



# **The Great Bunya Gathering**

**Early Accounts**

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Front cover photo: 2011 Bunya Dreaming (Ray Kerhove)

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## **PREFACE**

The Bunya Gathering was arguably the largest and most influential Indigenous gathering in Australia. It engaged a great slice of Australia, not only during its occurrence, but at all times. This is because even back at home, attendees were busy creating corroborees and crafts that would be shared at the event. They also looked forward to – or perhaps dreaded - the marriage arrangements, judicial decisions and ceremonies that would be made at that spot. Finally, they spent weeks to months simply journeying there and back – often conducting further ‘business’ (ceremonies etc.) en route.

Despite the Bunya Gathering’s immense importance, not much is known of its format or content, as very few whites had the privilege of attending. This booklet compiles a number of accounts of bunya gatherings, as found in early writings – mostly by whites, though where possible I have included Indigenous accounts also. It is difficult to be exhaustive. The current booklet largely collects memories published in early newspapers, and various firsthand accounts from published and archival sources.

I have organised these under headings relating to their main theme. The concept is to provide somewhat of a sourcebook for reconstructing a “living image” of what the Bunya Gatherings were like a century ago and earlier. As far as possible, I have tried to let the quotes speak for themselves. Where necessary, I have needed to add some explanations or comments.

The purpose of this little document is to help raise awareness of the amazing event that was and is the Bunya Gathering.

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(Dr) Ray Kerkhove  
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# **SACRED BUNYA TREE**

“The blacks would never by any chance cut a bon-yi, affirming that to do so would injure the tree....

(When father attempted to cut a notch in a bunya tree)

“...they almost cried in their distress, saying the tree would die of its wounds.”

- CC Petrie, Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Brisbane: Angus & Robinson, 1983), 15, p 254



“The personal possessions of blacks are usually not many, and in my time, as far as I could gather, the bunya trees were the only individual treasures.”

“Each (bunya) tree would be marked by its owner with his particular sign and on his demise; the owner of the property would bequeath it to his family. The territories - containing the trees, of course - belonged to the various tribes, and the trees were greatly treasured by the blacks; who would never cut them, and took great exception to white men doing so.”

- Hector Munro, 'Dark Ways -. Aboriginal Foibles,' *The Queenslander* (Brisbane) Thursday 26 July 1928

“According to Dr. Lauterer... the Bunya pine is the “holy tree” of the aborigines (Buni means holy or ‘awful’ in Turabul).“

- Royal Society of Queensland, *The Queenslander* (Brisbane) Saturday 24 November 1894, p 986

NOTE: In local Aboriginal lore, sacred places and sacred beings were sometimes described as “dreadful” or ‘awful’ or even equated with ‘debbil debbil (devil devil).’ This seems an attempt to convey to whites the sense of awe and respect they felt for these entities – and also to convey that these were not to be trifled with. There were

several Dreaming stories involving the “awful” bunya tree – its battle with the coastal cypress; forming a bridge to Mudjimba Island, and falling in love with the blue quandong.

“At certain times the bunya nut was “moonda” or tabooed to the gins.”

- Archibald Meston ‘The Bunya Mountains,’ The Brisbane Courier (Qld.)  
Monday 9 May 1892, p 7

“These (bunya pines) are highly appreciated by the blacks. “

- Ludwig Leichardt, 1840s, ‘Liechhardt’ Letters Townsville Daily Bulletin (Qld.)  
Saturday 5 May 1945, p 4

“The blacks resented the intrusion of the whites (into the bunya regions), and very much so when they began to chop down and haul away large quantities of Bunya Pine - a tree the aboriginals regarded with much veneration.”

- T. J. McMahon, Nature’s Gift: The Lure of the Bunya Mountains – Fairy Landscape, Romance of Charming Country,’ The Brisbane Courier (Qld.)  
Saturday 27 February 1932, p 20

“Among the blacks, the (bunya) trees were property, that was handed down from one generation to another, yet protected by black fellows’ law, and each tribe had a certain number of the trees.”

- J H I, Bunya Nuts, The Queenslander (Brisbane) Thursday 7 June 1928, p 6.

“In accordance with regulations issued by the Government the tree is not allowed to be cut down by those who are licensed to fell timber on the Crown lands, the fruit being used as food by the aborigines.”

- J & A Mortimer, The Native Police, Illustrated Sydney News (NSW) Saturday 23 April 1881, p 19

“... the bunya pine (in the 1870s) was inaccessible to the white man. The black man regarded the bunya tree as wholly and solely his heritage. It belonged to him, and on no account would he allow it to be felled or interfered with by the white man. I remember my father relating that on one occasion, probably during ‘big bunya season,’ when the Bunyas were swarming with blacks, all timber getters were ordered off the mountains because one of the white men, in felling another tree, happened to crush a bunya pine to the ground.”

- J C Bennie, ‘The Bunya Mountains – Early Feasting Ground of the Blacks, The Dalby Herald 1931, p 2

"...when we consider that it forms the principal sustenance for the blacks during some four or five months of the year, its utility cannot be over estimated. Sir George Gipps was so impressed with its prolific blessing that he issued a general order for its preservation, and to this day, although no absolute law exists, all the settlers consider themselves bound in honour to preserve the Bunya. It may thus be likened to the plantain and breadfruits of Jamaica, and take its rank, like the date of Egypt, amongst the sacred gifts of the Almighty to the untutored and helpless savage."

- Sphinx, Moreton Bay Sketches No.10, Sydney Morning Herald, 21 Dec 1857, p 8



Obi Obi Creek gorge  
(Ray Kerkhove)

# **BUNYA LANDS**

## **The Broader Bunya Region**

“The grandeur and solitudes (of the Blackall Ranges bunya forests)... produces a strange feeling of exultation... What can I say about the Bunya Bunya brush? ...About the majestic tree whose trunk seems like a pillar supporting the vault of Heaven? About its cones, their fall, sounding through the silence of the brush? What am I to say about the multitude of shrubs and rare trees that grow here?”

- Ludwig Leichhardt 1840s in M Arousseau, ed., *The Letters of Ludwig Leichhardt* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p 642, p 704.

“I rode ... to a little-known part which is generally called the Bunya Bunya district (the territory between Brisbane and the Burnett River). In the shrubs which cover the mountains, I found a mighty tree....”

- Ludwig Liechhardt, ‘Leichardt's Letters’, *Townsville Daily Bulletin* (Qld.) Saturday 5 May 1945, p 4.

“The Bunya Bunya... (grows as far south as) the north end of the Caboolture Bridge. About twenty miles farther north is where they begin to grow in numbers, namely, near Melum (Mt Mellum). From there to Coorooy (Cooroy), along the Blackall Range, and on the eastern side thereof, they grow in large numbers...”

- William Pettigrew, *Qld Philosophical Society – paper read On the Habits and Peculiarities of Some of Our Timbers*, *The Queenslander* (Brisbane) Saturday 3 November 1877, p 26.

“...a high, broken, and scrubby range, separating the head waters of the Brisbane River from those of the Mary... contain(s) great numbers of the bunya-bunya tree...”

- Thomas Archer, *Recollections of a Rambling Life*, *The Queenslander* (Brisbane), Saturday 21 October 1899, page 809.

“It (Pie Creek, Gympie) was a rich district for blacks. Bunya nuts and Queensland nuts were plentiful in the season.”

- Zachariah Skyring, Article 11 – *Hunting with the Wide Bay Blacks*, Gympie in *Its Cradle Days* n/d



“... there are ... plenty (of bunyas) on the head of Kilcoy and Sheep Station Creeks.”

- Russell, re/ 1841-1843, in A. J. M'Connel, 'Some Old Stations. No. IV. Old Documents., The Brisbane Courier (Qld. ) Saturday 13 February 1932, p 19

“...I have seen many (bunyas), some of vast dimensions, on the Upper North Pine River, also at the head of the Brisbane River”

- H. Gold, The Bunya Pine, The Queenslander (Brisbane) Saturday 18 June 1892, p 1162

“The Burgalda area (near Woodford) was known as ‘the Little Bunya Country’”

- As recalled in John Steele, Aboriginal Pathways St Lucia: University of Queensland, 1983, p 208

NOTE: As these early quotes indicate, the area in which bunya pines proliferated was fairly large, with small and large ‘bunya patches’ (some mixed with hoop) occurring virtually from Caboolture to Maryborough and Nambour to the Bunya Mountains (Ian Smith, pers. comm., 2012). It seems that within this region, different sites fulfilled different purposes - ceremony, gathering, fights, camping etc.

Although it usually envisaged that coastal groups went solely to the Baroon Pocket (Blackall Ranges) gatherings whilst inland groups only attended the Bunya Mountains gatherings, this counters the oral stories of Indigenous people. Certainly the list of ‘attende groups’ given by many of the early sources would suggest that tribes from all over attended both venues.

The bunya nuts were ripe later on the Bunya Mountains (from March to as late as May) than at Baroon Pocket (January to February), thus it could be – as Meston implies – that Baroon was the site for initial (December to February) ceremony and feasting, with the Bunya Mountains being utilized later (March to April). Meston states that the Bunya Mountains were preferred for larger corroborees, whereas “Sphinx” (1857) tells us that it was variations in climate and availability between each year which ultimately dictated whether the main gatherings were held at one site or the other.

## MT MOWBULLAN



“The great head centre during the bunya season was on the top of Mobilan (Mt Mowbullan, Bunya Mtns), but that was only on great and special occasions, such as grand Corroborees, as it was too cold a spot to camp on from March to September. The camps were down in the sheltered valleys, in the thick scrub, near the running streams.”

- Archidald Meston. The Bunya Feast - Mobilans Former Glory. In the Wild, Romantic Days, The Brisbane Courier (Qld), Saturday 6 October 1923, p 18

“No other part of Australia presented such a spectacle as Mobolon, and its neighbourhood, in the old days when the nut was in season. Here was the ‘gathering of the clans,’ the meeting ground of the tribes.... The hundred tribes assembled, join in wild corroboree.”

- Cornelius T Moynihan, The Feast of the Bunya Brisbane: Gordon & Gotch, p.11-12, 66

## Baroon Pocket



MURRAY VIEWS NO 4 - View from Range Montville Q

“I went to Booroon. A creek, fed by shady gulleys of the brushes, passes it; low ranges, all covered with thick brush, all of the igneous formation, surround it; many a bunya tree looks down on the capers of the children of the forest and brush, of plain and mountain, of sea coast and of the country inland.”

- The Letters of F W Ludwig Leichhardt December 1843 Vol. 2, p 795

“There was also a small open plain called “Booroon,” (Baroon Pocket – Maleny), the name of the bora ceremony in the Mary River dialect, and there the men fought in single combats, and threw the spear and boomerang, and had wrestling and running matches, and there, too, the young men went through their initiation ceremonies...”

- Archibald Meston, ‘The Bunya Feast – Mobilan’s Former Glory,’. In the Wild Romantic Days,’ The Brisbane Courier (Qld), Saturday 6 October 1923, p 18

“This plain they call Baroon, and it seems the rendezvous for fights between the hostile tribes who came from far and near to enjoy the feast of the bunya...”

- John Archer, 1884 in Stan Tutt, Sunshine Coast History Brisbane: Discover 1994, p 146

“The great Bunya Scrub, called Boorum by the natives, from an open space in the middle of it, where they hold their great meetings...”

- ‘Report 2nd – Additional Remarks on the Bunya District and Its Natives,’ Simpson Letter-book AD 1842, in G Langevad, Cultural & Historical Records of Queensland, No. 1, July 1979 St Lucia: Anthropology Dept, Uni of Qld, p 2

“Booroom... takes this direction perhaps for 50 miles from north to south, is almost impenetrable except by crawling on the hands and knees. Here the bunya is plentiful and in the month of January, the blacks assemble for hundreds of miles round, and partake of the fruit....”

- ‘Statement of Bracewell and Davis as to the Supposed Administration of Poison to Some Blacks by White Men,’ Simpson Letter-book AD 1842, G Langevad, Cultural & Historical Records of Queensland, No. 1, July 1979 St Lucia: Anthropology Dept, Uni of Qld.

“In the early days, the Blackall Ranges was spoken of as the Bon-yi Mountains and it was there that Duramboi and Bracewell joined the feasts, and there also that father saw it all.”

- CC Petrie, Tom Petrie’s Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Brisbane: Angus & Robinson, 1983), p 12

“The Maroochy District was the home of the great bunya forest.”

- Audienne Blyth John Low’s House and Family, Yandina - Koongalba 1894-1994 Yandina 1994 , p 38



Platypus Pool at Baroon Pocket in 1890s

“This (Nambour/ Maroochy district) is the great bunya country. It extends about 10 miles further south and goes north to about Pinbarren.”

- William Pettigrew 1865 in Rev. Joseph Taiton,, Marutchi – History of the Sunshine Coast Nambour: Taiton, 1976, p 103

“The Bunya Bunya tree (here) is confined to a narrow belt of elevated country on the coast range, averaging from twelve and a half miles wide by twenty five in length....”

- Journal; of a Naturalist –

Continues, The Argus (Melbourne) Monday 1 July 1850, Page 4

(NB Leichhardt describes the area as “10 miles wide by 50 miles long”).

“(There) were large forests of those trees in the early days (around the Blackall Ranges etc.). They flourish still in places, but nothing has been done to protect them...”

- J Zillman, In the Land of the Bunya Sydney: W. Dryrock, 1899, p 18

“(Bunya pines) clothed the (Blackall) range.... (with) almost impenetrable scrub.... (and) red cedar of 20 ft girth...”

- Dave Hankinson Reminiscences of Maleny Maleny: Maleny & District Centenary Committee 1978, p 3-4



MURRAY VIEWS NO 17

- Obi Obi River below Narrows,  
Montville Q

# ***THE BUNYA PILGRIMAGE***

## **Initial Invitations**

“...the Aborigines belonging to the district sending messengers out to invite members of other tribes to come and have a feast.

Perhaps fifteen would be invited here, and thirty there, and they were mostly young people, who were able and fit to travel.”

“Then these tribes would in turn ask others... from tribe to tribe all over the country, for the different tribes were generally related by marriage, and their relatives then invited each other.... Those near at hand would all turn up, young and old, but the tribes from afar would leave the aged and children behind.”

- CC Petrie, Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Brisbane: Angus & Robinson, 1983), p 11-12

## **Co-ordinating & Signalling the Trek**

“These fires of the blacks, according to their own account, are for the purpose of summoning the tribes to the feast of the Bunya Bunya.”

- 'History repeats itself,' The Queenslander, 6 Ap 1901, p 33

“The blacks would arrive almost simultaneously at the mountains ... I believe it (= coordinated arrival) was done by smoke-signalling. The blacks had a wonderful system of smoke signals and could communicate good or bad news for hundreds of miles around... from



Bald Knob  
(gateway to  
Baroon)  
looking north,  
1925

Mt Mowbullen signalling north and west, from Pt Turbayne signalling to the east, from Coyne's lookout, signalling to the south... (Possibly) the balds (were) from bonfires for smoke signalling”

- J C Bennie, 'The Bunya Mountains – Early Feasting Ground of the Blacks, The Dalby Herald, 1931, p 2

“Candle Mountain (near Peachester - height about 1200 ft.) is so called because the blacks in the early days lit a fire on its top as a signal to other tribes to congregate for the bunya feast. It is situated near the head of the Stanley River in Queensland. From the top, a beautiful view is obtained of the Glass House Mountains, the ocean, and Moreton Bay.”

*On Candle Mountain in days gone by  
When blacks were wont to roam,  
And from its top up towards the sky  
The smoke rose white as foam.\*  
This was a signal sent to tell the other tribes afar  
That for a time all would be well,  
And there would not be war...*

- “OLD HAND.” The Bunya Feast The Queenslander (Brisbane) Thursday 16 August 1934, p 5

NOTE: Bunya bark and bunya nut shell gives off a very white smoke when burnt (Alex Bond, per. comm., 2012).

“A number of bush fires have been seen around, partly attributable to the number of blacks assembled for the bunya season. The aforesaid blacks have a belief that it is necessary for the welfare of the game to burn grass in the bunya harvest, which harvest - by the way - is this year a very poor one...”

- The Brisbane Courier (Qld), Monday 10 April 1865, p 3

“The blacks appear to have been busied for some days past in firing the bush, which at nearly all points around Brisbane has during the past week been blazing with much vigour. If this burning off be followed by the rains so much wanted, we shall doubtlessly have the pleasure of seeing the now scorched and blackened ground soon covered with a rich carpet of verdure... These fires of the blacks,

according to their own account, are for the purpose of summoning the tribes to the feast of the Bunya Bunya.”

- Domestic Intelligence , The Moreton Bay Courier (Brisbane), Monday 10 February 1851, p 2

## **Peaceful Pilgrimage**

“When the bunya nut season was in full swing, (all) feuds would be abandoned for the time being, and all blacks would be free to move at will through the precious country of the bunyas, but at the end of the season the armistice would end,…”

- Hector Munro, Dark Ways – Aboriginal Foibles, The Queenslander (Brisbane) Thursday 26 July 1928

“...every third year... there is an unusually large attendance. Hostile tribes meet here from all quarters, and as if on neutral ground, seem to forget their animosities.”

- Charles Archer, Letter to William Archer, Laurig, Norway, 25 April 1845

“...the Aborigines seem unwilling to join (be recruited as Native Police) on account of the Bunya Bunya season coming on”

- Ltnt Fred Wheeler, September 1863: COL/A44/63/2144 (Qld Archives: Colonial Secretary's Reports)

“It is common for all blacks within fifty or sixty miles of the Bunya Bunya, in the season when it is plentiful, to leave for a time their more fixed localities and go to eat the bunya bunya.”

“Even station blacks, who never leave their masters at any other time, want a furlough for “one fellow moon”, or perhaps only “five fellow sleep,” which generally turns out to be about as many weeks (i.e. five weeks) to go and “barter bunya bunya and make him corroboree along-a brother”, and at such times their masters generally give them a little stock of tobacco and a few shillings (for the journey), of which they are very proud.”

- J & A Mortimer, The Native Police, The Courier (Brisbane), Tuesday 4 June 1861, p 2

“(As) the blacks have congregated in extraordinarily large numbers (en route to the bunya lands), we have felt apprehensive that they intended to do us some mischief, but we have never known a sheep to be taken from our flocks, or a bullock to have been speared, by blacks that came to eat the bunya bunya.”



- J & A Mortimer, The Native Police, The Courier (Brisbane), Tuesday 4 June 1861, p 2

“They were quiet and peaceable... (though) they mustered in large numbers from great distances...”

- Thomas Archer, Recollections of a Rambling Life, Japan Gazette 1897, p128

## **Haste for the journey: procedures for camping and hunting**

“(At Deception Bay) they are in great haste... in order to follow the others to the Bunya Country”

- Rev. Schmidt 1842 in Thom Blake & Peter Osborne, Deception Bay – The History of a Seaside Community Caboolture Shire 2008, p 10

“(Petrie in Brisbane joined)...with a party of a hundred, counting the women and the children... They camped the first night at Bu-yu (Enoggera)... (Next) night... happened to be at the Pine (River)...The third night they camped at Caboolture... and next day started for the Glasshouse Mountains... On the fourth day, at about 4 o'clock (pm), the party arrived near Mooloolah...”

- CC Petrie, Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Brisbane: Angus & Robinson, 1983), p 12-15

(Each time they rested to camp en route to the bunyas) “...a black fellow would shout out the name of the place they were to meet again that night... and off they all went, hunting here and there...”

- CC Petrie, Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Brisbane: Angus & Robinson, 1983), p 12-15

“They did not think it worth their while (during the bunya trek), making huts for themselves for one night, but just camped alongside the fire, with opossum rug coverings”

- CC Petrie, Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Brisbane: Angus & Robinson, 1983), p 15

“The bunya bunya fruit is ripe. They are eating it. Let us - tomorrow - go for bunya!”

“Where is my basket? Here it lies. I must take it to the Bunya.”

“There's a (bunya) fruit here. Will you throw it down?”

- Conversations recorded amongst people camped at Enoggera in 1850s, about leaving for the Bunyas in William Ridley, Notebook (mss John Oxley Library), 1855

“...their wives, their piccaninnies, their dogs and other belongings... (all) go along”

- Daily Herald 13 February 1931

“We tried hard to induce Diamond to accompany us to Bribie’s Island; but, although he first promised to do so, he afterwards changed his mind, and said he was going to the Bunya Bunya (feast). ....”

“1st February, started early .... At Kalounda (Caloundra) we found a camp recently deserted, as the fires were still burning. The blacks we took with us said the occupants of the camps had left for the Bunya that morning, whither they followed that afternoon.”

- R B Sheridan, Mr Sheridan’s Account of the Search for the Missing Men, The Moreton Bay Courier (Brisbane), Wednesday 9 February 1859, p. 2

- (Pie Creek Gympie)

“The big bunya season came around every three years and the blacks always followed it, but in the off seasons.”

- Zachariah Skyring, ‘Article 11 – Hunting with the Wide Bay Blacks,’ Gympie in the Cradle Days n/d (c.1900?)

“In late January the ‘traffic’ was always heavy... Grandad would tell of the people on their northerly trek. He spoke of the long, thin, dusty, scrawny people appearing to be in no hurry. Sometimes a group would camp for a night on the northern ridge (of Meringandan) and hunt wallabies - but the lure of the Bunyas... would draw them on...”

- Ben Gilbert, Who Bide in Ancient Valleys, p 36-7

## **The Great Influx**

“It is conjectured that 5,000 blacks congregated this year... “

- The Sydney Morning Herald (NSW), Wednesday 5 May 1847, p 3

“In the early days, (the first white settlers) were often amazed to see large numbers of the blacks travelling up the valleys, principally along the creeks, towards the (Bunya) mountains.”

- J H I, Bunya Nuts, The Queenslander (Brisbane), Thursday 7 June 1928, p 6

“(Father recalled) ...lines of dusty hunters advancing in single file at a steady pace”

- Ben Gilbert, Who Bide in Ancient Valleys, Kingaroy: Info Publications, 2006

“From the vicinity of Goondiwindi and the New South Wales border ... some 1,500 natives (arrived for the bunya bunya) .... the Dalby police force is totally inadequate to cope with such overwhelming odds”

- Dalby Herald, 24/5/1866

“The nuts ripened in March, but the blacks arrived long before, and remained long after the season finished. Some of them extended their visit to five or six months.”

- Cornelius T Moynihan, *The Feast of the Bunya Brisbane*: Gordon & Gotch, p 13

“The natives resort here (Kaimkillenbar) every year during the (bunya) fruit season... (Mr Rolleston) says he has seen as many as 2,000 at once... here also is their famous Yamgin or hunting ground – or fighting ground.”

- Peachey 1859 in Maurice French, *Conflict on the Condamine Toowomba: Darling Downs Institute*, 1989 : p 129

“This man, Davis-by the blacks called “Deramboi”(Duramboi = James Davis) - was encamped with a large assemblage of eleven distinct tribes, (all) on their way to the Bunya-Bunya”

- H. Stuart Russell, *An Interpreter Recommended – To the Editor of the Herald, The Moreton Bay Courier (Brisbane) Wednesday 9 November 1859*, p 2

“The hordes came up the Condamine and Charleys Creek and went across where water was not hard to find ... avoiding the crests of ranges.”

- 1/120 - letter from KE to Mr Clancy JOL, OM 78-2, Kathleen Emmerson Papers

“Coastal and inland aborigines would gather at Munna Point and hold corroborees before they set off for the bunya feast. As they went along, they would spread out to hunt for food.”

- (Reminiscences of Bull and others in) ‘The Aborigines,’ *Tewantin State School Project, History of the Tewantin-Noosa District 1957*, p 21

“Tribes used to come from the Moonie, the Dawson, and Morton every year. They used to camp at Warmga Creek for the three months of the season. Warmga creek used to be lit up like Queens Street...”

- Johnny King, son of the Princess, Humphreys, Bonyi Bonyi, Nanango: *Wyndham Observer*, 1999, p 76

# ***AT THE BUNYA FESTIVAL***

## **General Protocol**

“...all hostilities were suspended, and all the invited tribes met there on amicable terms...”

“The visiting blacks had not the privilege of climbing trees and knocking the cones off, that being the exclusive right of the tribes who owned the Bunya country.”

“...Each tribe camped apart from the others, and, though the women of all tribes could fraternise, no woman could go near the men of another tribe.”

“Old men with grey hair had special privileges, and old women could go anywhere.”

- Archibald Meston, 'The Bunya Feast – Mobilan's Former Glory,' *In the Wild, Romantic Days,* The Brisbane Courier (Qld), Saturday 6 October 1923, p 18

“On these occasions all the tribes would be on friendly terms, but the guests were not allowed to climb the trees or to help themselves. The owners always gathered the nuts, and presented them to the visitors.”

- J H I Bunya Nuts, *The Queenslander* (Brisbane) Thursday 7 June 1928, p 6

“(As) ‘owner’ of these (bunya) trees, (King Sambo) told the party to sit down and remain seated. Climbing the trees, he threw down the cones and these remained untouched on the ground until he descended and distributed them”

- Bernard McNamara re/ Mary Clarke's recollection of 1880s, Stan Tutt, *Spear and Musket*, p 76

“Each black fellow belonging to the district had two or three trees that he considered his own property, and no one else was allowed to climb those trees and gather the cones, though all the guests would be invited to share equally in the eating of the nuts. The trees were handed down from father to son, as it were, and everyone, of course, knew who they were.”

- CC Petrie, *Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland* (Brisbane: Angus & Robinson, 1983), p 16

“Mother...said it was right, what the old warriors used to say about it:

none of the old tribesmen would sleep up there (the Bunya Mountains) at night.”

- Johnny King to Ray Humphrys, Bonyi Bonyi, Nanango: Wyndham Observer, 1999: p 76

NOTE: Certain Indigenous families – especially those on the west side of the Bunya Mountains, still – out of respect – never camp overnight amongst the bunya groves.

“The men fought during the morning and hunted during the afternoon. The gins collected the cones, and conveyed them to Yamison, six miles down the valley.”

- Cornelius T Moynihan, The Feast of the Bunya Brisbane: Gordon & Gotch, p 12

“Surveyor Hector Munro... told of a (native) group from Goondiwindi who, without approval, cut steps into a tree owned by a local leader called ‘Kangaroo’... According to Hector, the Dalby people, who had escorted the Goondiwindi people into the Bunya Mountains, stopped them and sent word to ‘Kangaroo.’ He arrived, appraised the situation and challenged (them) to a battle, at the next bunya feast.”

- Nils Holmer, Linguistic Survey of South-eastern Queensland, Canberra : Dept. of Linguistics, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1983., p 28

## **Opening Ceremonies**

“(The groups) arrive almost simultaneously”

- J C Bennie, ‘The bunya Mountains – Early Feasting Ground of the Blacks, The Dalby Herald, 1931 p 2

“Arriving at the Blackall Ranges, the (approaching) party made a halt at the first bunya tree they came to and a black accompanying them, who belonged to the district, climbed up the tree by means of a vine.... “

“When the native climbing could reach a cone, he pulled one and opened it with a tomahawk to see if it was all good. The others said if he did not do this, then the nuts would be empty and worthless. Father noticed afterwards, that the first cone was always examined before being thrown to the ground.”

“Then the man called out that all was well, and throwing down the

cone, he broke a branch, and with it poked and knocked off other cones. (They) made fires to roast the (first) nuts...”

- CC Petrie, Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Brisbane: Angus & Robinson, 1983), p 15

## **Feasting, Resting and Mirth**

*“Then all would join*

*In one great band*

*To feast throughout the day,”*

- “Old Hand,” The Queenslander (Brisbane) Thursday 16 August 1934, p 5

“These gatherings are really like huge picnics”

- CC Petrie, Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Brisbane: Angus & Robinson, 1983), p 11, 14

“During the season of the year it is eatable, they live under the trees, gorging themselves and sleeping off the surfeit.”

- 54 Charles Archer 23 Nov 1844 Brisbane River Valley 1841-1850 – Pioneer Observations and Reminiscences, Brisbane History Group 1994

“(They) spent a joyous time in feasting...”

- Archibald Meston, ‘The Bunya Feast – Mobilan’s Former Glory,’ In the Wild, Romantic Days,’ The Brisbane Courier (Qld), Saturday 6 October 1923, p 18

“January and February were special times of the year – the bunya season. We relied on a good crop for a change of diet. Donald (Aboriginal worker) would have already climbed the trees and knocked the first knobs off about Christmas.”

- Audienne Blyth John Low's House and Family, Yandina: Koongalba 1894-1994 Yandina 1994, p 38

“There were sounds of revelry by night in the shades of the mountains... Today (1905) the remnant that is left assembles there still, but the ceremonial splendour of the old days is absent...”

- ‘Bunya’, Reminiscences of the Never-Never Country, Morning Post (Cairns, Qld. )Saturday 11 February 1905, p 3

“(They'd) sing at night of their fair land, beneath the Milky Way.”

- “Old Hand,” The Queenslander (Brisbane) Thursday 16 August 1934, p 5

“They intended to have a fight, but their antagonists did not (even) appear. I saw some black beauties – young unmarried women... they were full of mirth and joke, and examined us with all the naivete of youth.”

- F Ludwig Leichhardt at Baroon Pocket , letter to Ltnt R Lynd, 19 January 1844

## **News-telling and Story-telling**

“During these festivities, the blacks ...at night told tales round the camp-fire.”

- J H I Bunya Nuts, *The Queenslander* (Brisbane) Thursday 7 June 1928, p 6

“(During the bunya feasts they)... gathered round the fires, and settled themselves for some good old yarns, till sleep would claim him for his own. Tales were told of what forefathers did, how wonderful some of them were in hunting and killing game, also in fighting. The blacks had lively imaginations of what happened years ago, and some of the incidents they remembered of their big fights etc were truly marvelous! They are also born mimics, and my father has often felt sore with laughing at the way they would take off people, and strut about, and imitate all sorts of animals.”

- CC Petrie, *Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland* (Brisbane: Angus & Robinson, 1983), p 12

NOTE: At some point during the bunya gathering, a representative from each group gave an account of news and events in their region – each in turn. This was sometimes – perhaps due to language difficulties between groups - presented as a dramatic skit (as in the case of the Kilcoy massacre, according to James Davies).

## **Composing New Corroborees**

“Poets of various tribes composed new corroborees, and songs were learned by tribes who did not know a word of the language.

A new song had to face a critical audience, and great was the applause denoting approval. “

“One or two favourites may be briefly quoted here are recorded by me 53 years ago.... (For instance, a popular one was from) the blacks, from New England, the Clarence and Richmond, (who) had a very fine song, which the women sang as a welcome to the young men on their return

at the end of two months strict seclusion after the Bora ceremony..."

- Archibald Meston, The Bunya Feast – Mobilan's Former Glory. In the Wild, Romantic Days, The Brisbane Courier (Qld), Saturday 6 October 1923, p 18

"To show approval, men did not clap, but merely made a noise 'Aaaaa,' sharply uttered, and repeated if they strongly approved. But bora men would (be)... watching the actors closely."

- Gaiarbau, in G Langevad, Cultural & Historical Records of Queensland, No. 1, July 1979 St Lucia: Anthropology Dept., University of Queensland, p 7

"(From) Glasshouse Mountains... emus.... The feathers, the gins used to stick in their hair on state occasions (at the bunya gathering)"

- CC Petrie, Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland Brisbane: Angus & Robinson, 1983, p 23

"At night during the bon-yi seasons, the blacks would have their great corroborees, the different tribes showing their special corroboree (song and dance) to each other, so that they might all learn something fresh in that way. For instance, a Northern tribe would show theirs to a Southern one, and so on each night, till at last when they felt to journey on again, they each had a fresh corroboree to take with them, and this they passed on in turn to a distant tribe."

- CC Petrie, Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Brisbane: Angus & Robinson, 1983, p.12

"a grand corroboree... war dances, the singing of war dances, and the indulgence of numerous festivities... feasting, dancing, chanting and singing went on merrily"

- J Zillman, In the Land of the Bunya Sydney: W. Dryrock, 1899, p 14-15, 17

"When about to have a corroboree (at the bon-yi season), the women always got the fires ready, and the tribe wishing to show or teach their special corroboree to others, would rig themselves out in full dress."

- CC Petrie, Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Brisbane: Angus & Robinson, 1983), p 12

"A bunya season is nearly always celebrated with a corroboree. On this occasion, fully a couple of hundred had come to camp, and the corroboree was prepared on an elaborate scale. The dances of the warriors showed great agility, and the small dramatic episodes were realistic."



“But among the twenty or so whites present, as invited spectators, was one Jack, a New Zealand digger, a little man, nimble and muscular, and with enough animal spirits to serve a couple of Goliaths. When the stage, as the open space between the trees may be called, was cleared after one of the episodes, the performers going behind the trees for rest, or (for) fresh daubs of riddle and chalk, Jack vaulted into the ring with a barbaric whoop. He was painted black, with only a loin cloth on, and only one white, who was in (on) the secret, knew he was not a black fellow. “

“He was an excellent dancer, and he started on a highland fling with amazing vigour. The whites, recognising the skill of the performance, and taking him to be a black fellow, encouragingly applauded; but the gins, who were resting from their drumming at the lower end of the open space, sent up various cries of derision. A couple of black fellows returned and viewed the Intruder for a minute; then the whole band of performers rushed into the open. The uproar was great, and the gestures threatening. But Jack was now giving an exhibition of jumping with a pole, varied with opera ballet posturing, and eccentric athletics.”

“At other times and places, Jack’s temerity would have had bad consequences. As it was, some of the wilder blacks had to be held in by the others; but when Jack, thoroughly exhausted, paused for a rest, the (Aboriginal) King marched to the principal of the whites, and said, “You take’em that fella away.” Jack was now singing an English comic song, accompanied the actions, and the whites began to be suspicious of what they had taken to be a part of the corroboree, but before any step could be taken, the blacks, men and women, marched off the ground, the King declaring “No more plurry (bloody) corroboree!”

- ‘Boora’ ‘By the Way’ Australian Town and Country Journal (NSW), Wednesday 1 March 1905, p 22

## **Competitive Sports and Games**

“(They held tournament) fights...and athletic feats.... (and at Baroon) threw the spear and boomerang, and had wrestling and running matches”

- Archibald Meston, The Bunya Feast – Mobilan’s Former Glory. In the Wild,

The first bowl players in Australia were aborigines. The green was a patch of level ground near camp, where the players assembled in their gleaming nakedness when the bandicoot and the carpet snake had sufficiently digested after a ceremonial banquet. They played with round, water worn stones, obtained from the beds of running streams. Enthusiasts frequently searched the rocky shallows for bowls. A sufficient number of perfectly round bowls of equal size was not easy to get, nor was the right kind of stone easy to grind to the required shape if it were not quite round. They were valued according to their heaviness (?) and sphericity. A faultless natural bowl was a prize.

The same stream provided marbles, also tomahawks, knives, and pounding stones for crushing seeds and bulbs. A wide mountain stream was (thus) a treasury that was sometimes searched by the whole family or company after heavy rains.

A team with good bowls had a big advantage over those whose eccentric spheroids sometimes acted like comeback boomerangs.

When a prize bowl was hit hard and broken there were loud lamentations from the owner. Sometimes a side that had no chance of winning otherwise aimed to break its opponents' treasures. Broken bowls were scattered about many old camping grounds. At some places there were broken heads also, but I don't know if there was any connection between the two!

*The inter-tribal games were played on the occasions of big festivals, when many tribes met in common ground, as at the bunya feasts.*

*At these times the local tribe supplied the bowls, and there were no disadvantages. The best players of each tribe were picked. The non-players lined the sides of the green, and barracked for their representatives.*

*The same rivalry existed in spear and boomerang throwing, in foot racing, and other athletic contests, and also in various acrobatic competitions.*

A big gathering of blacks for a corroboree or tournament was usually preceded by a battue (banquet?), in which many kangaroos were killed for the feast. They also brought emus, ducks, scrub turkeys, carpet snakes, eggs, honey, koalas, wallabies, and heaps of 'possums.

The tournament was their equivalent of the Olympia games, and the great athletes had to be well fed and freed from the necessity of hunting for tucker between games. After the banquet the tournament commenced.

- E S Sorensen Aboriginal Games Queenslander 5 Dec 1929 p 9

NOTE: Willie McKenzie/ Gaiarbau (Dungidau man – Kilcoy area) describes competitions such as lines of wrestlers, and boomerang-throwing contests – concentric circles drawn in the earth, with contestants trying to get their boomerang to return closest to the ‘bull’s eye’ – a centre post. Presumably these were the type of sports competitions practiced during Bunya gatherings.

## **Initiations**

“...and there, too (Baroon) the young men went through their initiation ceremonies from which all women and uninitiated youths were rigorously excluded.”

- Archibald Meston, The Bunya Feast – Mobilan’s Former Glory. In the Wild, Romantic Days, The Brisbane Courier (Qld), Saturday 6 October 1923, p 18

NOTE: There were also many Indigenous ceremonial sites near to, surrounding, and en route to the bunya lands. Indigenous people retain stories of the ceremonies performed here. In many parts of SE Queensland, if mountains hold special significance (such as the Bunya, Glasshouse and Blackall Ranges) they were, out of respect, rarely visited except for serious reasons. Also, ceremonies about sacred mountains were often held at places where those mountains could form a backdrop to the rites (Alex Bond, personal comm., 2002).

## **Inter-tribal Parliament**

“My grandfather (Tom Petrie) told me the bunya gatherings were great meetings... a type of ‘inter-tribal parliament’ – much like our parliament. News and business relating to the entire region was discussed by the elders.”

- Rollo Petrie, personal communication, Petrie 1984.

“(The meetings were) somewhat after the style of a Salvation Army gathering” (= each elder in turn getting up to state the news or issues of their country)

- CC Petrie, Tom Petrie’s Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Brisbane: Angus & Robinson, 1983), p 22

“...there was a great meeting of the native tribes, 13 or 14 in number, called a Toor (ring) by the blacks, from the circumstance of a great circular ditch being dug by the women for that ceremony. These meetings may be called by any tribe, the messengers being dispatched in every direction, and are summoned for the purpose of settling any differences which may arise among them.”

- Report 3rd, Enclosures with Dr Simpsons Letter, 30 May 1842, (from Bracewell and Davis), On the Supposed Poisoning of Blacks by White Men, Simpson Letterbook 1842, p 2

“...To this meeting a party of blacks from the district of the bunya scrubs to the south (near Kilcoy)... made mention of a of a great number of blacks belonging to different tribes... having died in consequence of eating food given them by white men. They described the ...symptoms with much minuteness... These tribes vowed vengeance and said they already had some but were not yet satisfied. The blacks at the toor were very much infuriated at this report.”

- Durramboi (James Davis') account, in G Langevad, Cultural & Historical Records of Queensland, No. 1, July 1979 St Lucia: Anthropology Dept., University of Queensland, p 4-5

“...old men held conferences on all matters of importance, sitting in a circle... the younger men being allowed to stand round and listen, but not laugh or speak.”

- A W Howitt, regarding practices on the Bunya Mountains, Native Tribes of South-east Australia Cambridge University Press 1910, p 324

## **Dispensing Justice: Tournaments & Affrays**

‘(King) John Harvey, better known as ... the King of Laidley (one of the most accomplished of the Queensland Aboriginal Monarchs), passed through Toowoomba yesterday... Accompanied by his ...spouse, (he) was ... pleased to inform us that he had been to the Bunya Bunya Mountain, to ascertain, by personal observation and investigation, the actual position of the two rival tribes — those occupying the district around Maryborough and Wide Bay District, and those on the Darling Downs and Ipswich districts.”

“King John asserts that the Wide Bay and Maryborough blacks have long acted in a haughty, over bearing, and taunting manner towards

their neighbours on the Downs and in the Ipswich district, which culminated in an appeal to arms. The rival commanders mustered their men-of-war and, by mutual consent, the forces met each other in the field at the Bunya Bunya Mountain. The conflict is described as having been short, sharp, and decisive, the Wide Bay and Maryborough blacks being beaten at all points, and fleeing in the greatest disorder, leaving the moderate number of 0000 (no) dead on the field. The victorious heroes were in ecstasies of delight at the glorious triumph they had achieved.'

- Toowoomba Chronicle, 'War,' re-printed in The Cornwall Chronicle (Launceston) Saturday 29 June 1867, p 2

"First they began a quarrel, quarrelling soon led to blows, then to a grand melee. There was a great deal of noise, throwing of spears, boomerangs and waddies, but "no one was a penny the worse.' It very seldom happened in a fight that any were slain... despite the boasts of 'slaughtering' hundreds etc..."

- J Zillman, In the Land of the Bunya Sydney: W. Dryrock, 1899, p 14-15

"...many hundreds assembled. When each party was formed in battle array, with some few perches between the ranks, a few on each side came forth to meet each other, when a great "yabber" took place, and a few spears were thrown; then it was all over. There is always more bounce and yabber than fighting."

"I have seen two fights single-handed.... They bounced awhile as to who would cut first; one of them got a great cut at the back of the shoulder. It was a great gash, and he lay prostrated for a week, while his lubra filled the great wound up with clay, and camped with him, administering to his wants, giving him food, &c. ....

- Sketcher. 'A Trip to Gympie 50 Years Ago'. The Queenslander (Brisbane) Saturday 20 August 1904, p 8

"...the bunya harvest... this year (is) a very poor one, and scarcely worth the battle the Myall and the Burnett tribes are about to fight, according to annual custom, somewhere on the Burnett side of the Range."

- The Brisbane Courier (Qld), Monday 10 April 1865, p 3

NOTE: Many white observers recall how "major fights" were planned and carried out

during the Bunya gatherings. As these accounts demonstrate, although white settlers believed entire tribes were destroyed (because the victors would boast they had “annihilated” their foes) those who actually attended report the ‘battles’ being largely cathartic – for venting and sorting grievances. They almost never resulted in casualties. In fact, injury/ shedding of blood was the usual sign one party had ‘won,’ and apparently resulted in the cessation of the tournament.

## **Arranging Marriages**

“Polly Williams – she got married up there (i.e. had her marriage decided) at the Bunya Mountains.”

- Sandra Bauwens, Notes from Audio Recordings: Indigenous Knowledge of Bunya Mtns Region/ Bunya Festival Part 1: Routes and Traditions from Groups of the West Flank of Bunyas (Darling Downs etc.), 28 April 2010

NOTE: A number of early sources imply young people’s marriage partners were decided by elders during the meetings of the tribes in the bunya lands.

## **Tradefair and Gift-giving**

“On Dirijin, I harvest the bunya nuts and give some to the visitors.”

- Traditional song, recalled by Eve Mumerwa D. Fesle, Conned! St Lucia: University of Qld, 1993, p 22-3

“I clearly remember, since a boy, the blacks of the Clarence returning from the Bunya feast, bringing long black brigalow hand spears... they got from the blacks of Durundur, either as presents or by barter.”

- Archibald Meston. The Bunya Feast – Mobilan’s Former Glory. In the Wild, Romantic Days, The Brisbane Courier (Qld), Saturday 6 October 1923, p 18

“...before leaving any common meeting ground, the Aborigines always exchanged possessions”

- CC Petrie, Tom Petrie’s Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Brisbane: Angus & Robinson, 1983), p 56

NOTE: Indigenous oral traditions speak of the bunya gathering as a bit of a ‘trade fair’ where not only great quantities of bunya nuts were given, but also items exchanged or freely given at the conclusion of each festival.

# **CONCLUDING THE FESTIVAL**

## **Farewell Activities**

“(they) never leave the neighborhood till all has dropped from the trees”  
- Sphinx, Moreton Bay Sketches No.10, Sydney Morning Herald, 21 Dec 1857, p 8

“Taking the bunyas as a pivot, (distant) tribes .... whilst unable to enter into a general conversation... had many words in common, by which they could make themselves understood, and amongst those words was bung, used when the nuts were finished dead-gone.”  
- ‘Native Names,’ The Brisbane Courier (Qld) Thursday 22 November 1928, p 3

“(Festivities continued) until the time came for his farewell corroboree and the homewards march.”  
- Archibald Meston, ‘The Bunya Feast – Mobilan’s Former Glory,’ In the Wild, Romantic Days,’ The Brisbane Courier (Qld), Saturday 6 October 1923, p 18

“... as a matter of course they did not separate without a grand corroboree and fight...”  
- The Sydney Morning Herald (NSW), Wednesday 5 May 1847, p 3

“...all would repair to an open piece of country and there would keep the fight going for a week or so. ...At the finish of the great fight, the tribes would start off homewards, parting the very best of friends with each other, and carrying large supplies of bon-yi nuts with them.”  
- CC Petrie, Tom Petrie’s Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Brisbane: Angus & Robinson, 1983), p 23

“During the Bunya season they lived in the mountains, but when this was over they would come down to the (Jimbour) station where they were always well treated. The bunya nuts generally, begin to ripen in March, and finish towards the end of May.”  
- ‘Jimbour House – Historic Homestead,’ The Longreach Leader (Qld.), Friday 29 January 1926, p 5

## **Return Journey**

“According to my grandfather, by early July people (gathering at Bunya Mountains) would begin to return to their tribal lands”  
- Ben Gilbert, Who Bide in Ancient Valleys, p 36-37

“...when they felt to journey on again, they each had a fresh corroboree to take with them, and this they passed on in turn to a distant tribe....”

- CC Petrie, Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland Brisbane: Angus & Robinson, 1983, p 12

“...the travellers were lean and hungry-looking on the forward journey, but on their return, after some weeks... they would be fat as whales, with skins as glossy as a newly-polished boot. Some people aver that the blacks used to devour so many nuts that they were unable to walk, and had to lie down for a period.”

- J H I, 'Bunya Nuts,' The Queenslander (Brisbane) Thursday 7 June 1928, p 6

“The following day we passed Durundur station, now called Woodford ...We met a number of blacks, and got some of them to carry our swag up the range, for as it was the season for bunya nuts, consequently the blacks were very fat (i.e. strong). They were each carrying a load of nuts in nets on their heads.”

- A Trip to Gympie Fifty Years Ago,' Sketcher, The Queenslander (Brisbane), Saturday 8 March 1919, p 41

“(They) bestowed bunya nuts on whoever crossed their path”

- Simpson in Gerry Langevad, trans., Cultural and Historical Records of Queensland No. 1, The Simpson Letterbook (October 1979) H. J. Hall, ed., p 9

“At certain times of the year they would go walkabout from the Bunya Range, Hunchy... (They) camped overnight at our paddock (Woombye)... a happy care-free lot of folk... laughing and joking half the night... (Next day) they would leave behind a lot of bunya nuts for us”

- Charlotte Kuskopf recalling c.1890s, in Joseph Taiton, Marutchi – History of the Sunshine Coast Nambour: Taiton, 1976

“On the return journey (from the bunya grove) the party used to sing a ‘happy song’ learnt originally from a religious order. The modified words went something like this:

*Humma Dumma Humma Dumma*

*Happy Anivar*

*Preachin Preachin*

*Happy Annivar”*

- Bernard McNamara re/ 1880s to Stan Tutt, Spear and Musket, p 27



“The season for gathering the fruit of the bunya-bunya-tree is just over, and the blacks... are breaking up, and are returning to their native wilds... on the whole the separation of the numerous tribes has been very peaceable; the stations visited by them en route home were passed by quietly”

- The Sydney Morning Herald (NSW), Wednesday 5 May 1847, p 3

“After the feast was over, they repaired ... to the coast, where they lived for some time on the change of food... The blacks from afar would also go to the coast if they had friends there who invited them, and would be glad of a corroboree that took them seawards.”

- CC Petrie, Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Brisbane: Angus & Robinson, 1983), p 18 & 23

“Whether the trees (away from the bunya areas) originate from seeds planted by the blacks - the nuts being brought from the Bunya Mountains in ages long gone by - is a question that is hard to settle, but it seems to me to be very probable in the case of the isolated patches of bnyas found on the Pine River, since the tree is not found all over the scrubs like the hoop pine is, but only in certain places.”

“I have seen young blacks many years ago planting out young pines as an amusement... (or) for the sake of their valuable nuts.”

- H. Gold, The Bunya Pine, The Queenslander (Brisbane) Saturday 18 June 1892, p 1162

## ***Bunya Cuisine***

### **Harvesting the Nuts**

“The blacks here in the bunya season they climbed the (bunya) trees while they were milky for food and when ripe they got the bunya nuts.”

- William C Low, Letter 15 March 1945 to David W Bull, Royal Qld Historical Society Archives, p 4

“As they fell to the ground (from the climbers tossing them down), the blacks assembled below would break them up, and taking out the nuts, put them in their dilly bags. Afterwards they went further on,

and, camping, made fires to roast the nuts, of which they had a great feed...”

- CC Petrie, Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Brisbane: Angus & Robinson, 1983), p 15

“...The trees grow in clusters probably 30 yards apart - the shortest trees away from the ravines, and coincidentally bearing the sweetest nuts.... rarely do people take home the cones. Instead they break the cone in pieces, and from a thick covering, extract the nuts. The weight of nuts would possibly be half that of the cone, so it can be seen that when one carries home the cones, one is (too) loaded up with a lot of waste material. It takes some hours to gather sufficient nuts fill a sack. ...”

“When they fall from the height of 40 feet, they hit the ground with great force, so bunya nut seekers are always on the lookout, in case one of the cones should fall, and (they) never perform the task of relieving the nuts from the cone in the neighbourhood of a bunya nut tree.”

“Being oval to shape, the nuts (= cones ) roll down the sides of the hills when the ground is struck, and may stop a distance of 200 yards from the tree they fell from. The cones from some trees in a gorge used to roll a quarter of a mile before they stopped, because the trees were situated on the side of a precipice, where it was with difficulty (that) one could get a foothold.”

- J H I, 'Bunya Nuts', The Queenslander (Brisbane) Thursday 7 June 1928, p 6

“(The Mt Eerwah Vale) gullies filled with cones every three years, which the Aborigines came to collect...”

- Allan Gridley from Gridley Family in Hessie Lundsell, Eumundi Story Noosa: Noosa Graphic 1989, p 8

## **Bunya fireplaces**

“All over the Bunya country, old bunya trees were falling from time to time, and the blacks used the bark for fuel. A big old tree would give tons of bark, which is probably the thickest in the world and burns very freely... Bailey told me someone sent him a piece that was 10 inches.... “

- Archibald Meston, 'The Bunya Feast – Mobilan's Former Glory', 'In the Wild, Romantic Days,' The Brisbane Courier (Qld), Saturday 6 October 1923, p 18

“I have heard the old type of Aboriginal say that bunyas have the prettiest blaze that ever was seen.”

- Johny King, son of the Princess, Ray Humphreys, Bonyi Bonyi, p 76

## **Roasted and Raw**

“This is women work. When they get the bunya nut they (get) two flat stone one big stone one little one they crack the nuts up before they put it in the fire when they cook they crack it over again and they get the nut out what you eat.”

- Freddy Cobbo, Note No 98 - Gubbi file, Tennant Kelly

“As a rule, the nuts were roasted in the ashes, and seldom eaten raw.”

- Archibald Meston, The Bunya Feast Mobilans Former Glory. IN THE WILD, ROMANTIC DAYS The Brisbane Courier (Qld) Saturday 6 October 1923, p 18

“We always had plenty of nuts peeled to eat raw or cooked.... roasting in hot coals.”

- Audienne Blyth John Low's House and Family, Yandina - Koongalpa 1894-1994 Yandina 1994, p 38

“The bon-yi nuts were generally roasted, the blacks preferring them so, but they were also eaten raw’

- CC Petrie, Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Brisbane: Angus & Robinson, 1983), p 16

“...they eat large quantities of it, after roasting it at a fire. “

- Illustrated Sydney News, Saturday 23 April 1881

“Before being roasted each seed is partially bruised with a stone. When it has been in the fire for a minute or two it gives a crack, the signal that it is cooked.”

- Mathews Two Representative Tribes, p 93-4

## **Bunya Paste & Bunya Bread**

“Another variety of bread is made by pounding up bunya nuts. To the powder hot ashes are added to dry out moisture, and then the ashes air blown away, and the residue made into a cake, and cooked. The ashes remaining in the mixture are not objected to.”

- Hector Munro, 'Dark Ways -.Aboriginal Foibles.' The Queenslander (Brisbane), Thursday 26 July 1928

“(Also) grinding to a paste and making damper.”

- Audienne Blyth John Low's House and Family, Yandina - Koongalba 1894-1994 Yandina 1994, p 38

“For children and old people who have no teeth, the nut is crushed, mixed with a little water, cooked again in ashes, then eaten. This is called nangu. On this they get very fat.”

- Gaiarabau in G Langevad, Cultural & Historical Records of Queensland, No. 1, July 1979 St Lucia: Anthropology Dept, University of Queensland., p 55

“Bunga (bunya flour): This (too) is women work... They smash it up like mash potato and then it is made into bread they to put a bit of porky pine (echidna) & fat into it to make taste and it is bread. Everyone in the camp made it that way.”

- 98 Gubbi – Freddy Cobbo – Tennat Kelly

“The blacks.... also pounded it into a meal they called “Mannoo,” and baked it in small cakes.”

- Archibald Meston, The Bunya Feast Mobilans Former Glory. IN THE WILD, ROMANTIC DAYS The Brisbane Courier (Qld) Saturday 6 October 1923, p 18

## **Other Bunya-season Foods**

“It will be seen there is no lack of food of different kinds during the bon-yi feasts.; the natives did not only live on nuts as some suppose.”

- CC Petrie, Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Brisbane: Angus & Robinson, 1983), p 16

“Great times these were.... catching paddymelons in the scrub with their nets, also in obtaining other food, of which there was plenty, such as opossum, snakes and other animals, turkey eggs, wild yams, native figs, and the large white grub, which is found in dead trees...”

- CC Petrie, Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Brisbane: Angus & Robinson, 1983), p 16

“they came into the camp about 4 o'clock (pm), from all directions, laden with good things – opossums, carpet snakes, wild turkey eggs, and yams... The turkey eggs were about the size of a goose egg...”

addled eggs ... with chickens in them, were eaten and relished by the blacks after being roasted in hot ashes.”

- CC Petrie, Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Brisbane: Angus & Robinson, 1983), p 16-17

“They do the same with water potato and water lily and scrub yam (smash it into flour) ...made into bread they to put a bit of porky pine & fat into it to make taste ...and the children food is wild pansy. The children chew it all day only.”

- Freddy Cobbo Note: Gubbi, Tennant Kelly c.1933, p 98

“(They ate an) abundance of bunya and roast kangaroo for supper”

- J Zillman, In the Land of the Bunya Sydney: W. Dryrock, 1899, p 21

”Then the round tops of the cabbage tree palm, and other palms that grew there, served as a sort of vegetable, and were not bad, according to my father.”

- CC Petrie, Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Brisbane: Angus & Robinson, 1983), p16

“The top of young palms was eaten with honey.... Queensland nuts were just broken on a stone and eaten raw.”

- Gaiarabau in G Langevad, Cultural & Historical Records of Queensland, No. 1, July 1979 St Lucia: Anthropology Dept., University of Queensland., p 55

“During these festivities the blacks ... went hunting... (enjoying) weeks of feeding on bunya nuts and scrub wallabies, and ‘possums up on the scrubby gorges.”

- J H I, Bunya Nuts, The Queenslander (Brisbane) Thursday 7 June 1928, p 6

“In the evening, the gins came into camp laden with bags full of (bunya) pine cones: the men brought in the bandicoots, iguanas, wallabies, snakes, scrub turkey eggs, sleeping lizards, possums, bears and bustards from Jimbour Plains.”

- (Pioneer reminiscence), in Ray Humphreys, Bonyi Bonyi, Nanango: Wyndham Press, 1999, p 15

“A kind of bread is made, from (black) bean-tree nuts, which are pounded up between two stones, and the powdered material then placed in a trough consisting of wild banana leaves. The preparation is then placed in running water for some days to wash out any poisonous

content, and then the cooking proceeds. I have seen some sodden Johnny cakes and damper in my time, but I was never able to face the bean tree cake cooked by the black fellow.”

- Hector Munro, 'Dark Ways -.Aboriginal Foibles,' The Queenslander (Brisbane), Thursday 26 July 1928

“...on the way to these (bunya) feasts, the blacks in those days would often catch emus in the vicinity of the Glasshouse Mountains, and also get their eggs...”

- CC Petrie, Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Brisbane: Angus & Robinson, 1983), p 23

### **Preserved, Pickled and Fermented Nuts**

“they got the bunya nuts and in all parts of the district and they put them in mud holes covered with mud so they would never be short of food; (it) did not matter what part of the district they were in.”

- William C Low 15 March 1945 to David W Bull, p 4

“Besides what they eat on the spot, they preserve a great number in holes at the side of the creeks, so situated as to allow of their being always covered by the waters. This improves their flavour, and when carefully baked they are exceedingly (sweet?) and very nourishing.”

- Sphinx, Moreton Bay Sketches No.10, Sydney Morning Herald, 21 Dec 1857, p 8

“Donald (our black worker) would preserve some nuts by placing them in a mound of dirt and covering them with bark to keep them absolutely dry.”

- Audienne Blyth John Low's House and Family, Yandina - Koongalba 1894-1994 Yandina 1994 , p 38

“They stored large quantities by burying them in the ground, but when dug up the fragrance bore no resemblance to rondeletia, though nuts were actually improved for eating raw or cooking. The women also put the nuts in dilly bags, hung in running water, and kept them fresh for weeks. That process also improved the nuts considerably.”

- Archibald Meston, The Bunya Feast - Mobilan's Former Glory., 'In the Wild, Romantic Days,' The Brisbane Courier (Qld), Saturday 6 October 1923, p 18

“...they sometimes store up the Bunya nuts, hiding them in a water

hole for a month or two. Here they germinate, and become offensive in taste to a white man's palate, but are considered by the blacks to have then acquired an improved flavour..."

- Walter Hill, 'The Bunya Bunya Pine.' Illustrated Sydney News (NSW) Saturday 23 April 1881, p 19

"(They) collected large quantities and stored them by burying in the ground. These nuts when dug up had the pleasant fragrance of a decayed fowl...."

- A Meston, The Bunya Mountains The Brisbane Courier (Qld. )Monday 9 May 1892, p 7

"Barnji (bunya) was put into a large cane basket, which stood 3 feet high, was round, with a diameter of about 2 feet, and it had a lid that laced on. It was only some lagoons that contained the right kind of mud to mature the nuts, and natives would travel 15 miles to get to them. They carried the nuts in smaller baskets on their heads, some men even carrying two. Here they would bury the nuts in the big basket, and from time to time one man would go to see if the nuts were ready to eat. He would judge this by looking for the small hollow left in the point of the nut, made by the little normal yellow shoot having dropped out. Then they were ready. Before putting the nuts in the fire to roast it, the thick end would first be cracked with a stone, otherwise it would go off with a pop, and shoot everywhere."

- Gaiarabau (Willie McKenzie), in G Langevad, Cultural & Historical Records of Queensland, No. 1, July 1979 St Lucia: Anthropology Dept, University of Queensland, p 55

"The blacks of the district sought out a damp and boggy place – soft mud and water, with perhaps a spring, - and buried their nuts there, placed in dilly-bags. Then off they went to the coast, living there on fish and crabs for the space of a month, when they returned and digging up the nuts, had another feast... The nuts when unearthed would have a disagreeable, musky smell, and would all be sprouting, but when roasted were greatly improved."

- CC Petrie, Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland (Brisbane: Angus & Robinson, 1983), p 23

# **Attendees**

“(The bunya gathering) seems to be regulated in extent and profusion by the varieties of climate and peculiarities of the season, so that one year the great Gathering occurs here, at another in Wide Bay, &c”

- Sphinx, Moreton Bay Sketches No.10, Sydney Morning Herald, 21 Dec 1857, p 8

NOTE: I am not listing attendee groups by name, as names of such groups can differ enormously between the early accounts – in spelling, district, sub-divisions etc. – and also between what these accounts and what descendants today prefer to call themselves. Moreover, the early observers’ accounts of these names are far from reliable. Instead I am presenting here, in chronological order, the areas that early white observers noted people had come from.

This is hardly a full listing. Other records, and oral and anecdotal accounts speak of visitors from Charleville, the Central Highlands (Carnarvon Gorge area), the Coffs Harbour region, Dubbo and (presumably much less often) even further afield – some claiming even (presumably sporadic visitors?) from Cooper Creek, South Australia and Victoria. Finally, it should be noted that the information below only lists the areas the white observers had noticed, knew existed and bothered to mention in their writings.

Dr Ray Evans proposed that once the former Bunya Bunya Reserve was decimated (1850s-1870s), groups that had previously attended at Baroon Pocket may have instead attended more regularly at the Bunya Mountains, until that area also was no longer available (c.1880s – c.1890s).



**Baroon Pocket attendees:**

*Duramboi (Davies):*

- Kilcoy/ Esk
- Cooloola
- Fraser Island

*Revs Schmidt & Eipper:*

- Deception Bay
- Toorbul/ Bribie
- Redcliffe

*Sheridan:*

- Caloundra
- Bribie Island

*Mortimer:*

- Manumbar
- Widgee Widgee
- Wide Bay/ Burnett
- Maryborough

*Tom Petrie:*

- Logan district
- Moreton Bay Islands
- Burnett River
- Wide Bay district
- The Burnett
- Bundaberg
- Mt Perry
- Gympie
- Bribie
- Fraser Island
- Gayndah
- Mt Brisbane (= Mt Cootah & D'Aguilar Ranges)
- Kilcoy
- Brisbane/ Enoggera

*'Old Hand' (Peachester):*

- Peachester
- Upper Stanley River
- Glasshouse Mountains

- Moreton Bay

- 'Pacific Ocean' (coastal)

*Charlotte Kuskopf:*

- Buderim

- Hunchy

- Woombye

## **Mt Mowbollan attendees:**

*Dalby Herald (1860s-1870s):*

- Goondiwindi
- NSW border
- McIntyre River

*Archibald Meston:*

- Fraser Island
- Moreton Island
- Stradbroke Island
- Mary River
- Bundaberg
- Lower Burnett
- Bribie Island
- Brisbane
- Nerang River
- Main Range
- Barwon River (NSW)
- Richmond River
- McIntyre River
- New England (NSW)
- Clarence River
- Durundur (Woodford)

*Cornelius Moynihan:*

- Cooyar
- Yamison
- Mooloolah
- Conondale
- Yandina
- Eudlo
- Blackall Ranges
- Glasshouse Mountains
- Gympie
- Brisbane
- Tarampa
- Tarong
- Uralla
- Moreton Bay
- Jimbour

- Mt Bauple
- Dawson River
- Boyne River
- Mary River
- Toomgun
- Flagstone Gully
- Urah
- Cootharaba
- Esk
- Glamorgan
- Woomgoompa
- Tuleeen

*'J.H.L' (1928):*

- Moonie
- Maranoa River
- Clarence River
- Burnett River

*Bennie:*

- Maranoa River
- Moonie

*Kathleen Emmerson:*

- Chinchilla
- Condamine



