

ABORIGINAL CULTURAL ASSOCIATIONS IN EUROBODALLA

The Eurobodalla Shire lies within the Yuin (Djuwin) tribal area. Yuin is an Aboriginal word meaning 'man' or 'people' and is also a term used to describe all Aboriginal people from the Shoalhaven River to the Victorian border. The Yuin area is made up of many language groups, including the Dharumba, Djirringanj, Dhawa and Dhurga. The Yuin area is also geographically divided by clan groups living by the sea, the 'Katungal' or 'Guthaga' meaning sea people or coast dwellers and those living further inland, the 'Paiendra' meaning tree climbers.

Aboriginal people have occupied the south coast region of NSW for at least 20 000 years. Many recorded and unrecorded archaeological sites exist throughout the Eurobodalla Shire, each holding varying degrees of significance to Yuin people. These sites and places hold the remains of traditional (pre-contact) and historic (shared history) occupation by Aboriginal people. Aboriginal sites and places are landscapes and areas that are important to Aboriginal people as part of their customary law, traditions, spiritual beliefs, history and living culture.

Aboriginal sites are the physical remains of a unique culture which could be more than 40 000 years old. There is evidence of this everywhere, in rock art, stone artefacts, large shell middens on the coast to small surface scatters of stone on the inland and semi-arid plains. They can be found in towns and cities, on beaches, along river banks, on open plains and in dense forests. This is because Aboriginal people lived throughout Australia and different environments and different practices resulted in different types of sites.

Aboriginal people lived in harmony with the environment and lived in Mobs or Clan groups, covering areas, which they travelled for hunting and gathering. Aboriginal people today retain a strong attachment to their environment through their land and culture. Many Aboriginal sites and places are significant to particular Aboriginal communities as they provide a direct link with their traditional culture.

The first recorded contact between Europeans and local Aboriginal people was in 1797 when survivors of the 'Sydney Cove' shipwreck walked from Gippsland to Sydney. A few decades later the lives of Yuin people were radically changed as industries developed across the region and the colonial government imposed protectionist policies, suppressing their traditional way of life.

Aboriginal people's links to the land were maintained as Aboriginal families contributed to the development of the area and continued to use local natural resources for sustenance. Families travelled up and down the coast following work, mainly in the agricultural, fishing and sawmilling industries picking peas, corn and beans for settler farmers, and fishing for commercial and self-reliant purposes. The kinship links that were forged between Aboriginal families working together throughout the 20th Century have continued today.

Aboriginal cultural associations across the Eurobodalla Shire today reflect past practices. Spiritual links to landforms and waterways as established in the Dreamtime past continue to be of importance to local Aboriginal people. Traditional ecological knowledge of local plants and animals is held by Aboriginal families across the Eurobodalla Shire and continues to be taught to the next generation. A number of coastal campgrounds used by Aboriginal families today were also used in the past by their ancestors for the same purpose; for social gatherings, cultural exchange, and for food collection.



Bendethra Valley



Bendethra Cave

Deua River Bush Food – Bull Rush Tubers



Silcrete and Volcanic Artefacts used as tools, found throughout Eurobodalla



Deua River Dreamtime Story Stone formation

PROTECTING AND CARING FOR ABORIGINAL HERITAGE

Today Aboriginal people are interested in identifying, recording, protecting and caring for Aboriginal heritage. Recognition and preservation of Aboriginal heritage aims to sustain the relationship between Aboriginal people and their places in such a way that heritage values of each place are maintained for present and future generations of all Australians. We can all contribute to the protection of Aboriginal heritage by respecting its presence in the landscape and considering carefully how to minimise impact on the land.

The Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) protects Aboriginal heritage through management planning, public education awareness and physical protection works. The Minister for the Environment may declare a site an 'Aboriginal place' when it is of special significance to Aboriginal culture. The only criterion for declaration is that the place is or was of special significance to Aboriginal culture and heritage. The kinds of place-based associations that are typically recorded are:

- land containing Aboriginal burials;
- places that are identified by Aboriginal Stories or celebrated by ceremony;
- land that was once an Aboriginal reserve, mission or other post-settlement living area;
- land known from archival or historical records to have been the site of an important historical event, such as a massacre;
- areas that contain one or more Aboriginal relics or a combination of cultural landscape features, including culturally important plant and animal species;
- archaeological sites where the significance to Aboriginal people requires special recognition and
- land buildings or places significant to Aboriginal culture after 1788.

The DEC consults regularly with Aboriginal communities to ensure that as many Aboriginal sites are preserved as possible. Sections 86, 90 & 91 of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974 provides for the protection and preservation of all Aboriginal relics and places throughout NSW. The 'ownership' of an Aboriginal relic is vested in the Crown, with the DEC being the responsible authority.

The DEC maintains a register of recorded Aboriginal sites across NSW within the Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System (AHIMS). The register holds approximately 47 000 Aboriginal sites (source Gary Currey DEC March 2006) of these approximately 1 500 are recorded within the Eurobodalla Shire boundary.

Note: *There are many unrecorded Aboriginal heritage objects that have not been placed onto the register, particularly within the Eurobodalla Shire boundary. Many of these heritage objects will not be known until a formal Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment or Archaeological survey has been undertaken.*

The number of sites being registered is increasing as a result of improved ability of the community, Service staff and Aboriginal people to recognise and report Aboriginal sites and places to the DEC registry. Access to the register is restricted due to the confidential nature of most of the information, if you find a site or would like to visit a site you should contact your local DEC office. DEC encourage community members to register sites that may exist on private and crown land.

The primary purpose of Aboriginal Sites Officers is to care, protect and manage Aboriginal sites as part of the statutory responsibilities of DEC under the National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974. Aboriginal Sites Officers are also responsible for teaching visitors about Aboriginal sites and Aboriginal culture so that the community is made aware of and develops an understanding of the issues relating to Aboriginal cultural heritage.

Aboriginal sites and places are fragile and subject to weathering and natural erosion. You can help preserve them by following these guidelines:

- avoid touching the site with your hands or feet;
- do not try to re-groove the site;
- avoid placing water or sand on the site;
- leave any artifacts, vegetation or rocks as they are *and*
- take your rubbish with you.

Aboriginal sites and places are dynamic as they include tangible and intangible expressions of culture that link generations of Aboriginal people over time. The protection and preservation of Aboriginal heritage provides Aboriginal people with the opportunity to be involved and consulted in the conservation of their heritage ensuring their heritage values are respected and provides the opportunity to pursue sustainable, social and economic outcomes through the control and management of their culture.



Shell Middens: These remains show how Aboriginal people used the surrounding habitats.

References:

Eurobodalla Shire Council 2006 Aboriginal Projects
http://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/AboriginalHeritageStudy/pdf/reference_page.pdf

Flood, J. 1995, *Archaeology of the Dreamtime: the story of prehistoric Australia and its people*, Harper Collins, Pymble, NSW (AIATSIS)

Howitt, A. 1904, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia*, Macmillan & Co., London. (ML)

Goulding, M & Waters, K 2005, *Eurobodalla Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Study (stage one)*, South Coast NSW, Eurobodalla Shire Council / Department of Environment and Conservation.

ABORIGINAL HERITAGE IN THE EUROBODALLA

Open Camp Sites

These sites are mostly surface scatters of stone, sometimes associated with fireplaces. Recent studies have shown them to have significant scientific and cultural value. It is important that artefacts are not removed from the position in which they are found.

Scarred Trees

Scarred trees are becoming rare in New South Wales as the trees decay and fall over or are burnt. Aboriginal people caused scars on trees by removing bark to make canoes, containers, shields and to build temporary shelters. They also cut toeholds in trees to make them easier to climb and allowed them to use the tree as a lookout, hunt for possums or beehives or cut bark higher up in the tree. These trees are still significant to particular Aboriginal groups. Advice on the preservation of these relics may be obtained from the Department of Environment and Conservation.

Ceremonial Grounds

These are sites where initiation ceremonies, marriage alliance ceremonies, tribal meetings and other important social functions were held. They are places of great significance to Aboriginal people. Some Boonarn rings, which featured one or two raised earth rings were used for male initiations.

Aboriginal Reserves and Missions

Aboriginal Missions or reserves are important places to Aboriginal people. Although Aboriginal people were often moved to reserves by force and were restricted by harsh regulations and often insensitive white overseers, the reserves became home to many people, where their families were born, lived and died. Historic cemeteries at many reserves are still cared for by the local Aboriginal community, even if they no longer live at the reserve.

Burial Sites

A variety of methods to dispose of the deceased were used depending on particular practices of different groups. Aboriginal people were amongst the first people to cremate their deceased. Some cremation sites in New South Wales are known to be 26 000 years old. Burials in rock shelters, middens, camp sites, sand dunes, on hillsides and burial grounds are common in New South Wales. Burials may be marked by stone arrangements, carved trees or other features.

Occupation Sites

These are places with evidence of past habitation. They include stone tools, fireplaces and occasionally food remains such as shells, bones and plant seeds.

Shell Middens

These sites occur on the coast and along the edges of rivers and lakes in both coastal and inland zones. A midden is a deposit composed of the remains of edible shellfish. It may also contain fish and animal bones, stone tools and charcoal from campfires. These remains show how Aboriginal people used the surrounding habitats.

Rock Shelters With Archaeological Deposit

In outcrops of rock such as sandstone or granite, overhangs may form cave type shelters. Ashes from fires, sediments and material fallen from the roof accumulate in the protection of the shelter. Fireplaces, discarded tools and food remains become part of the deposits. Archaeologists can excavate these deposits in order to study the patterns of Aboriginal life. Their scientific value when undisturbed is high.

ABORIGINAL HERITAGE

in the Eurobodalla

