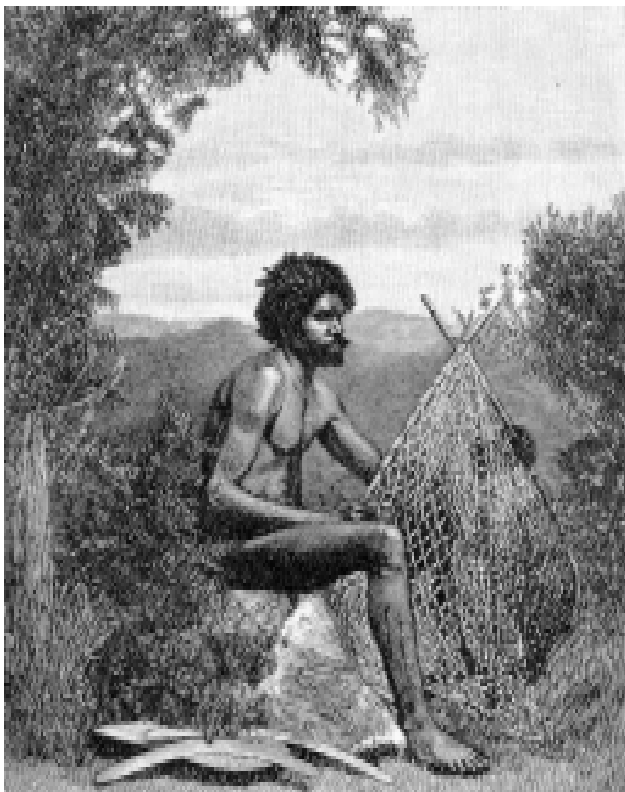


Section 2:

Aboriginal Culture and An Excursion to Yugambah Museum



*Aboriginal man mending a net
(From Picturesque Atlas of Australasia 1888)*

Aboriginal culture and language

Aboriginal people did not all speak the same language. Within Australia, there were around 200 different languages.

On the eastern side of Logan City, people spoke the Yugambah language. On the western side, people spoke the Jagera language. Today, it is not completely clear where the boundary was between these two groups.

Within each language group, there were a number of different family groups (sometimes referred to as clans). Each family group lived within its own territory, moving from camp to camp as the season changed and new food sources became available. Family groups often visited each other and large gatherings were sometimes held involving hundreds of people.

The following information gives example of social life which mention people from the Logan.

A special occasion: going to the Bunya feast

Tom Petrie came to Brisbane in the 1830s as a child and became friends with many Aboriginal people. Years later, his daughter Constance wrote down his memories and this has preserved information about the way of life of Aboriginal people of south-east Queensland. The original account is very long and the following is edited and simplified. Tom uses the word “tribe” where we would now say family group.

From Tom Petrie, we know that Aboriginal people from the Logan used to travel to the Bunya Mountains every few years, when there was a particularly good crops of nuts on the bunya trees.

“These gatherings were really like huge picnics, the Aborigines belonging to the district sending out messengers to invite members from other tribes to come and have a feast,” Tom said.

The Bunya Mountains people would perhaps invite the Ngunda people who lived on Bribie Island, and they in turn would invite the Turrbal people of Brisbane, who would invite the people of the Logan area. Because the different groups were usually related, people would invite their relatives from elsewhere and the news would spread. People who lived near the Bunya Mountains would all go to the feast, but if people lived a considerable distance away, only the younger and fitter people attempted the long journey.

When Tom was 15, he was taken with the Turrbal people to one of the gatherings - this was a rare privilege and Tom was the only white person there - even his parents did not accompany him. The total number of people who gathered at the Bunya Mountains on that occasion was about 600 to 700.

Tom said that every Aborigine of the district had two or three trees which he considered his own property, and no one else was allowed to climb these trees and gather the cones, although the guests would be invited to share equally in the eating of the nuts.

“Great times were those, and what lots of fun children had in catching paddymelons in the scrub with their nets, also in obtaining other food of which there was plenty such as possums, snakes and other animals, turkey eggs, wild yams, native figs and a large white grub which was found in dead trees. The bon-yi nuts were generally roasted but they were also eaten raw,” Tom said.

Tom always noticed how generous the Aborigines were. “If there were people who had been unlucky in the hunt for food, it made no difference; they did not go without but shared equally with the others. At

night through the bon-yi season, the Aborigines would have great corroborees, the different tribes showing their special corroboree to each other, so that they might all learn something fresh.

“The dancers kept up for a couple of hours, then they settled down to a sort of meeting. One man would stand up and start a story or lecture of what had happened in his part of the country, speaking in a loud tone of voice so that all could hear. When he had finished, another man from a different tribe stood forward and gave his descriptions and so on until all tribes had been represented.

“So the days went on for a month or more. Then there would be a great fight at the finish and this would go for a week or so. At the finish of the great fight, the tribes would all start off homewards, parting the best of friends with each other and carrying large supplies of bon-yi nuts with them. The Aborigines of the Bon-yi Mountains would bury a supply of nuts to keep for later, then they went to the coast, living there on fish and crabs for the space of a month. Other people from inland areas would also go to the coast if they had friends who invited them. People would be glad of a corroboree that took them seawards, if only for the reason that they might have a change of food.”

Questions

1. How did visitors get bunya nuts if they didn't have their own tree?
2. What did children do during the bunya feast?
3. What is a paddymelon? (Hint: it isn't like a watermelon! Look up a dictionary or a book about Australian animals if you don't know)
4. Name one way that news travelled among Aboriginal people.
5. Name four sorts of things that happened at a bunya feast.

Feasts and Fights

When Aboriginal groups gathered together, battles were common. Sometimes, these were more like a friendly sporting event while at other times, there was an argument to settle. Most fights were between groups but there were also fights between individuals.

Whatever the reason, the battle in some ways resembled a tournament from the days of the knights in armour - there were clear rules about how the fighting should take place.

Tom Petrie described an occasion when people from the Logan were among 700 Aborigines who gathered in Brisbane to watch a new corroboree by the Ipswich people.

The people from Brisbane, Stradbroke Island and the Logan camped on the hill above Roma St Station. The northern people - from Bribie, Mooloola, Noosa, Kilcoy and Baranbah - camped on the site of the present Normanby Hotel. The people from Ipswich, Rosewood and Wivenhoe camped on Petrie Terrace.



*There were strict rules for the tournaments which were held by knights in armour
Aboriginal battles had similar rules.*



After the corroboree, a battle took place between the northern people and those of the other areas. At first, the Brisbane group was stronger and chased the others until two people were wounded with spears. Friends of the wounded people then called out “tor” which meant hit or wounded. The battle stopped while everyone rested and the wounded people were cared for. Then the fight resumed.

“Two men from one side got up and rushed in a threatening manner across to the others...As the spears and waddies flew here and there, (Tom) was amazed to see how they were dodged. Looking on, he felt it was impossible for a man to escape being hit, and yet most of the weapons passed between legs or over heads or were turned aside on a shield.”

These battles sometimes continued for days, but there were breaks in between so people could go hunting for food. The Logan people crossed the river in canoes or by swimming and hunted at West End where there used to be a large patch of scrub on the bend of the river.

When the people all returned from hunting, a great feast was held, then the men painted and decorated themselves again and the battle continued.

Games

Aboriginal children played many games, and sometimes the adults joined in as well. The following games were played by the Turrbal people and were described by Tom Petrie. The games played by children on the Logan were probably very similar.

Purru-Purru was played with a ball made from kangaroo skin stuffed with grass and sewn up. Purru means ball. Both boys and girls played. Sides were picked, the ball was thrown into the air and caught as each side tried to capture it.

Skipping was popular, using a vine. Adults skipped as well as children, with two people turning the vine for someone to skip.

Murri Murri: a piece of bark was cut into a circle and bowled along the ground while children tried to spear it. Murri was the word for kangaroo and the game was really a way of teaching boys to hunt kangaroos.

Warru Warru was the same game known to Europeans as Cat’s Cradles – a circle of string held in the hands and woven with the fingers to form pictures and shapes.

Boomerang throwing with a toy boomerang was popular.

Marutchi: Swimming was very popular and games were played in the water such as diving for stones. In the game Marutchi, someone would pretend to be a black swan and would try to escape and dive underwater as everyone else tried to catch him. If Marutchi was caught, he was tapped on the head to show that he was “dead” and a new swan was chosen.

Secondary topic: What the Explorers Found

Fraser was the Government Botanist of New South Wales and had been instructed to set up a garden for tropical plants at Brisbane. In 1828, he went on an exploring expedition with Allan Cunningham who was collecting specimens of new plants for the botanic gardens at Kew in England, and Captain Patrick Logan, the Commandant of the Convict Settlement at Brisbane.

Here is part of Charles Fraser's diary from the expedition:

On the banks of the Logan and in the immediate vicinity of a native encampment, I noticed three sticks set upright in the ground, forming a triangle, and fastened together by a cord at the top, on which was placed a sheet of bark; and seeing something suspended under shelter of this bark, my curiosity induced me to point it out to Captain Logan, who informed me that it is customary for the tribes, when leaving a district, to deposit in such a situation their Kangaroo nets, Dillies, Bass Mats, chisels, and superfluous implements until their return. It is considered the greatest breach of faith among these rude nations to touch any of the articles thus placed; a degree of honesty which, it is to be feared, we might look for in vain among their white neighbours.

On examining this depot, we found a Kangaroo-Net, 50 feet long and 5½ feet wide, formed of the most excellent twine, as fine as any fabricated in Europe, but much stronger, and woven in a manner that would do credit to a professed net maker; a fishing net of a beautifully fine mesh, and dyed black, forming when in the water, an inverted cone about 7 feet deep; a Dilly or luggage bag, such as the females carry, made of the leaves of a species of Xanthorrhoea and strong enough to bear any weight; two Eillmans or shields of the wood of *Urtica Gigas* or the Tree Nettle, as light as cork; two chisels edged with flint; and an iron wedge, evidently stolen from Brisbane Town.

Questions:

1. Read the description and then make a list of the belongings in the shelter using the form on the next page.
2. Why would the fish net be dyed black?
3. Why would the shields be of a light timber?
4. Find an Aboriginal word in the description that is now used by many Australians.

Library research:

5. Find out more about *Urtica Gigas* – it is an interesting plant!
6. Find a picture of a Xanthorrhoea
7. Try to find photos or sketches of the type of equipment mentioned and find out how it was used.

Discussion question:

Ysola Best, a descendant of Bilin Bilin, has commented that Fraser thought he had the right, as an explorer, to examine the household contents in the bark shelter. But, she asked, what sort of reception would Aboriginal people have received if they had tried to examine the contents of a white person's building?

Talk about this in class. First, take Fraser's viewpoint, then take the viewpoint of the Aboriginal owner of the articles.

LIST OF ITEMS IN BARK SHELTER

Item	Aboriginal Name	Size	Sketch	Purpose