

Object of the Story



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Compiled by Michael Aird and Mandana Mapar

Keairra Press

Reflections on Place

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Reflections on Place*

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John Cook, Cabbage Tree Island, 1975

Photo by Sandra Bolt

“That’s my grandfather’s brother, Uncle Bunny. John Cook his name was. I took that photo in 1975. I asked Uncle Bunny, I said sit out here and let me take a picture of you. I am pleased I did that now.”

Sandra Bolt
Cabbage Tree Island, 12 April 2013

Cover Illustration: Boomerang made by John Cook
and given to Frank Del-Signore in the 1950s
Courtesy Frank Del-Signore

Introduction

A photograph holds many memories. Objects connect us to ideas, people and to place. This exhibition and publication present a selection of personal recollections by Ballina Shire community members in their own words. These stories are reflections on place through a variety of objects and embrace both historic and contemporary perspectives on Aboriginal experience and relationships.

Objects serve to mark our relationships with family, partners and landscapes that have changed and sometimes altogether disappeared over time. We think with the objects we love; we love with the objects we think with. Some recollections lay dormant in the recesses of our mind until a trigger unleashes them and reminds us of an event or occasion, a triumphant sporting match or early childhood memories of long days spent with friends and family.

The photographs taken specifically for this exhibition document the emotions and memories that arise from holding these objects close and contemplating the milestones throughout a person's life. The project has uncovered stories of the everyday and undoubtedly there are many more stories to be shared. We thank the community for letting us into their homes and lives and for their generosity in letting us share the many wonderful photographs, objects and stories in the exhibition.

It has been a pleasure to collaborate with the staff at Ballina Shire Council, the Northern Rivers Community Gallery and Jali Local Aboriginal Land Council. Bringing together history and emotion – we found ourselves privy to moments of pride in the community, of sadness and loss tempered with vivid childhood happiness. For this we thank the contributors to this project who bring these photographs and objects to life with their deep knowledge of local history, connections to culture and sense of pride in the many wonderful achievements of the community members of this region.

Mandana Mapar and Michael Aird
Exhibition Curators

"I got a good axe from when I went to Kempsey about 58 years ago. You know them electric light poles, I used to cut 'em. No chainsaws back them times. Used to cut 'em, fall 'em, bark 'em and get 'em straight, all with this axe.

I never broke a handle on an axe. A young bloke broke that handle. This young bloke he never wanted to work. He would get an axe and hit it over a log to break the handle. He would break every handle and the boss would come and he would be sitting in the shed. We used to have a bark hut and we were about 70 miles out in the bush. He would be asked, 'What are you doing?' and he would say, 'Oh, I broke the axe handle'. Again! So the boss made him an axe handle out of an ironbark tree. He got an ironbark tree and split it and made him an axe handle out of that. He couldn't break that one.

I worked in sawmills at Kempsey, I was there for 17 years. Then I come back up here and I put in for Social Security and they asked me my occupation and I said 'sawman and a benchman'. Then this old fella from Alstonville he came down and got me, old Evan Williams. Social Security told him about me. So I went and worked for him for about five years.

Sometimes those saws jam. The closest I've ever been to getting knocked over in a sawmill was when we were cutting this big log. You could just see the saw coming through the top. I was telling this bloke, 'Put a wedge in, put a wedge in'. But he was too late and next minute there was smoke coming out of the saw. It started lifting; the log started lifting and I just got out of the way. It just flew straight back, it flew back and broke all the trolley lines. We spent a couple of days fixing trolley lines.

I was working with a bloke when the saw hit a bit of bark and the saw just went shoosh, and chopped all his fingers off. And they fell on the ground and he ran up the hill and wouldn't come back to pick the fingers up. He was a big man, but he wouldn't pick the fingers up. We had to pick them up and we took them down to the office. We never saw that bloke again. Poor fella."

Lewis Cook
Wardell, 11 April 2013



Lewis Cook, Wardell, 2013. Photo by Michael Aird



Irene Ferguson, Cabbage Tree Island, 1960s
Photo courtesy Sandra Bolt

“I have never seen this photo of my mother before. I have only ever had two photos of my mother. I didn’t really know her, instead I knew my grandmother as my mother. My mother was the eldest child and she was the first one to pass away. She passed away when I was young, so I went to government homes. Then I ended up with Grandmother at Gundurimba.”

Marcus Ferguson
Ballina, 20 June 2013

“We couldn’t get a house to rent for whatever reason, I put it down to discrimination. There was a story in the paper at the time about a good footballer that could not rent a house because he was Aboriginal with six kids. So one of the farmers that was involved in the football club offered us an old farmhouse out at Dungarubba, near Lismore.

That is when the flood happened in 1974, and we were visiting at Cabbage Tree Island at the time and we couldn’t get off the island. The roads were all flooded and we ended up getting evacuated with the rest of the people from the island, in flood boats from here to the hall at Wardell.

We lost everything. The whole house went under, just the peak of the top of the roof was out of water. It was really sad. I cried for my photos, not the table and chairs or clothes. Why I have these is ’cause they were all waterlogged and I laid them out in the sun to try and dry them off. I kept whatever I could salvage. I had them in albums. I had a good recording of Cabbage Tree Island, just in my photo albums. The ones I could salvage I put them in an album and tried to restore them to a degree.

Then 30 years later we had a fire. What’s the song ‘I’ve seen fire and I’ve seen rain’. That is me. The owners of the house didn’t want me to go back into the house because it was dangerous after the fire. My bedroom appeared to be the last room to burn.

We put a ladder up to my room. That is where I had my photos, and they are precious to me. I had this album and it was in among stuff that was all burnt. I just went around and salvaged what I could. The fire and the flood.”

Sandra Bolt
Cabbage Tree Island, 12 April 2013



Sandra Bolt, Cabbage Tree Island, 2013
Photo by Michael Aird

“My uncle, Barry Ferguson, has done just about everything. From horse riding to tent boxing. He was a gun-footballer in his day, him and his brothers. He played against the New Zealand football side. He used to play for Tugun and he went to Sydney for a while and played for Manly.

We thought that jersey had been chucked out. But I had taken it so it wouldn't get chucked out. I had seen this photo of the under 23s representative team. Then I knew that this was the same jersey. This was from 1969, the Northern New South Wales Representative Team.

Old Uncle, he has taught me a lot about the bush. We still hunt and gather turtles and kangaroos. We eat a fair bit of bush foods. He makes walking sticks and loves mucking around making things for his grandkids. I think I was about 16 or 17 when he first took me down to pick grapes at Mildura. I went with Uncle Barry, Uncle Artie, Uncle Rick and Uncle Jock. I went with all the uncles. He had me out in the paddock picking grapes, even in the dark. We cleaned up, we made a few dollars. I think I was there for three and half months with Uncle Barry. It was magic going with them. He used to do it every year, pick a gang and go down. A lot of the boys used to go down with him.”

Marcus Ferguson
Ballina, 20 June 2013



Barry Ferguson, Cabbage Tree Island, 2013
Photo by Mandana Mapar

“Uncle Bunny Cook, he was an artist. He used to carve emu eggs, he used to go down the river bank looking for the bent root of a tree and cut it out with a saw. My uncle, Walter Cook, he was a shipwright, he could sharpen saws, he could make anything or do anything. He would sharpen saws for Uncle Bunny. They had everything there that they wanted. He would saw the boomerangs out and make them. He had all these little wires, bent different ways, sharp and flat. He would put them in a fire. He had a fire going in a little pot, and he would put them in there and he would burn patterns in the boomerangs. He would draw the designs first, then burn them. He was a good artist. He was a real good artist, old Uncle Bunny. He was a real quiet fella and he had a big beard.”

Lewis Cook
Wardell, 11 July 2013



Frank Del-Signore with boomerang made by John Cook Ballina, 2013. Photo by Michael Aird



Yvonne Del-Signore, Ballina, 2013. Photo by Michael Aird

“I have done a few paintings. I have given most of them away to friends.”

Yvonne Del-Signore
Ballina, 30 May 2013



Trevor Smith, Clement Park, Ballina, c.1977
Photo courtesy Trevor Smith

“That was one of the best sides I ever played with. Most of them are from Cabbage Tree Island. That was taken at the main oval at Kempsey. We had to borrow the jerseys off South Lismore. We had white and blue jerseys then, the old Cabbo team, but a lot of them got lost and a lot of people knocked them off too. So we had to borrow South Lismore’s jerseys for that game. I was playing with Ballina at that time. We all look a lot younger there.

I lost my teeth up at Oakes Oval, when we were playing South Lismore. That might have been ’67 or ’68. I was playing for Woodburn then. There was a copper there that used to play in the centres. I was in the centres then. He hit me with his elbow and knocked all my top teeth out. I was all stitched up in there. I thought he knocked the gum and all out. We were good mates after that. He came up and shook my hand. He said, ‘I was a bit careless doing that, Trev’. He was a copper, but a good bloke though.”

Trevor Smith
Ballina, 2 May 2013



Trevor Smith, Ballina, 2013. Photo by Michael Aird

"I have always liked ceramics. I did the hobby-type ceramics for fun, then I studied ceramics and I really enjoyed it. Most of the work I do now is more about feelings and connections to family. All my designs are around water and about this area. Stingrays are all about family, I think they are beautiful. They are family orientated, they protect their families. You see them in the river here a lot. So I feel that they are about me. I didn't grow up here. My family on my Mother's side are from here, from Ballina and Cabbage Tree Island. I have visited here all my life. We moved around a lot when we were little, but I have always called it home. When I came home to live, it felt right for me."

Emma Walke
Ballina, 4 July 2013



Emma Walke, Ballina, 2013
Photo by Michael Aird

"This horse was given to me when I was a very young girl by my brother Ernest. He used to travel with the shows. He would go away for long periods then come home, maybe only once a year. He would empty out his suitcase and whatever he left there, which was usually small change, would be mine, but that was a lot back in those days.

He gave me this horse. You used to get them on the showgrounds. This one is quite heavy, but years later they were made of another material, which was black but more tinny. He gave me several of these silver ones, but this is the only one left.

This is very special to me because it came from Ernest, who has since died. I have always loved it. I didn't have it with me all the years when I was living away, I left it with my father. For me it is very special. When I was a child we did not have a lot of things, so this was always very precious. I may have had the odd doll or pram, but they were never things that were lasting like this."

Nancy Walke
Ballina, 4 July 2013



Nancy Walke, Ballina, 2013. Photo by Mandana Mapar



The first Aboriginal debutante ball ever to be conducted outside the Sydney metropolitan area was held at Casino on 11th July last year. The occasion, marking the National Aborigines Day celebrations, was attended by more than 300 people. Twenty debutantes were presented to Mr R. W. Manyweathers, M.L.C. The debutantes are: Back row (left to right) Julie Kapeen, Sharon Cook, Lola Roberts, Muriel Torrens, Margaret Roberts, Carol Roberts, Lola Rhodes, Marlene Moran, Joey Mundine, Susan Mundine, Lois Marlowee, Marilyn Daley. Front row (left to right) Susan Roberts, Leone Roberts, Kathleen Cameron, Cheryl Bolt (flower girl), Mrs B. Kapeen, (matron of honour), Mrs Manyweathers, Mr Manyweathers, Mrs B. Thomas, Carmel Kapeen (flower girl), Lyn Bolt, Marjorie Hickling, Maureen Walker, Sandra Roberts, Narelle Walker

6

NEW DAWN, April, 1970

Photo courtesy Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

“It was really good to be in the first Aboriginal Debutante Ball and we all made our own dresses. Bought my own material and with the help of Mum and my older sister Joyce. We all made our own and we were so proud. That was with the Aboriginal Protection Board. We had a Koori band, Mac Silva and his band.

We used to do sewing at school, we used to sit under the cabbage trees and learn how to sew by hand. There used to be a women’s group and Mum and Aunty Roslyn and Aunty Elsie Kapeen and others used

to all come down. I was only young, but I used to go to. We used to do leather work. All the elderly people made a lot of lovely leather handbags.

The Debutante dress, I don’t know what happened to my dress. I probably cut it up and made something else out of it. We didn’t waste anything in those days. The machine I made it on was an old peddle machine. A foot peddle one. Mum used to do a lot of sewing, her and her sister, Auntie Edna. I think Aunty Edna made Mum’s wedding dress.”

Carol Roberts
Ballina, 4 July 2013



Carol Roberts, Ballina, 2013. Photo by Michael Aird



Robert Moran seated on motorbike
Cabbage Tree Island, 1930s

Photo courtesy Moran Family

“Old Grandfather Moran had a freshwater well and a big vegetable garden. He used to sell the vegetables and make money from the garden. The only memory I have of him, was when I was very young, and Granny had died. I didn’t know Grandma Moran. I can remember sitting beside Grandfather’s bed, he had arthritis really bad and his fingers were curled up. He had his walking stick and I can remember this snake carved in the walking stick. So the only memory of me and him was sitting beside him and he was lying in bed. I just remember his hands and the way they were and that walking stick.”

Laurel Moran
Wollongbar, 6 June 2013

“The artwork is based on a carved tree that is in the Australian Museum in Sydney. It was done by Bobby Moran, one of my ancestors. It is very important to me.

I had been doing artwork that is based on the diamond designs that were done in this area. I had been working with the designs that were done on clubs from this area. Then I was contacted and told about this carved tree and I went down to Sydney and actually looked at the tree.

It was special to see it. I had tears rolling down my face. I rubbed my hands all over it, just to feel the carving on the bark. The actual tree is just the bark wrapped around chicken wire, because the stump of the tree has all rotted away, but they preserved the bark.”

Digby Moran
Goonellabah, 30 May 2013



Digby Moran, Goonellabah, 2013. Photo by Michael Aird

“I was born over in MacLean on the Clarence River where we lived on Ullagundahi Island, which was my mother’s island, until I was about five years old. Growing up here in Cabbage Tree Island was good. We used to have Sunday School every Sunday in the church here and play around in the hall, and on the other side of the hall we used to have gatherings with all the elders and young ones.

I remember we were walking down the beach with Granny and Pappa. They would walk right out to the beach, carrying bags and pots to cook pipis and bake bread. Granny would take a saucepan, get the pipis and cook them at the beach with a tribe of kids. Whenever Granny and Pappa moved we all moved.

We used to walk up to the hills, our grandfather used to take us up there. There is a cave up there, grandfather used to take us up there. He would go in but we didn’t. We would be sitting down as the sun would be setting, eating pears and grapes. We had nothing to carry them with, but we used to have mangoes.

When I was a little older we would go down to Sydney and we would pick potatoes, peas, beans and goodness knows what else as a teenager. Uncle Walter Blakeney took us down, that’s my mother’s brother. We would go down as a big group and sometimes instead of picking the peas we would eat them!

I met my husband, Henry Bolt, here on the island in 1959. We had just gotten together in this photo, and we were together ever since, until he passed away up in Townsville.

I came home from up at Sandgate, near Brisbane, where I was working at the convent with stacks and stacks of pictures, books and records of Elvis. My husband used to get jealous, and finally he ripped them all up, all of them. I told him ‘You can’t do that – he’s here in my heart’. I was working there nearly for a year. I used to have to scrub floors, scrub the Sisters’ habits, starch them and then iron them. Irene Rhodes also worked up there with me. I stayed up there, working at Sandgate, but I came home for a trip and I didn’t go back. That’s where I first heard Elvis, up there at Sandgate, on the radio late at night. We used to sit up late at night listening to the music. I thought he was African American when we first heard him. That was around 1955 before that photo of me and Henry was taken.”

Patricia Cook
Cabbage Tree Island, 25 May 2013



Patricia Cook, Cabbage Tree Island, 2013

Photo by Mandana Mapar

“Frank, my husband, was a timber cutter. We lived at Dairy Flat near Woodenbong. Frosty Flat they used to call it. The timber mill owned about six houses for the workers. They let them out to the wood-cutters, so we got one. It had a fancy garden and I had chooks. We had to leave when the kids got bigger, 'cause there was no high school in Woodenbong at that time. We put in for a house with the Housing Trust in Casino. My in-laws were living down there, Granny Davies. They had Victory Camp just out of Casino. All tin shacks, where the Army used to live and have meals. After the war they let them out to people who put in for a house, like us, but couldn't get a house. There was all these people living out there then. So we lived out there in a tin shack for not long. Then we got a house at South Casino. We got our house through the Housing Department.

My father was Harry Combo and my mother was Florence Perry. This photo would have been taken at Dairy Flat near Woodenbong, not long before Mum died, a beautiful person, never smoked or drank. Mum was a real good gardener. Mum and Dad moved there after they had to leave Cabbage Tree Island. My parents had to get off the island, 'cause the manager reckons that Mum was too white. He said 'You are too white, you are not allowed to stay on the island'.

So Dad sold everything and moved. They moved into the house that we moved out from at Dairy Flat. They transferred the house to them when we left and went to Casino to live. Mum was in her 90s when she died. I think she was about 95 and Dad was about 97. So that is where I get it, the genes are in me.”

Mavis Davies
Goonellabah, 20 June 2013

“Granny Combo lived just outside Woodenbong. It was just near a dairy farm and she used to let the cows through the gate into her property on to the grass. Then later take them back across the road. I still remember her when she was really old, in her gumboots, doing gardening and all. That was the only house that I can remember Granny living in.

She went to bed early and got up early. I remember the wood fire she used to cook on. Kerosene, but no electricity. She didn't have a fridge. She had no electricity, I know that, 'cause we had to carry the kerosene lanterns to go to the outside toilet. I used to stay with her a few nights, then I would go back and stay at Nan and Pop's house in Woodenbong. I mainly stayed with Dad and Nan and Pop.”

Debbie McBride
Ballina, 4 July 2013



Debbie McBride, Ballina, 2013. Photo by Michael Aird



Mavis Davies, Goonellabah, 2013. Photo by Michael Aird

“Coming from Ballina, living on the coast, it is something you do every day. Especially having a dad who has been a surfer since he was a young boy. So I have always been very familiar with the water, but did not take up surfing until I was about 11. Dad used to take me out in waves and I would get smashed, it was a bit scary. I think he thought that is the way you do it. Getting the child comfortable, but it is not, it is the total opposite. As I got older Mum and Dad put me into Nippers, at the Ballina Surf Life Saving Club, that’s where I built my confidence up being in the waves.

I think I was at the age of about 11 and I jumped on one of Dad’s mate’s longboards at the Missingham Bridge here at Ballina, where we grew up surfing, in the river. My dad’s a craftsman, he can do anything, and he ended up making me my own board. Then Mum sewed me my first board-cover to go with it. I wish I still had that board. Dad made me that board so it was special. It was around 5’10”. That is very small compared to what I ride now, 9’ plus. I remember that board it was fluorescent orange, with black spots, like Dad just splashed paint on it like a kid would do.

I rode for Hobie for about three years, they did my boards and my clothing. When my contract ended with Hobie, then Donald Takayama of Hawaiian Pro-Designs, he picked me up straight away. I am still competing. I just made the Australian team, so I can go to the world titles, but I don’t think I will go this year, as I am studying full time at uni and I will probably go next year. I am a full-time student, and I am trying to get that over and done with. That’s my number one priority.

I had an unlimited supply of surfboards, and Dad used to always take them and ride them and break them. I was riding in the world professional longboard circuit at that time, around 2003. That’s my board Dad is with. He probably broke it, snapped it like the rest of my boards. He would always ride my boards and snap them. He probably broke that board. I have only broken about three boards in my whole life. If he borrowed it and if it rode well for him he would claim it. And he would ride it, ride it and ride it like he was driving a car into the ground. The sponsors knew.”

Melissa Combo
Ballina, 9 May 2013



Lee Combo, Scotts Head, 2003. Photo by Michael Aird



Melissa Combo, Ballina, 2013
Photo by Michael Aird



Brian Kelly playing for South Lismore Evans Head
Football Club, Kingsford Smith Park, Ballina, c.1982

Photo courtesy Brian Kelly

“When I first started playing Rugby League it was in the Ballina Junior League, which was formed in 1970. It started off with four junior clubs, under 12s. One was called Ballina Seagulls, one was called Ballina Wanderers, another club was called Ballina Rovers and a club was from out of town, it was Byron Bay. So they made up the four clubs.

I was playing five-eight in the under 12s for the Ballina Wanderers. As time went by the league got bigger and bigger and Austinville came into it, then a few years later other clubs came into it, like Marist Brothers, South Lismore and Evans Head. A lot of my family have played in the league. My sons and nephews have played, not only locally but in the Aboriginal knockouts as well.”

Brian Kelly
Ballina, 4 July 2013



Brian Kelly, Ballina, 2013
Photo by Michael Aird



Rick Cook with grandchildren, Ezekai and Minnie Cook
Wollongbar, 2013. Photo by Michael Aird

“Mum used to use a bit of language from down at Kempsey, Dunghutti language. As a kid I used to hear her talk about things like objects in the house, or somebody would be coming. She would mention something in Dunghutti or sometimes she would say something Bundjalung. So when I started working with language I could understand that this word is Bundjalung language or that word is Kempsey lingo.”

Rick Cook
Wollongbar, 4 July 2013

“I have been the music teacher at Cabbage Tree Island State School for a few years. I started teaching the kids keyboard and teaching them basic blues progressions, and then we started writing our own lyrics connected to living here. First we had the Cabbo Blues, and we were really getting a strong sense of the family connections that everybody felt. Everything we focused on was very positive. The kids were just taking to it so quickly. As soon as we would write a song, we would go and sing it to the rest of the school. We would write the lyrics up on cardboard and start to teach all the children the words. Then the other kids would learn as well. Then we started to get invited to community events to sing these songs.

All the songs are about what the students were doing in class, or their families. My favourite song on *No Shame* is called ‘My Nan’. That was about Aunty Viv, and when she would come to the concerts we would sing that and dedicate that to her and all the nanas. So she got to hear that song and she knew that was written about her.

You could see how the children’s self-esteem would pick up. They are very proud and have real ownership of the songs. The kids would say ‘Let’s do Collin’s song’ or ‘Let’s do Owen’s song’. All the families know the songs and they sing them. Even when I run into students a few years later, they say they still sing the songs. It has been a really positive experience for everybody involved. I am not an Aboriginal person, but the families have trusted me with their children, and they can see that they have an opportunity to shine. It is something we are all really proud of.”

Laura Nobel
Cabbage Tree Island, 12 April 2013



Laura Nobel, Cabbage Tree Island Public School, 2013
Photo Michael Aird

“As a young kid when we first lived at Cabbage Tree Island, Dad brought us back from Sydney, we were only there for a few years. From Kempsey to Sydney, then back up here. We always came up and down, even as a child I remember traveling between Kempsey and Cabbage Tree every holidays. That happened the whole time we lived in Kempsey, then we moved to Sydney. I went to school at La Prouse. Then we came back this way.

We lived in my great-grandfather’s house, Jack Cook, we lived there until my great-grandmother died, Old Susan. I remember taking cups of tea to her as a little kid. They had to find things for me to do ‘cause I was too energetic. So my daily routine started out with the elders. I got up in the morning, at the crack of dawn with the elders, Uncle George, Uncle Bunny, Uncle Ernest, Uncle Doug and my great-grandfather and went out and worked in the gardens for a couple of hours before I got ready for school. Then caught the bus to go to Ballina to school. Then in the afternoon straight over to the gardens to water them and collect fruit. While I was in the gardens, the old people used to tell me stories and that is why I am interested in story-telling.

Back in the mid ’70s I worked with the Aboriginal Medical Service in Redfern. From there I got involved in dance. I was dancing at the Bodenweiser Dance School at Broadway. That is when I first started dancing. I did about three or four lessons a week and I studied with a woman called Lucy Jumawan who was from the Philippines. She was the principal choreographer of NAISDA, the Aboriginal and Islander school of dance. That is when she asked me to join NAISDA.

It was a tough life working as a dancer. It was very competitive, with dancers from all over Australia. I was 20 when I went there, and I was there for four years and did many major performances at the Opera House and various festivals. I graduated in 1981.

When I joined NAISDA it was an access point for me to have a look at culture. Have a look at all these other Aboriginal cultures. We had teachers coming down from Mornington Island, far-north Queensland, Arnhem Land, Halls Creek and places like that, they were coming in and I would learn about their culture. So that gave me an awareness about the importance of story-telling.”

Lois Cook
Wardell, 11 July 2013



Lois Cook, Wardell, 2013. Photo by Michael Aird



Teresa Anderson
Cabbage Tree Island Public School, 2013
Photo by Michael Aird

“I used to do arts and crafts and then I applied for a job here at the school. At that time I was very shy. I didn’t like to talk to anyone. But from there I haven’t looked back. I have worked here at the school for eight or nine years. I also work with the Jali Play-Group. I have been working there for over four years as well. That is here on the island. I also work with young mums and their jarjums. When I got this job, I was told to apply for university, but having low self-esteem, I said, ‘I can’t do that’. Then I ended up doing that, and I only have a year and half to go. So I am getting there slowly.”

Teresa Anderson
Cabbage Tree Island, 7 August 2013



Delia Rhodes with her grandsons, Bobie and Thomas
Cabbage Tree Island Public School, 2013
Photo by Michael Aird

"I came to school here at the Cabbage Tree Island School, which was then just one building. The old school building was still here, but we didn't actually use it as a classroom at the time when I came here in the 1960s, 'cause we had the new building on top of the hill. If it was raining and we couldn't play outside, the teacher would set up some blocks or something for us to play with and eat our lunch. It also used to be used for community meetings.

The old school building was down where the play equipment is now. The cabbage tree palms that are

there, they were planted by Lewis Cook and my uncle, Cyril Rhodes. They were two of the boys that planted them. I don't know who the other boys were. Uncle Lewis always tells me that he and my Uncle Cyril planted those trees when they were boys coming to school here. The original school building was beside those trees and the veranda used to face them."

Delia Rhodes
Cabbage Tree Island, 8 August 2013

“We worked in partnership with Wetland Care and we asked the school what they wanted. We looked at the back of the school and said that a boardwalk would be a good project. Before we started it was pretty much like a rubbish dump and we got in and cleaned the area up. Then we worked on the design of the boardwalk with the school kids and the community. We looked around for turpentine logs, and we found some in Tenterfield. The reason being is that turpentine is a pretty hardy wood.

There was a lot of guidelines about working in the mangroves. Because it is crown land and we weren't allowed to touch any of the mangroves. We got a big length of wire and we used my dumbbells as a roller. We chained that to a tree, put the wire through it, hooked it on to a tractor, then drove the tractor away from the mangroves and that pulled the logs to where we wanted them, without damaging any mangroves. We didn't touch one plant. Those logs are in two or more metres deep and backfilled with shale and rocks.

We got the community to all contribute. The kids all wanted to work, so for the time that we were working on the boardwalk, they were at school every day. We ended up getting the kids to do all the tree plantings with us. Then they came back and painted some of the poles. It was an area that was not getting utilised.

It was about getting the men together, 'cause you already see the women at the school, but this got the men contributing towards the school. The women at the school said that it was good to see some men here. We had a father and son working together, it was a positive thing for the community. There are more projects we would like to do.”

Marcus Ferguson
Wardell, 11 July 2013



Marcus Ferguson looking at historical documents
Cabbage Tree Island School, 2013. Photo by Michael Aird



Preparing timber for the boardwalk, Cabbage Tree
Island, 2010. Photo by Marcus Ferguson



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