

Dunk Island and the Family Group

Family Islands

Off the Cassowary Coast in Rockingham Bay lie the Family Isles. The islands of the Family group, of which Dunk Island is the largest, are now all National Parks apart from Bedarra, Timana and those portions of Dunk held as freehold land by the resort. Tourist access to the islands is by light aircraft from Townsville or Cairns using the Dunk island airstrip or by launch from Clump Point. A water taxi also operates.

Aboriginal Heritage

The islands of the coast were the home of Aboriginal people who were displaced when the white settlers arrived. They were experts in fishing and canoeing and made good use of the local fish and shellfish resources as well as the plants and animals of the forests and mangroves. The indigenous names of the islands and details of cultural heritage were recorded by Banfield during his years on Dunk (*Coonanglebah*).

Natural Heritage

The islands are lushly forested as they lie in the tropics where rainforests are sustained by high rainfall encouraged by the high mountains of the mainland. Clean coral sandy beaches, giant granite boulders, sandspits, Beach Calophyllums and rainforest are typical. The Ulysses butterfly, and profuse bird-life also abound. The grey swiftlet and Torres Strait pigeon are among the important fauna.



(left: Dunk Island, 1930s)

Dunk Island

This well-known island was named by James Cook after the second Earl of Halifax, George Montague Dunk when Cook sailed past the island on 9 June 1770. Dunk had once been First Lord of the Admiralty and Cook had already named Halifax Bay after him. The island is 6km long and 2km wide, of granitic formation, and lies only 4km from South Mission Beach. Its highest peak is Kootaloo, some 244 m.

Edmund Banfield, the famous Beachcomber who lived on Dunk from 1897 to his death in 1923, recorded that the Aboriginal name for the isle was *Coonanglebah*. Banfield, a journalist, wrote many accounts of his tropical life on the island, including his experience of the 1918 cyclone which devastated the coast here.

During WW2 Dunk Island was annexed by the RAAF and became home to secret radar equipment which was to play an

instrumental role in the Battle of the Coral Sea.

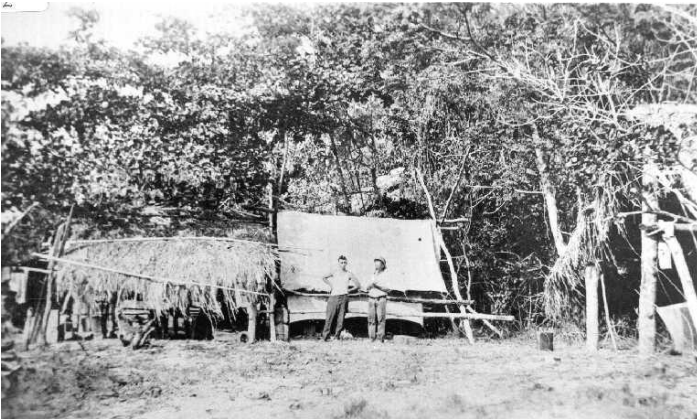
Dunk first opened as a tourist resort in 1936 under the ownership of Hugo Brassey: there were half a dozen chalets, a little bar almost on the beach (see right), a dining room on the hill and a hall further away for "entertainment". During the war the resort was closed and then sold to several new owners in succession, TAA and P&O among them, spending much on bungalows, an airstrip and bars. The resort became internationally



known, catering for up to 400: water sports, rainforest walks, horse-riding, fine dining and gymnasium were on offer. Subsequent cyclones caused further closure.

Bedarra

This island was known as Richards Island at first, then Allison Island. This was actually a misspelling: William Allason, champion English rower, had taken up the island in 1912 and lived there for some years.



In the 1930s people would row over to Bedarra to camp for the weekend, while canecutters who were unemployed at the close of the cane season often went to Bedarra to camp on the island, living in grass huts or tents. Whiting's sailing boat also took people over to the island, and took those camping on the island over to Cardwell for food supplies.

One well-known artist who lived on

Bedarra was Noel Wood. John and Phyllis Busst also owned much of the island for a time. In 1980 TAA purchased what became the Hideaway resort which was then run in conjunction with Dunk.



Above: grass huts and campers of the 1930s

Right: Bedarra resort in the 1930s

Timana Island

Lying between Dunk and Bedarra is Timana, a small forested island with no permanent water. It had several settlers over the years. Among these were Bruce Arthur and Deanna Conti who leased Timana for a wool-weaving venture in 1965, creating colourful tapestries for sale to tourists visiting the island.