



The Nature Of The Island

Moreton Island is a place of natural beauty, much cherished by all who have the pleasure of its acquaintance. Shirley Hawkins thinks *it's Olde Australiana untouched, the sand, the blady grass, the grass trees, the stringy barks, the birds – everything is just as it would have been 200 years ago. It's just a fabulous place to bring up children, I've found.*¹

Mandy Cilento recalls *in my early 20s I went over there as a break from studies with a couple of friends, and we were just amazed at how isolated and wild the place was. This was in the mid to late 1970s.*²

In Alan Genninges' opinion, *the whole island is just too beautiful to be there, and the wildness of it. As far as the island setting a mood, I (recall) the area of the northern half of the island about 1991. Part of my job was to take school-children through these areas, and I took them in about a day after a fire had gone through. Everything was absolutely black, and it was so overwhelmingly depressing to see everything black. As a biologist I realised that they'd all regrom, so I wasn't really concerned that the trees had been damaged, because they would all regrom, but it was just the sheer overwhelming nature of just jet black everywhere. Even three days later, when the black had come off and it was sort of more greyish, it was much less oppressive.*³

Moreton Island is composed of a mass of sand caught behind a rock outcrop at Cape Moreton. The island has a shape similar to that of other sand masses – long and slender. Fairly centrally placed in the overall mass of high dunes is the largest sandhill in the world – Mount

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Tempest at 280 metres above sea level. Storm Mountain, due west of Mount Tempest, comes a close second at 274 metres. Only in Iran are there sand hills approaching these; there the dunes measure 210 metres from base to crest.⁴

The only rock mass is to the north, at Cape Moreton and North Point. South of this, there is a great stretch of land covered in short closed heath, with large freshwater lakes and smaller, seasonally variable swamps perched above the water table. Lake Jabiru, the largest stretch of water, was named after a pair of jabirus seen there.⁵

To the west, the land rises to a long range of hills running north-south along the western edge of the island. Near Tangalooma, this escarpment is close to the beach, but in the north it is some distance inland and the lowlands lead into the Bulwer Swamp complex – sedgelands on peat.⁶

The most notable feature of the northern coastline is the large sand blow called Yellow Patch. Nearby is Heath Island (named after Captain Heath who cut the Koopa Bar in 1883). Once attached by only a narrow spit of sand, a narrow channel of sand is easily crossed by four-wheel-drive vehicles.⁷

In the central area of the island are the highest peaks, a number of freshwater lakes, strips of open forest and mixed scrub. It also contains a deep and steep valley aptly named ‘The Trench’ with a small patch of rainforest. Here is found one of the few rare plants of south-east Queensland – the satinay turpentine, *Syncarpia hillii*.⁸

Most of the lakes, ponds and swamps are coloured brown from rotted vegetation. Blue Lagoon is the exception. It lies on a sandy bed with clear, fresh water. Its popularity has now resulted in a constant stream of visitors in season. Not far from Blue Lagoon is Honeyeater Lake on which rare musk ducks have been seen.⁹

On the eastern side, it is all one long beach – 35 kilometres of it although different names differentiate one stretch from another; such as Sovereign, Toompani, Gonzales, Jason, Eagers, Warrajamba, Spitfire

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and Braydon beaches. The coloured sands are most noticeable near Gonzales and Jason beaches.¹⁰

The sand blows are starkly visible from the bay – the Yellow Patch, the False Patch, the higher Desert, and the Big and Little Sandhills leading through to the Oasis.¹¹

The vast majority of the island remains untouched by ‘development’. There are some tracks left from earlier sand mining and defence operations during the war. There are also the inevitable effects of the incredible number of visitors in their four-wheel-drives, but by and large, the island remains in its natural condition.

The official recognition of the pristine nature of Moreton Island has resulted in virtually the entire island having been declared a National Park. But it has also been recognised by the generations of residents and visitors who have loved the island, many of whom have been motivated to do what they can to protect it.

Not every visitor (or resident) has always acted in the interests of preservation of the island. Indeed there are many examples of quite the reverse, more often than not caused by lack of thought or knowledge. As Alan Gennings, a passionate member of the Moreton Island Protection Committee (MIPC), ruefully admitted *I have a photo of myself over there with a large bottle of washing-up detergent, washing my plates in a swamp. But very quickly we became aware that the environment couldn't handle any number of people doing things like that, so they were definitely out.*¹² Cliff Campbell explains, *we had a problem at one stage where people were using scented soaps and this sort of stuff in lagoons, and of course they don't have that flushing thing like creeks flowing through that will take that away. Once it's there, you could cause very bad problems with the flora and fauna that's on those lakes.*¹³

Many visitors are simply thoughtless, like those who are *just interested in going to a place for the weekend to camp.*¹⁴ Beth Lawler recalls waiting for the barge where *we encountered a group of fishermen also waiting. They were filling in the time by having quite a few drinks and promptly throwing the empties. A young lass from my group went over and spoke to them and in no*

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*time they were out of the four-wheel- drive and picking up all the rubbish. Hopefully, from then on they would have had more respect for the environment that serves them so well.*¹⁵

*Some people who come to the island and are very conservation minded will take all of their rubbish away with them. Some people will be driving around and you'll see them stop and pick rubbish up, and people like that are very, very ecologically minded; whereas other people will be driving along, you'll see them in front of you on a track, and they'll throw a beer can out of the window into the National Park.*¹⁶

You've got to remember that when we started going to the island, the people of the island were all males. There were almost no females. We were very much a rarity. People didn't go to the island unless they went fishing, and very few women went fishing. Really, the main reason why they went fishing was to drink as well, so they used to throw their rubbish into the bush and all that, because that was the way, you know, and it's still the way for the older people and some of the younger people, I suppose. That's the way it was.¹⁷

*Not all the rubbish on the island originates there. Plastic bags and helium filled balloons, cigarette butts and all sorts of paraphernalia wash up on the beaches of Moreton Island. It's sobering to realise the danger they pose to all sorts of marine creatures that live in the Bay. For example, plastic bags look like jellyfish to turtles. Some turtles in the Bay eat them, and of course we all know that you can't eat a plastic bag. I guess the human influence in Moreton Island is very tremendous, and I think by putting a plastic bag in the bin, maybe you could save a turtle's life. People should start to be aware of that.*¹⁸

*Even well-intentioned people are not always successful. Some residents used to bury their own rubbish in their backyards, and if they'd gone for a week, when they came back, the pigs had dug it up.*¹⁹

MIPC organised a massive clean-up of the island in 1982 which, according to Cathy Rice, was probably one of the absolute high points for me. In a way it was a cheeky thing to do, for a conservation group to take on the job of cleaning up the whole of an island which effectively belongs to the State Government. We had about 200 people go over to the island – an absolutely

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Moreton Island clean-up 1983
Courtesy Alan Gennings

enormous response – and three barges. The funding was all based on either donations, like, we had an army barge that first time, and the City Council sent one of those big rubbish compactors on the army barge for free. We had rubbish bags donated. People who went to help had to actually pay for the barge, perhaps a reduced fare. There is a good story in there, because for that first clean-up we'd booked a barge which had an association with a sand-mining company. We booked that barge, paid for it to help with the clean-up, and then the barge company rang up and said to me that Mineral Deposits, the sand-mining company, had offered to pay for the barge to help with the clean-up. We discussed this with the committee, and we decided that was not going to be on, for us to accept money from the sand-mining company, so we rang back and said, no, we wanted to pay for it, and they said, 'No, you can't have it.' So we did that clean-up one barge short, and what that meant in fact was that the plan was that the army barge was going to come over and sit at the wrecks with the City Council compactor on it, and we were going to load the rubbish into it. Because that barge got withdrawn, we unloaded the compactor onto the sand and used the army barge to go back and forth. It got very seriously bogged after the rubbish was all loaded. I think it was about 19 tons of rubbish, and it was over the limit, really. It was quite

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a job to get it back onto the barge.

With the second clean-up we did, the City Council said we could have a compactor again, but only if it stayed on the barge, rather than going onto the sand.

I remember it rained, but I don't remember much else about the weekend, except that it was regarded as a huge success. We had all the TV channels come over in their helicopters and cover it. We had the front page of the Sunday Mail, and we got phenomenally good coverage. I think all that sort of thing helped not just in the public eye, but in the politicians' eyes, for us to be seen not just as knockers, that we weren't just knocking sand-mining, but we were actually prepared to do something really positive at the same time.²⁰

There has been an on-going campaign to encourage users of the island not to rubbish it. Betty Osborne of the Tangalooma Resort thinks *it's like a contagious thing. Our staff, when they are walking around, are taught to pick up any rubbish they find on paths, and if you watch, you see the guests picking up rubbish that someone else has dropped. Guests will walk along the beach, and they will actually pick up rubbish that someone else has dropped, and they all comment on how clean and tidy the areas are. People when they come on the island, are impressed with the cleanliness and the care that is taken not only by our staff, but by other guests as well.*²¹

Betty has also experienced failure in modifying littering habits. *At one point in time on our own commercial boat we decided we'd try different types of cups that were disposable. That lasted about one week, because instead of using the bins, the people would throw the cups off the boat into the Bay. So we just had to stop doing it and go back to glass glasses. We tried to avoid them because the glass glasses break, of course, and people would be likely to cut themselves in bad weather, but we had to go back to them. People just don't think. They have no respect for Moreton Bay, for the Bay in general.*²²

Keith Wilson agrees that education is important, but that it is best done in an informal manner. *We're sort of unofficial rangers, I guess. Actually, in my role as a tourist operator on the island, we probably have more contact with the general flow of the public than the actual rangers do, because we're able to speak to them quite frankly, whereas a ranger has to set down*

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*policies, etc. You know, if they suggest to us that they might be able to go and take a bit of firewood out of the forest for a campfire, we don't say, 'You're not allowed to do that,' we just sort of suggest it's not a good idea. You can explain to them why the timber is required there, to keep the island here, so they probably take a little bit more notice of what we tell them than what the officials tell them.*²³

It is all a learning experience. *In the early years when we first came to the island, of course people never had a big concept about conservation, I'm afraid, myself included. When we purchased a block of land in the township, we had no qualms about chopping down the trees and pushing them out of the road, clearing the land, not fully understanding what was involved with such a fragile environment. It's only really after living here for probably 10 or 15 years that you start to realise, 'Whoa!' I'm seeing the impact of what that did to what I am trying to achieve now – put all the trees back in. Things have changed. People are more conscious these days, thanks to groups like MIPC and ourselves. We now try to convince people that they shouldn't be doing anything like that, chopping down trees and moving things around, all that sort of stuff.*²⁴

It is Trevor Hassard's wish that *it would be great to see campers staying on the island and not destroying any of the island's native environment. Instead of breaking branches to make a clothes line and hang clothes on and pitch tents off, it would be great to see that people could come in and camp on the island and respect it, and leave with nothing harmed.*²⁵ According to Shirley Hawkins, this wish is gradually being realised. *More and more people take their own wood (to the island) and really care about leaving things the way they found them, I've found. I think Moreton Island Protection Committee has done a lot for the island and brought it to the notice of the public in Brisbane.*²⁶

The big four-wheel-drive vehicles have had their impact too. *Prior to their advent, people drove in VWs with great big fat tyres so the tracks were almost flat. We never had any boggy bits, except on the beach at high tide or something like that.*²⁷ *In those days there were few cars there. There were some A Model Fords and things, but people didn't drive up to the dunes like they do now. They walked. People all used to walk in those days. We used to go up and down the island, but everybody walked off the beach, up the dune, and up the*

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mountains.²⁸ And people used to walk in front of the cars to make sure everything was right, whereas they don't do that these days. So in some ways they did less damage.²⁹

The island certainly has times when it is an immensely popular destination for visitors. Terry Ward well remembers *Ken Whitlock or one of the rangers saying Easter was coming up and he had something like 8,000 people in 300 vehicles coming to Moreton for four days.³⁰*

National Parks and Wildlife Services manage the National Park and hence the island. *National Parks have taken over the island now, and it is probably a very good thing for the island, because the way everything was going, with more and more visitors every year, when people were coming over here camping, they weren't really interested in the island and conserving it. They were just interested in going to a place for the weekend to camp. It's good to see, too, that a lot of things have been restricted, a lot of access to places that I guess are very, very delicate has been restricted.³¹*

Some restrictions have been introduced on the activities of four-wheel-drive vehicles. As Terry Ward says, *there has to be a certain amount of control. Otherwise, you can just imagine, you only need one per cent of them to turn into idiots, and of course you've got all sorts of trouble. Of course you have to look after the place.³²* The vehicles are banned from driving on the dunes – ‘stay off the grass so the dunes will last’ – and are denied access to sensitive parts of the island such as the desert area where National Parks have erected a gate and a little fence to stop cars from going into it.³³

There was one instance of a chap in one of the townships here, promoting the fact that he wanted a power station on the island so we could all have reticulated power. He took it as far as Parliament. I'm afraid he was by himself. Nobody else wanted the power. We do have our own electricity, but nowadays of course we've got new technology and new attitudes to the generation of our own requirements in regard to power, so we're gradually becoming more eco-friendly. It's going to take a long time, of course. We have to run a diesel generator to operate our equipment here, but a lot of the people around the island are on solar power. The Brisbane City Council is promoting the use of solar systems

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and the Government is giving rebates to make it attractive.

Some people have strange attitudes, don't take into account the water table, for instance, when they're digging septic tanks. They are very self-centred, and those situations come down to when you require regulations to be imposed.³⁴

Most people appear to support the notion of restrictions. Dave Mitchell thinks *the time will come when we'll have to restrict (the number of) visitors too, the same as they tried to do on Fraser.³⁵*

While MIPC has been very active in promoting conservation and clean-up of the island, the fundamental reason for its existence was to oppose sand mining on the island. In her last years prior to her death in 1985, Jessie Wadsworth (the Queen of Moreton Island) campaigned to restrict mineral sand mining on Moreton Bay and the use of four-wheel-drive vehicles, maintaining that future generations were entitled



Queen of Moreton Island Jessie Wadsworth presents petition to Tom Burns MLA (ALP, Lytton), Ian Prentice MLA (Liberal, Toowong) and Mike West (Democrat candidate for Ashgrove) at Cowan Cowan Beach, 1983

Courtesy Alan Genninges

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to enjoy the peace and tranquillity of Moreton Island's unspoilt beaches.³⁶

The founder and one of the leading lights of MIPC was Don Henry. *Don first went to the island as a schoolboy and rode his bike up the beach, when he was about 17 and in Senior. He had been going to the island for many years before he actually started MIPC.*³⁷

One of the long-serving members was Cathy Rice. *We worked very hard, I tell you! It seemed endless at the time, displays around the place. We*



*MIPC founder Don Henry with Prime Minister Bob Hawke on Moreton Island, 1987
Courtesy Alan Gennings*

*used to go to things like the Medieval Fair and the Society for Growing Australian Plants flower show, and local fairs and all sorts of things, and get people to write letters to their politicians, or just show people photos of the island. We used to always have this map of the island, which showed that even though it was only 6.4% that was proposed to be mined, it was half the eastern coast. That was something that people could see. It was the ocean beach, it was where people would go, it had the Blue Lagoon in it.*³⁸

We had huge support from a really wide range of groups, but there were always

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*areas of conflict was well, like the four-wheel-drive clubs which strongly supported the no-sand-mining stand, but didn't support restrictions on four-wheel-drive use on the island.*³⁹

Fund raising was a major issue. Some of it came from members and friends pledging part of their weekly wages. Much of it came from fund raising ventures such as dances, originally in a little hall in Vulture Street, West End. But the group eventually took the plunge, hired City Hall and held a New Year's Eve Dance. It was a huge success. *We let 1,000 people in, and then we turned people away, and we made \$7,000, I think, that very first one – which pleased Peta, our Treasurer, very greatly! It was a big step up for us from small fund-raisers. Then we had one for many years. When I went off travelling in 1985 they were still going, and I think eventually the numbers declined, but it stayed a big fund-raiser for a long time. It became maybe a third of our whole year's income at some point.*⁴⁰

Even once the sand mining battle had been won, MIPC remained in existence with the objective of maintaining the integrity of their beloved island. MIPC had already produced a management strategy – which was a huge job – for the island and set about implementing it. *We erected 20 signs all over the island telling people how to look after the place.*⁴¹ One supporter of the 'this-is-how-you-should-care-for-Moreton-Island' campaign was the Hospital Fishing Club's Rex Fane whose firm made the metal signs.⁴²

In developing the management strategy, MIPC *invited the (Aboriginal) elders over there on the island to get (their) opinion on these issues, and it seems to be working really well.*⁴³

According to Alan Gennings, *there's almost constant work for MIPC, in what I suppose some people would consider to be the smaller issues, management plans, numbers of people visiting and how they impact as the place gets busier and busier. You know, more people destroy those special values for most of those people who really like the place, who live there.*⁴⁴

Another possible man-initiated threat to Moreton Island arose in 1997. Alan Gennings takes up the story. *There was one particular issue that could have changed things quite a lot on the bayside near Tangalooma, and that*

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was a proposed aquaculture project. In the first half of 1997, there was just a small ad in the paper saying there was to be a public meeting, with a bit of a press release expounding the virtues of the huge aquaculture industry that was proposed for the Bay. I realised that aquaculture meant lots of increased nutrients into the area. This was aquaculture where they were going to put net cages off the shore of Moreton Island and the fish would just swim in the cages, and they'd throw feed in. The quantities they were talking about for the pilot project were fairly small, but they were working towards an industry which would involve putting 15 tons of fish pellets into the water each day in the one area in the Bay, and I knew the nutrient levels in the Bay were quite high with all the sewerage from Brisbane going in.

MIPC initiated a Freedom of Information request and ended up with about 190 pages of documents. Alan was surprised to learn that, according to the documents, Tangalooma had been contacted and they didn't have a problem with the project.

Having discovered that there might have been a few things of interest there, we held our Annual General Meeting at Tangalooma the day before the Department of Environment had set up this meeting of people so that they could have some sort of input into the proposal, submit their objections in a formal process. We invited the Tangalooma dolphin expert, Trevor Hassard, to come along and give us a talk. During that talk we just happened to mention this aquaculture proposal, and the fact that Tangalooma had no objections to it. He said, 'I know nothing about this.' After the meeting he contacted his boss, who said, 'Get on the plane, and take another person with you, and go to the meeting tomorrow and put our objections forward, because of course we object.'⁴⁵

From Alan's perspective, the tale had a happy outcome. *Just round about that time, the Asian economic crisis occurred...It's very difficult to know exactly why the project – well, it's easy to know why it didn't go ahead, because the permit wasn't issued – but one just wonders whether the economics of it really didn't stack up, and that was why the people didn't come back.⁴⁶*

An on-going problem on the island has also resulted from human activities, though of times long gone – feral animals. In the nineteenth century, goats were introduced to many islands to provide a food

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source for shipwrecked sailors and, perhaps, sporting opportunities. These have since run wild as have the brumbies and pigs which were introduced. Serious attempts have been made to eradicate these pests; in 1997 the rangers rounded up most of the goats who were then transported to goat farms and animal parks on the mainland.

Terry Ward, who lived in the lighthouse at the Cape, remembers *we had a herd of goats at the Cape. I tolerated the goats and Don Henry and I used to have these great discussions all the time about our goats, but the goats were originally put there by the government before any (white) habitation. They were to be a food source. Anyhow, there was this herd of goats living at the Cape, about 20 of them, and I clung to the historical value of having the goats there. Of course, they're feral, and National Parks were really quite hot to get rid of them, to the point that they actually went to our Department and said, 'We want to cull or get rid of the goats.' Give our Department head his due, he said, 'No, the goats that are inside the lighthouse boundary are our concern, so we'll look after them. You worry about the rest of the island.'*⁴⁷

*I'm not a shooter or anything, but a good friend of mine, an Italian fellow who used to have goats in Italy, would come over, and any of the old billies that were a bit of a nuisance, we used to pop a few of those. He used to, under my supervision. He knew how to dress them and, yes, we used to eat a little bit of goat. I wouldn't have known how to butcher one or anything, but he did. We eventually got rid of most of them. A lot of them are up on a property at the back of Pomona. Through natural causes a few of them died, and I think Parks have now taken over. I think they shot them and the rest of them have all gone, but there are at least some of them living on a property at the back of the Sunshine Coast. I wasn't there. I'd left, so I don't know how I would have felt if someone had tried to shoot them.*⁴⁸

One thing we've noticed, up around the headlands, since they got rid of the goats. When they were there, there were well-worn tracks down to our fishing spots. Now the goat tracks have disappeared and you've got to be careful walking down under the lighthouse, down around what I used to call the Gardens. The casuarinas now have just spread up everywhere and it's very hard to push through them. Before there were only two pandanus on the whole headland, but now it's

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*all taken over with casuarinas, just reclaiming everything again.*⁴⁹

The origin of the brumbies, which were once quite numerous, is not known with any certainty. When questioned, Terry Ward ventured, *We don't know, but they think either a ship sank and there were horses on board and some swam ashore, or those horses were just remnants of the Army, in the Second World War days.*⁵⁰

Cliff Campbell recalls being told by an old uncle that his (the uncle's) mother and father had bred horses for World War I. Cliff believes that there was a fence from Tangalooma right across the island to keep the wild horses in the north.⁵¹

Terry Ward was rather fond of the brumbies. *They were lovely creatures, but unfortunately they went. They had a real hierarchy. If one was ever sick, we would see them in the early days that they'd carry or support the sick one, walk him up and down the beach until he came good, and things like this, so there was a real social thing with them.*⁵²



Fay Mitchell and Dainty, feral horse tamed to come on call, 1970

Courtesy Dave and Jean Mitchell

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Kevin Yule recalls *we'd towed a caravan up. We were sitting at the table there having breakfast, and next thing there's a brumby there, a stallion, and he had his head over our shoulders trying to get some of the bread and that off the table. They were very friendly. In fact, they were too friendly, a lot of brumbies up there at that time. You had to be careful of them.*⁵³

Jean Mitchell used to feed the wild birds. *I used to buy the wild bird seed mix, and what the birds didn't eat, the horses would come and eat. I used to put it out on the plastic lid of an icecream container or something like that, and the horses would just come and clean up what was left, and we used to feed them any stale bread and things like that. Quite a few of them would come up and eat out of our hands. They were getting tame because there were so many people, campers and that, starting to come onto the island. It was quite nice to see them, little foals and that. The kiddies loved them.*⁵⁴

Cliff Campbell believes *my Dad and his brothers periodically joined up with their cousins, the Lewings, to corral horses over at Moreton Island for their own use. Most of the horses in the early days of my uncles and my father were brought from Moreton Island. We used to go and chase our own brumbies for*



*Herd of brumbies, early 1970s
Courtesy Mandy Cilento*

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our own use on North Stradbroke Island. I believe they were brought from Moreton Island originally and let loose there, because back in those days that was the only form of transport we had, on horseback. We'd go and build a corral out on the horse pads and catch the younger ones for our own use.

They had a racetrack at Amity which they raced them on, and that's now out in the water, too. I believe the fellow that was a bookmaker back in those days was Bill Rankin, who had a casket agency in Brisbane and, indeed, I think the family still has Rankin's agency and paper shop. I said to my uncles, 'But you guys would have known the fastest horse on the island, anyway,' because, in my day growing up, I knew which was the fastest horse. I believe it was a bit more fierce competition, because people trained their horses secretly. It was a big affair, because every day when they held that particular meeting at Amity Point, people came in sailing boats from as far south as Southport, Curragee. It was an oyster staging area which a lot of earlier people in the Bay worked for, the Moreton Bay Oyster Company. They came from Wynnum, the fishermen from there, plus all the fraternity coming up the Brisbane River. They flocked over for that particular event.⁵⁵

According to Jean Mitchell the brumbies were becoming a bit of a menace to the campers to start with. Most of the time they were breaking into the camps wanting food, but they were becoming ill because they were eating so much sand with the grass that they were getting sand balls in their stomachs and were getting a bit sickly and interbred and a bit dangerous.⁵⁶

There was some disagreement about what should happen to the brumbies of Moreton Island. There were just a handful of horses.⁵⁷ There were never that many in the first place, so I don't think they were doing any major damage to the island. And I haven't seen any major improvements since they left.⁵⁸ I think they were affected by the amount of people that came to the island, because the more people that came, the more food they came and ratted and things like that, so they really had to go. But people were getting rid of them prior to National Parks coming. They used to shoot them. They were going to go anyway, whether National Parks came or not.⁵⁹

Terry Ward thought to me they were part of the history of the place, and some of them should be kept. Of course they are feral and they could be disturbing

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*something native that lives there and is pretty fragile. But it's a bit unfair on them.*⁶⁰

*And there were pigs. They'll never get rid of all the pigs, but they try pretty hard to get rid of them. A pig can do a lot of damage. They can root around and dig up acres and acres. The island is reasonably fragile, if you cause that sort of damage.*⁶¹ *There are still some pigs there. I've seen pigs come down and catch crabs on Campbell Point. It's interesting to see the evolution, see the pigs living off sea creatures.*⁶² *Kevin Yule recalls there were a couple (of pigs) there like old Richard the boar. He used to just roam around amongst us, great tusks, and he used to live in the lantana. One of the chaps, when he was camping there, to get rid of his scraps he'd just call Richard and he'd come out and follow him like a dog to get the scraps.*⁶³

*Dave Mitchell recalls his encounter with a pig. I'd never seen the pigs close up before, and we were starting to build a house over there and this one came stalking out of the bush, right up to us. I didn't know what to do, whether to run or hit him with a shovel or what – or her, a big sow it was. We named her Sadie the Cleaning Lady, because she used to clean your camp up if you didn't keep everything out of reach.*⁶⁴

*Another threat to the nature of the island is Nature itself. Comboyuro Point isn't there any more. I hadn't been there for years, but I went up there about 12 months ago, and I just could not believe it. It's incredible, the way it's eroded. By the same token, you look at Comboyuro gone, and you look at the beach building up behind the wrecks, and at Cowan they are losing their sand there quite drastically in some places. The Signal Station looked a bit shaky for a while. I guess it comes back, doesn't it, because Comboyuro Point washed out when it took the lighthouse out all those years ago, so I guess it will come back again. Erosion, a lot of people worry about it all the time, but it does come back, doesn't it?*⁶⁵

Erosion has been a long term problem, according to people like Frank Pellat. Once when I was living at Cowan in '45, there was a terrific blow. Prior to the blow, there was a tug bringing in a dry dock, and he was in the North-West Channel, and he was having trouble maintaining any headway. He decided to let the dock stay out there and he'd come back next day, he hoped,

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to take it away. But, as I said, that night we had a terrific blon, and when we got up in the morning, where was that dry dock? It was in front of the two guns of the Fort. It had come across the seabed and it took all the communication cables with it, and it was there on the beach in front of the guns. That night, quite a lot of the bank in front of the guns was washed away. I considered that there must have been anything up to 20 yards of the land in front of the guns that disappeared that night, and the jetty became quite exposed. That was the first real erosion I saw on the island, and that was the start of the protection, when there had been no protection for the island.

In fact, there was no protection taken by anybody until well after the War, and it was too late then. The erosion had taken place on the seafront, and at the present time I understand the gun pits are now isolated or exposed to the sea, and in fact I think it would be very dangerous for people to be living on the island now. They've spent a lot of money on homes, but I anticipate that eventually that beachfront will be taken away. At the present time, the concrete magazines which were behind the guns are okay, but I don't like their chances, because even then, when you came back from Tangalooma along the beach, you used to have to go into the Bay unless it was very low tide. You used to have to drive your truck through the shallows to get back to Fort Cowan. There was no conservation practised while I was there. All we were there to do was look after the equipment and the buildings at the Fort.⁶⁶

Some parts of the island fare better than others. There hasn't been too much change around the headlands, except it's sort of regenerating now the goats have gone. That part of the island will never change too much. It's solid rock. You see the sand move in and out, and little bays, but I think that top end was pretty good. But around Heath Island, in what used to be a creek there, there was a flat rock. A 40 foot boat – Norman R Wright, I think, was the name of the boat – would go right up this creek and anchor, let the boys off around the flat rock. Now sometimes you can drive right along the beach and there's no creek.

Otherwise, you know, Combi Point has disappeared. I don't think you'd really call it a point now. All in all, I suppose that's just Nature working its way. I don't think you can blame any human element for that.⁶⁷

The Nature of the Island

Cliff Campbell thinks *it's unfortunate that so much of the island has disappeared. I was told as a young lad that in the past people were able to talk to each other between the two islands (Moreton and North Stradbroke), which would give you an idea of that distance being probably a few hundred yards. Now you're looking at maybe a couple of kilometres. All that end of Moreton has washed away.*⁶⁸

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