

PROGRAM

seven

Aboriginal Collaboration and Capacity-Building in Research

*Led by Dr Sandra Pannell,
James Cook University*

Objective: The rainforest is a complex system of living Aboriginal cultures. Sustaining these cultures requires recognition and respect for Aboriginal peoples' prior ownership and their intricate and vast knowledge of the rainforest. Program 7 works to ensure information is available to enable incorporation by agencies and industry of best management practices that are appropriately cultural, collaborative and capacity building for Aboriginal Traditional Owners in reciprocal relationships with others within the Wet Tropics region.

Project 7.1 – An Environmental History of Ngadjon-Jii Country and Community

Led by Dr Sandra Pannell, James Cook University

Aboriginal values, perspectives and indicators of environmental change and continuity have been identified in Project 7.1, of which a major objective is an examination of the overall role the Ngadjon-Jii community have played in contemporary environmental management regimes. Ngadjon-Jii Aboriginal people today have been both witness to and, at times, co-agents of some dramatic environmental transformations that have taken place in the rainforests of the Wet Tropics. As rainforest dwellers, the Ngadjon-Jii people have continually occupied the Malanda region on the Atherton Tablelands and possess a social memory spanning more than eighty years of European and Aboriginal interactions with the environment – a period during which vast areas of rainforest were cleared for European farming practices.

Following productive field work in 2003/2004, progress this year saw the continued extensive researching of the archival and photographic database located at the Cairns Historical Society, Eacham Historical Society and James Cook University Library, with the Ngadjon-Jii community receiving copies of documentation relating to their cultural and environmental history.

During collaborative field work with Ngadjon-Jii community members over the past two years, Dr Sandra Pannell recorded the environmental values and histories of the Malanda Conservation Park; Topaz Road National Park; *Top Camp* in Wooroonooran National Park; former sites occupied by Aboriginal camps around the Malanda township; *Jillan*; Lake Eacham; *Bunjabilli*, *Gulkagulka*; Josephine Falls in Wooroonooran National Park; various farms at Glen Allyn; Curtain Fig Tree National Park; Picnic Crossing on the Barron River; The Seven Sisters near Atherton; the Johnstone River and a number of its tributaries; the Russell River; Old Boonjie; and the Topaz Area. Selected Ngadjon-Jii community members also took part in field-based audio-visual training as part of the project.

Dr Pannell's research this year culminated in the finalisation of a manuscript that will be published by the Rainforest CRC during 2005/2006.



Dr Sandra Pannell's researching of archives belonging to the Cairns Historical Society unearthed this image dating back to the 1930s. The inscription reads 'Aboriginals at their Natural Huts, English's Jungle Avenue, Malanda Q'. The photo is one of many included in a manuscript of Ngadjon-Jii Country and Community to be published by the Rainforest CRC (Image courtesy of the Cairns Historical Society).



In December 2002, Ngadjon-Jii people demonstrated the building of a traditional rainforest dwelling, 'midja', for a student researching the architecture of traditional residential structures. Many of the Ngadjon-Jii people involved in the demonstration had lived in such dwellings at various places around Malanda on the Atherton Tablelands (Image courtesy of Roger Wilkinson).

Project 7.1

Set Milestones 2004/2005	Achievements 2004/2005	Predicted Milestones 2005/2006
1. Continue field work training for Ngadjon-Jii community members.	Training was continued this year and participants attended a video production workshop in December 2004.	
2. Continue with field-based research interviews with Ngadjon-Jii community members.	Four field trips were undertaken during this reporting period.	
3. Further research the archival files of John Oxley Library during 2004/2005.	Archival research was carried out at Cairns Historical Society, Eacham Historical Society and James Cook University Library.	
4. Finalise report to AIATSIS.	Final report completed September 2004.	Publish as Research Report through Rainforest CRC.
5. Complete final project report and other research products.	Final project report and book manuscript completed June 2005.	

Project 7.3 – Technical Education and Training, and Participatory Domestication of Native Food Plants with the Ma:Mu Community

Led by Professor Roger Leakey, James Cook University and Ms Marianne Helling, Innisfail TAFE College

Researchers of Project 7.3 are working with members of the Ma:Mu Aboriginal community to develop superior cultivars of a number of bush tucker species for future nursery and orchard enterprises. There is great interest in northern Queensland in the development of the bush

tucker industry. Commercial companies see potential in the market for bush tucker, while growers show interest in diversifying their farming systems to include new crops. This interest gives opportunity for Aboriginal communities, who under the Convention on Biological Diversity, have rights over their indigenous knowledge and germ plasm, to supply the farming community with planting stock that meets the needs of the commercial trade in Australian foods. Project 7.3 aims to develop technical skills in conservation and land management, project management skills and enhance the horticultural capabilities of the Ma:Mu community.

Setbacks were experienced in 2003/2004 due to permit limitations in the collection of fruit specimens within the Ma:Mu Native Title area. However, this year saw forty fruit collections of 21 'bush tucker' species collected from a variety of locations and vegetation communities within Ma:Mu country. Initial analyses of fruit weight, size and flesh thickness in some species indicates a significant size difference between individual trees within a species. Researchers haven't yet determined if these differences are strictly genetic in origin or if other factors such as site characteristics and seasonal variations also play a role. As such, further specimen collections need to be undertaken for a number of years to assess if seasonal variables such as rainfall and temperature have a significant effect on fruit size, quality and taste. Field sites containing species with a greater level of fruiting activity received a higher collecting effort.

A Bush Tucker Summit was held in Cairns in November 2004, specifically targeted at charting a course for the bush tucker industry that would have Aboriginal people and their knowledge as its foundation. This principle was accepted and adopted by delegates.

The first phase of the Ma:Mu bush tucker project is the collection of bush tucker specimens (fruits and nuts), tasting, measuring, marking of the parent tree species and propagation of three to five individuals per species. Of an extensive list of species due for collection, fruits or nuts from 10 species are yet to be collected. Of the 21 species collections made to date, the project team have identified fourteen species that could have good commercial value as either raw fruits, kernels or as value adding foods (e.g. jam or sauce production). Some of the species involved in the study are already commercially used and well known, including *Acronychia acidula*, *Davidsonia pruriens* and *Syzygium leuhmannii*.

A project stocktake was undertaken in March 2005, resulting in a total of 1,526 plants in propagation as part of the project. Ten species in seedling trays are due for planting in the ground during Spring 2005. Work still to be undertaken includes collection of specimens from species not yet completed, measurements of fruits to be made over several years in order to gain required data relating to the size and quality of fruits from individual trees within a species and identification of bush tucker products that a species could produce through experimentation with different recipes/techniques for different species.



Project 7.3 research received media coverage in December 2003 following completion of Stage 1 of the bush tucker project. From left, Professor Roger Leakey of James Cook University with Ma:Mu Chair, Victor Maund, and students Francis Bull and William Niehsner. The group were photographed with indigenous fruits considered 'marketable' – blue quandong, Davidson plum, cherry satinash and lemon aspen (Image courtesy of The Cairns Post).

Project 7.3

Set Milestones 2004/2005	Achievements 2004/2005	Predicted Milestones 2005/2006
1. Completion of TAFE Certificates III/IV by students in receipt of project scholarship.	Certificate III student, Alfe McCarthy, successfully completed in Semester 2, 2004. Certificate IV student, William Niehsner is due to complete in July 2005. Francis Bull, a candidate for Certificate IV, withdrew from the course due to personal reasons.	Further TAFE College courses.
2. Investigation of additional educational opportunities through traineeships and labour market programs.	Training provided in fruit collection and nursery management.	Further TAFE College courses.
3. Identification and collection of species specimens, propagation.	Twenty-one species collected (forty collections) and established in the TAFE College nursery in Innisfail (1,526 plants).	A further 25 species to be collected (goal of 2,500 plants to be propagated in TAFE College nursery).