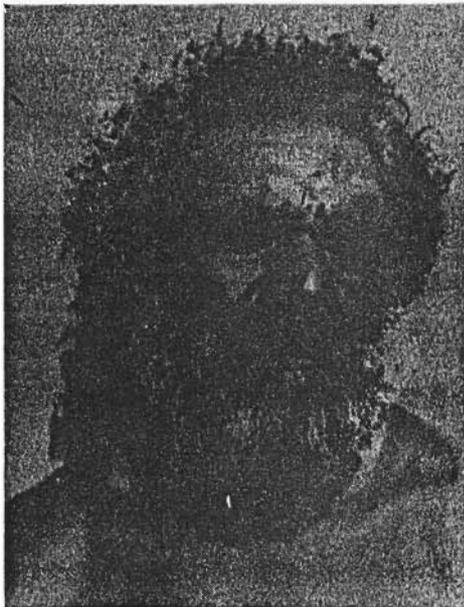


Blackfellow — good spirit of the Hastings River

("Koree-Koree- Nabbe Doongang.")

It was one hundred years ago when the word went out... "The blacks are back"... "They are making their way now across "Yeppen". It was true and the group must have comprised 60 or 70 in all with women and children and the warriors leading the way, trailing spear and weapons, surrounded by their hunting dogs who relentlessly sniffed the grass for game. They called the animals "Mirree" and as they crossed the "Bit-tay" (Creek) the women and picanninys brought up the rear, splashing and laughing their way across in single file with the "Mirree" pups that had to be carried if the going was too heavy for them in the water.

Earlier a farmer had sent word to the tribe that he could use a couple of men for some tree-felling and fencing and maybe a couple of months work... it didn't matter at all, the whole tribe came along for it was time to shift anyway. Their previous campsite was starting to stink-up with decaying food not burnt and human excrement. The "Housekeepers of the Australian Bush" would now take over...



CHARLIE "KING MURRI"...

One of the Hastings most prominent aboriginals was Charlie Murray, born at Walgett in 1864. More commonly known as "King Murri" he married Nellie Dungay a member of the Thungutti tribe at Rollands Plains on the 18th October, 1891.

His son, also Charlie, passed away on the 13th August, 1983. The senior Murray was nominated as "King" by the white settlers, however, he was never heard to be referred to as "King" by his fellow aborigines.

It is reported that Bunyah Jimmy "King of the Hastings River" would never allow his photograph to be taken.

Some of the elders were distant and aloof with the whites and only spoke in their own tongue for they did not want to understand the ways of the white strangers with their weapons used for hunting and "Boongar-Bongalar"... (shot when fighting.) The natives had their "Nulla-Nulla and "Heliman" and they were the weapons that had been theirs for countless generations so they talked about it as they sat in front of the "Kooyah" (Fire) taking in the heat from the burnt log as the lubras busied themselves cooking them a meal of roasting flesh.

They reflected on strangeness of the white man's ways. There were never any starving blacks, but always, it seemed, there were starving whites when the droughts came, and they asked them for help. The younger bucks in the tribe approaching manhood were more affable with the whites for they were the new generation and the smaller picanniny laughed and played with the "white picanniny" in the creek, for they had a curiosity about one another with the colour of their skins on their naked bodies. The Gins were Gunyahs now that were springing up everywhere with their sparse skin and bark coverings as a shelter wind, sun or rain. A wandering tribe from over the Range in the New England area could be expected one day for they had been told to join camp and re-new friendship and marriages that were promised. They were always reciprocating past visits with the Wilson River, Pappinbarra and Forbes River Tribes.

When you came to visit, you always brought food in abundance, and left without taking any, for that was the rule. With a bit of luck a white-man may be persuaded to hand over a beast for a Corroboree as a kind of rent for the land that was used and the white flour was much sought after if the settlers could be prevailed upon.

In other times hates erupted in some spiteful jealousies that burst into open quarrels over a young and comely gin. When that happened it was never safe to set foot outside your own territory. If it was time to move into new hunting

country then you kept a wary eye out for unfriendly faces until it quietened down and always avoided the old camp sites unless you had the safety in numbers that made of risky to throw a hissing spear.

The men rose and went out to "read" the country for game and the hunt. From now on it would be the job of the women and children to keep the forest floor clean and clear of sucker growth and dead wood so the warriors could hunt with more speed and stealth. The gins would climb the trees and rob the nest of the "Kuppine" (wild bee) for his honey. It was an easy task for the men to catch the wild bee in flight. They just plucked him out of the air between forefinger and thumb which was a practice that amazed the whites for their reflexes had long been dulled with the easiness of their living. Once held, the "Kuppine" was pricked with a small soft feather and released. It was the gins job to follow the flight back to the hive. They climbed the trees looping a vine around their waists and jumped up with amazing speed sometimes dislodging a "Coola" (Koala) or the "Whattoo" (Possum) for those on the ground with their killing sticks.

When the wild yams showed yellow leaf it was time to use the digging stick and then replant new vine so it would bear again. Over by "Bulkara" which the whites called (Bago) there was always a prolific growth of these.

Sometimes a woman would be "Cast for death" and that got everyone talking and other times it was a newly initiated man who had broken tribal law. Even if this happened accidentally, and he had run far away, to escape, it did not matter at all for it was always the end for him. Everyone just seemed to know when he died and went about with down-cast eyes, wishing to forget, as they searched for food and wild fruits of the Australian bush. The Burrawang was much sought after for its nuts, which were crushed, placed in a paper bark then leached in running water for a week. It could poison if this was not done. Then it was roasted and became known to the whiteman as "Brown Flour", highly valued by them too.

Along the coast this area was known as "Ulitarra" which meant bountiful land. For the "Koree-Koree" it was also known as "Touris" and that meant their spiritual territory and the tribe roamed their monadic life freely in the land which stretched from the Manning River in the south up to the Wilson River in the north. Generally the Hastings Tribes were called "Ngamba" and the dialect was "Biripi."

Tribal friends today and enemies tomorrow, for that was the way it was. Especially with the young wild ones growing with their lusts and passions and found it hard to be contained when an "Elder" took a more desirable lubra for himself. The more eager ones tried to filch them away from the visiting tribes and then, passions exploded. "Big Peter" over with the Rollands Plains tribe attacked his own lubra in a jealous fit of anger and "Dungar Billy" came to her assistance for he liked her. That led to a fight watched by the whole tribe as they tore at each other with stone axes. "Dungay" slashed "Peter" on the neck and in the weeks that followed, he seemed to recover a little, but he could never again completely lift his head. "Big Peter" had to even the score when he swung a murderous blow that caught "Dungay" on the hip and he had a terrible limp after that. In a few years both men had died as a result of these wounds which restricted their hunting stealth for survival.

The gins always carried a tomahawk, mainly to cleft the water-logged trees lying in the stream for they were in constant search of the Cobra worm which was chopped from under the bark. It was a delicacy as also was the sweetness of the yellow back-fat strips of "Tarroke" and known to the whites as the black goanna.

When drunken orgies broke out that was the worst time, and they erupted when the men had taken too much "Fey", which was fermented honey. The whites gave them their own alcohol, and trouble was more frequent, as tribal life

(continued on Page 13)

“Good spirit of ‘Hastings River’”

(continued from Page 12)

disrupted. Wheaten flour and “Bakka” were given for labour sometimes and the people became more indolent and tried to avoid the tribal discipline which had kept them together before. They became more slothful and avoided the hunt. Diseases appeared and Tuberculosis struck them as they lay about the whiteman's village in the wet after a too frequent drunken bout. The end was gradual but it was coming.

The warriors were curious of the whiteman's sports. Harry and Dave Combo were horsebreakers and roughriders of note who could be depended to roundup straying stock. The gins ogled them for their prowess, and in athletics they were both eventime runners competing with and beating many whites. They were great bowlers in cricket with their accuracy and could throw from the boundary to break the wicket stumps. Harry Combo became a whip-master and the accuracy of his flick could peel a leaf from an overhanging limb. He was always at it.

The white man found a market for Koala skins in Canada and Alaska and killed them in thousands. Distainfully, they wasted the flesh as they stripped the fur and the blackman wondered about that. The whites would prefer a fattened steer, quartering it amongst their families and neighbours. With the carcass strung up on the gallows, to be gutted, the blacks came in like magic from the bush grabbing at the entrails as they spilled out on the ground and threw them into the fire; scorched a little, but mostly eaten half raw. It confounded the whites that they seemed to be able to sense when this was about to happen. The settlers gorged them selves of fresh meat and salted the rest away in huge vats or casks that they said would keep for up to 12 months at a time. The natives continued to hunt for fresh meat all the time without provision for tomorrow, and they smiled when the whiteman had trouble from so much food poisoning, for meat was hard to keep in a fly blown hot Australian summer. Ducks and Waterfowls were in abundance, rising noisily when disturbed in great black clouds out of the swamps and lakes. Skilled warriors could bring down a bird with every throw of his “Burrikun” (Boomerang).

The whites thought little, of their own waste and destruction, hating the Kangaroo who stood in his corn paddock peeling the cob when it had reached the muttii stage and never bent the stalk. They called it sport as they chased them with their staghounds and shot “Maroonghe” (Black Duck) and “Waring” (pigeon) in many thousands, even neglecting to retrieve them in places they said were too wet to go.

The “Koree-Koree” was born to a totem which he could not kill, and that ensued the survival of

that species. As he grew older and received more tribal scars, the law was relaxed for him with his age, and he could then eat it if it meant to live. This was a natural law of conservation bred into the native way of life as it was for all the tribes who respected it.

The whites had a strange and curious way of understandings in these matters. The “Koree-Koree” just knew that the EARTH, the AIR, the WATER, and the SUN were the Great Spirit's gift, for ALL men to enjoy. The whites wanted to BUY Land for blankets, Tomahawks and Flour. The natives thought this strange. How could you sell something that was owned by everyone and was communal property. There was plenty for everyone. Let the whites think that it was theirs if they wanted to buy. The natives would wander back later and travel over it again just the same as they always did... that was their nomadic existence.

Mick Landrigan bought his farm at Colonel's Creek and put a paling fence around it to keep the Paddymelons out which liked to eat the seeds he planted. The “Koree-Koree” liked the flesh of “Burrage” for it was sweet and they hunted him with a leader in a line, spaced apart in the undergrowth. Their leader would give out short sharp yelps and the startled Paddymelons would try to dodge back towards the sound of the hunter as the quickest means of escape. That was his undoing as he ran the gauntlet of the line of warriors who aimed their killing sticks at his legs. They communicated silently along the line as to how many they had killed, took what they wanted and left the rest without destroying more than they needed. Those left behind, were not disturbed by what had happened.

Someone said to Mick Landrigan... “Those Paddymelons will eat you out.”... Mick took a few palings out of the fence and let some in, each night. Early in the morning, before daylight, he put the palings back and killed the “Burrage” as they raced about to escape. Then, there were no more left, and Mick reported, much later... “We

ate the Paddymelons out.”... no longer was heard the warriors yelp in ambush of the “Burrage”.

After all, Mick Landrigan wasn't any different to anyone else and the blackman had taught them all about the good things to eat.?

“KOREE-KOREE. NABBA DOONGANG.”

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