



BONGAREE TRAIL

Bribie's Indigenous People

Like all of Australia, Bribie had a rich Indigenous culture prior to European occupation. Information gleaned from early colonial accounts and today's archaeological research portray a thriving society with complex social structures.

The bountiful landscape supported a largely sedentary society. The Indigenous people of Bribie lived in small communities, in semi-permanent dwellings. They lived in balance with the natural environment, with the seasons, custom and lore governing their way of life.

Being saltwater people, their diet was largely marine based, including fish, shellfish, crustaceans, dugong and turtle. 'Tow row' fishing nets were woven from plant fibres. Fish traps were assembled with stones – remnants of these can still be seen today.

Plants and fruits were also an important part of the diet. The rhizome of the Bungwall fern, for instance, was pounded with stones, then roasted to make a 'damper'. As there is no naturally-occurring stone on the sandy Bribie, all stone was introduced.

Early descriptions of the local Indigenous people note their tall stature, robust health, friendliness and generosity. This warm welcome turned to hostility as Bribie's first people were driven from their country and their livelihoods were taken away.

Archaeological research reveals the once-thriving first people of Bribie. By studying the bora rings, scarred trees, stone tools and shell middens they left behind – some dated at around 3500 years – we can see how the local Indigenous people once lived. And how their descendants – today's traditional custodians – maintain their connection with this wonderful place.



Discover Bribie's Indigenous heritage



Scan the QR code for further information
<http://mbr.c.gov.au/bongaree-trail-7>

Bribie Island Seaside Museum 60m ➔

Explore more Bribie stories at the Bribie Island Seaside Museum on South Esplanade.

"I had spent nearly five months with these hospitable natives of Moreton Bay. Their behaviour had been so invariably kind and generous that I did not leave them without sincere regret."
Thomas Pamphlett



"The Finding of Pamphlett" by J. Ashton, Pictureque Atlas of Australasia, 1886. Image courtesy: National Library of Australia. ID 10-1654251.

BONGAREE TRAIL

Bribie's first European guests

The first Europeans to live on Bribie were three convicts who were marooned in Moreton Bay in 1823.

Ticket-of-leave convicts Thomas Pamphlett and Richard Parsons, along with convict John Finnegan, had been assigned to work on a timber-getting expedition. They had set out from Sydney in March in a 10-metre boat, heading south for the Illawarra. Caught in a violent storm, they were blown far off-course to the north.

After 25 days lost at sea and disoriented, they became wrecked on Moreton Island in April. A fourth member of their party, John Thompson, died at sea.

Aided by the local Indigenous people, the trio travelled to the mainland and up the elusive and yet to be surveyed and named 'Brisbane River'. Returning to the river mouth, they headed north, thinking they were south of Sydney. They reached Bribie in September.

Welcomed by the local Indigenous people, the trio remained in the area for several weeks. It was only when they were stumbled upon by Surveyor General John Oxley in November that the castaways came to realise how far off-course they truly were.

The castaways returned the favour by leading the surveyor to the large river that had thus far eluded him and those who came before him.



See where you can be our guest on Bribie

From beach shacks to B&Bs, there are lots of great places to stay on Bribie.



Scan the QR code for further information
<http://mbrz.a9k/bongaree-trail-8>

← 30m Bribie Island Seaside Museum

Explore more Bribie stories at the Bribie Island Seaside Museum on South Esplanade.



*"The birds are singing in the cloud-flecked sky,
A magpie chatters to its distant mate,
A gorgeous butterfly flits joyously
From bloom to bloom on downy wings elate."
Evening at Bribie Island,
Emily Cungeau, 1919*

Emily Cungeau c. 1892. (Image courtesy: Elizabeth Dobson Collection, Bribie Island Historical Society)

BONGAREE TRAIL

Bribie's oldest house and Australia's first opera

For more than 30 years in the late 19th and early 20th century, Emily and Naoum (Norman) Cungeau ran a hugely popular café and wine bar in Brisbane's Queen Street. The 'Olympian Café', as it came to be known, grew to occupy two city buildings. The Cungeaus lived in an apartment above the café. That is, until they retired to their favourite holiday spot – Bribie.

The Cungeaus purchased land in Bongaree and commissioned Brisbane architects Hall and Dods to design their home in the Queensland style. Their Bribie retirement retreat was built in 1915–16.

Norman was a keen surfer, and regularly hiked the five kilometres across the island to the surf beach. Emily was a widely published and highly regarded poet. With much of her work penned while living on Bribie, she is an early exponent of a uniquely Queensland verse. Her work 'Princess Mona' – a fantastic interpretation of the ANZAC legend – provided the libretto for Australia's first professionally staged opera 'Auster'.

The Cungeaus' commercial success saw them become generous philanthropists and patrons of the arts. Emily was a passionate supporter of women's causes. The Cungeaus bequeathed their beloved Bribie home to the Anglican Church.

'Cungeau House', as it's known today, is now owned and operated by the Toc H organisation, providing holiday accommodation for people in need. Located about 500 metres from here at 36 Banya Street, Cungeau House is the oldest home built on Bribie that is still standing today.



Everyone has a Bribie story! What's yours?
Find out how you can join us and share your Bribie story.



Scan the QR code for further information
<http://mbr.cak/bongaree-trail-9>

← 80m Bribie Island Seaside Museum

Explore more Bribie stories at the Bribie Island Seaside Museum on South Esplanade.