In the beginning

People of the Quandamooka have lived on and around what is now the Redlands for tens of thousands of years. Archaeological evidence dates occupation of Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) at a minimum of 21,000 years BP (before present).

Many tribes mingled on Minjerribah and local people identify the Noonucal and Gorenpu as the traditional owners of the Island and adjoining areas.

A 1964 archaeological survey of North Stradbroke Island identified 121 living sites where shelter, water and food were available and where evidence of occupation was evident. Visitors to the Island in the 1820s reported numerous large and well built huts.

A complex system of belonging to the land ensured responsible management of land, sea and resources. Membership of a tribe was and is conferred at birth. Tribes provided access rights to hunting, fishing and gathering resources of the clan estates, which are integrally entwined with sacred sites, songlines or dreaming tracks, and natural features with spiritual importance. Tribal members were and are responsible for carrying out appropriate ceremonies, observing taboos, and physically managing resources.

Communication between people at different locations was by means of message-stick; “a semaphore-like method using pieces of bark”, beacon fires, and word of mouth, including calling between islands. Later on, when the Europeans arrived, mirror flashes were used over distances up to 40 kilometres.

Food supplies were plentiful. Fishing, hunting and gathering were part of the communal economy, with people collecting food according to their carrying capacity, and food shared according to families’ needs. Dugong as well as fish such as mullet and tailor were caught with nets, sometimes aided by dolphins. Turtle and shellfish were also collected.

There was a special bond between the Aboriginal people on Minjerribah and the dolphins. Aboriginal men would call the dolphins by slapping the water and digging in the sand with their spears. The dolphins would herd the fish into the gutters, where the people caught them in towrow nets. After the people had enough fish, they would feed fish back to the dolphins.

Islanders also relied on the sea eagle, which foretold the coming of the mullet. Oysters, eugarie, crabs, prawns, cockles, eugarie, mussels and turtle were common foods at different times of the year. Terrestrial foods collected at different times of the year included kangaroo, wallaby, iguanas, flying foxes, birds, possum, and bandicoots, bungwal/dingowa, the rhizome of a fern, native fruits and berries, honey, and drinks made from flowers.

Corroborees and other ceremonies were an integral part of community life, and huge regional celebrations were likely to have had ceremonial, spiritual, social, cultural and economic significance.

Over the centuries, many tracks and travel routes were laid on the islands and the mainland. When the European settlers arrived, these tracks proved invaluable to their own travels. Over the years they have evolved into some of our main roads.

Traders from many parts of Asia also visited over the centuries. Although the main trade routes were further north, boats are known to have visited the Moreton Bay...
region. The first Europeans probably appeared in the 15th to 16th centuries, when the European trade expansion began. Again, boats carrying Europeans are known to have visited Moreton Bay, and even today people still search for a Spanish galleon reported to lie near the Eighteen Mile Swamp on North Stradbroke Island.

Of the recorded European visits, Captain James Cook passed Minjerribah in 1770 but he did not land. He provided one of the first non-indigenous names to the area when he named Point Lookout. Matthew Flinders entered what is now Moreton Bay in 1799 and contact was made between Aborigines and Europeans. In 1803 a group of Minjerribah people helped Matthew Flinders’ crew find water when they came ashore near Cylinder Beach on their way back to Sydney. This was possibly the first black-white contact on the Island.

The next prolonged contact occurred when three shipwrecked timbergetters, Pamphlett, Finnegan and Parsons, were blown off course near Sydney and landed on Moreton Island in 1823. They crossed to Minjerribah and the Noonucals at Pulan (Amity Point) looked after them for nearly six weeks. They housed, fed and advised the trio on canoe making, and saw them off some months later in the craft they’d made on the island. During their time on Minjerribah (Stradbrooke Island), the three experienced bora gatherings, and ceremonial, celebratory and gladiatorial events.

The three then crossed the bay from Minjerribah (Stradbrooke Island) and landed near what is now Beckwith St, Ormiston, near a spot containing six or seven native huts and a fire; the inhabitants were fishing south of this spot when the castaways came ashore. They also found a pathway which they used to make their way through the mangroves that thickly lined the shore.

That same year more officials were sent to look at Moreton Bay, this time as a potential convict settlement intended to take some of the surplus from the southern areas. By sheer coincidence, the Surveyor General, John Oxley, ran into two of the castaways. On their information he explored the Brisbane River and recommended to the authorities that Moreton Bay would be an ideal convict settlement. The Moreton Bay Penal Settlement was set up in 1824 at Red Cliffe Point, moving some months later to what is now Brisbane.

Ships travelled to and from the penal settlement via the South Passage between Moreton and North Stradbroke Islands. As a result, a pilot station was established at Pulan, which was soon renamed Amity Point, in 1825. In 1827 a depot for unloading stores was set up at the recently renamed Dunwich. This was the beginning of permanent contact between Europeans and Aborigines in the Redlands district.

Over the following decades, tensions arose, most frequently over the European occupation of the land. On Minjerribah possibly one of the first conflicts occurred in 1828 when a cotton plantation was established at Moongalba, employing 30 men. It occupied a favoured Aboriginal camping place and was inexplicably abandoned within six months.

Between 1831 and 1832 there were more than 10 violent clashes between Minjerribah people and Europeans at Dunwich and Amity, resulting in deaths on both sides.

In 1843 missionaries arrived on Minjerribah in the form of four Passionists (Catholics) who set up at Dunwich to convert the locals. Like most missions at the time, it was unsuccessful, and it broke up in 1846.
However, not all relations were uncompromising. In 1847 the *Sovereign* sank in South Passage\(^\text{12}\) and considerable recognition went to the Minjerribah and Ngugi (Moreton Island) people’s role in rescuing the survivors.\(^\text{13}\)

From the 1850s fishing became a major industry, and the Europeans turned to the Aboriginal people who had been fishing very successfully and sustainably in the area for centuries. Dugong and oyster fisheries were set up, frequently run almost entirely by Aboriginal people, especially from Minjerribah. At the same time, the mainland, especially around Cleveland, was becoming popular as a holiday destination for European settlers from Brisbane and west. Again the Aboriginal people taught the Europeans how and where to fish for dugong, oyster and turtle as well as finned fish. Some even became the first commercial fishermen, selling their catch door to door in Cleveland.\(^\text{14}\) Unfortunately the Europeans ignored some vital practices and within decades both the dugong and oyster industries were near collapse due to over-fishing and poor management.

Meanwhile, farmers and graziers had begun moving into other parts of the Redlands, with the first land sales in Cleveland in 1851 and Capalaba in 1853. Indigenous and non-indigenous people recount stories of these times while physical evidence in the form of scar trees and bora rings remains, especially around some of the district’s creeks and waterways. Other evidence in the form of place names also serve as reminders of these days.
Endnotes

1 Ponosov, VV, 1963-64, *Results of an archaeological survey of the Southern Region of Moreton Bay and of Moreton Island*, University of Qld, Dept Anthropology.


5 Evans, Raymond, 1992, ‘Early racial contact and conflict on Stradbroke Island’, in *Whose Island? The past and future of North Stradbroke*, proceedings of a public seminar held by the Qld Studies Centre, Regina Ganter ed, Brisbane: Griffith University, p.24.

6 Pearce, Chris, 1993, *Through the eyes of Thomas Pamphlett, convict and castaway*, Brisbane: Boolarong Publications, p.94. Steele cites Thomas Welsby’s suggestion that this spot was Ormiston, p.68.

7 Riviere, Marc Serge, ed, 1998, *Discovery of the Brisbane River, 1823; Oxley, Uniacke and Pamphlet 175 years in retrospect*, Royal Historical Society of Qld, p.117

8 Riviere, 1998, p.117


10 Evans, 1992, p.27.


13 Keats, JA, HM Smith, CC Rogers and GP Rowe, 1966, *Dunwich: a study of Aboriginal and European integration*, University of Qld Social Sciences Papers Vol 1 No 1, St Lucia: University of Qld Press, p.10.


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