

# Revisiting the place name meaning of Yaroomba

*The Gaiarbau, 'bunya country' and 'thick vine scrub' connections*

(by Kerry Jones, Arnold Jones, Sean Fleischfresser, Rodney Jones, Loretta Algar, Helen Jones & Genevieve Jones)

The Sunshine Coast region, fifty years ago, may have had the greatest use of place names within Queensland derived from Aboriginal language words, according to researcher, E.G. Heap's 1966 local history article, 'In the Wake of the Raftsmen'. In the early days of colonisation, local waterways were used to transport logs and timber, with the use of Aboriginal labour, therefore the term 'raftsmen'. Windolf (1986, p.2) notes that historically, the term 'Coolum District' included all the areas of Coolum Beach, Point Arkwright, Yaroomba, Mount Coolum, Marcoola, Mudjimba, Pacific Paradise and Peregrine. In the 1960's it was near impossible to take transport to and access or communicate with these areas, and made that much more difficult by wet or extreme weather. Around this time the Sunshine Coast Airport site (formerly the Maroochy Airport) having Mount Coolum as its backdrop, was still a National Park (QPWS 1999, p. 3).



Figure 1 - 1925 view of coastline including Mount Coolum, Yaroomba & Mudjimba Island north of the Maroochy Estuary

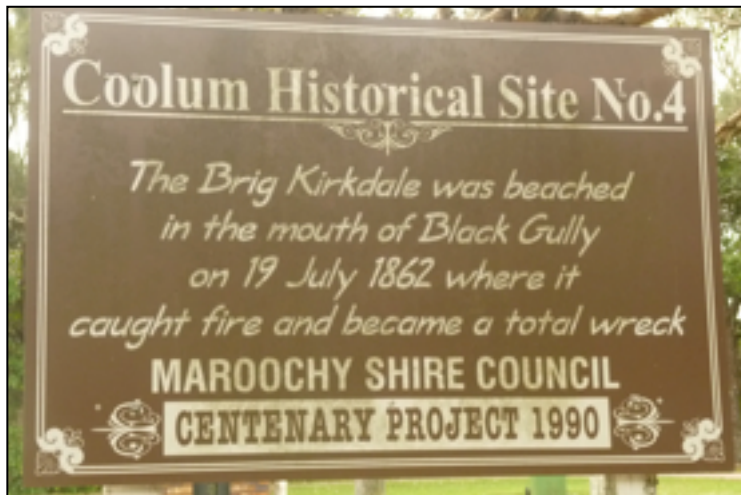
In October 2014 the inaugural *Yaroomba Celebrates* festival, overlooking Yaroomba Beach, saw local Gubbi Gubbi (Kabi Kabi) Traditional Owner, Lyndon Davis, performing with the yid'iki (didgeridoo), give a very warm welcome. While talking about Yaroomba, Lyndon stated this area too was and is 'bunya country'. Windolf (1986, p.8) writes about the first timber-getters who came to the 'Coolum District' in the 1860's. Here, the Bunya tree (*Auracaria bidwillii*<sup>1</sup>) Hoop pine (*Auracaria cunninghamii*), Brown pine (*Podocarpus elatus*) and White Beech (*Gmelina leichardtii*) were of significant commercial value, very keenly sought and then soon depleted (Davies 1995, p.36; Windolf 2004, p.13). Windolf (1986) in his research refers to Audienne Blyth of Yandina, a descendant of the pioneer family, the Low's (hence David Low Way). Audienne has records from her own family's history that such trees were felled from the Coolum District and taken to Coolum Creek, then rafted down the Maroochy River.

In 1842 Windolf (1986, p. 8) notes that, 'Andrew Petrie reached Noosa in a small boat and met with the escaped convict Bracefell. It was from Bracefell that Petrie received the names of prominent features,

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<sup>1</sup> The locally occurring Bunya nut tree (*Auracaria bidwillii*) and the Hoop pine (*Auracaria cunninghamii*) are related to the Norfolk Island pine (*Auracaria heterophylla*), endemic to Norfolk Island and used extensively in coastal streetscaping.

among them Coolum Mountain'. Aside from a number of escaped convicts beforehand, Tom Petrie (son of Andrew) in 1862 was the first, free white man to come (here) to the mouth of the Maroochy Estuary from Brisbane, accompanied and guided by a band of 25 Aboriginal People (Windolf 1986, p.8; Davies 1995, p. 36). Davies (1995) notes that, 'from this time timber-getters intensively occupied land along the streams, such as Maroochy and Mooloolah Rivers...'



**Figure 2 - Birrahl Park at Yaroomba Beach (the site of the Kirkdale wreck of 1862 now known as Black Gully)**

As well in 1862, the brig Kirkdale became beached and wrecked at Yaroomba, at the mouth of the creek known as 'Black Gully'. Part of the Kirkdale (timber) is on display at the Sunshine Coast Council's Coolum library. Yaroomba and Black Gully have been researched and recorded as 'first contact' sites (Greenwood 2010), as Aboriginal

People had been sighted leaving the Kirkdale in their canoe, a short time after its beaching. The local Aboriginal People (Kabi Kabi/Gubbi Gubbi or *Undunbi*) involved in the Kirkdale incident, were most likely a different group or clan from those that had travelled up the coast with Petrie from Brisbane.

**Figure 3 - mouth of Black Gully on Yaroomba Beach. (L to R) Rodney Jones, Sean Fleischfresser & Kerry Jones visit their family's old stomping grounds for fishing and eugarie (pippi); a place for possum hunting over countless generations.**



In past times and throughout the millennia beforehand, Mount Coolum was and is surrounded by freshwater springs. Before colonisation, Yaroomba Bushland Park (wetlands), via Warran Road would have been a significant source of drinkable water and bushfoods. Such spring water today still drains into Black Gully and onto/into the sands of Yaroomba Beach.

An article in the Nambour & North Coast Advertiser dated 4/5/1951 suggests that,

'The hills all around the east of Mount Coolum were called, 'Eurangunda', meaning 'water under the hills', for there are springs around the hills". And that, "...there were different kinds of water, notably water with an iron content, a sweetish water and a water with a sulphur content" '.

As well, the word 'Eurungunda,' is explained by Windolf (1986, pp.43-44) in that,

'Eurungunda - A name seldom used now but it refers to the hill on which the water tower stands near the southern end of Grand View Drive. It is almost certainly derived from "yurru-nga-gunda", which was the word for both vines (as for ropes) and the Cabbage Tree palm (*Livistona australis*). These two meanings are interconnected in that the natives used a vine, in much the same way as Canadian loggers do today, to climb the palms to obtain the edible heart. Palms of this type and *thick vine scrubs* were prevalent in the area and this place would seem to be appropriately named in line with Aboriginal word usage.'



Figure 4 - A remnant of the 'thick vine scrub'; a historical term used for local vegetation in the early days of colonisation and timber-getting (Yaroomba Bushland Park)

Heap (1966, p.16-18) points out that, 'Aborigine names were more descriptive and utilitarian than ... (European) names'. Euringundery and Yurru-nga-gunda, refer to places of rope vine (Supplejack), Cabbage palm tree, and spearheads. Explained further by Heap in that,

'The Aborigines used a vine (*Flagellaria indica*) which they called "yurru"<sup>2</sup> and which they cut into lengths ten or twelve feet long, for climbing trees quickly. The hard outer part of the cabbage palm (*Livingstonia australis*) which is prettily marked, was used in making spear heads'... and that a, 'single name can indicate the presence of more than one commodity in that area (eg Euringundery).'

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<sup>2</sup> 'yur'ru', 'yu'roo' and 'Yurol' are listed in numerous historical documents and language dictionaries; vine was used in the making of huts, fishing nets and basket weaving; spears were also used for fishing; for more details go to: <http://noosasnativeplants.com.au/plants/234/flagellaria-indica>





Figure 5 - Aerial maps of Yaroomba & Black Gully

The word Coolum as in Mount Coolum is a local Kabi Kabi language word possibly meaning a combination of things like ‘blunt’, ‘wanting’ and ‘death adder’ (or short snake). The name word for the locale Yaroomba came to be approved in 1961 by the Place Names Board North Quay in Brisbane. This transpired after the board received advice from Dr Fred Whitehouse, working with the Aboriginal Elder and Knowledge Holder, *Gaiarbau* (whose anglicised name is Willie McKenzie) from the neighbouring Jinibara Clan. Whitehouse wrote that,

‘An alternative spelling would be Euroomba which we would prefer, if your board would approve. But since in the Dawson Valley there is Eurombah Creek on which Eurombah cattle station<sup>3</sup> is situated, you may prefer Yaroomba’.

<sup>3</sup> Eurombah cattle station is located in western Queensland, formerly a part of Hornetbank (Goongarrie) station, near Taroom. Hornetbank station had members of its Fraser family killed in 1857 by Aboriginal people as a retaliatory action to pastoralists continuing to invade sacred sites and traditional resource areas (Laurie 1957). Historically, various Aboriginal clans (having traditional and established sovereign laws) are noted as having met to collaborate at the Bunya gatherings, eg Bunya Mountains near Kingaroy; and then to ‘resist’ the colonising forces. In the early 1900’s, many local Kabi Kabi people were ‘removed’ to and are buried at inland ‘missions’, including at Taroom and Cherbourg. It is more likely than not, that in the 1960s Willie McKenzie (*Gaiarbau*) and Dr Fred Whitehouse, would have had knowledge of such events. Libby Connors (2015) has written about such events in ‘Warrior’, regarding *Dundalli* of the Jinibara people (Connors 2015; Murphy & Crook 2016).

Once local source concludes that the word, 'Yaroomba that Dr Fred Whitehouse suggested ... means surf beach but there is little to support this view and it seems likely that there was some adjustment to the truth to suit the tourist image'. The Courier Mail, back in 1936, has articles about place names (*Nomenclature of Queensland*) that refer to the nearby *Yurol* (Yurol State Forest) as being a, 'A settlement between Cooroy and Pomona, on the North Coast (railway) line; it was the native word for scrub vine'.

Gaiarbau's traditional country (Jinibara - hence *Yinneburra*) extends along the Blackall Range (known for its traditional Bunya nut gatherings<sup>4</sup>) including the western side of the railway line from Eumundi to Caboolture and further (eg Woodford). Gaiarbau is noted as having extensive traditional knowledge (Murphy<sup>5</sup> & Crook 2016) including that of traditional methods in net making and fishing along coastal waters (Walters 1985, pp. 52-53; Kerkhove 2013). Unlike other Aboriginal People, it seems that in the 1960's he had the freedom to move around southeast Queensland and was extensively interviewed and written about by researchers and by the poet, Kath Walker. The language of the Jinibara People may be quite different from that of their coastal neighbours, the Kabi Kabi People.



Brough Smythe Papers, c 1840 (State Library of Victoria's Manuscripts collection)

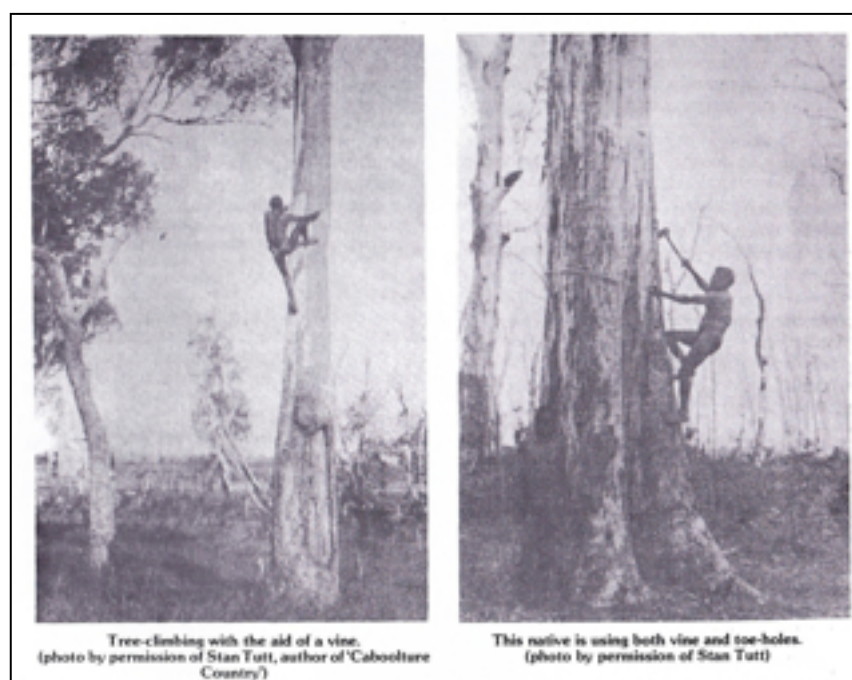
Figure 6 – a) L to R - Sean Fleischfresser, Rodney Jones & Kerry Jones, local Kabi Kabi Traditional Owners at Yaroomba Bushland Park reflect on the traditional uses of vines by Aboriginal people; b) Artist impression of hut; c) sketch of traditional Aboriginal huts and village.

<sup>4</sup> The 1842 *Bunya Proclamation* declared for protection of bunya groves within the Maroochy and Mooloolah catchments was a response by Governor Gipps, so as to protect Aboriginal people from being displaced from their traditional lands and resource areas, following a series of massacres of Aboriginal people in NSW (Blyth 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Ken Murphy, Jinibara Traditional Owner, is the grandson of Gaiarbau (Willie McKenzie).



In reflecting upon the possible Jinibara meanings or interpretations of Yaroomba, it is questionable (as Windolf 1986 indicates) that it refers to 'surf beach', although it would have been quite convenient to 'sell' this meaning. Yaroomba came to be named in the 1960's (sea-change) at a time of marketing and promotion of holiday destinations, land sales and land speculation. In light of the above information it is possible Yaroomba or Euroombah is an interpretation of Eurungunda or 'yurru-nga-gunda', referring back to useful things in the daily traditional life of Aboriginal People when camped in the area (eg springs, freshwater, vines to access food and to build huts/shelter). As mentioned earlier, the eastern side of Mount Coolum was known for its springs and freshwater. This idea is made more plausible when considering the known traditional campsites at (and other special use areas close to) Coolum Beach, Stumers Creek, Twin Waters, Bli Bli and Cotton Tree. Many places containing freshwater were particularly significant to traditional Aboriginal people, and were often sites of legends and stories (Symons & Symons 1994, p.21). Speaking in more general terms, Historian Dr Ray Kerkhove (2015, pp. 5, 8 & 10) notes that many towns in southeast Queensland and across Australia have been founded on Aboriginal camp or village sites and the nearby freshwater resources.



**Figure 7 – Tree climbing to access traditional food resources included the use of vines and toe holes.**

Obviously more research is needed into the name meaning of Yaroomba; ideally and ethically this would be done by or in partnership with the descendants of *Gaiarbau*, the (neighbouring) Jinibara Traditional Owners (Native Title Holders), of the Blackall Range and Bunya gathering area. How Yaroomba came to be named is especially interesting, as the fact that the much revered (now and back then) *Gaiarbau* (Willie McKenzie) came to this locale and gave it some place-names, significantly adds to the historical and cultural heritage values of the area; this in addition to the already very extensive local Kabi Kabi Aboriginal heritage.

It is vital that the community help advocate for greater recognition of the exceptional cultural heritage, historical and environmental values of the Yaroomba, Mount Coolum and Coolum Beach area. Guidelines as to how government, council, developers and landowners can work towards 'best practice' and better work with Traditional Owners in conserving and promoting cultural heritage, can be found online at:

<https://www.datsip.qld.gov.au/people-communities/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-cultural-heritage/cultural-heritage-management-plans>

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### *Additional online information:*

About Jinibara People:

[http://www.nntt.gov.au/searchRegApps/NativeTitleRegisters/NNTR%20Extracts/QCD2012\\_011/NNTRExtract\\_QCD2012\\_011.pdf](http://www.nntt.gov.au/searchRegApps/NativeTitleRegisters/NNTR%20Extracts/QCD2012_011/NNTRExtract_QCD2012_011.pdf)

Poetry about Gaiarbau (Willie McKenzie) by Aboriginal Poet, Kath Walker, also known as Oodgeroo Noonuccal of Stradbroke Island:

<http://www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/poets/noonuccal-oodgeroo/last-of-his-tribe-0719010>

<http://www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/poets/noonuccal-oodgeroo/the-dispossessed-0719048>

Sunshine Coast Libraries – photographs from 1962 of Gaiarbau (Willie McKenzie), of the Jinibara People:

[https://sunshinecoast.spvds.com/cgi-bin/spvds.exe/ENQ/OPAC/BIBENQ?ENTRY=willie+mckenzie&ENTRY\\_NAME=BS&ENTRY\\_TYPE=K&BIBCOLX=PSC&NRECS=30&QRYTEXT=Picture+Sunshine+Coast](https://sunshinecoast.spvds.com/cgi-bin/spvds.exe/ENQ/OPAC/BIBENQ?ENTRY=willie+mckenzie&ENTRY_NAME=BS&ENTRY_TYPE=K&BIBCOLX=PSC&NRECS=30&QRYTEXT=Picture+Sunshine+Coast)

Dr Fred Whitehouse (a geologist with an interest in anthropology)

<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/whitehouse-frederick-william-12017>

## **Acknowledgments**

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