

The Wildsoet Interview — Some Recollections of the Aborigines of the Tully Area

by
F. P. Woolston and F. S. Colliver*

In March 1965, I was carrying out some field research in North Queensland for a paper which Stan Colliver and I were preparing on 'The Rain Forest Sword & Shield in Queensland', for A.N.Z.A.A.S.' Having read in Dorothy Jones admirable book *Cardwell Shire Story* of Chris Wildsoet and his knowledge of the Aborigines of the Cardwell-Tully area², I was extremely pleased to learn from friends that Chris was still alive and was living in Tully.

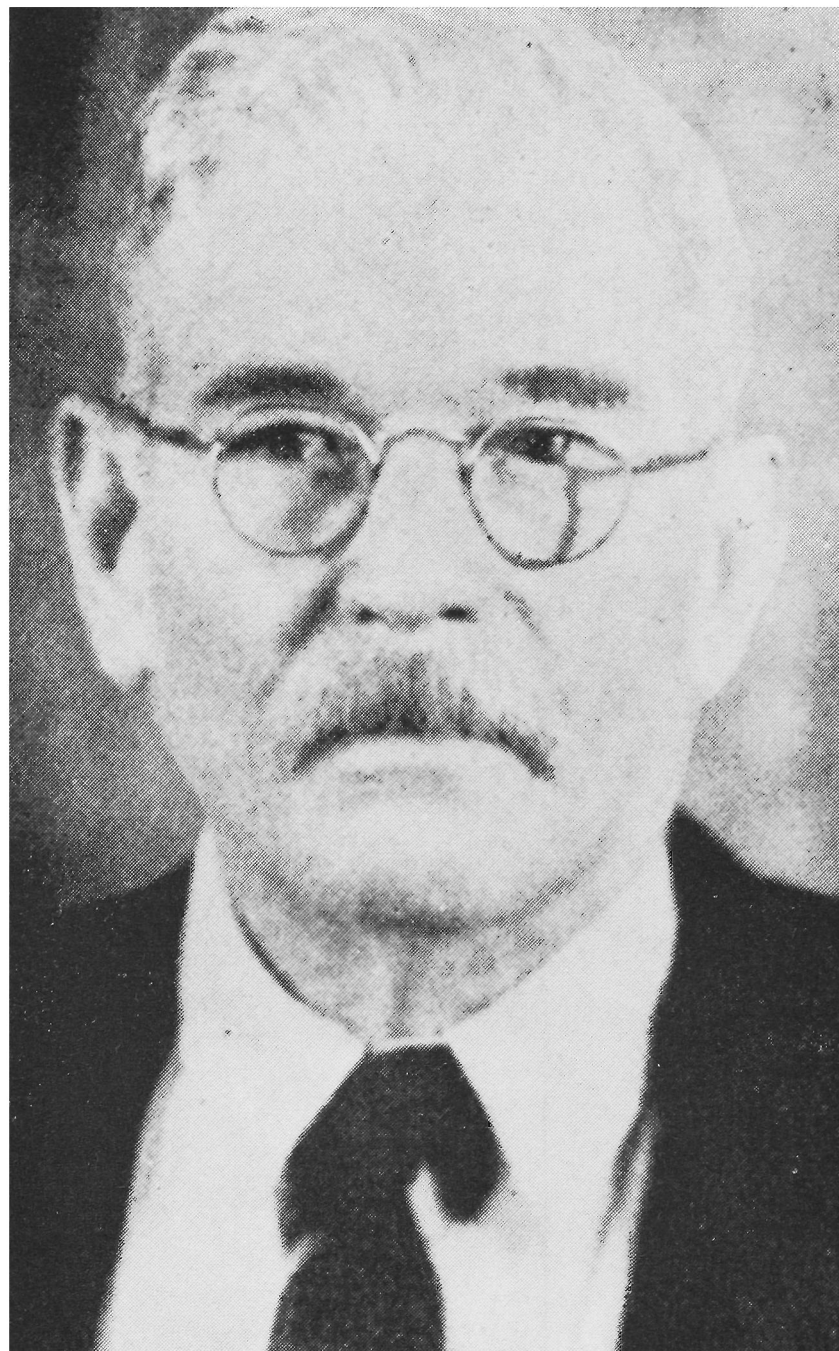
So it was that I found myself knocking on his back door at about 7 p.m. on 17 March, 1965. He was some time answering the door, and when I introduced myself and explained why I had come, he explained that he had already gone to bed. He was a little agitated at being disturbed. That day was, after all, his eighty-second birthday. He asked me in but it was some time after we had begun to talk that I dared to introduce a tape recorder. However, the old gentleman soon warmed to his subject and I was able to tape our conversation for nearly an hour. I found that it was difficult to keep him on the subjects I wished to pursue and his sentence endings trailed away. This explains some of the gaps and rapid subject changes evident in the edited transcription. But as the conversation progressed, I became more and more elated as I realised how much of the information provided by this remarkable old man endorsed previous research and assisted so much in assembling the pieces of what had proved a baffling ethnological jigsaw.

Christian Magnus Wildsoet was born in Port Douglas on 17 March 1883, and went with his parents to the Tully-Cardwell area when he was a baby.³ His father, a Danish seafarer, who appears to have held a command before coming to Australia, was naturalized on 6 February, 1880.⁴ Christian's father owned and operated a small boat out of Cardwell and also took up land at Tully.⁵ Chris began work in the timber industry and was timber inspector for the Tully Sugar Mill for a time. He later worked with the Department of Main Roads and the Cardwell Shire Council, retiring at seventy-six in 1959.⁶ He lived in Tully until shortly before his death at Charters Towers in December, 1966.

The transcription has been edited to reduce repetition and to keep to the subject of the Tully Aborigines and their swords and shields. The original tape is held by me and a copy is in the Institute of Aboriginal Studies in Canberra.

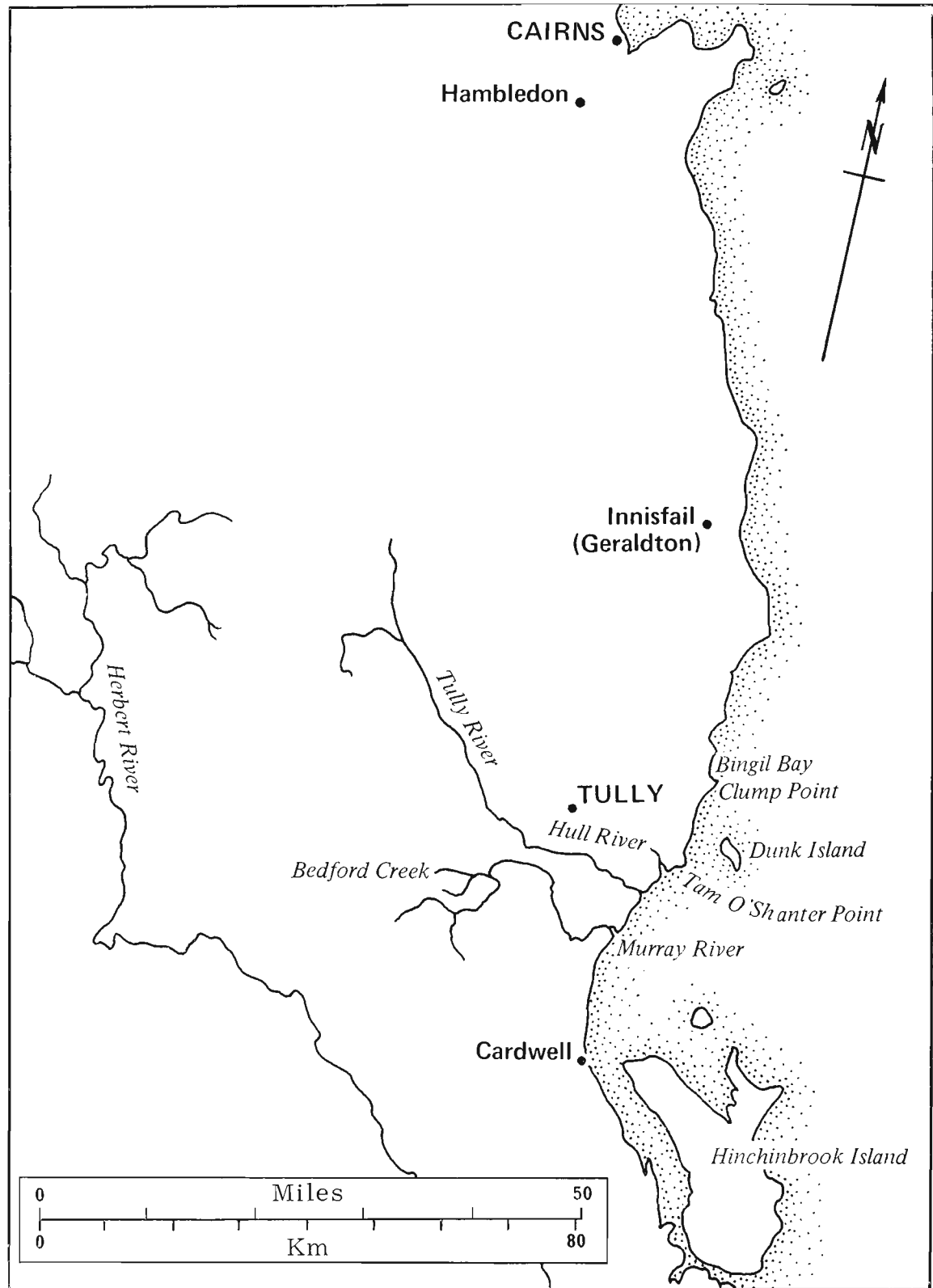
The tape begins at a point when I had explained to Chris our particular interest in the large swords characteristic of the Cardwell-Tully-Innisfail area.

F. P. Woolston.



C. M. Wildsoet
(By courtesy of Cardwell Shire Council)

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Frank Woolston Now Chris, you actually have seen the
Aboriginals using those swords.

Chris Wildsoet Yes — I've used them myself.

F.W. Which way did they swing them.

C.W. Straight over.

F.W. Straight over the top, and how did the other
man protect himself.

C.W. Well, he's got his shield you see, and he
holds the shield up and shields himself.

F.W. Well, he holds it this way or that way
(*using a broom Frank Woolston illustrates*
the vertical and horizontal position).

C.W. He wouldn't hold it that way (*broom held*
vertically) no, he'd hold it sideways (*broom*
held horizontally), while they chop at it and
they try and cut him down if they could.

F.W. They would try and cut him down the top
would they.

C.W. Yes, but what used to beat them was the
spears. Throwing the spears — sometimes
they get it in the feet, sometimes they get
it in the body — see a lot of them run about
— women folk was mostly the trouble.
When a boy is born or a girl is born,
that's in their habits here, they're
allotted five women, or five men, if it's
a woman she's allotted five men and they've
got to fight over her.

F.W. And when they had these sword fights,
would they have hit for hit or just any old
way. If you and I were fighting would I
have a smack at you and then you have a
smack at me or just when we had a chance.

C.W. Well if you've got a shield I'll have a smack
at you.

F.W. Supposing you've got a shield too, what
about that.

C.W. Well they don't always carry a shield then.

F.W. Did you ever see them fighting — two men
with a sword each and a shield each.

C.W. No. One fellow with a sword and the
other fellow with a shield, he might have a
spear, he might have a bundle of spears —
well he couldn't carry a shield.

F.W. You never actually saw a duel where both
both men had swords and both men had
shields.

C.W. No, I never saw that — I've seen a thousand
in a mob.



Sword and Shield People
(By courtesy of F.P.W.)



Rain forest sword
(By courtesy of F.S.C.)

F.W. You've seen a thousand in a mob — where did you see a thousand blacks.

C.W. Here in Tully.

F.W. In the Tully.

C.W. On the Murray really Bedford Creek.

F.W. A thousand is a lot of men Chris, you are quite sure of that.

C.W. Well they come from different mobs, Bingil Bay and Cardwell and Upper Murray and all around the place.

F.W. What skins would they be — would they be Djirbal people or what would they be.

C.W. Aborigines.

F.W. Yes, but would they be in tribes, were they Ma Mu, Djirbal and Idinji.⁷

C.W. All the tribes — all tribes come in different mobs and the women folk — see I was going to tell you that the five boys or five girls each, they're allotted five each when they're born, one might be a Bingil Bay and one might be up near the Murray, one Cardwell, one here, one somewhere else. Well they fight over her see. All the mobs are going to see them fight and they help one another.

F.W. Yes — I get you.

C.W. Well the women folk will fight too.

F.W. What do they use.

C.W. Spears and sticks.

F.W. Sticks, not swords.

C.W. Sticks that they trim up themselves.

F.W. Pointed ones.

C.W. Pointed ones — they belt into one another, oh yes, I've seen them crippled.

F.W. What about this five thing — the man would have to fight somebody else belonging to that girl before he got the girl.

C.W. He's got to be a good man, he can take the five if he's good enough — he can take the five girls.

F.W. Who would he have to fight — the girls father or uncle or something.

C.W. No, her boy friends.

F.W. Her boy friends or anyone who wanted to defend her.

C.W. If they want her, well they have got to fight to get her and keep her. If they can't beat this fellow, say you and I, well if I can beat you . . .

F.W. Then I take the girl.

C.W. If I can beat you . . .

F.W. You take my girl.

C.W. I take the girl, he gets five of them see.

F.W. Did you ever see some of them with five wives.

C.W. Yes I have.

F.W. But not more than five, Chris.

C.W. No, not more than about five, that's the most they have.

F.W. And Chris, did you ever see a man killed with the sword.

C.W. No — I've seen them killed with the spear though.

F.W. Killed with the spear.

C.W. He had no shield see. They run about protecting, talking about the women folk, fighting and that, arguing the point, different tribes. And they'll get a spear . . .

F.W. And did you ever see them fighting with the swords made from crosscut saws.

C.W. Yes oh yes. I've used them myself.

F.W. I see and what did they do. Would they get a six foot crosscut and split it in halves.

C.W. They cut it in halves, cut it square.

F.W. Cut it across to make two threes.

C.W. Yes and they break all the teeth off it and they use the back of it then, and they put beeswax and anything at all that would make a handle. They don't use the tooth part, they use the back of the saw.⁸

F.W. They'd cut all the shields to pieces I suppose.

C.W. Yes they would, they cut the shields to pieces but they like them because they're light see. It's like the fish hooks, now the fish hooks — a bloke wants me to go to Dunk Island — they own Dunk Island — they know the caves. Well, I saw the caves seventy odd years ago.

F.W. Yes — seen the death-adders there too, eh Chris.

C.W. Oh no, not many death-adders there, not many snakes there. But I said there are three caves. One time in the early days when I first went there in the War, with the blacks, there was a mob camped there — lived there.

F.W. That's right, that was even before Banfield got there.

C.W. Oh yes, long before. I was with my father then. We were sailing about. He used to cart the first bread and meat from Cardwell to Geraldton by boat, there was no baker there.⁹

F.W. Old Innisfail.

C.W. Used to cart the fresh bread there and they wanted him to go three years before the mast again, to become a pilot and he was a deep sea captain where he came from. He said 'No more, I've had enough—do no more training.' So he bought a boat and wherever he went I went with him — he reckoned I was the only one.

F.W. And you were on Dunk and those places when the blacks were living there.

C.W. Yes.

F.W. Were there many living there at the time, Chris.

C.W. Yes, about thirty, about thirty or . . .

F.W. Did they show you the caves, or did you find them yourself.

C.W. No, they showed me the caves. There are three caves — one with rocks, all rocks where the paintings are, and next one, the big one, the niggers are frightened of it and they wouldn't go into it.

F.W. Didn't like it, too many spirits.

C.W. Too many birds.

F.W. Birds.

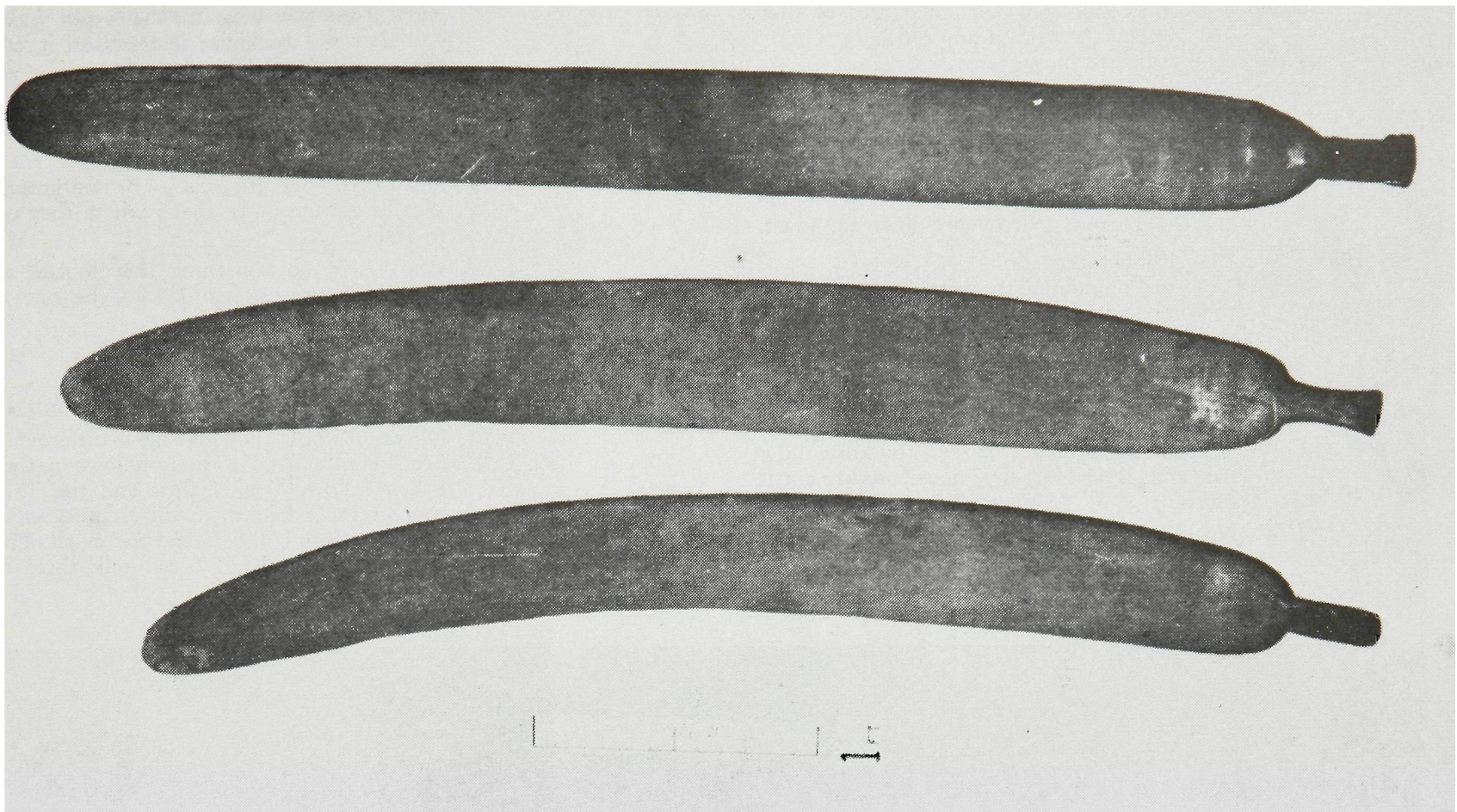
C.W. Swifts coming out like bees — oh they'd blind you.

F.W. That's the one that's open — the big open one.

C.W. And they wouldn't go near it. I believe there's none there now.

F.W. No. Chris, how many of those caves had paintings in them.

C.W. Only one and the other one is a small cave. There's three in a line. The sand has blocked it up and you can't get into it. It's all rocks, the sand blocks it. Well, if you went there with a flattie¹⁰ you could dig a place and you could get away with a flattie again.



Rain forest swords
(By courtesy of F.S.C.)

F.W. Because this one with the paintings faces the sea does it — pretty close.

C.W. Faces that way (*points towards the North-east*) North-east. Then there's another place where they make their hooks. I always say there's a bed of pearl shell there. I never went to look for it.

F.W. No. Probably was too you know because it's pretty reefy around there isn't it.

C.W. Yes, it's all reef right round. Yes, there must be pearl shell there, I'll tell you why. I took Banfield to what you call the Coconut Bay where the niggers used to camp and we got the pearl-shell, the full shell. It's about that size (*hand measurement of 10" approximately*) — a big shell.

F.W. Yes. A black-lip eh.

C.W. And they've had the hooks from when they started to make — cut them out to the really manufactured, until they got British hooks.

F.W. Oh, the steel ones, no more make their own.

C.W. The steel ones — no more make them — finish, finish — well there's no more. They're round like ' ' . . . (*fingers rounded*).

F.W. Like a ring.

C.W. Just like that (*fingers round*) and they tie the line on here (*indicating one part of the ring*) and the other part comes round. But the stone — they worked it with a stone somehow and they sharpened it. They must have taken a long time.

F.W. A lot of work.

C.W. Yes, a lot of work.

F.W. Chris, do you ever remember in the very early days ever see them using that thing called an Ooyurka — shaped like a T — a T shaped piece of stone shaped like this (*drawing outline on paper*) — like a T.

C.W. I might have seen it, but I don't . . .

F.W. But you don't remember, Chris.

C.W. No, but I'll tell you what, I have one here somewhere, a part of one — because this was an old camp here (*indicating the house*) a long time and I saved it, but you couldn't put a handle on it now — it's a stone tomahawk.

F.W. Oh yes, a stone tomahawk, yes, I know them. Chris you saw a lot of the rain forest people didn't you, you saw hundreds and thousands of them.

C.W. Yes, oh yes.

F.W. Were they big people, small people or medium sized people.

C.W. Oh — mixed. Some were big fellows and some were small.

F.W. How small were they — were they very small, some of them.

C.W. Oh some of them, they were just like Europeans.

F.W. Just like some of us, big and small.

C.W. You get big men and small men and you get dwarfs.

F.W. Do you remember any very small ones.

C.W. Oh well you couldn't say yes. I remember them here, they were only about that high (*hand gesture indicating about 4' 6"*) little fellows.

F.W. Were they from any particular area or they just happened to be in any old tribe.
 C.W. Any tribe at all.
 F.W. You don't remember any particular place where they were real small.
 C.W. No. But I'll tell you what I do know, that I can talk their language as good as they can themselves. They all say 'Good day' to me and shake hands when we're down the town.
 F.W. Yes, I'll bet they do.
 C.W. Yes, if I'm talking to them or I'm talking to you or anybody else, they'd leave you and come and talk to me.
 F.W. Chris, do you remember anything about their hair. Was their hair wavy or curly or curled or what.
 C.W. Well, it was long and frizzy. You know how hair goes frizzy, but they never used to cut it much.
 F.W. No, but you wouldn't say it was straight hair.
 C.W. No, but the only thing and they kept it long,

and I'll tell you what for. They put wax on and they put cockatoo feathers on it when they go to the Br'oon grounds.

F.W. Yes — Br'oon grounds.
 C.W. Br'oon grounds we called them, the Br'oon grounds.
 F.W. Not Corroboree grounds — Br'oon grounds.
 C.W. No, Br'oon grounds, that's where they used to fight.
 F.W. And Chris, do you think they looked any-ways different in features to the ones up around Cairns way.
 C.W. Oh, I don't think so.
 F.W. Much the same, eh.
 C.W. Much the same — the language is different.
 F.W. Oh yes, I know the language is different.
 C.W. See, I couldn't talk to them fellows up there. I saw fellows from Cairns and the Tableland and I asked them different questions and they didn't understand me at all. From Cardwell to Innisfail I can talk three different dialects.



Young men and boys, rain forest people
 (Date and location unknown)

- F.W. You don't know the names of the dialects, eh, just that you can talk them.
- C.W. No. I can talk them. See, from Cardwell — see now you take the head for instance. *Mulgul* is the head in Cardwell. *Tingal* is here (Tully) and *Woomboo* is up here (*pointing towards Innisfail*). That's three different dialects see. The same as water.
- F.W. What's water in Cardwell.
- C.W. *Kamoo*, no *Tambul* is in Cardwell. *Kamoo* is here (Tully) and *Panirr* is up here (Innisfail). See that's different altogether.
- F.W. Yes, now the Cardwell ones. The first ones would be from Cardwell to where, say.
- C.W. From Cardwell to the Murray you may say.
- F.W. Cardwell to the Murray.
- C.W. From the Murray to Bingil Bay.
- F.W. And then from where.
- C.W. From Bingil Bay on to Innisfail — a big difference altogether. It's just like the hair of your head, *Murai* they call that. It's *Murai* with them all.
- F.W. There were some words that were the same but mostly it was different eh.
- C.W. *Boyen* is the forehead, *Wailoo* is your ear — see I know all the names. *Poon* is your nose, *Kiega* is your eyes, and *Mungoo* is your mouth. *Moongul* is your chin and *Tira* is your teeth. *Shelai* is your tongue — see, I know them all.
- F.W. Which one was that in, the Cardwell lot or the . . .
- C.W. All the same. They're all the same and I can talk it. I know the body line right through and it's the same as wild animals — *Goota* is dog.
- F.W. *Goota*.
- C.W. *Goota* is dog with them all.
- F.W. Yes, I know *Goota* is dog at the Murray. Do you remember any of the songs they used to sing, Chris.
- C.W. Oh, I do, Oh, but I never bothered.
- F.W. Never bothered about them.
- C.W. It's just like crying at a funeral. You hear them but I never bothered.
- F.W. Chris, did you ever see them bury anybody— what did they do with the dead in the early days.
- C.W. Well, I've seen them buried and I'll tell you what I have seen them do to people that they want to preserve. They'll put them in water where there's nothing that will eat them, no prawns or no fish or nothing that'll eat them, and they'll put weights on them and keep them down. In three days the pigment — when your skin . . . They're a bloody sight whiter than we are.
- F.W. Do they take the skin off, or do they just get white.
- C.W. Just take the thin skin off.¹²
- F.W. Then they are white.
- C.W. They're as white as blazes.
- F.W. What do they do then, Chris.
- C.W. They take all the inside out, the tongue, the brains and everything and they'll put them aside, they'll keep them there for about six months, and they'll carry the bones about.
- F.W. How did they get rid of all the flesh though, Chris.
- C.W. Oh, they take the flesh off afterwards — it'll fall off see after about six months. Then they'll take the bones and they'll carry them about another six months, and then they'll bury them. I've seen them bury them as they were and I've seen them in this water business.
- F.W. Do you think there is any reason for some in the water and some being buried — were they more important ones in the water.
- C.W. Well . . .
- F.W. Anything like that you can remember.
- C.W. The only thing is that their kings or queens amongst them — they kept them longer.
- F.W. What would happen at the finish, Chris, would they burn them or bury them or what.
- C.W. They bury the bones, and they bury the flesh.
- F.W. Would they have any special place to bury them or any old place.
- C.W. Oh well — special places.
- F.W. Do you know where they used to bury them.
- C.W. Yes, I know — on the Murray here.
- F.W. You do know the place on the Murray.
- C.W. Oh yes, I do know the places well.
- F.W. There would be a few hundred buried there then, Chris.
- C.W. Oh yes.
- F.W. Is it a sand ridge or what, a place where the digging was easy or not.
- C.W. Oh no, black soil. I know down at North Mission here, where the Mission Station was there are two hundred buried along a sand ridge there.
- F.W. You know that place, eh.
- C.W. Oh yes, I know that.
- F.W. Could you go back to the place on the Murray where they are buried.
- C.W. Yes.
- F.W. It's not a farm today.
- C.W. No, there's no farm there.
- F.W. Chris, do you ever remember seeing in any other caves on the mainland, in any other caves other than Dunk, any other rock shelters on the mainland here where they used to paint.
- C.W. No, I never saw any caves here.
- F.W. No caves with any paintings in them at all.
- C.W. No, I never saw any caves here. There could be caves here, but I've never seen them.
- F.W. Chris, do you remember if they ever put any bones up in trees at all, like they do in Central Australia.
- C.W. Yes, they do. They put them up in trees here.
- F.W. What, bones or bodies.
- C.W. Bodies.
- F.W. How did they do it, put it in a bark or what . . .
- C.W. They rolled it up in bark and they build a frame just like a birds nest and they'd put the body on top of that and they covered it over and leave it there.

- F.W. They had different kinds of burial practices then, some they buried in the ground, others they put in trees.
- C.W. Yes, some in trees.
- F.W. Was it different tribes Chris, that did this.
- C.W. Oh no.
- F.W. Just as likely to do anything.
- C.W. Anything at all — it might be different tribes, but I never bothered much about it.
- F.W. No. Did you ever eat any of their food.
- C.W. Yes.
- F.W. What stuff have you eaten.
- C.W. I've eaten the bean-nut,¹³ the pine-nut¹⁴ and the wild yam¹⁵ and the Bulguru.¹⁶ Well, anything they can eat I can eat. Snakes, lizards, anything at all. Goannas, snakes or lizards or anything.
- F.W. Possums.
- C.W. Anything they can eat I can eat.
- F.W. Chris, did you ever notice any special idea about the paintings of their shields — different designs — did you ever get any stories about why they painted them in different designs on the shields.
- C.W. No, not different designs, but I'll tell you what it is, its mostly clay, clay and blood out of the nose and charcoal.
- F.W. How did they get the blood out of the nose.
- C.W. They get the sword grass¹⁷ — three cornered grass, and they'll break it off about that long (5") and they'll keep poking it up their nose until it bleeds, and they'll catch it in a shell. Then they'll break up the charcoal very fine and put the dust in there and they mix it up and they paint with it.
- F.W. The man who was doing his own shield would get the blood out of his own nose.
- C.W. Out of his own nose, yes.
- F.W. You said the three bladed sword grass. Where does that grow, in the swamps or anywhere.
- C.W. Anywhere near the swampy ground. It's got three edges and its very sharp too and they shove it up their nose and they cut inside the nostril and make it bleed. They catch it in the shell then, and they get a lawyer cane and belt it up and make a sort of brush out of it, and paint it all over then. Some's white, they get the white clay, and they get the black with the blood and the charcoal and whatever different colours they want.
- F.W. Chris, you didn't know what the designs meant on the shields. Every shield seems to have a different design you know.
- C.W. Oh yes — well they're not, it all depends who's painting them. Nearly always the old men paint them.
- F.W. Not the women.
- C.W. No, not the women.
- F.W. Did you ever see them working on a shield — cutting it out of . . .
- C.W. Oh yes, I've cut the boomerangs, I've cut the shields out myself.
- F.W. What tree mostly did they use for the shield.
- C.W. Well they use — it's a hard wood. They get the big spur roots, it comes down see, and they cut it out of them. They cut the shields and boomerangs, they get one that's a bit smaller.
- F.W. Yes, they call it the butress.
- C.W. Yes, small root on it, and they cut that out for boomerangs.
- F.W. Chris, did they ever use the fig trees for their shields or not, or was it a hard wood.
- C.W. It's not a fig tree no, it a soft wood. Whatever's got a big spur they cut the shield.
- F.W. Some of those figs have got a big spur haven't they.
- C.W. Yes, they cut it out of figs or any tree at all, anywhere at all.
- F.W. Did you ever see them using stone axes, or had they finished with stone when you came along.
- C.W. Oh yes.
- F.W. They were.
- C.W. Oh yes.
- F.W. Did you ever see them using great big stone axes, great big fellows this size (*hand gesture showing 18"*).
- C.W. No, not the big ones. I've seen them cutting bees-hives out. They cut a triangular piece out to get the native bees out.
- F.W. With a stone axe.
- C.W. With a stone axe.
- F.W. I've seen axes found in the cultivation of Midgenoo¹⁸ that would be this long (*hand gesture 18"*). You never saw them using those, eh.
- C.W. Oh, they might've used them, But I never saw them.
- F.W. Did they ever use stone knives, or what did they use to cut small things with.
- C.W. Well, I don't know. They'd use the tomahawk to cut the boomerangs and shields out with.
- F.W. How did they finish them off. What did they scrape them down with.
- C.W. Another stone, the same as they do the fish hooks see, you keep on rubbing and rubbing and rubbing and rubbing until they get it fine.
- F.W. And Chris, did you ever see any evidence of cannibalism. Were they eating one another or other people.
- C.W. No, I haven't. They talk about it, but I've never seen it.
- F.W. I think the word for flesh was *Talgoro* wasn't it. *Talgoro* — that was for human flesh. That was over in the Herbert Valley when Lumholtz¹⁹ was around.
- C.W. Yes, yes, *Chalgueroo* is, *Chalgueroo* they call it here.
- F.W. Oh, that's interesting. Is that down the Cardwell way or where.
- C.W. It's all the same.
- F.W. But you never saw any cannibals or any evidence of it, eh.
- C.W. Oh, no, no.
- F.W. See Banfield in his book mentions where some girl was taken away and they were supposed to have eaten her on the mainland here somewhere.
- C.W. Well, if they did, nobody ever saw them eating them. Nobody ever saw them eating her.

F.W. I see. Did you ever see any big Br'oon — that's the big dance place. Did you ever see any big dances.

C.W. I saw the Corroboree, what they call a Corroboree.

F.W. Did they call it Corroboree or some other word.

C.W. Corroborees — they called it Corroboree.

F.W. Now this time you said you saw a thousand of them, were they together for any special reason, Chris.

C.W. They're different mobs see, they fight over women folk. They have a feed up at night. They fetch one another tucker see, and give it all round and have a feed up, just a bit of a spree, and then they'd have a sing-song, and a bit of a corroboree, then they'd go and you'll hear them howling after, some of them happy, some of them singing.

F.W. After they were fighting.

C.W. After they were fighting.

F.W. All sit down, not exactly mates, but they'd be more or less at peace when they'd finished the fights, is that the idea.

C.W. Yes. There's no more then, finish, they go home.

F.W. Did those tribes fight among themselves, one tribe against the others very much.

C.W. Over women folk, nearly always women folk and if there's one thing about them, if there's any fellows from the different tribes that's killed, they take them to their country to bury them.

F.W. Never bury him anywhere else.

C.W. No, No, not on the Br'oon grounds, no, take him away. Take him back to wherever he belongs, to Clump Point or Upper Murray or Tully or Cardwell, they'd take him back and bury him there. They cry over him see.

F.W. That's reasonable when you think about it Chris, isn't it. Take him back to his own ground.

C.W. Oh yes, take him back, bury him there.

F.W. And do they do much for the treatment of wounds. Did you ever see them treating any spear wounds at all or anything like that.

C.W. I've seen them. One fellow was speared here; he lived for a long time. He used to be our mailman. Sam the mailman we called him. He was speared through here (*indicating lower left side and out at the lower back*) came out here and they cut a great big hole here and it was all the sting ray barbs. They start small at the small end, they go back bigger all the way and they've got to cut them out.

F.W. Did he live very long after they'd taken them out.

C.W. About six months.

F.W. Must have got poisoned then, or something.

C.W. Oh well, they cut too big a hole see, they had to cut right through.

F.W. To get them out of him, eh.

C.W. I was talking to . . . about the massacre of the *Maria*.

F.W. Oh yes, the brig *Maria*, wasn't it.

C.W. They came here in the early days and the white fellows — they come from Cardwell and all around, the white policemen, and they cut the niggers off at Tam o'Shanter Point. Tam o'Shanter Point pretty funny though. It comes around like this (*hooked index finger gesture and then finger tracing a line on the table*) here, goes round here, around this way and comes in around here; a narrow neck here.

F.W. Oh yes, I get you.

C.W. Well, they cut the niggers off here (*pointing to the narrow neck*) And they drove them out to sea and they shot women and kids and all — only five survived. Five of the old fellows, and I got talking to them in their old language one day and one fellow said to me, he said 'What you interested in then.' I said 'Yes, and I'd like to know what happened to you fellows.' 'Well' he said, 'they killed all the women and the kiddies and they started to swim, they were swimming out. They shot them all.' I said 'how did you fellows get away.' 'Well, we got in the caves, the tide was going out and when the white men and all the policemen had gone, we got up too, and cleared out.'

F.W. Had they actually killed some of the people from the *Maria*.

C.W. Oh yes, they'd killed the lot, but they didn't know see — the white race coming among them and they killed them.

F.W. Do you think they ate them, Chris, or just killed them.

C.W. Oh I don't know whether they ate them or not, I couldn't tell you, but these old fellows wouldn't say, but I know that five survived.

F.W. They were picked up further down though weren't they, those five. Didn't they get down on to Hinchinbrook somewhere.

C.W. No, they got them here — Tam o'Shanter Point. And its very funny where Kennedy landed. He landed between the Hull and Tam o'Shanter Point. Well, we camped right where he landed and I didn't know it. I was poking around and I saw a shield on a tree and being with the surveyors a lot I got sticky-beaking and had a look. I cut the shield off and I gave it to Banfield and he sent it away south somewhere to the museum.

F.W. I wonder where it got to.

C.W. Lost in transit.

F.W. When you were up in the scrub, Chris, do you reckon you ever came across any of Kennedy's crossings, where he cut the banks down at all.

C.W. No, but I was up here at one time on the Murray and I know there was one place on the Murray where he tried to go up that way and he couldn't. There was something left there by them. Anyway he went further south and he went up bloody ranges, and they found parts of the stuff there of his — parts of the dray and one thing and another.

F.W. Any of the old blacks ever remember him and talk to you about him.

C.W. They would be dead and gone.

F.W. Yes. Never heard any stories about it Chris.
 C.W. No, but if they did kill a white man they wouldn't tell you, they wouldn't say a word — they're very very close that way, the Abos.

F.W. Chris, do you think there was much interbreeding with the Kanakas and the Aborigines.
 C.W. Oh no, not much.

F.W. Did you ever reckon you saw any young children who were half caste Aboriginal and Kanaka.
 C.W. No. They kept to themselves. I saw a mob of Kanakas at Hambleton sugar mill, that's in the C.S.R. times, and the Kanakas wouldn't mix with the Abos at all, they kept to themselves.

F.W. And Chris, you don't remember any other things in particular about the Aborigines up here in the rain forest. Do you remember ever seeing any tribal boundaries, or any of them telling you this is where their country finished and where the other fellows started. Do you ever remember anything like that.
 C.W. No, they all reckon it's the same boundary really, but they only go to a certain place and they go as far this way as they can and they stop there.

F.W. For instance, there is a story I heard down near the Upper Murray, that somewhere near the falls on the Upper Murray there is a boundary of where the four different tribes picked up; the western ones over that way (*gesture*) and did you ever hear anything about that.
 C.W. No.

F.W. Would you be able to pick up the different [dialects]. If you met [some Aborigines] you would soon find out which mob they were, eh.
 C.W. Oh yes.

F.W. So you'd know which language to use.
 C.W. Oh yes.

F.W. You could switch from one to the other, could you Chris, if you knew which one they were.
 C.W. Yes, I could easily find out.

F.W. One of these days you know Chris, there are people who are trained, they are called linguists — they're trained linguists, and I'm sure they'd be very thrilled if they could get you and ask you — there's certain grammatical phrases they ask — to record the languages you know. Because a lot of these [Aboriginal] people are gone now — I don't know how many are left, there are not very many left now.
 C.W. No, there are not very many. I'm about the only one here.

F.W. Yes, that can speak the three I'll bet.
 C.W. Speak it fluently. There's three different dialects see. I'm the only one here.

F.W. I think there's a linguist coming through sometime this year, Chris. I might get him to call on you. You'd give him a good hearing wouldn't you.
 C.W. I'd give him a good hearing, yes.

F.W. Did you ever witness any initiation ceremonies — when they're making the boys into men. Did you ever see any of that.
 C.W. No, but I'll tell you what I have seen. I've seen them when they're putting the marks on here (*gesture to stomach*).

F.W. Cutting across the belly.
 C.W. Yes. They hooray and sit on their feet and sit on their arms and hooray in their ears singing out.

F.W. Making a noise. Then they cut them.
 C.W. They cut them.

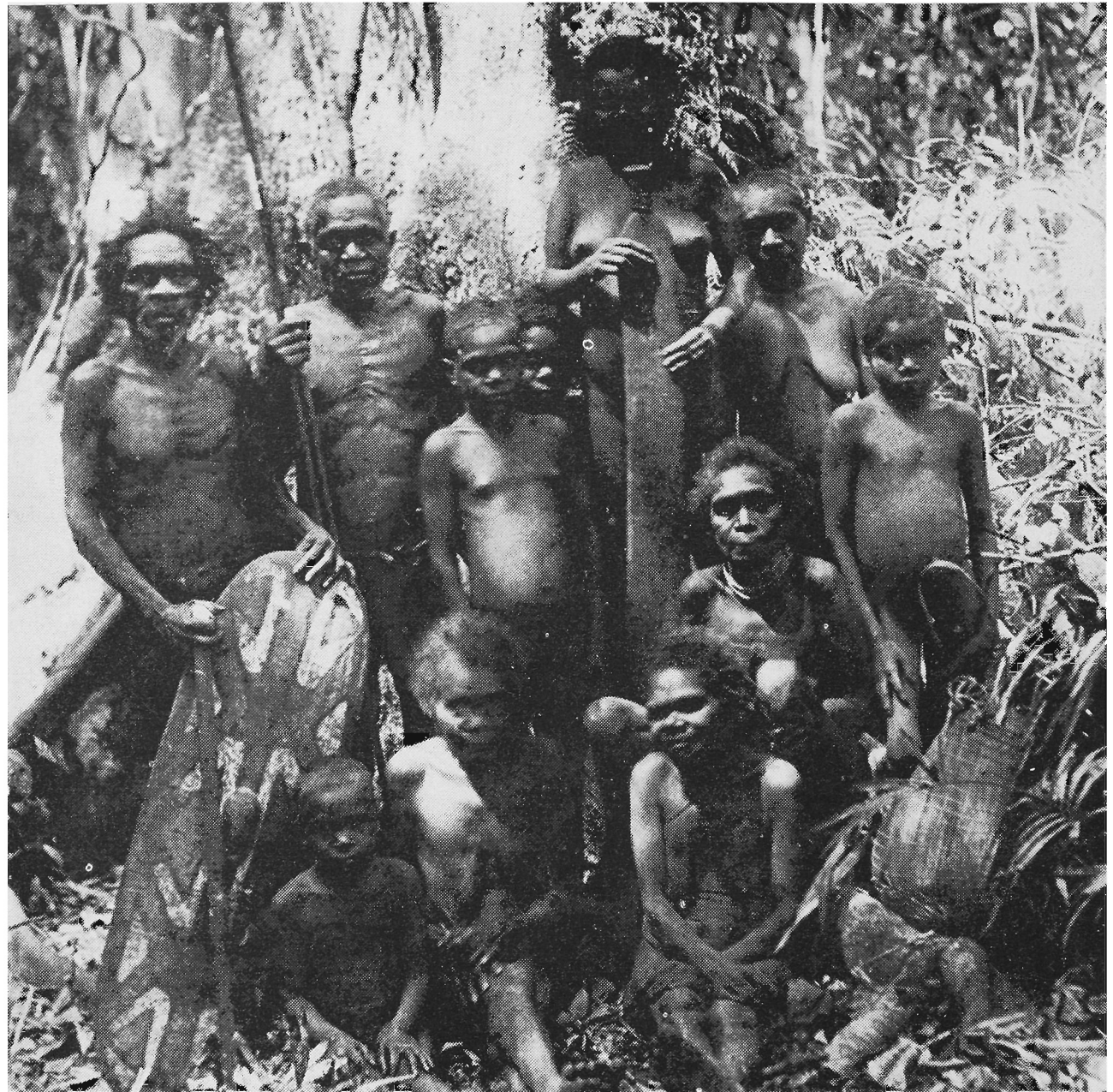
F.W. Did you ever hear the story that they used to give them a great big feed of something first before they did it to make their bellies stick out.
 C.W. Oh yes, they feed them on eels — eels and everything. The take all the bone out, then they start. They frighten them see. The kids'd want to run out to the camp, and as they run out the basket would be open and down would go the bloody eels. They'd make them go back, and then they'd sit on



Russell River Aborigines
 (No date) (By courtesy of F.P.W.)

- them and start the operation on them. Of course in the early days they used to use a shell, a sharp shell, part of a shell to cut them. When white people came here and brought bottles, they'd get sharp glass, and they found that was better too, easier done.
- F.W. Do you think they were good hunters, Chris.
- C.W. Oh yes, they were good hunters.
- F.W. Tell me, did you ever notice any difference between the blacks who lived high up on the mountains and the ones that lived on the coast.
- C.W. No, no difference at all, only they were jealous of one another. Women folk mostly.
- F.W. Chris, about the food the Aboriginals ate. Did you ever see them using those stones with the hollows in to crack the nuts.
- C.W. Yes, oh Yes.
- F.W. Do you know the ones I mean.
- C.W. Yes, it's a big stone and it's hollowed out and they crack the nuts in them. Oh yes, I've seen them.
- F.W. What about the big stones with just the little tiny depressions where they hold the nut in place and they could crack it. Did you ever see those.
- C.W. No, I never saw those.
- F.W. Ever seen any stones used that have grooves across them.
- C.W. No, none here.
- F.W. Did you ever see them making the baskets.
- C.W. Yes, I've seen them.
- F.W. Who used to make those, men or women or both.
- C.W. Men mostly, but the women were as good at making them, but the men mostly made them. I had a basket here. I threw it away now.
- F.W. What other things did you see them make. Can you remember anything else.
- C.W. Oh yes, a lot of things. They made the long baskets, and they made a little one about that size round (5") for catching eels. Long ones — they poke it underneath, eels go in it, they take them out and empty them out. That's on the Murray.
- F.W. Yes, the big eel traps.
- C.W. At the Cardwell they use them — the great big ones. They use them for prawns and fish.
- F.W. How big would the traps be.
- C.W. Oh, the basket would be about 8' long and about 4' deep.
- F.W. They put those sort in the rivers.
- C.W. They don't put them in the rivers, they block the creek across see, and they put this through in the middle, all the fish go through there, and they go down and it's full.
- F.W. Would they have a sort of safety net in them, like an ordinary crab you know — like a safety pot. Would they be like that too.
- C.W. Oh no, just a straight opening. They go in there and they'd drag it out and take it up on the bank and empty it and put it back again.
- F.W. Block the creek up with stones, eh.
- C.W. With bushes and leaves and grass — anything at all, bark, or anything they get hold of. They'd block the creek right across and [there were] no stones on the Murray. They block it up see, and they leave a round hole and they poke this thing through and they tramp it down so nothing could get underneath it, and all the fish would go in there, and the prawns. They made them small — well big enough, but tight together see, so that the prawns couldn't go through, and they'd go in there and fetch them out and empty them on the bank.
- F.W. Do you remember the great big freshwater crayfish being caught in this part — up in the freshwater.
- C.W. No, no big crayfish.
- F.W. And Chris, do you remember them poisoning the water to get the fish.
- C.W. Oh yes.
- F.W. What did they use.
- C.W. There's two or three trees you can use — the bark off it. And there's a vine, there's vine on the beach. It grows on the beach, they get it and they pummel it up, you know, break it up.
- F.W. Would you know that vine today — you'd pick it up.
- C.W. Oh yes, I know it. There's two trees and a vine that will kill fish. They can kill fish 200 yards, 300 yards long and 100 yards wide — kill everything in the water.
- F.W. Doesn't hurt them to eat them, eh. And Chris, you'd know those plants again.
- C.W. Oh yes, I know them well.
- F.W. Two different barks.
- C.W. Two different barks and a vine.
- F.W. Any other medicines you remember.
- C.W. Oh no, of course you know it's a long time.
- F.W. What part of the vine did they use.
- C.W. Any part.
- F.W. They crushed it up.
- C.W. They belt it into powder and then take it into the water. About five minutes and you see the fish, barramundi and all sorts coming.
- F.W. Where did they use that, in the rivers or out in the sea.
- C.W. In the rivers.
- F.W. In the Hull.
- C.W. In the saltwater or anywhere.
- F.W. Did they pick protected places where there was no tide.
- C.W. Well, see out here on the coast there are sandbanks come along and it leaves deep water along here and there's a lot of fish.
- F.W. That's where they'd use it.
- C.W. It might be 100 yards long, 200 yards long, it might be 100 yards wide.
- F.W. Yes, a big sort of lagoon thing, you mean.
- C.W. Yes, like a lagoon. They go and get a couple of bundles of this vine stuff and they'd put it in there. Next thing you'd see all the fish out on the shore.
- F.W. Plenty of food, eh.
- C.W. Plenty tucker.

Rain forest people
 (Date and location unknown)
 (By courtesy of F.P.W.)



ENDNOTES

1. F.S. Colliver and F. P. Woolston, 'The Rain Forest Sword & Shield in Queensland'. Paper delivered by F.S. Colliver to A.N.Z.A.A.S. Meeting in Melbourne on 20 January 1967, to be published later.
2. Dorothy Jones, *Cardwell Shire Story* (Brisbane, 1961), pp. 58, 150, 230, 277, 280, 296, 309 et seq., 325, 346, 363, 402.
3. Obituary, *The North Queensland Register*, 17 December 1966, p. 3.
4. Oath of Allegiance, Markus Wolder Wildsoet, taken at Cardwell on 6 February 1880. [Queensland State Archives, Register of Oaths of Allegiance, SCT/CF15, folio 4950].
5. Portion 507, Parish of Tyson, County of Cardwell, (on Bedford Creek) was selected by Marcus Wolder Wildsoet on 24 July 1884, as a Homestead Selection. Selection conditions were fulfilled and a freehold deed granted on 27 March 1890. [Q.S.A. Selection file 518D, Ingham Land Agent, LAN/AG370].
6. Obituary, refer endnote 3.
7. Chris Wildsoet was not familiar with the recognised tribal names.
8. Two examples are held in the Queensland Museum, at QE822 and QE823.
9. Dorothy Jones, p.219.
10. A flat-bottomed boat.
11. The Aboriginal pearl-shell hooks, not the British steel ones.
12. The epidermis.
13. Walnut bean, *Endiandra palmerstoni*, syn. *Cryptocarya palmerstoni*. This poisonous nut has to be extensively processed by crushing, washing and roasting, before it was edible.
14. From the pine cone of the kauri pine, *Agathis palmerstoni*.
15. *Dioscorea* spp.
16. *Eleocharis dulcis*. Not poisonous but required processing.
17. *Seleria ciliaris*, Nees.
18. Farming area three miles north of Tully at 17°54'S 145°58'E. Refer F. S. Colliver and F.P. Woolston, "Artifacts from Midgenoo, north of Tully", 'Anthropological notes from Queensland', *Queensland Naturalist*, 18 1 & 2 (1966).
19. Carl Sophus Lumholtz (1851-1922), Norwegian scientist, lived with the Herbert Valley Aborigines for fourteen months in 1882-3. He described his experiences in *Among Cannibals* (London, 1889). Refer *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, v.5, p.109.