

RESEARCH

Project 7.2

Project 7.3

Project 7.4

PROJECT 7.1**An environmental history of Ngadjon-Jii country and community*****Project Leaders: Dr Sandra Pannell (CRC) and Ms Yvonne Canendo (Ngadjon-Jii)***

Since the first Europeans arrived in the Malanda area in 1907 and set about clearing the blocks of rainforest allotted to them by the government, this rainforest environment has undergone dramatic transformations resulting in a contemporary landscape which suffers from many of the effects of extensive environmental degradation. Notwithstanding the magnitude of these changes and their somewhat recent nature, there is a strange silence about the natural and social processes associated with the creation of the landscape we see today.

Ngadjon-Jii Aboriginal people today have been both witnesses to and, at times, co-agents of some of the more dramatic environmental transformations that have taken place in the rainforests of the Wet Tropics. Identified by Tindale (1974) as the quintessential Aboriginal rainforest dwellers, Ngadjon-Jii people have continually occupied the Malanda region. As such, members of the Ngadjon-Jii community possess a social memory which spans more than 80 years of European and Indigenous interactions with the environment, a period in which vast areas of rainforest were cleared for European farming. While their cultural memories of the environment extend well into the past beyond these experiences of contact, at least, it appears, to the most recent volcanic activity in the region, some ten thousand years ago (Johnston 1994, see also Dixon 1976).

In the native title era, in both pre and post-determination situations, Indigenous people are increasingly involved in negotiations and new partnerships with a variety of environmental management agencies. Many are faced with the soon-to-be realised prospect of actually determining the future management of their traditional country, perhaps for the first time since the arrival of Europeans. In this context, indigenous environmental histories, framed by local laws and customs, represent an important cultural resource in explaining and understanding the present landscape to Aboriginal and non-Indigenous communities, while Indigenous indicators of environmental change and continuity represent a culturally appropriate way to identify and monitor the health of country in the future. For the current generation of Rainforest Aboriginal people there is a time critical dimension to the recording and communication of Indigenous environmental histories, dependent as they largely are upon the knowledge and memories of a diminishing body of elders with direct experience of 'early days' and 'old people'. Mindful of

these demographic limitations, one of the key aims of the project is to establish for future generations, an enduring and accessible record of Aboriginal environmental histories and ecological knowledge.

POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

Karen MARTIN (JCU) Masters

The implications of rainforest Aboriginal worldviews and cultural processes for western research and researcher relationships



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