and had seen the canoes up north, Banfield discounted his story as pure imagination. Yet it would seem surprising, in view of the constant movement between islands, if a few larger outrigger canoes were not employed, at least well before Banfield's time, to carry larger groups of people than would have been possible with bark canoes alone.



Peerahmah or Battleship Rock.

All over Australia, the origins of prominent landmarks are described in Aboriginal legend. Banfield records one such for the rocky islet Peerahmah, just off the eastern shores of Bedarra, known also as Battleship Rock. The latter is a not undeserving name, as when viewed from a certain angle low down on the sea, its rocky protuberances above the long, rounded, grey base, resemble in the centre, the bridgedeck, and at 'bow' and 'stern' the guns, of a battleship floating at anchor. The Aboriginal version of the rock's story is as follows. Long ago, in the dreamtime, two beautiful young gins were left alone on Coonanglebah while the rest of the tribe journeyed in canoes to Hinchinbrook. The gins were alone for such a long time, they



Coomboo Island, Hinchinbrook in distance

finally resolved to find their relatives by swimming from island to island. They could almost walk to Mungumgnackum and Kumboola at low tide. Timana was a swim of 2½ kilometres, and it was another 2 kilometres across the water to Bedarra, where they walked to the easternmost point. But soon after they splashed into the sea strait between Bedarra and Toolghar, they were caught in a strong tidal rip, which spun them back and forth in the water until they were exhausted. As the young women sank beneath the waves they were changed to stone, the stone of lovely smooth curves and upraised arms at either end, known as Peerahmah.

Another legend tells of the Falling Star cave on the northern end of Dunk Island, known to the Aborigines as 'Coobeecotanyu', which means 'falling-star-hole'. However, the connection with a falling star is not apparent in the version of the tale told to Banfield by one of his aboriginal helpers. The sinister looking cave was, his informant insisted, made many aeons ago by a giant debil-debil man, who plucked out a huge plug of rock with his fingers and put it atop the jagged pinnacles of Hinchinbrook, twenty miles away. The hole was reputed to be a very bad place, and anyone venturing inside would fall sick and die.

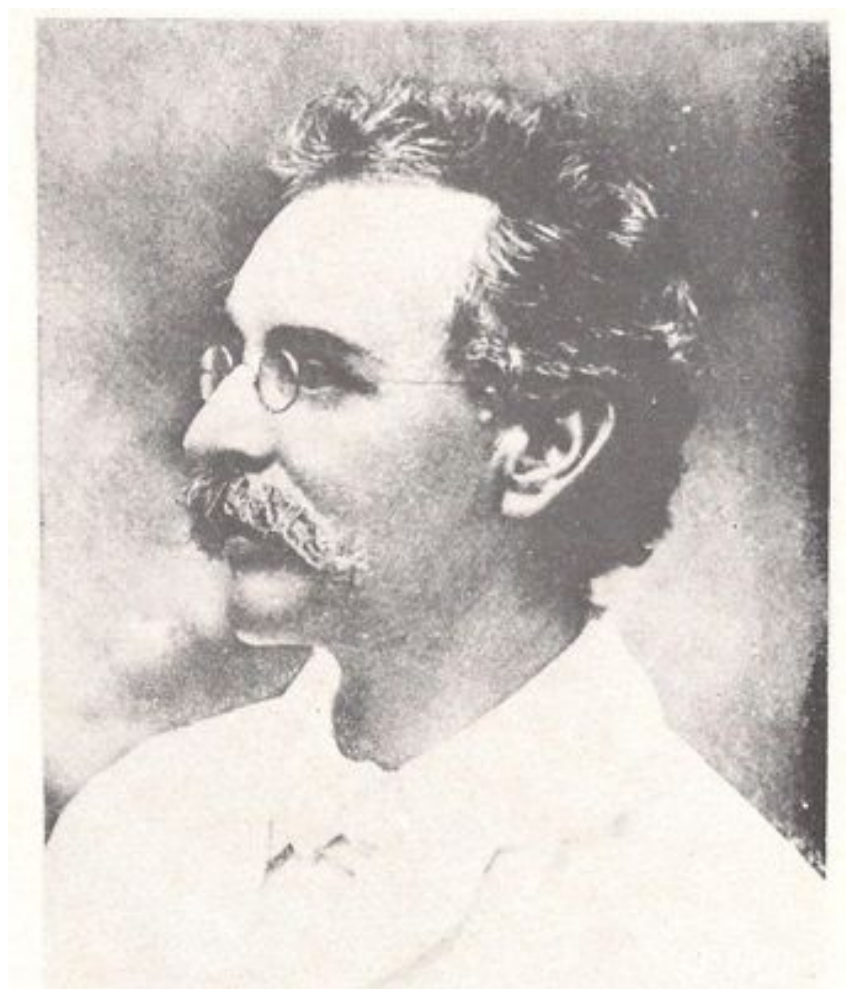
The stars of course, gave rise to many legends, a local one being the origin of the Southern Cross constellation. Two Aboriginal fishermen of old, out in their canoe off Dunk island, speared a huge shovel-nosed shark called Dooey-dooey. When speared, Dooey-dooey immediately dived under the canoe and capsized it, throwing out the occupants. Dooey-dooey then dragged the canoe through the water on the end of the harpoon rope. When the two men tried to regain the canoe they could not catch it. They swam far out from Dunk Island chasing it, way down past Magnetic Island, then out to the Great Barrier Reef itself, and even beyond that, away over the distant southern horizon of the Pacific, in a vain attempt to catch their canoe. And you can still see them there in the southern sky – Dooey-dooey and the canoe in front (the Cross), with the two men (the Pointer stars, alpha and beta Centauri) following behind.

While on the subject of Aboriginal lore, there is the story of a woman rain-maker who lived on Hinchinbrook Island. Such secrets are more often the preserve of the male. The old gin Kitty became famous, and eventually feared, for her skilful, some say sinister, control of the weather. Should someone fall foul of this grim old lady, the result was likely to be a most terrible storm of thunder and lightning and cyclonic wind and rain. When she died, the old gin's spirit took up residence among the highest peaks of Hinchinbrook. No Aboriginal ever willingly ventured on to those mountain tops thereafter. And who knows, but that Kitty may still wield great influence with the rain-gods among those lofty, cloud-enshrouded crags?

The islands are now all national Parks apart from Bedarra, Timana, and those portions of Dunk Island which are held as freehold land by the resort and one or two other private owners or lessees such as wool tapestry weaver, Bruce Arthur. Bedarra is split into three freehold portions owned privately, two of them run as tourist resorts, the other portion owned by artist Noel Wood. Timana is leased from the Victorian owners by Deanna Conti, a wool tapestry weaver. The areas of the islands set aside as National Park are: Dunk Island 730 ha, Toolghar 31 ha, Coomboo 49 ha, Kurrumbah 10 ha, Budjoo 10 ha, Coolah 20 ha, Kumboola 12 ha, Purtaboi 6ha, and Mungumgnackum 2 ha.

Tourist access to the islands is by air from Townsville or Cairns, using the Dunk Island airstrip, or alternatively by launch from Clump Point. A water-taxi service operates from South Mission Beach, and the Bedarra resorts will make special arrangements to pick up guests from either the Hull River landing on the mainland, or from the Dunk Island airstrip. The Dunk Isle resort caters for a large number of guests with varied facilities, while the Bedarra resorts are much smaller and quatter for those preferring a more secluded holiday.

The family Island group occupy a unique geographical niche along the Great Barrier Reef coastline. With their lush vegetation they resemble more closely the stereotyped image of a tropic isle, as found perhaps in the Caribbean or the Seychelles. One lands in a secluded rock cove on the purest of beach sands, and enters the dim jungle with a feeling of mystery and adventure about to begin.



E. J. Banfield, 1901

E. J. Banfield



The first 'new Australian' to fall under the spell of the Island Dreaming was Edmund James Banfield, born 4th September 1852 in England. Banfield's spontaneous love for the place which became his ultimate sanctuary, and where he died after a quarter century of idyllic island life, lives on in the pages of his four books: *Confessions of a Beachcomber* (1908), *My Tropic Isle* (1911), *Tropic Days* (1918), and *Last Leaves from Dunk Island* (1925).

Banfield's father, Jabez W. Banfield, a printer by trade in England, migrated to Melbourne with his brother James some time ahead of his wife and four children who arrived in February 1855. Edmund was then two years old. His father had joined the Ballarat goldrushes, but later jointly founded a newspaper at Maryborough in central Victoria. Then in 1857 he took his family to Ararat to take over another newspaper.

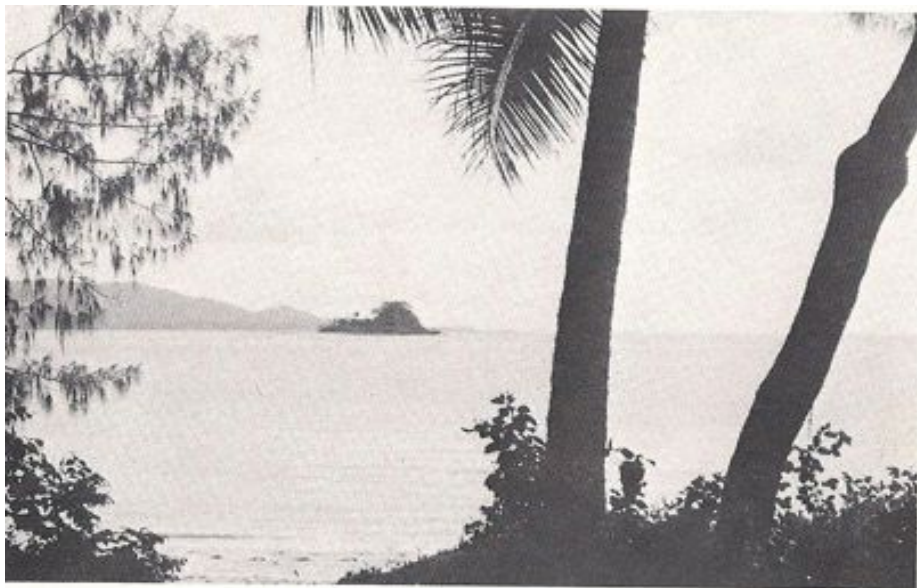
The young Edmund grew up in journalism at Ararat. He also worked as a journalist in Sydney before, at the age of thirty, deciding to try the tropics. He went to Townsville in 1882 and eventually became co-editor of the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* newspaper. In 1884 he visited England where one eye was removed; it had been injured earlier. Banfield never mentioned this disability in any of his books, and indeed it is the last thing one would expect, reading the keen observations of nature contained in those volumes. While in England he met Bertha Golding, the daughter of friends of his parents at Liverpool. Bertha migrated in 1886 to Townsville, where she married Edmund.

Banfield remained with the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* for fifteen years, finally working himself into a state of nervous exhaustion, his only ambition to get away from it all. Somewhere along the way, he had discovered the writings of the American nature philosopher, H. D. Thoreau, and this must have been a great influence in his decision to abandon the accepted mode of living. In September 1896 he and Bertha camped with a few friends on the beach at Dunk Island, one hundred miles north of Townsville. Banfield records in *My Tropic Isle*;

“having for several years contemplated a life of seclusion in the bush, and having sampled several attractive and more or less suitable scenes, we were not long in concluding that here was the ideal spot. From that moment it was ours. In comparison the sweetest of previous fancies became vapid.”

A year later, in September 1897, after much preparation, Edmund and Bertha Banfield sailed back to that spot to begin permanent settlement. There they were to remain for twenty-five years, during which time they were absent from the Island on not more than half a dozen occasions, the longest break being for nine months in 1901, when Edmund returned to the Townsville Daily Bulletin to relieve a journalist friend who was going overseas.

On that day of settlement a brisk nor'easter ruffled the ocean across Rockingham Bay, rocking the vessel which bore them thither. The would-be Beachcomber became sea-sick, and landed that evening on the far-flung shores a physical wreck, full of doubts as to the viability of the whole project. Too weak and weary even to erect the tent that first night they spread it out on the ground with rugs on top, slept there among the camp equipment, the hero utterly disconsolate and wishing himself back to scenes so recently abandoned.



Purtaboi Isle from Dunk foreshore.

“But the first morning of the new life! A perfect combination of invigorating elements. The cloudless sky, the clear air, the shining sea, the green folded slopes of Tam o’Shanter Point opposite, the cleanliness of the sand, the sweet odours from the eucalypts and the dew-laden grass, the luminous purple of the islands to the south-east; the range of mountains to the west and north-west, and our own fair tract –awaiting and inviting, and all the mystery of petted illusions about to be solved! Physic was never so eagerly swallowed nor wrought a speedier or surer cure.”

Banfield plunged into the early morning sea full of vigour and optimism regained.

During his visit the year before, Banfield had met one of the few Aboriginal survivors on the Island, one known as Tom. Tall, broad chested, and “... a man of brains,” Tom was a skilled hunter both on land and sea, knowledgeable in marine life and of the vegetation familiar with many star constellations, and “... was afraid of no man in daylight, though a child might scare him after dark.”

Tom had received word through the Aboriginal grape-vine of the imminent arrival of the Banfields and, accompanied by his gin, one piccaninny, and mother-in-law, paddled island-hopping from farther south to arrive on Dunk a week ahead of the settlers. And the settlers promptly took the willing Aboriginal and his wife Ness, into their employ. Tom was known to have three wives during his life time, but the first was never seen on the Island, and the third, Little Jinny, a later arrival, died at the Island camp after a somewhat stormy period of sharing Tom with Nell. Nell remained, to be trained out of the ways of a wild gin to adopt the habits and duties of a domestic. Apart from occasional walkabouts, Tom remained with Banfield until a short time before his (Tom’s) death sometime around 1910. During the last four years of his life, Tom was lured more and more often to the mainland by opium and rum, and was eventually speared there by his half-brother during a drunken quarrel.

Another Aboriginal helper, George, ex police-trooper from the Cooktown area, was faithful for many years, the names George and Tom recurring often in Banfield’s writings. Many other dusky characters drifted to and from the Isle until the government established compulsory reservations at the Palm Islands and elsewhere, a happening which saddened Banfield.

Having recovered his spirits that first morning on Coonanglebah, Edmund proceeded to clear a space in the forest for the pre-fabricated cedar hut he had brought with him. This was “... no light task for unaccustomed hands, for the bloodwood trees were mighty and tough,” but he persevered, meanwhile living in the tent and dining under the shade of a bloodwood tree. Until they learned to live off the land, to

reap the rich harvest awaiting them from diligent effort with the soil in a tropic clime, and had time to catch fish and acquire cows and goats for the milking, their fare was mostly tinned meat, bread and jam from the two months' provisions brought with them.

With blistered hands, the ex-journalist felled trees which were sawn into short lengths for piles. Holes were dug for them and a base prepared for the cedar hut. The kitchen, of rough bush slabs and corrugated iron, was entirely of his own design, with an earthen floor (compressed earth and charcoal) covered with asphalt. Two solid pieces of driftwood served as posts for a doorway; one of the wall plates was a jibboom of some boat, and the broken mast of a ship became the ridge-pole. The rafters were made up from all sorts of odds and ends, and second-hand corrugated iron roofing sheets were used with the previous nail holes stopped with solder. The doors were made in horizontal halves, and the wooden shutters over the windows hinged from the top.

"All this laborious work – performed conscientiously to the best of my ability – occupied a long time, and from it originated much backache and general fatigue, and at the end I found that I had been so absorbed in the permanence rather than the appearance of the dwelling that one of the corner posts was out of the perpendicular and that consequently the building stood awry. Grace of style it cannot claim; but neither 'white ants' nor weather trouble it."



The Banfield bungalow, Dunk Island, c. 1921

At night in the hut, mosquitoes came to feast on new blood, bats entered to catch the mosquitoes (which at first seemed reasonable), but eventually snakes followed to prey on the bats. The unwelcome presence of a snake coiled round the roof rafters where bats clung in early morning, led to the banishment of the mosquito-catchers. But the hut continued to attract many more jungle denizens. Beady-eyed geckoes stalked moths and beetles attracted by the lamp, wasps built mud-houses on the walls in which to store paralysed carcasses of spiders and grubs, and bees constructed a comb among the books, "...transforming a favourite copy of *Lorna Doone* into a solid block."

The cedar hut sheltered them from the elements from October 1897 until Christmas Day 1903, when the larger bungalow was completed. The original hut became an annexe to the bungalow which was sited as unobtrusively as possible in the wilderness landscape. About 4½ acres was cleared for a plantation of fruit and vegetables – bananas (a mainstay), pineapples, papaws, oranges, custard apple, sour sop, Jack fruit, pomegranate, litchee, mange, sweet potato and English potato, melons and pumpkins, maize, parsley and mint. They also ran cows, goats and horses on the rest of the 360 acres of land which was held initially as an 'agricultural homestead' lease from the government at a rental of 2s./6d. per acre. This leasehold was eventually converted to freehold.

A weekly steamer plied along that part of the coast, and as Dunk Island was but a few minutes off the route, the Banfields (by prearrangement) enjoyed a regular weekly mail service and convenient freightage of supplies. Eventually too, settlers on the mainland opposite came out to Dunk in boats to meet the steamer for supplies, or to travel.

Banfield had his own boat, a fine sailing yacht to start with, about which he admitted:

"I knew not the distinguishing term of a single halyard, save the 'topping lift', and even that scant knowledge was idle, for I was blankly ignorant of the place and purpose of the oddly-named rope. Necessity drove me to the acquirement of boat sense, and now I manage my home-built 'flattie' – mean substitute for the neat yacht which necessity compelled me to part with – very courageously in ordinary weather; and I am content to stay at home when Neptune is frothy at the lips."

One day while out sailing with two Aborigines and his dog, the boat capsized in a bust which came hurtling down off the heights of the Isle. Half a mile from shore, with a stiff nor'easter getting up after an earlier calm beginning to the voyage, Banfield clung to the upturned hull while the boy Willie swam for shore and

eventually paddled back to the rescue in a frail punt. Meanwhile, Paddy the dog had disappeared during the capsizing. Banfield at first feared he had drowned, but on probing underneath the hull with his feet, felt the kicking legs of the dog trapped there. With a shout of joy he dived under and drew the dog down and out into the air. The animal had survived for a quarter of an hour there in the dark, with its nose in a trapped bubble of air.

The Beachcomber, true to his name, was often out in his boat (in later years a motor-vessel), cruising around the shores of Dunk and among the other islands, or visiting friends on the mainland such as the Cutten brothers. Purtaboi, the little islet just out from Brammo Bay, was a favourite visiting spot from where he loved to watch the play of nature – nutmeg pigeons nesting from October on, terns laying their eggs among the tinkling coral chips along the beach, the blue reef heron gliding to and fro, blue doves, honey-eaters, wood-swallows and many other feathered nomads.

Banfield did not set out to become a farmer, to live by the sweat of his brow. His rural pursuits were of a subsistence nature merely following the true Thoreau tradition. Even bee-keeping which at first promised a modest profit, was abandoned in deference to the birds – the beautiful Rainbow bird or bee-eater, and the White-rumped wood-swallow, which depleted his hives. His very meagre outside income, necessary for ‘outside’ purchases, derived mainly from the column he continued to write for the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* under the pen-name of ‘Rob Krusoe’ and later ‘Rural Homilies’ in the *North Queensland Register*. His first book *The Confessions* was not published until ten years after his arrival on the Island.

A chapter preface in the original 1911 edition of the second book, *My Tropic Isle*, was a quotation from Charles Kingsley:

“Some day ere I grow too old to think I trust to be able to throw away all pursuits, save natural history, and to die with my mind full of God’s facts instead of men’s lies.”

Banfield’s books are crammed full of ‘God’s facts’, extremely detailed accounts of nature’s secrets, for a one-eyed observer who taught himself with scientific reference books, aided perhaps by those most astute observers of the way of the wilds, the Aborigines. The very fact of Banfield’s intense interest in the natural world about him, would have endeared him to the dark people.

The Beachcomber was by nature a conservationist at a time when the wilderness was considered a thing to be tamed, something to do battle with, a forbidding forest to be felled so that the land could be put to the plough, to ‘profitable’ use. He, on the other hand, was willing to do battle with anyone who interfered with

the pristine order of things in his islands.

There is the story of the shooting of nutmeg pigeons on Purtaboi one afternoon. The Beachcomber, on hearing shots, motored across to the islet to find the culprit, a young British naval officer. When the lad objected to Banfield’s forthright censure, Banfield returned, threatening legal action. Later that day the captain and his errant officer came ashore in a boat from the warship anchored in the bay. The captain regretted that one of his men had caused Mr Banfield so much annoyance. At this, the kindly Beachcomber relented, quite ready to forget the incident in the knowledge that he had made his point. He assured the naval men that he was very glad to see them both, and invited them in to enjoy a cup of tea with fresh jersey milk from the Island.

When publication of Banfield’s books brought fame to Dunk Island, many would-be Crusoes from all over the world wrote to him, pleading to share his idyll. Some even arrived unannounced to take up residence on the various beaches and islands with the intention of living the good life. Not one of them lasted.

The late A.H. Chisholm, well known historian and ornithologist, who wrote biographical introductions to the various editions of Banfield’s books, visited the Banfields on Dunk Island after reading a copy of the *The Confessions* while still a lad in Victoria working as a journalist for the same newspaper which Edmund’s father founded in Maryborough. Chisholm wrote of him, in the 1925 introduction to the posthumously published *Last Leaves* from Dunk Island which he edited from Banfield’s papers: “The Beachcomber’s step was brisk, his speech rapid (at times vehement), his enthusiasm as extensive and keen as those of any boy.” Chisholm also noted that, “...a teeming brain triumphed over a hand that did not take kindly to the pen.” Banfield’s scribble apparently gave the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* compositors some hard thinking.

Banfield always stoutly defended the tropical climate against its detractors. He said:

“Bounteous rain and glorious sunshine in combination might seem to constitute a climate unsuitable to persons of English birth, or at least trying to their preconceptions of the ideal. My own experience is entirely, enthusiastically favourable ...”

He went on to describe how, during all the hotter hours of the day, he toiled in the bush felling trees and splitting logs in the blazing November sunshine, the perspiration evaporating as fast as it flowed from his pores – and all the while with no great discomfort. And there was always at the end of it a refreshing plunge into the

tepid sea.

And alongside the Beachcomber was Bertha Banfield, the merry little woman, slightly hard of hearing, who followed him cheerfully through all those lonely years of island living. From 1904 on, the childless Bertha did have the company of Essie, an Irishwoman, as an ‘assistant’ at the enlarged bungalow. Essie had been with the Banfields in Townsville up until 1897 when they for the Island. The little Irishwoman followed them as soon as they had room for her, and stayed with Bertha until after Banfield’s death, though unhappily she was away from the Island on a visit to Townsville when Banfield died of appendicitis on 2nd June, 1923.

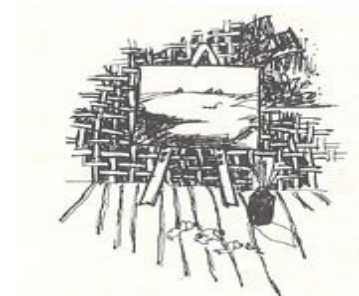
Not until the 5th June did the world learn of the Beachcomber’s death. Bertha had been alone with his body for three days. The captain of the small coastal steamer *Innisfail* passing in the channel, noticed a figure waving from the beach and he merely waved in return and sailed on. Then the figure on the beach collapsed, and the captain sent a party ashore to investigate. The steamer crew made a coffin and buried the Beachcomber in his own garden, a spot now surrounded by jungle on the slopes above the resort. The cairn there bears an inscription from Thoreau’s writings:

“If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music he hears.”

Bertha Banfield survived her husband by ten years. She and Essie remained on the Isle until August 1924, when they went south. And when Bertha died in 1933, her ashes were deposited beneath the stone cairn on Coonanglebah, where under Thoreau’s lines, another inscription was added:

“Whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge – where thou diest, will I die and there will I be buried.”

Another Beachcomber and Island Settlers



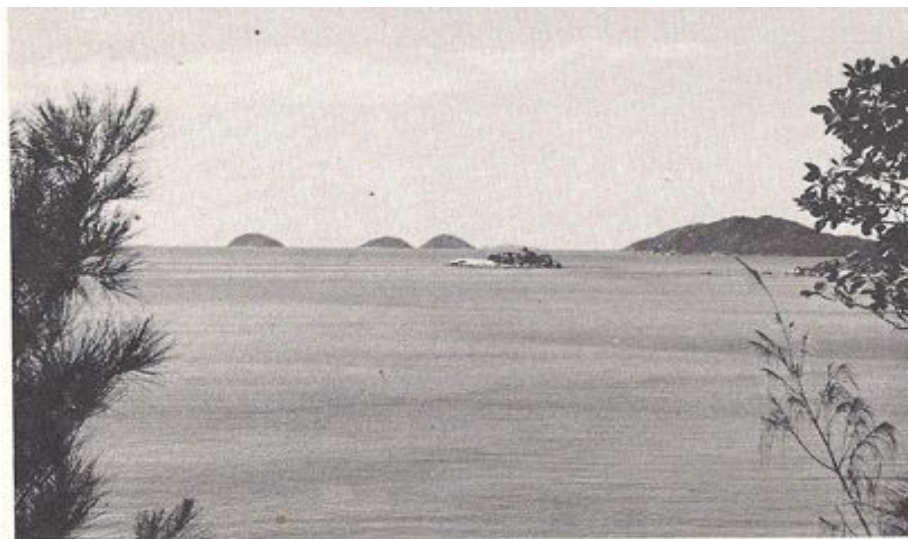
In Banfield’s *Last Leaves from Dunk Island* there is a chapter entitled ‘In reserve’ from which the following is quoted:

“Among the islets of the Family group, sprinkled between Hinchinbrook and Dunk Islands, not one is denied distinction ... There is, of course, one scene which combines more of excellences than the others, however admirable individually. A little bay lies open to the turbulent south-easters, yet lacks not a sheltering cove wherein a small boat may nestle. The cove is formed by a bold and rounded mass of granite, on which pandanus palms and straggling shrubs find foothold. The boat glides round the sturdy rock, revealing a white beach, the sand of which has been ground to such singular fineness that it feels as silk underfoot ... From a low pinnacle of rock, on which an osprey is fond of perching, the virtues of the wider scene are best revealed. Five islets, wildernesses of leafage, trip out to the east. A mass of fantastic rocks, round which confusing currents swill, intercepts the fairway, and beyond the islets are the Brooke Group, with Goold Island and Hinchinbrook to the right to complete the picture ... Few visit the spot. All its charms are held in reserve.”

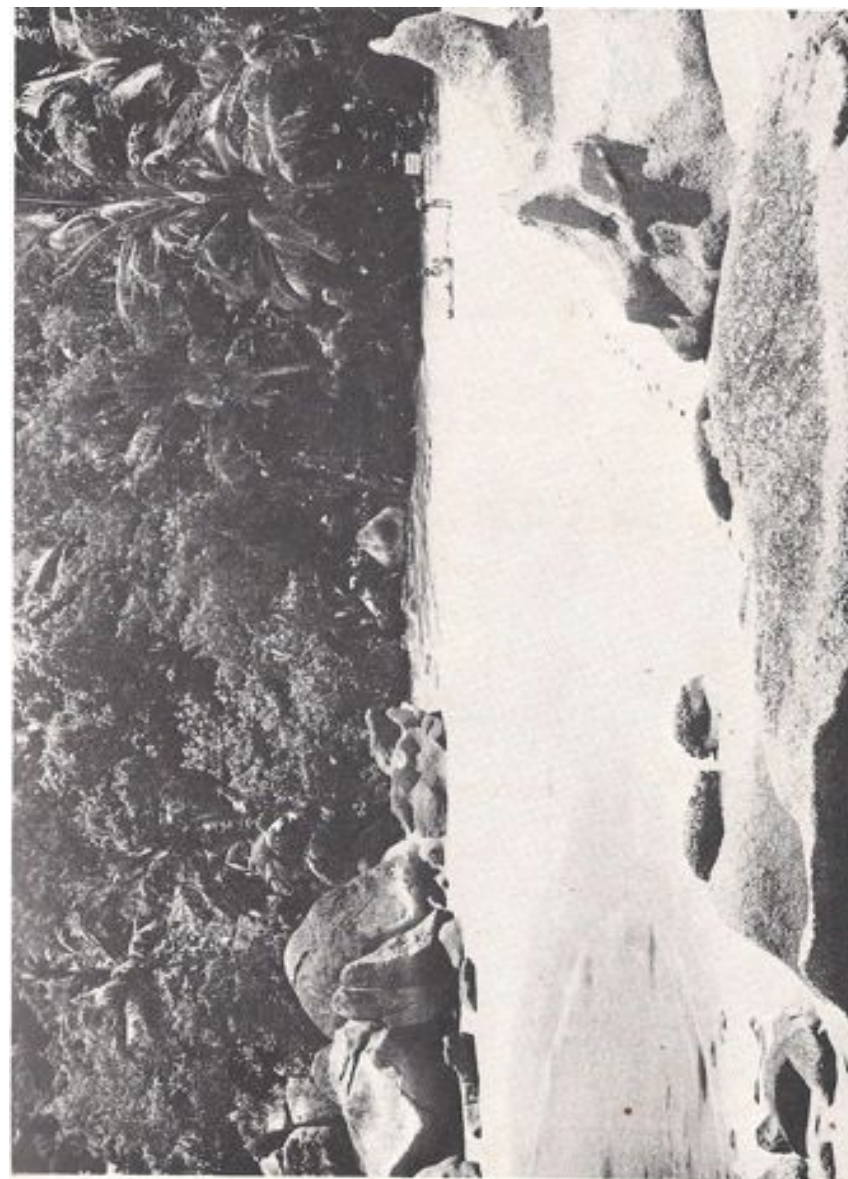
Banfield did not name the place, but there is only one scene in the group which fits his description – Doorila Bay on Bedarra. One wonders just what the Beachcomber meant by ‘in reserve’ – whether he saw it simply as an unspoiled spot hidden away there for the occasional enjoyment of a wanderer, perhaps even eventually to become part of a National reserve or park – or whether he envisaged it as a gem awaiting discovery by some future settler worthy of its charms. If the latter, then fate saw to it that the appropriate spirit materialised in the form of the artist Noel Herbert Wood, a Thoreau disciple in the truest sense, of whom the Beachcomber would have wholeheartedly approved. For almost half a century Noel has lived a simple

life on that rare corner of Bedarra, leading an existence more Spartan even than that of the Beachcomber himself.

A colourful pareu wrapped round his waist the sole article of clothing, long hair, full beard, trim build and keen dark eyes, Noel, standing bare-footed on his silken beach beckoning a visiting friend ashore from a boat, seems somehow just the kind of man one would expect to find here. Along a neatly raked path through the coconut palm grove, beyond the fishing-net hung to dry on a pole, one walks to the shell fountain and pool where water from the spring above gravitates perpetually. There, one's feet are dipped to remove clinging sand. Then through the gate to the palm-thatched dwelling, spacious, airy, and built around a large stone fireplace used for cooking. Woven frond ceiling, polished bloodwood roof-support posts, painted stone floor with coconut matting squares, and one end wall of empty wine bottles cemented lying side by side to admit a soft light of delicate and varying hue depending on the angle of sunlight filtering through tall trees at the back. The other aspects of the wide, single room are mostly open to the lush green jungle outside; open, that is, above a half-metre high stone-cemented wall, with windows and shutters on the seaward side. A couple of divans, cane easy-chairs, occasional tables, and crammed bookshelves, complete the picture of an abode offering cool, gracious living.



The view from Doorila Bay on Bedarra—Banfield's "fairest scene in the Isles"



Noel Wood's Doorila beach on Bedarra—Wood's house is hidden behind the coconut palm grove at right.

Now, through a doorway in the bottle wall to the back, our host leads the way to a tropic garden of such riotous glory and abundance of bloom and fruit as to put even the jungle itself to shame. In fact, it is only an extension of the surrounding jungle, an area planted with exotics from world wide – rare and beautiful flowers, fruit trees and vegetables, to sustain a man both aesthetically and physically on his isle. If the numbers of oils on canvas have declined in latter years, it is more than compensated for by the creative effort in that growing, living art form, the garden.

The vegetable plots and shade-houses are productive, with the never-ending water flow from a hose-end spread around in rotation during the dry season to maintain moisture content in the rich humous built up over years of back breaking barrow and bucket loads of seaweed and jungle debris – the cultivation by man which the Aboriginal was content to do without. But the latter could not reach for an avocado rich in food value, a nutritious banana superior to the rank jungle specimen, a sweet potato fatter than his hard-won yams, a mulberry juicier than wild raspberry, bread-fruit, papaw, pineapple, orange, lime, lemon, lettuce, tomato, peppers, Chinese cabbage, beans, taro and herbs of all descriptions.

Continuing our walk, we zig-zag up the pathway beyond the terraced garden to a saddle on the ridge above Noel's house. Tracks branch off in various directions, one to a high lookout rock on the northeastern extremity of the Isle, another to the spring, and the main path leading down to a beach on the opposite side of the peninsula, Coomool Bay, included in the artist's domain of 15 acres. Here, in the shallow reef waters, Noel maintains an oyster lease. It is also a more sheltered spot in which to moor his aluminium dinghy. A cabin of modern design has been built here for the use of visiting friends.

Now to the spring – we retrace our steps back to the saddle to follow a gently graded pathway benched in around steep pinches over granite rock headlands offering those delightful views mentioned by Banfield of the other five islands, the twins and triplets, with the rock islet of Peerahmah in the foreground just to the left of Hernandia Bay and the Plantation resort on the opposite corner of the Island. In a small steep gully, about thirty metres above sea-level, the best spring on the Isle wells out of the granite. A small tank has been sunk into the gully there as a catchment from which to pipe the water around the cliffs to Noel's house and garden. The tank also excludes cane toads which may otherwise foul the water.

Just beneath the spring is Noel's taro swamp. With taro and sweet potato, Noel never has need of English potatoes. Above the spring on one side is another vegetable garden surrounded by fruit trees, and on the other side, the fowl-house, where a number of hens provide fresh eggs. The Birds are on periodic free range in

the jungle, and in addition to coconuts which Noel splits for them to peck at, and occasional worms and grasshoppers, they receive daily handfuls of what to keep up the egg supply. Farther up the gully the path leads through a plantation of citrus trees, bananas, papaw, pineapple, mango, custard apple, avocado, mangosteen, and the rare *mamea americana*. Here is hidden the artist's studio on the edge of the jungle. Beyond the studio through a grove of pandanus the pathway winds into the jungle, skirting the northern edge of the highest hill on Noel's land, and eventually leading back to the saddle above his house.

So much for the artist's domain, which speaks much of the man; but there is more. One settles comfortably into a cushioned cane chair in the cool dwelling, entertained by a deep, cultured voice; something of the actor in his demonstrative, enthusiastic manner, and it seems an almost photographic memory for events heard or read. One is handed a favourite book (such as Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*) to read of an evening, and in the ensuing discussion of it next day, Noel quotes almost verbatim from a passage. Current affairs do not interest him – politics and the like. For years he did not even have a radio, and he takes no newspaper – it was Thoreau who said that to read one newspaper was sufficient to improve one's education in that respect – the report of a murder, rape or robbery is novel reading only once. Noel does subscribe to one or two magazines such as *The New Yorker*, and he cannot get enough good books. His shelves are full of the works of the great philosophers and novelists, reference books on natural history, gardening, alternative life-style publications and art books. And of art – Noel Wood's paintings hang in galleries world wide.

Many years ago when I first met Noel – I had walked across the Island from the resort on the other side early one March following a near swipe by a cyclone, to find him repairing his old yacht on the beach – I was at once struck by the unexpected practical nature of the man, and indeed, any man who aspires to live on an island must have that attribute in order to survive. When storms blow up as they sometimes do for weeks at a time, when the sea is too rough for a small boat, one must be resourceful enough to turn one's hand to whatever urgent task requires attention.

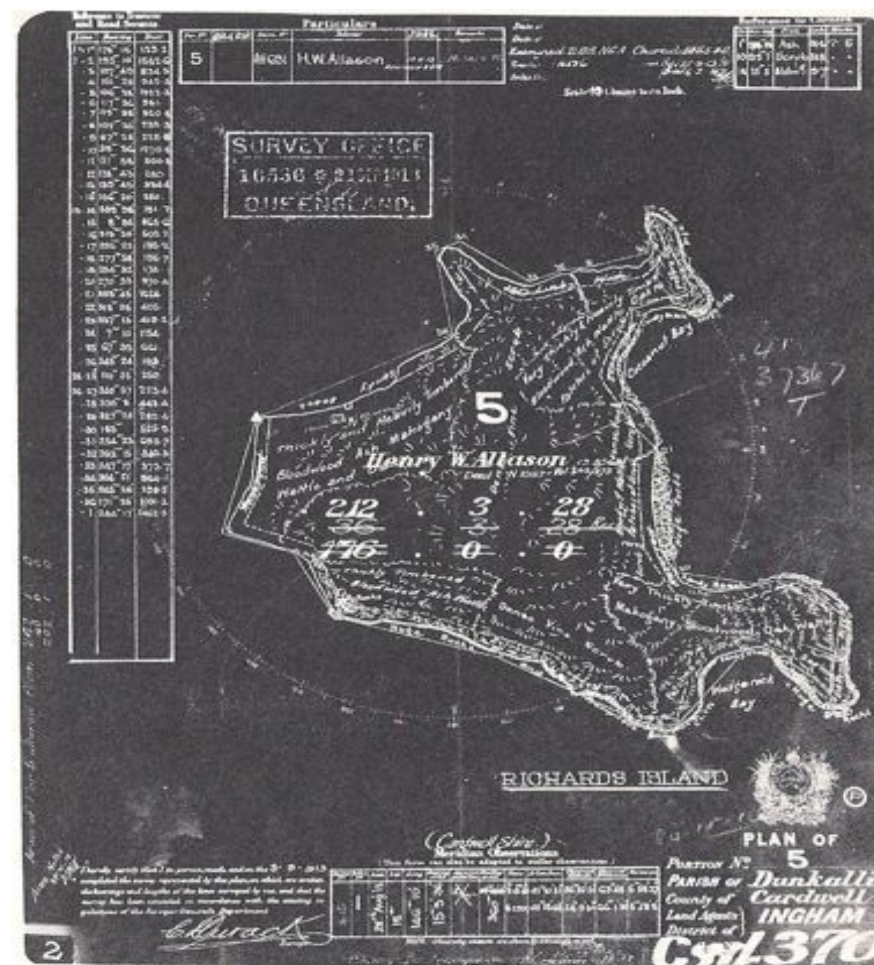
Noel's father, T. Percy Wood, was a mining engineer in South Australia, and later a Church of England minister, with some rather unorthodox views. Noel's mother, Fanny, was one of the well known Herberts of Yankalilla, early rural pioneers in South Australia. In 1935 at the age of 23, Noel read an article in *The Queenslander* newspaper entitled 'It can be done', describing the life of a man living on Long Island in the Whitsunday group. This man had apparently succeeded in the cultivation of tropical fruits and vegetables sufficiently well to have become independent of society. Noel, as an artist not long out of the Adelaide School of Arts, and who, during those

Depression years, was making a living painting portraits and landscapes, was intrigued to the extent of setting out to find his own Garden of Eden. To put it in his own words – he wanted “to get to a place with a warm climate, where one could live for approximately nothing, and solve one’s own problems in paint and colour.”

During Christmas 1935 in Adelaide, Noel held a successful exhibition of his paintings which enabled him to finance his venture to North Queensland. He drove overland to Rockhampton in an old Ford jalopy he had purchased for £30, but here his initial search for an island was doomed to disappointment, for all the most desirable islands had already been taken. He pushed on farther north to Townsville and went out to have a look at Havannah Island, just south of the Palm Islands Aboriginal reserve. This did not come up to expectations but on his return to Townsville he was fortunate enough to meet Spencer Hopkins, who had taken over Dunk Island after Bertha Banfield’s death in 1933.



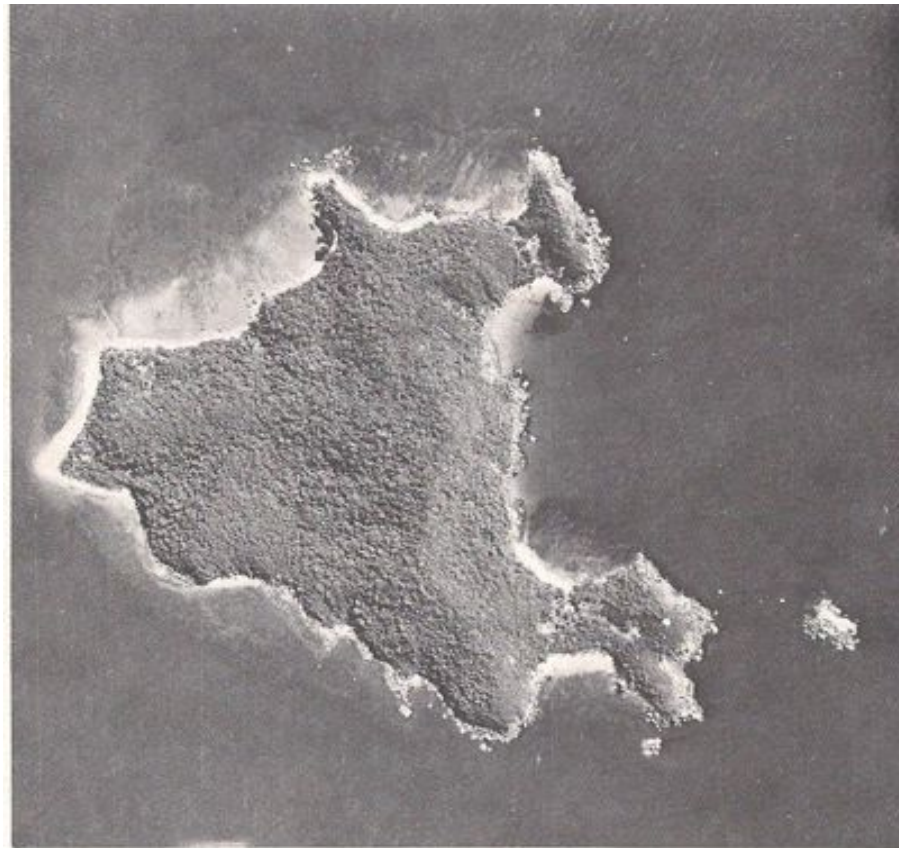
Noel Wood, Bedarra.



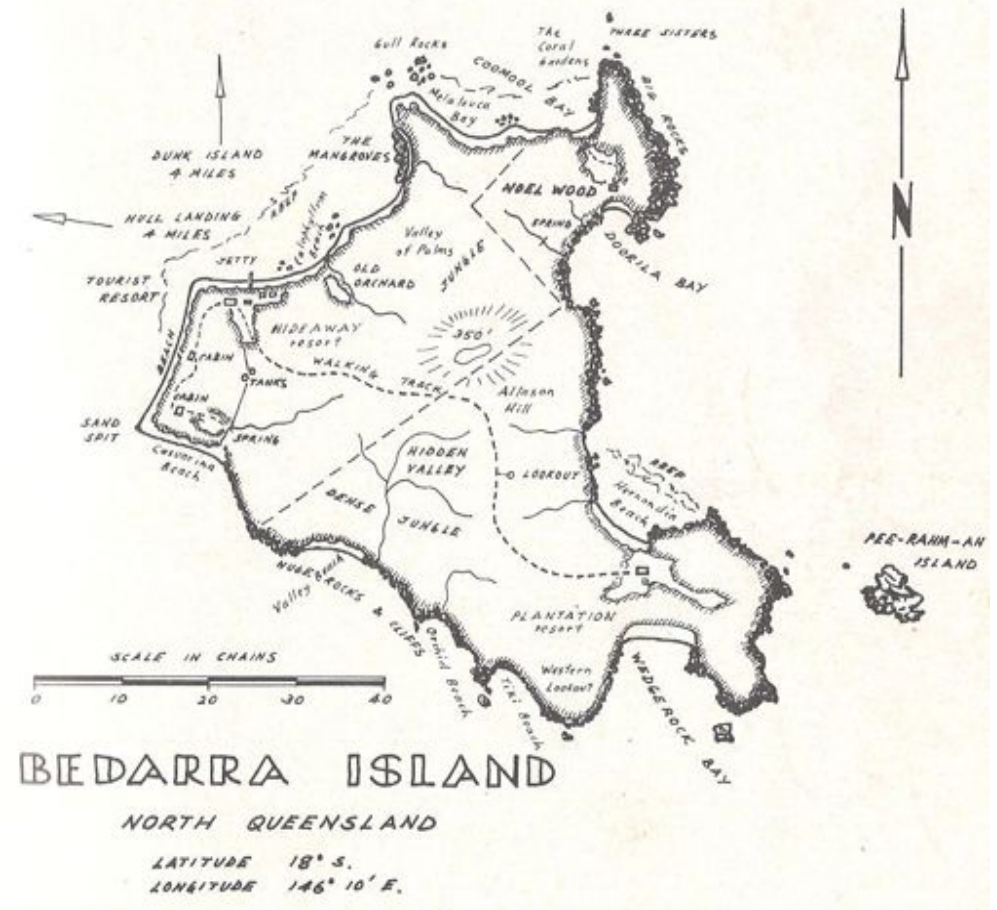
The original Lands Department survey plan of Bedarra in 1913

Hopkins told him about Bedarra Island which had only recently been bought by a syndicate in London headed by a chemist named Jack Harris. Bedarra had first been settled as early as 1913 when Banfield was still alive on Dunk. A captain Henry Allason read Banfield’s *Confessions* in England and became determined to go and live on an island too. He visited Banfield on Dunk, and was shown Bedarra, which he

bought from the Queensland Lands Department for £20, this princely sum including the purchase of neighbouring Timana Island for good measure! Allason settled on Bedarra near the sandspit corner (not Noel's Doorila Bay) with his wife in 1913 and at this time became known for his long distance inter-island swims in the area. He was there for only a year, however, before he was called up by the British Army at the outbreak of World War I, and was unlucky enough to be gassed in France. He spent the rest of his life recuperating at Nice.



Aerial photograph Bedarra Island



Sometime during the twenties, Ivan Menzies of Gilbert and Sullivan fame, happened across Allason at Nice, and persuaded him to sell Bedarra for £500 sterling. Menzies had hoped to conduct Bedarra as a home for underprivileged English boys, but the idea eventually fell through, and he never lived on his newly acquired island. In 1934 he sold his title to the Harris syndicate in London. Harris, as the only member of the original syndicate to actually set foot on Bedarra, never got as far as living there either. He shipped out nine tons of provisions from England; canned foodstuffs, cabin trunks full of glass beads and trinkets to be used in trade with the 'cannibals' on the North Queensland coast, but finished up staying on the not quite so isolated Dunk Island. Harris built a small house on public land at the Dunk sandspit, where he lived with his son David for a year or so, trying to get the syndicate in London organised.

At about this time, the George Morris family, originally from Tolga on the Atherton Tableland, and who had conducted a tourist resort on Orpheus Island, were running the ex-Banfield bungalow (owned by Spencer Hopkins of Townsville) as a tourist resort. In 1935 Hopkins sold portion of his Dunk Island freehold to the Hon. Hugo Brassey, a London Stock Exchange and Insurance broker. Noel Wood had met Hugo Brassey previously in Adelaide. Hugo, two years older than Noel, had gone out from England to South Australia to stay with his aunt, the wife of Sir Alexander Hore-Ruthvern, Governor of South Australia and later Lord Gowrie, Governor-General of Australia. Hugo studied at the Roseworthy Agricultural College where he was involved in a student revolt. After that, he went to Beaudesert in Queensland to stay with the De Beau Perce family there. Hugo then bought a yacht in Brisbane, renamed it Sunbeam after his grandfather's celebrated yacht, and cruised the Barrier Reef. On Dunk Island he met up with a Swiss named Treudhardt who persuaded him to buy the main portion of Dunk Island from Spencer Hopkins for a sum of £10,000. Hopkins retained a small section on the southwestern side.

Hugo straightaway went to London to organise finance, and in the meantime became engaged to a girl called Lilly De Meter. (She later married the actor Errol Flynn.) Hugo's father objected to the match with Lilly, and he eventually married Baroness Christa von Boderhausen instead. Brassey went to live on Dunk with his wife, in a house the ruins of which still stand near the present day resort. Treudhardt managed the Dunk resort for Brassey for a time until Arthur P. Pollock (brother of Lady Gowrie) and his wife Frieda took over management. It was Brassey who subsequently arranged construction of the original airstrip on Dunk in 1937, using an old worn out caterpillar tractor. Before that, ANA aircraft used to land on Mission Beach opposite, tourists being taken across to Dunk by boat. The same airstrip on

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Dunk was extended during World War II by the RAAF, and later again by Eric MacIllree of Avis, and is today the sealed strip used by TAA.

But to return to Noel Wood's story – after seeing Spencer Hopkins in Townsville, Noel went straight out to Dunk Island, where Harris was still living in his hut at the sandspit, with the Morris family and others as neighbours. Harris agreed to show Noel a portion of Bedarra which he might have. That was in June 1936. The day they chose to sail across to Bedarra proved to be quite rough. The boat was a small one sailed by Nugget Rivett, the oyster-man on Dunk. Nugget, with his thick mass of curly hair, dressed in what passed in those days for shorts – pyjamas – lived for twenty years on Dunk Island running the oyster lease, boat building, and raising ducks. Other characters there at that time included Chris Wildsoet (who visited the Island from Tully, and who spoke many of the Aboriginal languages), and old Charlie, a part Aboriginal mentioned in Banfield's writings.

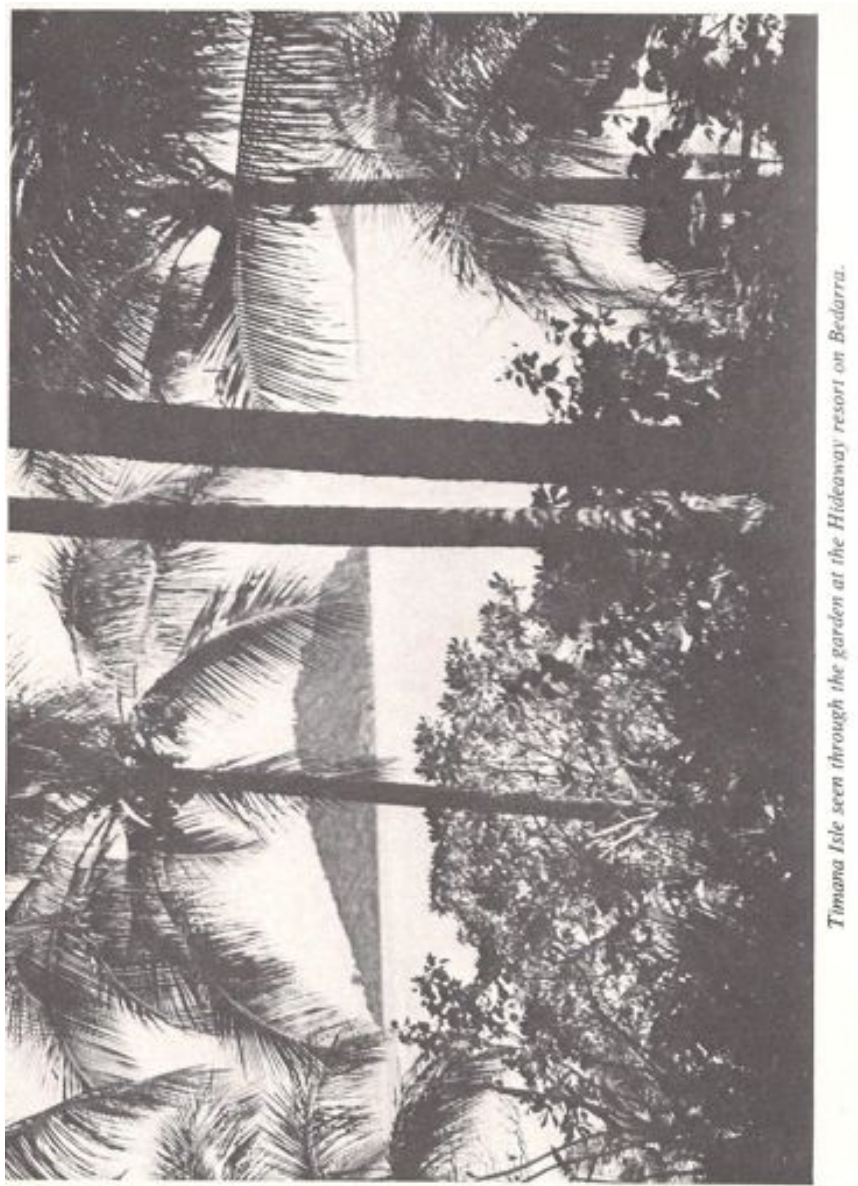
When the party reached Bedarra in Nugget's boat, Harris showed Noel the northeastern corner of the Isle. Because of the rough seas which threatened to become rougher, time was short, and Noel had but half an hour in which to make up his mind. One look at the wild beauty of undespoiled Doorila Bay however, and the young artist was as spell-bound as Banfield had been when he wrote of it. An agreement was drawn up on the spot, for a section of 15 acres of that corner of Bedarra, signatures being affixed to a scrap of foolscap paper atop a chest of Nestles condensed milk cans, some of Harris' provisions.

In July 1936 Noel Wood returned to settle on Bedarra with his then pregnant wife Eleanor (nee Skipper) whom he called 'Skip', accompanied by Eric Cawthorn who was a partner in the Harris syndicate. Cawthorn and Noel worked together in different parts of the then almost virgin isle, clearing two acres each. The only sign of previous habitation was a tall skinny specimen of a coconut palm on the sandspit side which must have been planted by Allason and which bore a few nuts, another at the mangroves on the northern side, and a third in Doorila Bay.

Noel at first chose a flat spot near the mangroves on the opposite side of the peninsula to his present Doorila Bay, in which to clear his two acres for a garden and homesite. This had the advantage of a more sheltered boat anchorage, but the inconvenience of not being able to swim there at low tide caused him to change his mind, and he moved to the choicest scene in the isles, Doorila, and has never regretted it. He helped Cawthorn clear his two acres at the southeastern corner (present day Plantation resort) while the older (60 years old) Harris himself intended eventually to live at the original Allason spot to the east of the sandspit later occupied by Ken Druitt and now the TAA Hideaway resort.

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Timana Isle seen through the garden at the Hideaway resort on Bedarra.

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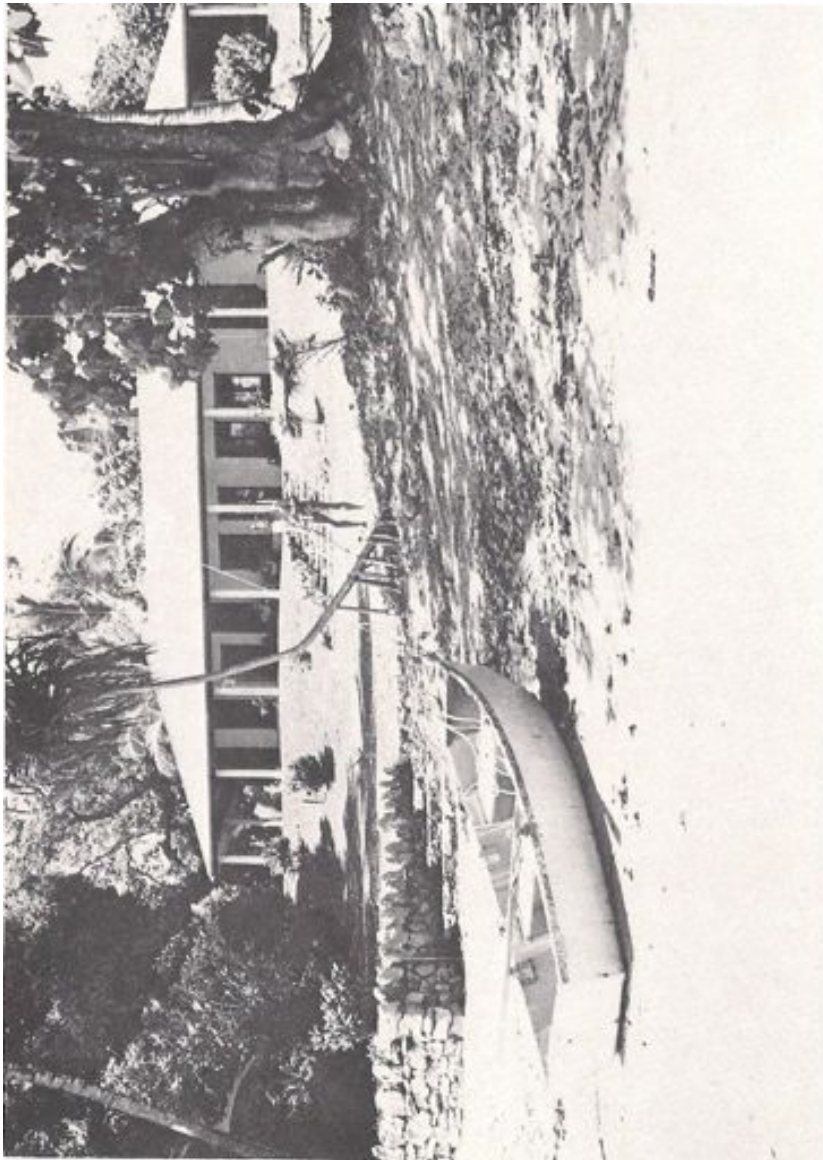
After two weeks on the Island, Noel's wife Skip returned to South Australia to have her baby, while the menfolk prepared a home. But a month later, Cawthorn tired of his partnership with Harris, and pulled out, leaving Noel alone on the Isle with a goat and her kid, six laying hens and a rooster.

Frank Coleman from the Atherton Tableland then took Cawthorn's place as a partner with Harris, and went to work on Bedarra. And work he did, like a Trojan, according to Noel. A skilled bushman, young and strong, he cleared land and constructed a tin hut on Harris' corner, and in a very short time had the place habitable. But Harris himself continued to live on Dunk. He only ever stayed one night with Frank Coleman in the hut on Bedarra, and once with Noel in his dwelling at Doorila. On that occasion in December 1936, a severe storm blew up, cutting off Harris' return to Dunk, and Noel put him up for two nights.

In the new year when Noel had his place all ship-shape, his mother came up from Adelaide on a visit. Skip also returned to the Island with her baby Virginia. Virginia was still at the crawling stage when Skip again went back to Adelaide for a time, leaving Noel looking after the infant, feeding her goat's milk and trying to keep one eye cocked on the child's wandering in the jungle while he matted out the track up above the rocky cliffs to his spring.

In 1938 Frank Coleman's parents came to Bedarra together with his father's brother and his family. Arthur and Charlie Coleman bought out Jack Harris after the syndicate broke up, and paid off the debt owing to Ivan Menzies. Jack Harris and his son David, then four years old, went to Bowen where Jack grew tomatoes. Harris eventually died in an old folk's home there. David, then eight, was adopted by a family named McConnachie. Forty years later David McConnachie came out to the Island to see Noel to re-introduce himself as Harris's son, and explain how he had taken his foster parent's surname.

At last Noel began to have enough time to paint on his island. With his water pipeline organised, a garden established, and fowls and goats producing, he managed to squeeze in a few hours each day for art. But things continued to go wrong – drought periods, the goat's milk drying up, fowls off the lay, poor fruit crops, and lack of vegetables during the wet. Before he got his own boat he was even forced to forage in the jungle for native plant foods during a lean three month period living virtually on green coconut milk and fish.



The mud-brick homestead built by artist John Busst on Bedarra, now the Plantation resort.

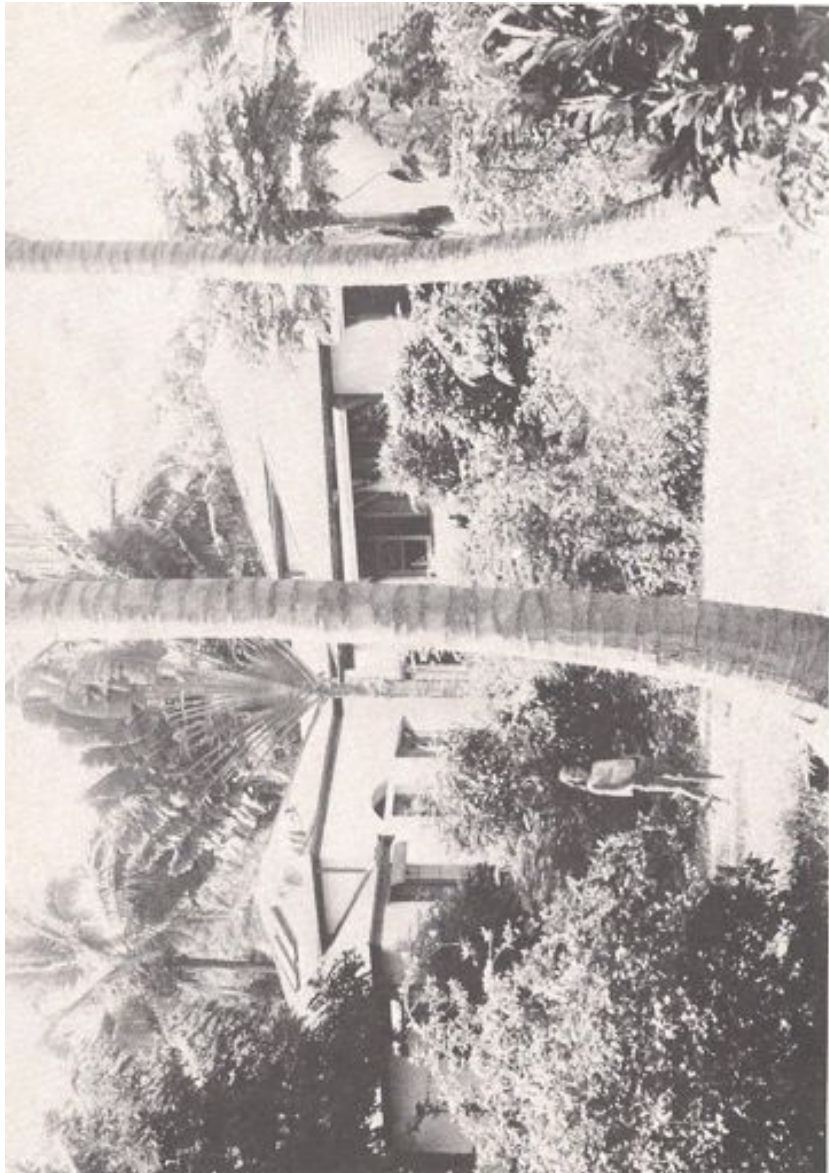
And even when he acquired a motor-sailer yacht so that he could go to the mainland for additional supplies, there was the weather to contend with. The Hull River bar was at that time quite perilous to negotiate with any sort of sea running. Sometimes he would arrive at the bar to find great curling seas, making it impossible for a landing, or, if already ashore, to be cut off from the Island. However, in the past few years, river sand and silt seems to have diffused and spread over a broader area at the mouth, and now only choppy seas occur, though the tides still have to be watched. For many years Noel preferred the Tully River bar three miles farther south. Nowadays, he finds it easier to wait on fine weather and take his outboard-powered aluminium dinghy across to the Mission Beach South store.

The problem of constant labour on an island is a continuing one though. As an artist Noel is the first to admit that the matter of food does seem to take up a disproportionate amount of time each day. He says, "This theory that an island environment is a good place in which to paint or to write is a fallacy. There is far too much work to be done. In other words you have to do all your own building, plumbing and gardening, and look after your boats yourself. There's no-one to call on for help."

In the past, he says, he sometimes found it more profitable to go to the mainland and stay in an hotel in the canefields to paint. Noel's paintings hang in art galleries and private collections throughout Australia, the United States, and Great Britain. He has exhibited in San Francisco as well as Melbourne and Sydney, and for a year worked in the Hollywood film industry as an art director, until the urge to return to balmy scenes prevailed. At the time Noel went with Hugo Brassey in 1939 on his painting exhibitions to the David Jones store in Sydney, and at the Riddell Gallery in Melbourne, he was written up in the papers as the most successful painter in Australia for that year. The articles referred to Noel and his companions as the 'Greek God' people living their island idyll.

Of course all this publicity brought too many 'friends' to the Isle. In 1940 a writer came uninvited, stayed for a year during which time he lived in a palm hut at the spring, and eventually published a book in which he referred to host as 'unfriendly'.

In 1940 the artist John Busst leased the southeastern corner of Bedarra (now the Plantation resort) for ten shillings a week, from the Coleman brothers then still living with their families on the other side. Busst obtained the services of a local builder, Harry Northam, to construct a log cabin above the beach there. During the building, Busst became ill with ulcers and was forced to occupy the hut before it was finished. Harry carried on building the cabin around the sick man.



The Plantation homestead, Bedarra, once the home of artist and conservationist, John Busst.

Busst eventually had a mud-brick home built on the site which is in an ideal position atop the narrow peninsula between two attractive beaches – Hernandia Bay on the northern, and Wedgerock Bay on the southern side. The front verandah of the homestead style bungalow looks out to a striking view over sloping green lawns and coconut palms, across the white sands of Hernandia beach, to Noel Wood's Doorila ay a kilometre across the water. The original Busst house included a big art studio built Spanish style facing an inner courtyard garden. Colour washed mud-brick walls, with wide shady verandahs running around the three outer sides of the U-shaped dwelling, and th high ceilings of cool bedrooms and spacious dining-room, lend the building a gracious air suited to its surroundings. Busst and his sister Phyllis were often visited there by the late Prime Minister Hold and dame Zara. The same building with modifications now houses guests at the Plantation resort.

On the other side of the island, the brothers Charlie and Arthur Coleman had been putting up a few paying guests, among whom one year were an Englishman named Dick Greatrix and a Frenchman Pierre Huret, who made the aging Colemans an offer for their place. The Colemans agreed to sell the whole island (apart from Noel Wood's section) to Greatrix and Huret in late 1940, allowing John Busst to retain his lease. Greatrix and Huret had a new house built by Harry Northam, the cottage 'Les Tropiques'. Friends Charles martin and Cliff Middleton, whom they'd met on Heron Island, built another cottage at the sandspit. Martin and Middleton ran the resorts on both Heron and Green islands then, and at one time had the 'Book-lover's Library' at King's Cross in Sydney. The success of their book business had decided them to retire to the northern isles of the Barrier Reef while still young enough to enjoy it. They became known for their movie films on natural history – the life of whales and so on. Martin who was in the Royal navy during World War 1, had sustained a brain injury during a naval battle off Heligoland, but lived a full life in spite of it.

During the years of Greatrix and Huret's residence on Bedarra, Pierre Huret laid out the attractive garden landscape as it is today at the Hideaway resort, using Italian labour to shift tons of soil and great boulders to line the paths. Exotic plants and tree4s were introduced from overseas and from the Council gardens in Cairns, to merge with the natural forest beauty of the Island and turn it into a tropical show-place. The two romantic foreigners soon discovered however, that life on an offshore island, bountiful even as is Bedarra, was not so easy. Labour became difficult to get, and the continued isolation palled in the end. They sold out to John and Phyllis Busst in 1947 and moved to Lae, New Guinea.

The Bussts then owned all of Bedarra Island apart from Noel Wood's 15 acres. When Busst's sister Phyllis finally tired of the Island, they divided their portion into two again, selling the northern part (86 acres) to a Mr and Mrs Goldrich, who lived there for a year or two, before it was sold again to Michael and Neura Hall in 1949. Ken and Cynthia Druitt bought it in 1957 after leasing it earlier.

Ken Druitt came upon Bedarra by chance during the early 1950's. He had been running a garage business in Sydney, and while following up competitors in an 'around Australia' Redex trial, happened to hear of Timana Island as being available for lease. Timana had been purchased in 1937 by Valerie and Yvonne Cohen of Victoria. Ken made immediate arrangements to lease the tiny Timana with the idea of wintering there each year and returning to Sydney for the summer months. But the northern wet season turned out to be hardly as trying as southern summer scorchers, and when the opportunity arose of acquiring the Bedarra Island property, Ken jumped at the chance and stayed on permanently to set it up as a small tourist resort. The layout of cabins hidden away in the jungle along pathways and gardens created by Pierre Huret, was delightfully done. Approaching the resort from seawards a visitor was quite unaware of any buildings within the dense green mantle spilling out over white beaches, the only sign of human habitation being the small landing on the beach under the huge *Calophyllum* trees. The 'Les Tropiques' dining hall and several separate well-spaced cabins only a step from the beach were designed to cater for about a dozen guests. The neatly raked white coral gravel pathways running from the main complex around westwards through the jungle to the end cabin at the sandspit, became an attraction for visiting boatloads of day tourists. Ken's corner was bought to TAA in 1980, to be run in conjunction with the Dunk Isle resort as the Hideaway.

John Busst remained on his corner of Bedarra (114 acres), painting in his mud-brick studio, until 1957 when he sold to Colin Scott, a grazier from Omeo, Victoria. Busst spent his remaining years at Bingil Bay on the mainland just north of Mission Beach, where he became well known as a conservationist leading the fight to protect Australia's Great Barrier Reef Areas.

Colin Scott employed several resident managers over the years to maintain the property as a private 'plantation' retreat. The first of these was Bert Dawson, a war pensioner, known locally as the hermit of Goold Island where he lived for many years. Chris Jackson, the most energetic of Scott's managers, took over from Dawson in about 1958, and over the four years he and Joan were there, put much effort into improving the place. Chris was a home-spun philosopher of the Banfield strain, who delighted in scribbling thoughtful comments in the margins of books on Colin Scott's shelves, a not altogether unpleasant diversion for later readers of these volumes.

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He toiled unceasingly in the gardens, extending the wide spread of well-kept lawns back and front, building rock walls and terraces, and improving on Busst's original house with concrete shell over mud-brick walls. He installed a large water storage tank up on the hillside, supplied by a long polythene pipeline running almost the length of one side of the Island, from the only reliable spring at a place called the Hidden Valley, some fifty metres above sea-level. The water gravitated from there, and air locks in the pipe were a problem at first, but Chris sorted them all out and was able to store enough water, together with the windmill tower well pump close to the house, to keep a luxuriant garden and orchard going during the dry season. Rainwater tanks supplied the house.

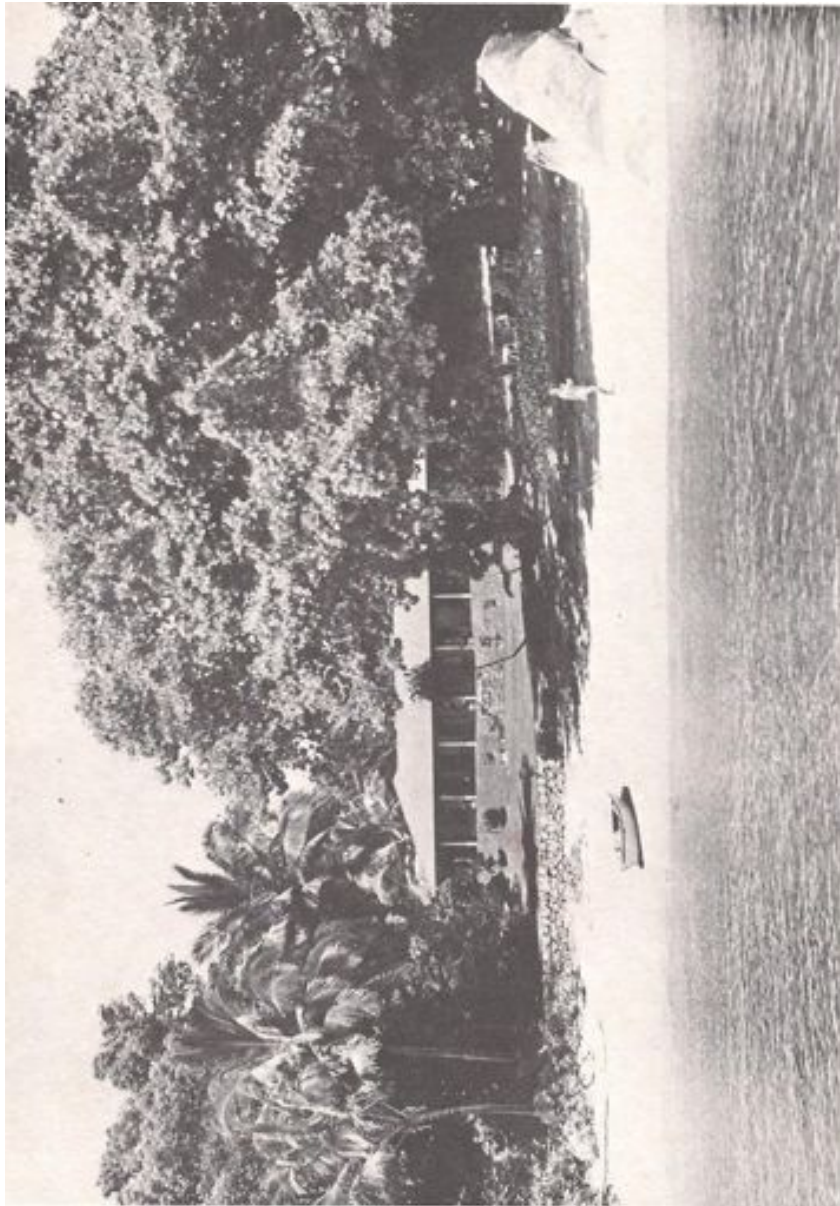
Chris often used to visit Noel Wood across the bay to seek his advice on tropical gardening and to exchange plant specimens and fruit, not to mention many racy yarns. Noel returned the visits to Chris and Joan, and they collected each other's mail and supplies from the mainland. Chris and Joan left Bedarra in October 1961 to go to New Zealand, where they eventually joined the most successful community farm in that country – Riverside Community near Motueka in the north of the South Island.

Lloyd Abell and his wife kept up the good work initiated by Chris for some years, and other managers lived at the Scott property for brief periods before it was sold in 1979 to Tor Hultén, a Swede. Tor converted the property into a small tourist resort which he called 'Toranna Plantation' – Tora, after his real mother in Sweden, and Anna, his foster-mother who looked after him as a child for many years while his parents were overseas making documentary films. Chris Dickson from Melbourne, settled in as resident manager for Toranna. When Toranna was bought by TAA in 1981, Chris continued to manage the resort.

The lease of Timana Island was eventually taken up by the artist and wool tapestry weaver, Deanna Conti. The attractive, dark-haired Deanna, studied art at the Royal Melbourne Technical College, and at the age of sixteen, having already discovered the writings of Banfield, came to live on Timana to put her artistic flair to work in a new medium – wool tapestry creation. In the islands she was fortunate enough to meet and study under Jock Loutit, a noted European master-weaver, who worked with the Marquis of Bute and Gobelin Atelier, France. Deanna has been weaving professionally for over fifteen years on Timana, working to her own art designs (she tends to the abstract rather than figurative) as well as completing commissions for other Australian artists. The Brilliant, vibrant colours of her tropic surrounds are reflected naturally in her work – bold outline of coral reef and fish, delicate tint of tropic bloom, variegated bird plumage, and jungle butterfly – all

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Hernandia Beach and Plantation resort, Bedarra.

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influence to some degree her colourful abstractions in this special dimension of wool, in which she is still exploring and forming new trends and ideas. Her work is represented in both public and private collections throughout Australia and overseas. She has exhibited at the Joseph Brown Gallery, Melbourne, Bonython Art Gallery, Sydney; the Martin Gallery, Townsville; Manyung Gallery, Melbourne; Trinity Gallery, Cairns; and Holdsworth Art Galleries, Sydney. Deanna won an Australian Art rant in 1975 and he Cairns Art Prize in 1977. She tutors on occasions at the Townsville College of Advanced Education. Some of her commissions include those for Henry Ford II of Dearborn, USA; the Consulate of the Dominican Republic; Franco Belgiorno-Nettis, Transfield, Sydney; Kenneth Myer, Melbourne; and Eric MacIlree of Avis, Sydney. The big 'Tropic Butterfly' exhibited at the main entrance foyer of TAA's Dunk Isle resort, was also one of her commissions.

Another island resident and wool tapestry weaver is Bruce Arthur. The ginger-bearded, ex Olympic middleweight wrestler, Bruce, leases 16ha of Spencer Hopkins' land on the southwestern side of Dunk Island. He has built a mud-brick home there in the jungle, and established a place where other artists and students may come to work, some to learn weaving, others to take up pottery or painting. Much of Bruce's work is done under commission for Australian artists such as Clifton Pugh, John Olsen, Frank Werther, and Fred Williams, who send him up colour sketches of their designs. Bruce uses spun wool flown up from south which he dyes to his own requirements. He opens his house to tourists from the Dunk resort on certain days of the week. One walks across the track from the Dunk Isle airstrip to reach Bruce's hideaway in the jungle – a ring of the cow-bell to announce one's presence while still some distance off, and one is admitted to the inner sanctum. Bruce was born in Melbourne in 1921, and spent his early years as an amateur wrestler, and later as a coach and physical education teacher. In the 1950's he joined the Dunmoochin artist's colony near Melbourne where he learned to weave before coming north in search of a better way of life; a life that is both simple and peaceful, with kerosene lamps and refrigerator instead of electric; and no clocks. Every month or so, Bruce visits the resort to obtain food supplies, and time is measured by such jumps from the jungle to the bright lights and back again to his work.

But we must return again to the story of the man who has resided longer than any other in the Family Islands – Noel Wood. Noel recalls staying with Hugo Brassey on Timana straight after the war. Brassey had managed the Dunk Island resort himself for some time after A. P. Pollock left. Then when war was declared, Brassey enlisted in the Navy. Noel was rejected for military service on medical grounds. George Morris ran Dunk again during the war while the RAAF were there. Hugo Brassey's return to Dunk Island after the war was brief. He had to go back to

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England when his father died, and decided to remain there, leasing the resort to Gerald Court for about three years during the late 40's. At this time Noel spent three years in London with Brassey who had divorced his first wife, Christa, and married Barbara (Bubbles') Peacock. Gerald Court eventually went bankrupt and Brassey gave Noel Wood power of attorney to go back there and serve a writ on him. Court relinquished the lease of the resort in 1950 and Noel managed it for Brassey for two years. Noel, acting on Brassey's behalf, finally sold the resort in 1952 to Eddie Doeppel of Ballarat, retaining only Brassey's private home and ground.

The Dunk island property changed hands twice more during the 50's. Gordon Styne renovated it during his ownership from 1954 to 1956. Until Court's time, Banfield's original bungalow was in good repair, but it disappeared about then, apparently to be incorporated into one of the other resort buildings. In 1956 the property was sold to Eric MacIlree and Co. of Avis rent-a-car. In 1976 P & O shipping lines and TAA took over the resort, and finally TAA alone.

Between 1953 and 1957 Noel Wood lived with the Brasseys in Ireland. It was also during this period that Noel spent some time at Hollywood art directing in films. After wandering through Europe and visiting his older brother Rex, a portrait painter who had settled in Portugal, he returned to Australia in 1958, spending a short time with his other brothers, Jack and Dean, on their Kangaroo Island farm, before going back to Bedarra. Noel's wife Skip, who bore him a second daughter, Anne, had tired of the island life some years before, and they were eventually divorced.

Noel looked after Scott's property across the bay for him occasionally. He was there in 1967 and again in 1969 when he asked me to take over for three months while he went north on a painting trip to Cape York Peninsula. He also looked then at the possibility of settling farther north in the remote Forbes island group. He had earlier considered Lizard Island before it was talked of as a possible tourist resort. Noel's desire to retreat from the place where he has spent most of his life, was not for the reason most people want to leave an island. Over the peaceful years on Bedarra, Noel had understandably come to feel that Doorila really belonged to him, right down to the water-line, and that the ever increasing discovery of Bedarra's beaches by uninvited speedboat parties, was an unwarranted invasion of his privacy. Speedboats from the mainland would roar in around the headland to picnic on his lovely little beach with their noisy dogs and leave it littered – the silky sand beach which he naturally regards as part of his front garden, but which the law says is his only above high water mark. Noel finds it difficult to understand why they should choose

Bedarra for their weekend picnicking, when just across the water lie several other beautiful unoccupied island beaches, part of the National Park.

At one stage he even went on an extended cruise throughout the Pacific, looking at various islands, but none measured up to the natural attractions of Bedarra. Some drawback was found with every purported island paradise; malaria, hookworm, or some other exotic disease not found in Australia's unique tropic regions – the healthiest in the world. A secluded bay in the New Hebrides described as ideal, turned out to be nothing more than a mangrove swamp. Problems in other places with dense native populations and land ownership disputes, convinced him that here, on the Great Barrier Reef coastline, was after all the most salubrious spot on earth. Banfield would have unhesitatingly agreed with him.



A good introduction to the plant life of the islands, is a walk into the heart of Bedarra in company with Noel Wood.

We begin at Doorila beach, Noel's front 'garden'. Typical of these islands, fringing the top of the beach, points out Noel, is a hedge of sappy, green beach cabbage (*Scaevola taccada*). Behind this hedge we find Guettarda trees (*Guettarda speciosa*), with large oval leaves and rather handsome, white, beautifully scented blossoms. Beach Barringtonia (*Barringtonia asiatica*) is another spectacular tree here, with its huge shiny leaves and magnolia-like, white blossoms with hundreds of pink stamens. The Fruit is a large angular pod with a waterproof skin, which when dried, can be used as fishing net floats. Big Terminalia trees (*Terminalia arenicola*) known as the Fiji almond, have leaves which turn bright scarlet in August-September. There is the white native lily (*Crinum pedunculatum*) with long, sword-shaped leaves. Also beach hibiscus (*Hibiscus tiliaceus*), and Tanarius (*Macaranga tanarius*) with its large heart-shaped leaves, a good food tree for the bronzewing and pheasant-tailed pigeons.

The sprawling vine of Morning glory is a distinguished by its purple trumpet-shaped flowers and broad leathery leaves. Prickly Nicker-nut vines have interesting stone-coloured seeds suitable for making donkey-beads. The Nicker-nut, though a handsome vine, is noted for its hooked thorns. It is also a medicinal plant. The common bronze orchid (*Dendrobium discolor*) is seen everywhere on the rocks, and umbrella trees (*Schefflera actinophylla*). Hoya (*Hoya australis*) is also found growing over the granite rocks right by the water's edge on most of the islands, with its thick, sappy leaves and very strong scented sprays of blossoms almost artificial in appearance. And of course behind all the sandpits, the beach sheoak (*Casuarina*) sighing in the wind.



Timana Isle from Bedarra



Looking towards mainland (Mission Beach) and Timana Isle on right, from Coomool Bay on Bedarra.

Noel points to a White-cedar tree (*Melia composite*) which he says has very soft, spongy wood. The heart-wood is very often dead and decayed, with the sap-wood and bark holding tree together, making it quite dangerous to be near in a strong wind. It has a pleasant-scented lilac blossom. Morinda (*Morinda citrifolia*) is another beach loving tree, with large, extremely shiny green leaves, and a clear compound fruit which can be eaten if you can get past the smell of rancid cheese. The immature fruit when steamed make a good poultice. Noted particularly for its dye qualities, Morinda was once used for dyeing the yellow in Batik sarongs. The wood is bright saffron yellow, the dye taken from both the wood and bark.

The Cockatoo-apple (*Planchonia careya*) is one of the many edible fruit bearing species. It has a rounded dark-green leaf and pinkish-white blossoms which appear only during the night hours. By early morning they have already dropped. The Barringtonia flowers mentioned earlier, also have a habit of dropping in early morning after a show during the dark hours. The north Queensland bluebell is another food plant, of which one eats the blossom, not the purple berries or the seeds.



View of Bedarra from Toolghar, seen through limbs of Moreton Bay ash eucalypt.

Noel leads the way now through the coconut palm grove to his garden by the house. A giant Coral tree (*Erythrina variegata*), known to the Aborigines as 'bingum', dominates the seaward edge of the garden behind the coconut palms. It was planted there as a cutting by Noel about twenty-five years ago. Two or three big Calophyllum trees (*Calophyllum inophyllum*) with their wild-fig-like leaves and white flowers, are also prominent near the Coral tree. The Calophyllum, says Noel, is known throughout Polynesia as the Tamanu tree. The writer Robert Dean Frisbie described how he tied himself and his children to the massive branches of a Tamanu tree on Suvarov Atoll in the northern Cook Islands during a cyclone which sent huge seas crashing right across the low-lying isle.

Walking under the big introduced breadfruit tree which had grown to well over sixty feet high before Noel topped it, we now climb the pathway above Noel's garden. The friable beach soil is left behind as we enter a region of poorer, gravelly hillside country bearing a more open forest of Bloodwood (*Eucalyptus intermedia*), Moreton Bay ash (*E. tessellaris*), Black wattle, and Swamp mahogany (*Tristania suaveolens*). The latter, Noel comments, belies its name, for it never seems to grow in swamps, but on hillsides. Smaller plants here are the native coffee, more beach hibiscus, and wild ginger clumps (*Alpinia caerulea*), in this rather wind-blown, exposed side of the Island along the pathway toward the spring.

We note a fairly rare species, a small shrub-like tree, usually found growing in the full blast of the sou'easters, balanced among the granite boulders – the Scarlet wedge-apple (*Ochrosia elliptica*). There were only two on the Isle when Noel first arrived, but he has since planted others all over the place because of their handsome appearance – small creamy-white flowers and bright scarlet fruits in pairs of triplets on a single stem. The Aborigines classified the fruit as poisonous. Another plant found growing under similar harsh conditions, is the Derris creeper (*Derris trifoliata*), sprawled over the rocks in the glaring sun. It has a white pea-blossom and very dark-green shiny leaves which were used by the Aborigines as 'wild dynamite', a fish poison. The Derris leaves, known to them as 'Pagarra', were crushed and thrown onto the surface of a pond to stun the fish for easy catching.

Kerosene grass (*Aristida*) with its sharp cutting edge, grows everywhere along the pathway edges and in the bush. Its seeds were used by the blacks for fire-lighting. Noel recalled seeing Aborigines light fires with a pencil of hardwood rubbed into a base hole of dry, soft beach hibiscus until it smouldered, then adding these seeds.

At the spring now, we pass through Noel's taro path growing in the moist gully, and on beyond his second garden and fruit plantation, to the slopes above.

Noel heads off into the jungle toward the high centre of the Isle. We are still on the weather side of the Island, and the growth is not yet particularly lush. The largest trees to be seen here, are the swamp mahogany, with bottle-brush orchids (*Dendrobium smillieae*) growing on their trunks. We negotiate a large sloping rock (which can be quite slippery in wet weather) with the aid of a natural hand-rail; the slim trunk of an Alexandra palm (*Archontophoenix alexandrae*) growing almost parallel to the rock for some distance before curving upward for the last metre or two under its crown of leaves. We crawl under and over several fallen tree trunks and enter a valley in the rainforest proper, sheltered from coastal winds. The going suddenly becomes much easier, with no underbrush here below the dense overhead canopy which restricts the amount of sunlight reaching the alley floor. Even the fallen leaves here have been raked by the jungle fowl (*megapode*) into large incubation mounds, making for a very pleasant walk.

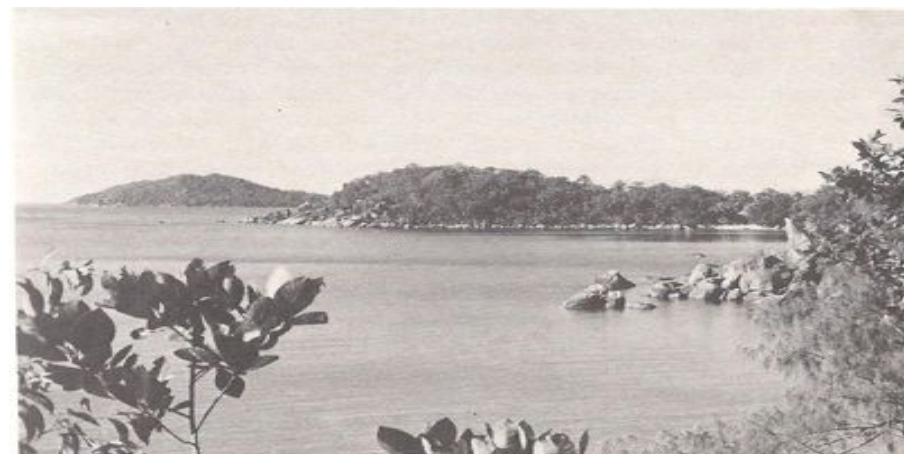
Soon, we divert around the perimeter of a very dense, impenetrable pocket of Lawyer vine (*Calamus australis*), a veritable curtain of hairy cane and barbarous tentacles armed with rows of hard, sharp, incurved hooks. Above the lawyer cane barrier we reach a point higher in the valley, but still under the dense rainforest canopy. Fern of God (*Lygodium*), a graceful climbing fern, winds its way up the Alexandra palm trunks. Another climber, less objectionable than the lawyer cane, is the climbing bamboo (*Fragellaria indica*), with its long smooth strands dangling aloft with the aid of leaf hooks from what-ever support it can find after snaking its way across the jungle floor.

A large Strangler fig (*Ficus destruens*), Banfield's 'stealthy murderer', is seen throttling the last vestige of life from an enormous old swamp mahogany. The strangler fig is spread birds which eat its purple fruit and wipe the seeds off their beak on to a tree trunk. The seed sticks and germinates to send roots down the bark of its host to the ground. Where these roots touch each other on the trunk, they coalesce, eventually enmeshing the tree in a lacy network of insidiously growing, strangling strength, with its own leaves reaching the sunlight above its victim.

Now we reach the 'potted palms' so called by Noel – two Alexandra palms which have taken root between the high fluted buttress roots of what could be an Antarctic beech. The Alexandra palms have grown parallel to the beech tree trunk, and appear as though contained in an natural pot at the base where one of the flutes has curled around to almost meet another buttress. A few metres farther on is a very old, but perfectly healthy, Fan palm (*Licuala ramsayi*), only three metres high, which Noel says for some reason has never moved in growth since he first saw it 45 years ago.

Soon we are on the high spine of the Island where the path between the Hideaway resort and the Plantation resort passes. We cross the path and descend steeply down a crater-like face, still under the rainforest, avoiding more dense stands of lawyer vine, and passing now among many different trees. The big grey-barked, large-leaved, gin-gee tree (*Deplanchea tetraphylla*) which in September bears sunflower-like, pear-shaped florets, would, Noel suggests, be best observed from a helicopter above the canopy. Another new tree is the Milkwood (*Alstonia scholaris*), those here being among the tallest on the Island. There is a Pinda tree with fluted buttress and wood very hard and heavy, which was used in times past for bullock yokes. The tall, symmetrical Quandong trees (*Elaeocarpus*), unlike the southern red-fruited Quandong of the mallee scrubs, have bright blue fruit and hands of scarlet leaves. The Eugenia cormiflora tree must surely be, says Noel, the most spectacular of all the rainforest trees. It is distinguished by a blackish trunk covered with wens, which in season are smothered with fluffy white blossoms giving the dark trunk the appearance of being lit up. After the blossoms wither and fall, the fruit is a large white apple which, though edible, is rather insipid and tasteless.

Climbing further down the crater wall we come upon a valley laced with small streams flowing through lawyer cane jungle – the Hidden Valley. The streams here are tenanted by freshwater crayfish, shrimps, small eels, and introduced tortoise.



Looking towards Plantation resort on Bedarra, from Noel Wood's spring. Toolghar Island on the left.

On a flat area by one of the streams we find some old bloodwood stumps and their felled trunks which were cut by Captain Henry Allason in 1913. He intended to make a garden here, but after he was called up in 1914, the land quickly reverted to jungle. The bloodwood, however, being virtually indestructible, still seems as good as the day it was felled.

Below the spring-fed streams is a dam built for the Plantation settlement, then below that again, on a rocky cliff top, the remains of an old Aboriginal kitchen midden, with conus shells and other debris. Noel has found a few artifacts here; also he says, an interesting creeping orchid which has a very pleasing blossom with an extremely short stalk. The orchid seems to be unique to this part of the Island, for it has not been seen elsewhere.

And so we have crossed Bedarra from east to west, to the mainland-facing side of the Island. Had we walked from Noel's northern (Coomool) beach instead, we would have begun with the mangrove, which Banfield called the 'conquering tree' because of its marvellous ability to wrest land from the ever-invading ocean, to support a primitive, teeming life in its muddy swamps. The large, spindle-shaped seed pods, after dropping into the water already germinated, float perpendicularly, with the spiky end (containing embryo leaves) uppermost, and the slightly heavier end beneath, ready to strike roots at the very first opportunity of touching mud.

Again, had we begun our journey at Coomool Bay, we would also have seen the lovely paperbark trees (*Melaleuca leucadendron*), known as 'teedoo' to the Aborigines. The beautiful white-layered bark is nature's multi-ply tissue paper, fine and soft straight from the tree. The paperbark tree inspired Banfield's essay on 'tree grog'. The pale yellow blossoms which appear twice a year, have an odour of burnt treacle, or of a sugar distillery, attracting birds and insects to gorge themselves on the syrupy nectar, sometimes to a state of inebriation. A blustering Spangled drongo under the influence once attacked the Beachcomber as he strolled beneath a melaleuca grove.

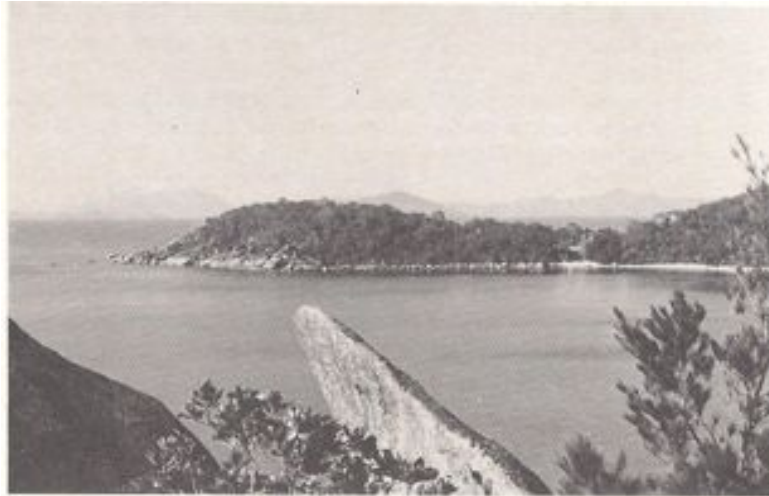
And if the forest provides tree grog, it can also, says Banfield, supply 'green ant cordial', the Aboriginal 'bookgruin'. The lively little green ant makes a nest of living tree leaves ingeniously cemented together into a ball hanging among the branches. A ferocious fighter, the jumpy green ant is capable of inflicting a painful bite to the unwary passer-by who brushes against the leaves in the near vicinity of his abode. You will not win your green ant cordial easily. The protecting warriors must be smoked out of their nest so that the raider may get at the white larvae and the adult ants with distended abdomens. The victims are macerated in water to make a pungent drink

If we had traversed other islands in the Family group, especially Dunk itself, the variety of flora would have been more extensive. Individual islands do harbour a few different species to the exclusion of others. The little island of Timana for instance, is noted for its gigantic Milkwood trees rising above the other vegetation. Some of the smaller, far-flung isles of the group have a more open, scrubby appearance, on the weatherside particularly, with dwarf forms of casuarina among the wattle and other shorter, wind-blown trees.

Banfield makes much of his beloved rainforest, with detailed descriptions of form, habit, and hospitality or otherwise to man or bird. There is his 'Upas tree' for instance, *Pisonia umbellifera*, known to the Aborigines as 'ahmmoo', but which Noel Wood says is not found in the islands themselves, only on the mainland. Upas is a Javanese tree yielding a milky sap used as arrow poison, and the tree was held in local native lore to be fatal to whatever came beneath its branches. The tall, glossy-leafed ahmmoo tree produces extremely sticky seed capsules which exude a viscid substance. An unwary bird brushing against such a seed, finds the evil object immediately stuck to its feathers. A wing may become immobilized, stuck to its side, and the bird falls to the ground where hundreds more sticky seeds lie, and where it becomes encased in a hideous death mantle. Even the powerfully-winged Torres Strait pigeon can fall prey to the ahmmoo tree. Spiders, flies, beetles, moths, bees and many other insects lie entombed in the trap beneath the tree. Dogs too, have been caused real distress after such an encounter, with seeds clinging to nose, mouth, head and body, during a vain attempt to rub them off.

A delightful Aboriginal story tells of the genesis of the boomerang. A favourite game among the piccaninnies of the tribes was the throwing of the sickle-shaped leaves or phyllodes of *Acacia holcocarpa*. The laughing youngsters had discovered that when thrown in a certain way, the leaves would return to them. One day, a canny boy keen to have a bigger 'returning leaf' borrowed his father's stone axe and shell knife to carve from a bent tree branch a wooden leaf. This, he discovered, returned even better than the tree leaves, and also could be thrown much further and faster. When the boy became a young man learning to hunt with the warriors, he remembered his carved 'leaf'. He found his old toy to be a very good throwing-stick, one which always came back if it missed bird or beast. He made an even bigger version of the returning stick, and so the boomerang joined the primitive arsenal of spears, waddies and nulla-nullas.

Many trees were a source of food for the Aborigines who had learned the secrets of making the often unpleasant and even poisonous fruits edible. The heart of the Alexandra palm was called by them, 'koobin-karra'; the core of the tree-fern,



From Willis' Leap lookout on Bedarra



Dunk Island and Kumboola from Bedarra

The Plants

'kalojoo'; the beans of the white mangrove 'kummooroo'; Herbert River cherry 'topkie'; finger-cherry 'poolboonong'; wild raspberry 'panga-panga'; cockatoo-apple 'raroo'; and wild banana (*Musa banksia*) 'boogaroo'; which as Banfield's black boys said was 'close up all bone'. The tough nuts of the Fiji almond (*Terminalia*) were called 'moojee'; the kernels of Pandanus (*aquaticus*) 'cankee'; the orange custard scraped from the outside of the drupes of Pandanus odoratissimus 'pimnar'; the seeds of the blue flower of native ginger 'coolpun'; and the brown, hot and spicy wild strawberry of the Leichhardt-tree (*nauclea orientalis*) 'Koobadgaroo'. There were also many kinds of wild fig, and 'date' bearing tree palms. The Moreton Bay chestnut (*Castanos-permum australe*) known as 'tinda-burra', bears large beans which develop from pea-shaped flowers strong in nectar, and are in their raw state quite deadly poisonous. On Dunk Island, the Aborigines firstly cooked the beans in a stone oven, then scraped them into shavings which were immersed in running water for two or three days, by which time the tapioca-like food was ready to eat.. The poison element, saponin, is very soluble in water.

Banfield notes that among this extraordinary range of fruits and nuts produced by the bounteous jungle, so very few can be classified as pleasant tasting or even truly edible. Most are bitter, acrid apologies or food, even after treatment. The Beachcomber poses the question, "why"? Why, among all this profuseness of nature, is there so little food fit for ready use by man? The birds and animals are more than adequately catered for, but in this Garden of Eden, man, the intelligent, must use his wits before partaking. Perhaps, suggests Banfield, we have here a natural garden merely awaiting the skills of some horticultural genius – for, when one considers the unpromising origin of the modern apple, there must be similar latent promise lurking under the skin of many a crude jungle fruit.

The Beachcomber has raised an important point. Surely this is one of the soundest arguments for present day conservation – to leave as much as possible of the earth's forests in their natural virgin state, as pristine wilderness, so that future generations of mankind will have a full array of vegetative material to draw upon and experiment with, in a starving world. And apart from food, there may be plants of medicinal and other value yet undiscovered. Every time a forest is felled, who knows what untold gems may be exterminated forever.



The Family Islands are among the few recorded nesting places of the tiny Grey swiflet (*Collocalia terraereginae*), although other breeding sites on the mainland have recently been discovered. The first breeding cave found in Australia was on Dunk Island in 1908. Banfield found a fragment of a nest adhering to the roof of a cave high in the interior of the Island, and submitted it to an ornithologist of the time, A. J. Campbell of Melbourne, who identified it.

The bird itself had been identified many years earlier by the naturalist John Macgillivray during his voyage on HMS Rattlesnake in 1848 with Captain Owen Stanley. Macgillivray described it as “a swallow which Mr Gould informs me is also an Indian species.” But it seems Banfield was unsure of its identity during his earlier years on Dunk Island, for he omitted it from his original ‘Census of Birds’ published in early editions of *The Confessions* and included here at the end of this chapter. Only in his later publications, *My Tropic Isle* and last leaves from Dunk Island, did he write of swifts and swiftlets. As soon as Banfield confirmed the identity of the builder of the nest, he went straight to another swiflet colony close to the water’s edge on the eastern shoreline of Dunk, where he had frequently seen the birds darting among the granite rocks. Sure enough, a search revealed numbers of the same nests in a sheltered cavern there, the owners in full occupation with eggs in their nests. Other caves have since been discovered on Bedarra and Toolhar.

Anyone entering a swiflet cave for the first time, could be forgiven for mistaking the small dark shapes flitting around him, for bats. Only 110mm long, the Grey swiflet has dark, blackish-brown body and wing feathers, with a much paler grey, almost white, band across its rump. The dark tail is forked, and the underparts grey-brown. It has deep-set eyes and a short black bill with very wide gape for taking in insects on the wing. Within its cave, the swiflet emits sharp clicking sounds which are thought to be used for echo-location in the dark gloom. Out in the open the birds

utter a shrill cheep as they whirl and dive dexterously after insects. They are tireless flyers. Most of their lives are spent in the air where, with their long wing-span they are in complete control. Like their near relative, the larger Spine-tailed swift, they are fast flyers – the jet-planes of the bird world. But they are relatively helpless on foot. When resting in the cave they cling to the rock vertically with their tiny claws. Their legs are very short and weak, making it difficult for them to take off from a flat surface. Normally, if stranded on the ground, they climb awkwardly up a rock or tree trunk for a short way to gain height for a take-off, but they have been seen to rise from clean, level sand, presumably by the impact of both wings against the sand. They never roost in trees, and their only refuge of rest is the cave.

A typical cave may contain a hundred or more small, half-round cupped nests cemented to a backward sloping rock face. Such ‘caves’ are usually only an indiscriminate pile of huge granite boulders tumbled upon one another haphazardly to form a large enclosure vented at various points by gaps between rocks hidden by overhanging foliage. The nest, so small that it contains merely one pearly-white egg, is constructed of fine grass, moss and feathers congealed with the bird’s own saliva. Swift and swiflet nests in Asia are deemed to be edible. Chinese fables maintain that the swift catches small delicately flavoured fish which it exposes on the rocks to become desiccated before being incorporated into their saliva-vegetable matter nests. However, the birds are known to exist only on insects taken in flight.

The grey swiflet begins breeding in the Family Islands about September, and may rear three or four young, one at a time, until February, when the caves are abandoned. Although swifts are migratory to Australia, coming here only from September to April after their breeding sojourn in northern Asia, the grey swiflet is seen on occasions right through the year. Little is known of their migratory habits and it is thought they disperse nomadically over northeastern Australia during the winter months.

The most characteristic bird sound in the islands would undoubtedly be the loud cackle of the Jungle fowl (*Megapodius Freycinet*), heard both during the day and through the night. Known as ‘Keerowan’ to the Aboriginal, the ground-dwelling megapode (large-footed one) builds huge nesting mounds of rotting leaves in the jungle, where its large eggs are hatched by heat of decomposition. A megapode hen, slightly smaller than a domestic hen, lays eggs three times larger than those we eat for breakfast. Presumably this is because the chick must be fully developed at hatching, with feathers and all, in order to scratch its way to the surface of the mound, and even to fly if disturbed, within an hour of birth. Adult birds fly more often than is generally realised, and they perch quite high in the trees. They are capable of flying the distance (three or four miles) from the islands to the mainland on rare occasions.

The bird is quite plain, unlike its relative, the bright-red-headed Brush turkey, also found on some islands. The Jungle fowl has a dark-brown colouring, with somewhat lighter grey neck and underparts, and a short brown crest on its head. The large legs are orange, as is the bill.

The tiny Yellow-breasted sunbird (*Nectarinia jugularis*), Australia's humming-bird, is smaller than many of the flowers it feasts upon. Bright yellow underparts are seen in both male and female, with long curved bill and olive-green back. The male is distinguished by his glossy, dark-blue breast. "Sired by a sunbeam, born of a flower, gaiety its badge," says Banfield of this delightful little island denizen. And as one of the smallest jungle dwellers, it builds the best home of all – best, that is, in the eyes of a human, for it is completely enclosed save for a small side entrance, and that covered by a hooded, sloping verandah. Made from frayed bark strips, dead leaves, grass, spider-webs and caterpillar droppings, the long spindle-shaped nest is hung on a thread from jungle tree or house verandah rafter, swinging in the breeze like a piece of flaking bark or windblown rubbish. Such construction is ideal camouflage in the forest, but when built near human habitation, stands out like dirty washing on the line. Snugly lined inside with down and feathers, it is an ideal home, difficult of access to the tree snakes, and hiding the colourful feathers of a sitting bird from other predators.

During my three month residence at Scott's corner of Bedarra some years ago, I watched a pair of sunbirds build their nest under the front verandah within three metres of the main doorway. The nest swung in the cool breeze to one side of my view out over green lawn, white beach, and blue sea to Noel Wood's Doorila Beach on the opposite corner of the Isle. Mrs Sunbird laid two eggs, sat on them and eventually fed two youngsters – aided somewhat belatedly by her husband who must have suddenly realised he was a father with responsibilities – undeterred by my constant comings and goings out of that doorway. I saw both young fly the nest, all with a few weeks.

During that same stay on Bedarra, while I was busy at my typewriter, the remarkably loud notes of the Mangrove warbler (*Gerygone levigaster*), the Queensland canary, entertained me daily. It could have been a small boy whistling up and down the scales – the warbler's notes are incredibly loud for a bird so small. About the same size as the sunbird, but plainer, with grey-brown body and white eyebrow, the warbler builds a similar dangling, enclosed nest. Noel Wood says that some of his visitors have thought it to be a double sunbird's nest, with two porches and entrances, but it is in fact the mangrove warbler's – a shabbier, bigger (because of the two compartments) version of the much more elegant sunbird's nest, with a separate little room at the back for the male, and the main nesting chamber for the

Strangely, Banfield does not mention the warbler at all. It is missing from his Census and from later volumes – perhaps because of his note about ignoring some species "as to the identity of which doubt exists in the mind of the compiler ...". Another anomaly, unusual for an observer as keen and accurate as Banfield, was his reference to the Manucode as the 'Calloo-calloo' of the blacks, in *The Confessions*, whereas in *My Tropic Isle* published three years later in 1911, he ascribes the name 'Calloo-Calloo' to the Koel cuckoo, a very similar-looking bird. Both have glossy black-blue-green plumage, red eyes and prominent bill, though the Koel is somewhat larger (400mm) and much more common than the Manucode which is known as the Australian Bird of Paradise. Both migrate from the north to breed, but the range of the Koel is further south than that of the manucode which is mainly restricted to Cape York Peninsula. It seems that in this, Banfield made a genuine mistake. However, as an expert at the Australian Museum once told him (after Banfield had sent a marine specimen with tentative, but incorrect, identification), "I don't dare to laugh at anybody's misidentifications; I make so many myself." Banfield said later, "There speaks the knowledgeable man – the one who knows so much that he realises how little he knows."

The 'Calloo-calloo' or Koel (*Eudynamis scolopacea*), known also as the 'cooee-bird', is one of Banfield's 'red-letter birds' of the calendar – i.e. birds signifying or presaging certain events of the year. To the blacks its arrival in September was a welcome one, for it was supposed to bring the bean tree (a food source) into blossom. Its loud, shrieking 'cooee' call was also an indicator to the Aborigines of the presence of a fat python or carpet snake in the tree tops. The Calloo-calloo was held in high esteem and it was taboo to kill one. Banfield cites the instance of a fighting Koel and falcon lock in 'death holds' on the ground, so preoccupied in their engagement, that both birds were easily captured by the blacks. The birds were separated, the falcon taken away to be cooked by the gins, the dazed Calloo-calloo to be petted until it revived enough to fly away with a grateful 'Cooee'. "B'mbi that fella look out snake belong me fella!" explained its saviour.

The metallic starling (*Aplonis metallica*), greatly interested Banfield. It was one of his 'Socialistic Birds' as was also the Nutmeg pigeon. The Metallic starling of 'eyes aflame', known as 'Teealgon' by the blacks, is a lively colonizer of certain large trees. Banfield also referred to it as 'Shining calornis' but scientific names change with time. Glossy black plumage with a greenish sheen and iridescent purple on the crown, long spiky tail, and bright ruby-red eyes staring out of its dark head, make for 'eyes aflame' indeed. Not to be confused with the Spangled drongo which is also dark with reddish eyes, but is slightly larger and more crow-like with a pronounced curling forked tail, the native starling congregates by the hundreds in a chosen nesting

tree, to build their untidy looking, massive globular nests with side entrance, and gorge upon the fruits of the jungle or of human habitation. Up to 200 nests may be built in a tree such as the Moreton Bay ash, with the consequent debris of fallen nests and young, broken eggs, and excreted fruit seeds piling upon the beneath. A tree snake among the branches causes real havoc. Banfield likened the iridescent sheen of the bird's feathers, to that of a glistening soap-bubble, and we could say its nature too, is about as bubbly. Always those flaming eyes draw attention as it hustles about noisily, with never a moment's rest.

In the year 1908 Banfield became so absorbed in the activities of the metallic starling, that he wrote a detailed daily diary of their doings in a Moreton Bay ash tree within view of his verandah. From August 2nd, their first arrival, through November, December, to January 1909, when persistent heavy wet season rain finally drove them off, he recorded numbers of nests, the mood of the colony, family squabbles, flirtations, love-making, feeding of young, bed-time preliminaries, morning fuss, reactions to the weather, and eventual destruction of the nests and final abandonment of the whole thing – this incredible experiment in social living – until the next year. The Beachcomber's predilection for the bird of the flaming eyes, extended to his adopting a fledgling metallic starling one year. On 4th February during a wet season storm, several nests fell, killing fledglings all save two, one of which died soon after rescue. The surviving bird took over the Banfield bungalow for two months as it gorged on oatmeal porridge and milk, rice, mango, papaw, bread, cake, march flies and other insects innumerable – as much food, estimated Banfield, as a human infant might consume. Finally one day out in the garden the ungrateful orphan happened to see a flock of its own kind overhead and, with a sudden shriek it followed the mob, never to return.

The Spangled drongo (*Dicrurus hottentottus*), also called the fish-tail, has, as mentioned above, bluey-black spangled feathers similar to the Metallic starling, but the Drongo is larger (300mm) and has a heavier, crow-like bill. And by nature, the drongo is a very different character. Banfield branded him a bully, swaggerer, and swashbuckler. Since Banfield's time, ornithologists have noted that the Drongo moves further south in winter, quite the reverse of most migratory birds – a thing which some say only a 'drongo' (Australian slang for 'fool') would do. The Drongo gives instant warning of the presence of falcons and hawks with his shrill shriek, and often performs spectacular aerobatics and long dives. As mentioned in the previous chapter, a Spangled drongo once attacked the Beachcomber as he strolled beneath a blossoming melaleuca tree, the bird having imbibed too much of the intoxicating nectar. A cheeky Drongo also flew at Noel Wood in the forest on his way back from Toranna corner one day, the bird misjudging its swoop and becoming stuck inside

Noel's open shirt. Noel says they sometimes make the cat-bird noise.

A bird I invariably associate with the islands is the hammer-bird, or Large-tailed nightjar (*Caprimulgus macrurus*). It is heard rather than seen. Soon after dusk it begins its loud "chop-chop-chop," call, continuing unending through the night hours. A moderate-sized (250mm) grey-brown bird streaked with black and buff, with a white collar and a somewhat owl-like looking bill with whiskery side feathers, the hammer-bird roosts close to the ground in dense cover during the day. It feeds at night on the wing, flitting about after insects. As if it were some vagrant of the bird world, it does not build a home, merely laying its eggs on the ground amongst the leaves and rearing the young there. More respectable perhaps than that truly lazy vagrant, the cuckoo, which does not even raise its own.

The beautiful Noisy pitta (*Pitta versicolour*), has more colours of the spectrum in its plumage than even the Rainbow bird. But the pitta is much shyer, a dweller of the rainforest floor. One is aware mostly of its voice, a bright, cheery whistle of three or four interrogative-like notes, which to Banfield was the "Sleepers wake" call of early morn. A similar "goodnight" whistle is given at dusk. With chestnut crown, black head, green back, blue shoulders, tan breast, and bright red lower belly, it is a pity the thrush-like Pitta does not show itself more often. Noel Wood is fortunate enough to be regularly visited by a 'pet' pitta, which forages about his open, quiet house and likes to look at itself in the mirror resting on the kitchen bench. The Pitta's favourite food is snails whose shells it cracks open by repeated taps against a convenient rock anvil in the forest, the anvil often worn smooth by repeated use. The Aborigines called the bird 'Wungobah'.

The Rufous-backed sea-eagle (*Haliastur indus*) deserves a name more regal than the strange new one allotted him in bird books- Brahminy kite. He is every bit as lordly in demeanour as his cousin, the White-breasted sea-eagle, and a more imposing figure than his close friend, the Osprey. His beautiful, rich chestnut back and wings, crowned with head and neck of pure white, his typical sharply-hooked eagle's beak, and strong talons, brand him as a most handsome hunter of the skies. Banfield called him the White-headed sea-eagle and insisted that he was a friend to all the little birds. Of "stately face and magnanimous minde," as he said. The bird is essentially a fisher, but on occasions when rough weather conditions prevent detection of his prey through murky water, the rufous-backed sea-eagle will go inland and hunt tree snakes, the enemies of the little birds. Thus their veneration for him. Whereas the mere presence of a falcon or goshawk, deadly foes to anything smaller than themselves, creates absolute terror among the birds, rufous-back can glide overhead and be totally ignored. Banfield describes the instance of a Moreton Bay ash tree 'policed' by a

nesting pair of rufous-backed sea-eagles. In the same tree nested a pair of sulphur-crested cockatoos, and five hundred strong colony of rowdy metallic starlings. Unfortunately, blacks climbed the tree one day to steal the eagle's eggs, and soon afterwards the tree was abandoned by all birds. Banfield asked himself, why? Such a large colony of starlings, he reasoned, is a great attraction to the tree snake, but while rufous-back was present, those pests, if unwise enough to venture among the birds, were quickly despatched. Without the policemen, the snakes took control and frightened off the population at large. The quiet well-mannered rufous-backed sea-eagle was once seen to have a fish snatched from his talons by a sneaking falcon flashing out from the trees in full view of the Beachcomber. Noel Wood also testifies to the sea-eagle's friendliness to other birds. He has noticed that the eagle's nest on Peerahmah Rock is often surrounded by the nests and eggs of terns and reef herons.

The butcher-bird, says Noel, is not found on Dunk Island, nor on Bedarra, but strangely enough, they are native to little Timana Island, where their cheery whistle is often heard. On a trip to the mainland one day, Noel said he was amazed to see hundreds of pelicans lining the sandbanks. It seems that only on rare occasions does the pelican visit the area in any numbers.

I was surprised one evening at Noel's place, to hear the mournful wail of a Bush curlew, the 'Weeloo' of the Aboriginal, and well known on Magnetic Island further south. The Beach stone curlew, Banfield's Long-billed stone-plover, is also found in the islands together with the extremely long-billed Eastern curlew, which in September migrates to Australia from Siberia, returning in March for the northern summer.

The Reef heron (*Egretta sacra*), called the Blue reef heron by Banfield, is actually a white-feathered bird in the tropics, though it is the same species as the dark blue form found along southern shores. Herons breed in the islands as early as July and continue through spring, summer and autumn. Their rough twig nests are often found on rock ledges of the smaller isles and rocks.

A number of terns are seen around the islands, from the smallest Australian tern, the Little tern, to the larger Black-naped tern. Other sea birds are the Common noddy of dark brown body plumage and white crown, and the black feathered White-capped noddy. Bitterns, cormorants, darters, gannets, and the frigate-bird all frequent the beaches.

The beautiful white Torres Strait pigeons (*Ducula spilorrhoa*), once nested in their thousands along the Great Barrier Reef islands, but today are very much reduced in numbers. The Aborigines in times past were able to venture out to the island breeding colonies and return with their canoes laden with fledglings and eggs which



A sea-eagle's nest on Budgee Island

were regarded as a food reserved only for older men and women. In spite of such slaughter by the natives, the numbers of Torres Strait pigeons did not begin to decrease until the white man arrived with his shot-gun and axe – the gun to hunt a bird which Banfield maintained was of inferior meat quality, dark and earthy of taste – the axe to fell vast areas of rainforest on the adjoining mainland, the prime food source (fruit trees) for the pigeon. Their habit is to feed on the mainland during the day and return to their island colonies at dusk. In spite of the name Nutmeg pigeon and the old theory that the fruit of the nutmeg tree was swallowed whole by the bird and the hard indigestible nut excreted while in flight, thus being the main agent in the spread of the tree, Banfield noted that in fact the birds ate far more of other species of fruit than the nutmeg, including Quandong, native cabbage, Burdekin plum, and the seeds of the lawyer vine. Black wing-tips and tail enhance the appearance of the handsome white bird, which nowadays is limited to flocks of only a few dozen birds among the Family Islands. Even in Banfield's time, numbers had sadly diminished, and he made a plea for sanctuaries along the coast. People argued that the extermination of such a

Bird, still breeding in thousands in certain areas, was impossible. Yet Banfield stressed the then current instance of the extinction of the passenger pigeon of North America. Largely due to Banfield's urgings, the Family Islands were eventually declared a National Park. But Noel Wood has become very worried about the pigeons – he used to see flocks of two hundred or more flying overhead in the evenings on their way back to the Brook Islands, after feeding on the mainland during the day, but whether the flyway has changed (which seems unlikely) or their numbers have been reduced still further, he has seen very few birds indeed over the past couple of years.

In 1921 when Banfield penned the pages of Last Leaves from Dunk Island, he sadly noted a great depletion in the numbers of different birds listed in the original 'Census' of his first book. Missing birds included the sparrow-hawk, kestrel, black-shouldered kite, black-cheeked falcon, yellow oriole, yellow-bellied fig-bird, black-backed magpie, striated pardalote ((black-headed diamond-bird), helmeted friar-bird, silver-eye, blue, pied, shining, white-eared, and spectacled flycatchers, purple-breasted and white-headed pigeons, pied oyster-catcher, masked plover, plumed egret, and the crested, sooty and bridled terns. Of the other species still present, numbers were reduced in most cases.

Noel Wood has noticed fluctuations in bird numbers over the years. For instance, swiftlets seem to have increased in the 1980 breeding season, following a lean year in 1979. In fact, during a stay with Noel in October 1980, while eating dinner we were interrupted by a couple of swiftlets flying about inside the dimly lit house, which, quite insultingly, commented Noel, they seemed to regard as some dark cave. The birds seemed to be looking for a new place to colonize, with their scolding, clicking sounds of an almost indignant tone, at finding two humans in occupation. One bird actually struck Noel's face with its wing-tip as he stood at the fridge – "an extraordinary thing," said Noel, "because a swiftlet would never hit anything accidentally, even in the darkest cave, where they will always quite deftly avoid you."

It is to be hoped that a more enlightened attitude to wildlife, and the expansion of National Park and Wilderness areas on the mainland, will restore the numbers of feathered inhabitants to a level, if not quite that which coexisted with the black man for thousands of years before the white-skinned invader arrived, at least sufficient to ensure survival of all species remaining.

E. J. Banfield's Census of birds seen on Dunk Island, 1897 – 1923

Author's note: I have used modern terminology. Banfield's names, were different, are indicated in brackets. There were one or two puzzling omissions in the original Census published in 1908, which are included here (numbered asterisks) for the sake of a complete check-list, with explanations in the foot-notes below. Birds marked with a cross (X) were noted as missing by Banfield in 1921.

Avocet,	Red-necked
Bittern,	Black (Yellow-necked mangrove bittern)
Brolga	(Native companion)
Chough,	White-Winged
Cicada bird	(Jardine Caterpillar-eater)
Cockatoo,	Glossy Black
	Sulphur-crested (White)
Cormorant,	Little Pied
Cuckoo,	Channel-Billed
	Golden Bronze (Bronze)
Cuckoo-shrike,	Black-Faced (Little)
	White-Bellied (Varied graucalus)
	Yellow-Eyed (Barred)
Curlew,	Beach (Long-billed Stone-Plover)
	Bush (Stone-Plover)
	Eastern
Currawong,	Pied (Crew-Shrike)
Darter	
Dollar-bird	
Dotterel,	Black-fronted
	Red-capped
Dove,	Bar-shouldered
	Emerald (Little Green Pigeon)
	(Ground) ?
	Peaceful (Little)

	Drongo	
	Duck,	Black
		Grey Teal
	Eagle,	Rufous-backed sea- (White-headed sea-)
		Wedge-tailed
X	Egret,	White-breasted sea- (White-bellied sea-)
		Plumed
		White
	Falcon,	Black
		Grey
X		Peregrine (Black-cheeked)
	Fantail,	Black and white
		Northern
		Rufous
X	Figbird,	(Yellow-bellied)
	Flycatcher,	Black-faced
X		(Blue) ?
		Leaden
X		Pied
X		Shining
X		Spectacled
X		White-eared
	Friar-Bird,	Noisy
X		Helmeted
	Frigate-bird,	Lesser
	Gannet,	Brown (Booby)
		Masked
		Red-legged
	Godwit,	Bar-tailed (Barred rumped)
	Goshawk,	Brown (Australian)
		White
	Grassbird,	Tawny
	Grebe,	Little (Black-throated)
	Greenshank	
X	Hawk,	Collared (Sparrow-hawk)
	Heron,	Mangrove (Little mangrove bittern)
		Reef (Blue)
		White-faced (White-fronted)
	Honeyeater,	Dusky

		Mangrove (Fasciated)
		Varied
		Yellow-tinted
	Ibis,	Straw-necked
		White
X	Kestrel,	Nankeen
	Kingfisher,	Forest (Blue)
		Little
		Mangrove
		Sacred
	Kite,	Black
X		Black-shouldered
	Koel,	Indian (Koel Cuckoo)
	Kookaburra,	Blue-winged (Leach kingfisher)
	Lorikeet,	Red-collared
	Magpie Lark	
*1	Manucode,	Trumpet
	Mistletoe bird,	(Flower-pecker)
	Nightjar,	Long-tailed
	Noddy,	Common
		White-capped
X	Oriole,	Yellow
	Osprey	(Fish-hawk)
	Owl,	Boobook
		Lurid
		Rufous
X	Oystercatcher,	Pied
		Sooty (Black)
X	Pardalote,	Striated (Black-headed Diamond-bird)
	Parrot,	Red-winged (Lory)
	Pelican,	Australian
	Pheasant-coucal	
	Pigeon,	(Allied)
		Pheasant-tailed
		Purple-crowned
		Red-capped (Rose-crowned)
		Torres Strait (Nutmeg)
		White-headed
X		Wompoo (Purple-breasted)

X	Pitta,	Noisy
	Plover,	Masked
	Quail,	Brown
		Little button (Little)
	Rail,	Buff-banded (Pectoral)
	Rainbow-Bird,	(Bee-eater)
	Sandpiper,	Common
	Scrub Fowl	(Megapode)
	Shrike-Thrush,	Grey (Brown)
	Silvereye	(Yellow white-eye)
X	Snipe,	Japanese
	Starling,	Metallic (Shining calornis)
	Sunbird,	Yellow-breasted
	Swallow,	Welcome
		Barn (Eastern?)
*2	Swamphen	(Bald coot)
*3	Swiftlet,	Grey
	Tern,	Black-naped
		Bridled (Brown-winged)
		Crested
		Little (White-shafted Ternlet)
*4		Sooty
	Triller,	Varied (Pied Caterpillar-eater)
	Turnstone	
	Warbler,	Mangrove
	Whimbrel	
	Whistler,	Rufous (Rufous-breasted Thickhead)
	Wood-Swallow,	White-breasted (White-rumped)

Notes:

- *1 It seems unlikely that the Manucode was ever present – a case of mistaken identity by Banfield (for the Koel cuckoo – see text)
- *2 We are not sure which species Banfield meant by ‘Eastern’ Swallow.
- *3 The Swiftlet was omitted from the list in *The Confessions*, but described later in *Last Leaves*.
- *4 The Mangrove Warbler, well known in the Family group, was for some reason omitted both from Banfield’s list, and from his subsequent books.

Marine Life



The Family Islands are not coral cays like Green Island or Heron Island, which are part of the Great Barrier Reef itself. The Family group are the peaks of a submerged Continental Shelf. The Reef is a further 28 kilometres east. But, as mentioned earlier, these islands do have small fringing gardens of coral with their accompanying marine life.

Coral growing in relatively shallow waters, is subject to constant change. It is very susceptible to damage by wave action in storms, for instance. Even quite moderate sea storms fan rip up marine plants and dislodge large lumps of coral to be thrown up on beaches. The repair of such damage may take years, as coral growth is slow, yet, as in the forests, scars are fairly quickly covered, even if the general form becomes different for an intervening period.

Banfield said of this brilliantly beautiful underwater environment: “A coral reef is gorged with a population of varied elements viciously disposed towards each other. It is one of Nature’s most cruel battlefields ... Molluscs are murderers and the most shameless of cannibals. No creature at all conspicuous is safe, unless it is agile and alert, or of horrific aspect, or endowed with giant’s strength, or is encased in armour ... All is strife – war to the death.”

Even among the relatively immobile corals there are those (*alcyonarian*) which overtake other more delicate corals. The depredations of the Crown of Thorns starfish are well known – the way they destroy vast areas of coral. Ever-hungry sea anemone suck the life out of small fish, giant clams take their due, and myriads of other shell-fish compete for food. Octopus, sharp-toothed eels, clawed crayfish and crabs of all descriptions are alert for prey. Larger fish eat smaller fish, and monster proper consume practically anything that moves. Sharks and giant rays do battle, while a few gentler denizens such as turtle and the quietly grazing dugong try to keep out of harm’s way.

But as always, even in such a 'cruel battlefield', man wreaks most havoc – from the over-fishing of many areas, the pollution of sea bottoms, the drowning of dugong in shark nets designed to protect human swimmers from attack, to the gradual extermination of whales – man is the culprit, the one to do most lasting harm.

Noel Wood says whales disappeared from this area about twelve to fifteen years ago. During his first twenty years here, they were a common sight. "Every winter," he said, "you'd see up to twenty or thirty whale – sometimes too close to your boat for comfort – then suddenly, they vanished, in the space of about two years."

Noel described one occasion when he had been to the mainland shopping for food supplies. At that time he owned a little flat-bottomed dinghy with a bamboo mast and small sail. The tiny craft was so heavily loaded with provisions, including a big sackful of wholemeal flour from the baker in Tully, not to mention a rather hefty girl companion, that there was hardly an inch of freeboard as they embarked for the Island. Sailing out very slowly, like a water-logged raft, over the sandbar at the mouth of the Hull River, they came suddenly right in amongst a great school of whale. The huge animals were frolicking, flipping over on their backs showing white bellies all around the wallowing sailboat. "Fortunately," said Noel, "they were very friendly, and didn't do anything to us. But what a tragedy, to have them disappear like that."

Happily, there are still a few dugong around. Over the past year or two, a dugong has made a regular appearance in Doorila Bay. Sitting on the beach under the shade of the coconut palms having a cup of morning tea with Noel one day, I watched this dugong rolling through the clear water just offshore. Then, in a flash, it was gone. The sound of a diesel engine throbbing underwater had scared it off. A big tourist launch cruised in and out of the Bay a few minutes later.

The dugong is a herbivorous mammal. Although in appearance it resembles seals and dolphins (except that it has no dorsal fin), it does not eat fish. Various kinds of seaweeds form its exclusive diet, which gives rise to the name 'sea cow'. Apart from grazing sea-grass, it also suckles its young, but from mammary 'breasts' instead of abdominal udders like the cow. Its meat also (unfortunately for its survival) tastes much like beef. It is thought dugong were responsible for ancient mariners' tales of mermaids – the sight of a mother dugong nursing her babe at the breast, holding it with her flippers, both heads above water in order to breathe, presenting that human image. Although close-up, the dugong head, with its flattened snout and bristly bulging under-lip adapted for grazing from the sea floor, is not exactly a picture of fair maidenly beauty. Yet overall, the impression is one of graceful movement of

shapely bodies, wet skins glistening in the sun, and close affection between mother and babe.

The young are nursed for up to a year after birth until they learn to eat sea grass, and they stay close to the mother during this time. This display of affection for its offspring is probably its most 'human' trait.

The dugong has become almost extinct in Southeast Asian waters due to the over-hunting by man. Banfield was of the opinion that the Great Barrier Reef would continue to be one of the last resorts of the dugong. He had been afraid at first that the increasing number of steamers in his day, might scare the animals away, but it seemed the dugong adapted to what was after all a fairly harmless disturbance. The rapid decline in numbers of its Aboriginal predators, bolstered this view. However, the status of a protected species which the dugong enjoys today in Australia, will be of no avail if they are drowned in shark nets around swimming beaches. Sharks are not as much of a danger on island beaches as is commonly believed. The Aborigines had little fear of them – plenty of worse things in the sea as far as they were concerned. Shark netting is hardly justified in view of the unavoidable deaths of so many harmless species.

Dangerous denizens of the deep around the islands include the stone-fish, one or two sea-snakes, crown of thorns starfish, and the deadly sea-wasp jellyfish. The latter, a cuboidal jellyfish with tentacles up to six metres long, can inflict fatal stings. They appear only during the wet season, between December and April. Swimming then, particularly from northerly facing beaches, should be avoided. The jellyfish drift down from the north with the onset of the monsoon, then disappear during the winter season.

The ugly stone-fish, called 'mehee' by the Aboriginal and greatly feared by them, is fortunately fairly rare. It is extremely difficult to see, in its usual hiding places – partially buried in the mud and rocks and seaweed of the foreshores – and if trodden on, can inject poison from a number of erected spines along its back. With its repulsive upturned mouth, a body covered in stony looking lumps and craters, smothered in slime, and armed with those deadly spines along the back, it would be hard to find a more hideous looking creature. Banfield called it the 'Warty Ghoul' or the 'death-adder of the sea', and it is not unlike that land snake with its passive nature. Both must virtually be trodden on before the fatal stab is inflicted. The death adder, resembling a sleepy old lizard mingling with the vegetation on the forest floor, relies on its worm-like tail to attract birds for the kill. The stone-fish has its camouflage of mud and slime from where it grabs unwary little victims cruising the shallows.

Sting rays often lurk half buried in the mud and sand of rocky shallows, with raised pedestal eyes protruding. They are usually well aware of an oncoming wader, and at the last minute rush away in a flurry of stirred up sand and whipping barbed

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tail before the startled eyes of the intruder. On a launch trip out from the Hull River to Bedarra one day with Ken Druitt, I saw a yellow-bellied sea-snake basking on the surface, floating coiled up in the sunshine. We drifted in quietly for a closer look, and watched it wriggle off quite unhurriedly using its flattened paddle tail.

'Long-Tom' fish, called locally 'skippers' and known to the Aboriginal as 'Curramill', are often seen skipping over the water surface. They have no 'wings' like the flying-fish of the tropics, but accomplish their feat by an initial high speed leap out of the sea, followed by nicely timed flips of the tail together with a agile wriggling movement of the body, which is held in an almost vertical position during the shih's fast forward movement. Such flights are often prolonged for the prodigious distances, the height of each 'bounce' gradually diminishing as energy finally flags.

Turtle, mostly the green turtle, may be seen surfacing around the isles, and sometimes on the more remote beaches, their tracks to and fro in the sand giving away the location of their buried eggs. The outer Reef itself is of course teeming with life; brightly coloured fish of all descriptions from the tiniest up to the big groper which hunt their prey more doggedly than the nervous sharks. The fisherman is assured of a good catch, on line or spear, of coral trout, mackerel, barracuda, tuna, or even the bigger game fish such as marlin or sailfish. And if any proof were needed, the 'Fishers of the skies', the sea-eagles, do not go hungry around the Family Isles.

Access



The Dunk Isle airstrip offers the quick access which seems to have become mandatory for island resorts of the jet age. Guests are flown in daily by light aircraft from Townsville or Cairns, where connections are made with southern flights. Those people heading for the Bedarra resorts are picked up by launch at the Dunk Island jetty, or by prearrangement from the mainland. A water-taxi is available for hire from South Mission Beach as an alternative to the regular cruise launches which also offer passage to the isles from the Clump Point jetty north of Mission Beach.

The Dunk resort is well equipped to handle its large numbers of guests. There are no water shortage problems as on some resorts the Great Barrier Reef, and electric power cables have been run under the sea from the mainland to supply the Isle. A 300 acre farm is run in conjunction with the resort on Dunk Island – an extension of Banfield's original small farm. Dairy cows supply fresh milk and cream, and fruit and vegetables are grown. Riding horses are available for guests. Other facilities at Dunk include a golf course, tennis courts, swimming pool, archery range, clay-pigeon shoot and water skiing. Small boats can be chartered for fishing in addition to the regular Reef trips on the larger cruise launches. Aircraft charter flights over the islands and the outer Reef can also be arranged. And of course there are many different walks through the National Park along the well-graded tracks maintained by the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Services. The longest of these is a round trip beginning southwards from the resort across the end of the airstrip and past Bruce Arthur's retreat to Coconut Beach, thence north through Palm Valley climbing steadily through heavy rainforest all the way along the high ridges forming the backbone of the Isle to Mt Kootaloo at 271 metres. Here there is a very good view southeast-wards over the whole chain of Family Islands to Hinchinbrook

and Goold Islands in the distance. From Kootaloo the track descends steeply westwards back to the resort, passing Banfield's grave.

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Dunk Isle resort buildings

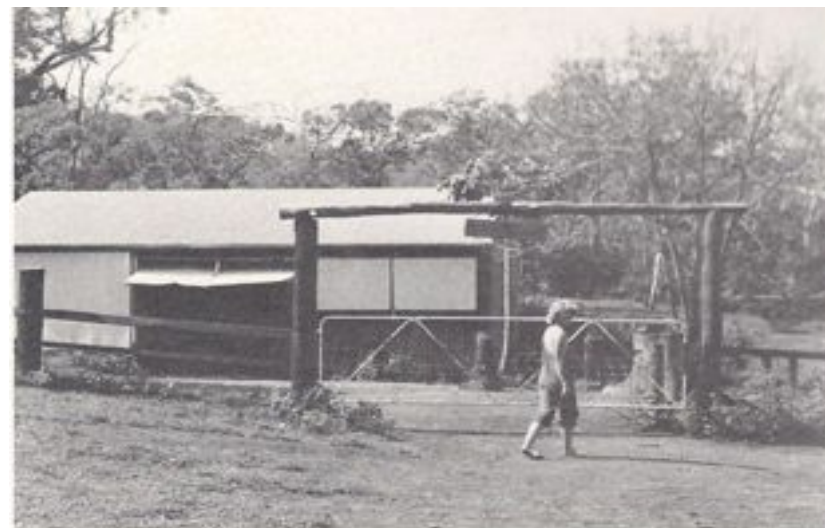


The farm on Dunk Island

Access

The smaller Bedarra resorts offer a quieter sojourn among the Isles. The Hideaway resort on the northwestern corner has separate cabins well spaced and hidden among the jungle growth, with as many jungle fowl walking the paths as people. Accommodation at the Plantation resort on the southeastern corner is similar with a central dining complex overlooking landscaped gardens. There are swimming beaches here on both sides of the peninsula, at Hernandia Beach to the north, and Wedgerock Bay to the south. The best swimming at the Hideaway is from the sandspit. The walking track between the two resorts takes one through the heart of the jungle and over the highest peak on the Isle, from where a lookout rock gives a fine view over the rest of the islands. Anyone attempting a walk along the coastline of the Isle should be prepared for very rough conditions. Huge granite boulders tumbled one upon the other in utter confusion, many with faces sheer to the sea, are not easy scrambling for the average walker. And it should be remembered that the northeast corner of Bedarra Island is private property. Although the coastal walk eastwards from the Hideaway is tempting at low water, guests should not proceed farther than the point (Gull Rocks) just beyond the mangroves in that direction. Those adventurers sailing or rowing in small boats should be wary of venturing too far offshore, as sea currents running between the islands can be very strong, and waves build up quite quickly with any wind.

The casual visitor to the Family Islands area is well catered for by the cruise launches running from Clump Point jetty. The *Lawrence Kavanagh* run by Leo and Adriana Hobbins, cruises daily to Dunk Island, and on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays to Bedarra and Timana as well. Perry Harvey's *Friendship* Cruises conduct scenic trips around the Family Islands and also to the Great Barrier Reef itself. Tourists staying at the many motels or caravan parks along the Mission Beach to Bingil Bay coastline of the mainland are thus offered a brief opportunity of exploring a tropic isle without the need to overnight. Launch trips are timed so that one may be dropped off at Dunk Island early in the morning, then picked up later in the afternoon on the return cruise from the outer islands. Alternatively, shorter visits to both Dunk and Bedarra, and sometimes Wheeler Island, are possible in the one day. The Great Barrier Reef cruises are separate all-day trips (Sunday, Wednesday and Friday) on the *Friendship*, a converted fishing trawler, thoroughly seaworthy and well adapted to this kind of cruise. *Friendship* cruises the local islands from Easter through to the end of October, and also during the Christmas holiday period. During November and December Perry takes the *Friendship* on extended twenty-day cruises north along the coast of Cape York Peninsula to Thursday Island. These trips cater for about a dozen guests living on board. Other shorter charter trips can be arranged, preferable on Mondays. The water-taxi at South Mission Beach is also available for charter by small groups for special sightseeing tours among the isles.



Dairy farm buildings, Dunk Island



The Dairy, Dunk Island

The following lists summarise access facilities in the Family Islands area:

Water Transport

Lawrence Kavanagh Cruises

From Clump Point jetty	Phone (07) 4068 7211
North Mission Beach	A/hrs (07) 4068 7141

Friendship Cruises

From Clump Point jetty	(07) 4068 7245
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Water-taxi

From South Mission Beach (bookings necessary)	(07) 4068 8177
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Island Resorts

(by air to Dunk Island airstrip from Townsville, Cairns)

Dunk Isle Resort

Dunk Island	Phone (07) 4068 8199
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Hideaway Resort

Bedarra Island	(07) 4068 8168
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Plantation Resort

Bedarra Island	(07) 4068 8233
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Motels – Hotels

Tam O'Shanter Resort Motel

Tam O'Shanter Point	Phone (07) 4068 8154
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Captain Morgan Motel

Mission Beach	(07) 4068 7100
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Mission Beach Hotel/Motel

Wongaling Beach	(07) 4068 8288
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Sherylee Motel/Holiday Units

Mission Beach	(07) 4068 7212
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Blue Pacific Motel

Bingil Bay	(07) 4068 7208
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Caravan Parks

Beachcomber Tourist Park	
South Mission Beach	Phone (07) 4068 8129
(formerly Pacific Coast Caravan Park)	
Dunk Island View Caravan Park	
Wongaling Beach	(07) 4068 8248
Wongaling Beach Caravan Park	
Wongaling Beach	(07) 4068 8138
Hideaway Caravan Park	
Mission Beach	(07) 4068 7104
Island Coast Caravan Park	
Tully Heads	(07) 4066 9260

Further information on flats and holiday units may be obtained from the Information Centres in the area. Shopping and postal facilities exist at North Mission Beach.

The Author

James Porter was born in South Australia and worked as an electronic engineer in telecommunications for some years in Australia and overseas. A love of nature, begun as a boy photographing birds in the mallee, later extended to canoeing in Arnhem Land, bushwalking in the Australian Alps and Southwest Tasmania, climbing mountains in Ethiopia and Papua New Guinea, and sailing in a 33 foot yacht to Fiji and New Zealand. Since first reading E. J. Banfield's books many years ago, he has maintained a close interest in the Family Islands of North Queensland. His first novel *The Swiflet Isles* has a locale in this area. He has written other novels for young people, and has also edited selections from the writings of E. H. Banfield. He is a member of the Australian Conservation Foundation.