

Estuary history

The Aboriginal interpretative story presented here is derived from a report prepared by Jabree Limited for the City of Gold Coast, (2015) 'Palm Beach Parklands Signage Project: Aboriginal Cultural Heritage'.

The Yugambeh people from the Yugambeh Language Region are the traditional custodians of these reserves. Aboriginal people have been present in the area for at least 20,000 years. Following sea level stabilisation around 5000 years ago, the Currumbin area has been characterised by melaleuca forests, coastal swamps and intertidal zones which provided important resources for Aboriginal people. The climate was mild and food such as shellfish, mud crab, turtles and other species in the estuary were readily abundant and harvested using fish spears, traps, nets and shell hooks.

The meaning of the Aboriginal word 'Currumbin' has been debated and variably translated as 'kangaroo', 'a species of pine tree' and 'quicksand' for which Currumbin Creek, particularly at its estuary and mouth, was notorious.

The Aboriginal family known as 'Costello' lived and built a home on a little island at the mouth of Currumbin Creek which became known as Costello Island (and later also as Granny Birch Island in the late 20's and early 30's). The island was partially washed away by the floods of the 1930s but today has been reinstated through sand replenishment and is known as Rockview Park and is no longer an island.

Logging was the first major industry in the Gold Coast region, including Currumbin Valley, with timber getters heavily exploiting the area's rich stands of red cedar, hoop pine and other valuable timber in the 1840s and 50s. Logs were sent down Currumbin Creek, collected on the beaches and formed into rafts that were floated to Brisbane.

At first there were few inland roads and so loaded drays and coaches used the beach to get from Currumbin to other places. Crossing creeks and getting around headlands was difficult, dangerous and only attempted at low tide. The mouth of Currumbin Creek was particularly treacherous as it contained quicksand which swallowed up horses and travellers.

The extension of the railway from Nerang to Coolangatta from 1900 to 1903 stimulated an economic recovery, boosting both tourism and agricultural production. The railway required the building of sizeable steel bridges over Tallebudgera and Currumbin Creeks and a station was situated at West Burleigh. The original rail bridge over Currumbin Creek survives today as a footbridge.

Wild weather has played a part in the development of the Currumbin area. The mouth of Currumbin Creek is changeable and prone to silting up during floods. On various occasions locals have been forced to clear the mouth of sand, sometimes by hand, and in 1929 floods washed away part of Granny Birch's Island. In 1931 a flood severely damaged the Currumbin Creek motor bridge. The beaches of Currumbin and Palm Beach have also been scoured away during cyclonic weather and over the years rock walls and groynes were built to help protect foreshore areas.



Hotel Nicol, Currumbin, 1924 and the surrounding vegetated banks of the creek.

A place for the community

Tarrabora Reserve and Beree Badalla Reserve were proclaimed reserves for environmental and recreational purposes by the City in 1980 following a hard fought campaign by locals. The Currumbin Estuary Protection Committee led the campaign to protect the public park from a development proposal to build a marina, hotel and multistorey apartments on the site.



Currumbin Estuary protest - photo Will Ardill.

Following the success of the campaign to preserve the estuary for public enjoyment, the locals as a group worked for many years to raise public awareness and generate support for its protection. The group changed their name to the Friends of Currumbin and from this Gold Coast Hinterland and Environment Council (GECKO) was also formed. Since that time both groups have continued to lobby for the protection of the social and environmental values of Currumbin and wider areas.

In the late 1990's the Beree Badalla boardwalk was built by the City to offer visitors a unique opportunity to walk through an intertidal wetland and marvel at the marine life living on their doorstep in what is otherwise an urban environment.



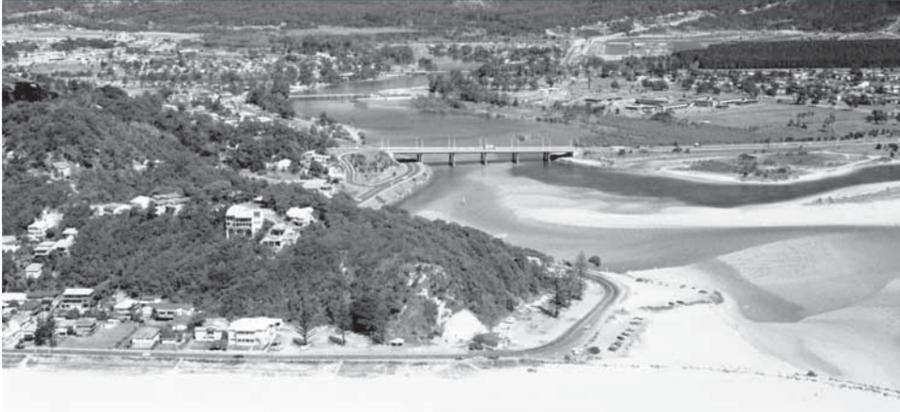
Some of the dedicated Tarrabora Reserve Bushcare group members

In 1999 the Tarrabora Reserve Bushcare Group was officially formed with assistance from the Councillor at the time Daphne McDonald. Through environmental weed control and the replanting of native species, the group has successfully restored the reserve from a once weed infested landscape, to a flourishing ecosystem that provides habitat for both native flora and fauna. Over the years the group have planted thousands of native plants and contributed countless hours to regenerating the area. The group meets monthly and new members are encouraged to join.



The Motley Crew

The Motley Crew Group is another local community group which utilise the Currumbin estuary. Since 1985 the group have met daily at dawn at the inlet near the entrance to Tarrabora Reserve for swimming and social gatherings. The crew is comprised of mostly mature aged individuals from all walks of life. In the Crews words, "the old codger or old chookie you may see standing on the beach may be a barrister, a nurse, a professor, watchmaker, magistrate or school teacher". One of the most valuable aspects of this group is the comradeship members enjoy. For some, it is their reason for getting out of bed each day, providing a sense of purpose and an opportunity to keep fit.



Currumbin Creek and Tarrabora Reserve, circa 1970.



Railway line and bridge over Currumbin Creek, Currumbin, circa 1914.



Granny Birch's/Costello Island at the mouth of Currumbin Creek, Palm Beach, Queensland, circa 1911.



Currumbin Creek and Hotel Currumbin, circa 1940.



View from Hotel Nichol, Currumbin, circa 1920s.



View of Tarrabora Reserve, year unknown - photo Will Ardill.



View of Currumbin Creek inlet, year unknown - photo Will Ardill.