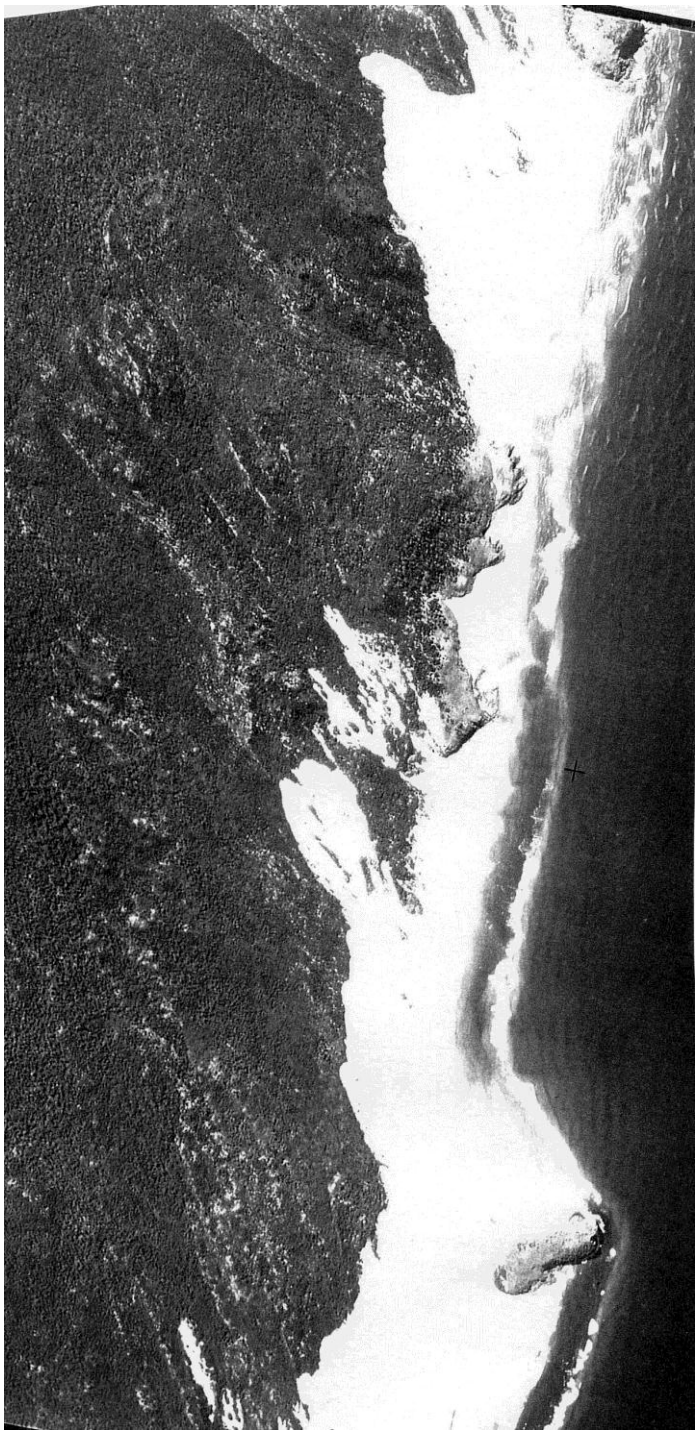
Ecological Changes Around Fraser Island's Rocky Headlands

Pictures tell thousands of words and this backgrounder attempts to illustrate the shrinking or disappearance of Fraser Island sandblows by comparing recent aerial photos with older ones. FIDO first noted the accelerating encroachment of the vegetation into the sandblows in the mid 1980s. Climatologists suggest that 1978 was a switch year in which the effects of global warming became more apparent. FIDO dedicates this backgrounder to the late Catherine (Kit) Mackay. Kit was a foundation member FIDO member as well as being a Maryborough local historian. It seems appropriate that this should chronicle historical changes. ***This is FIDO Backgrounder No 51 — First published 2008***

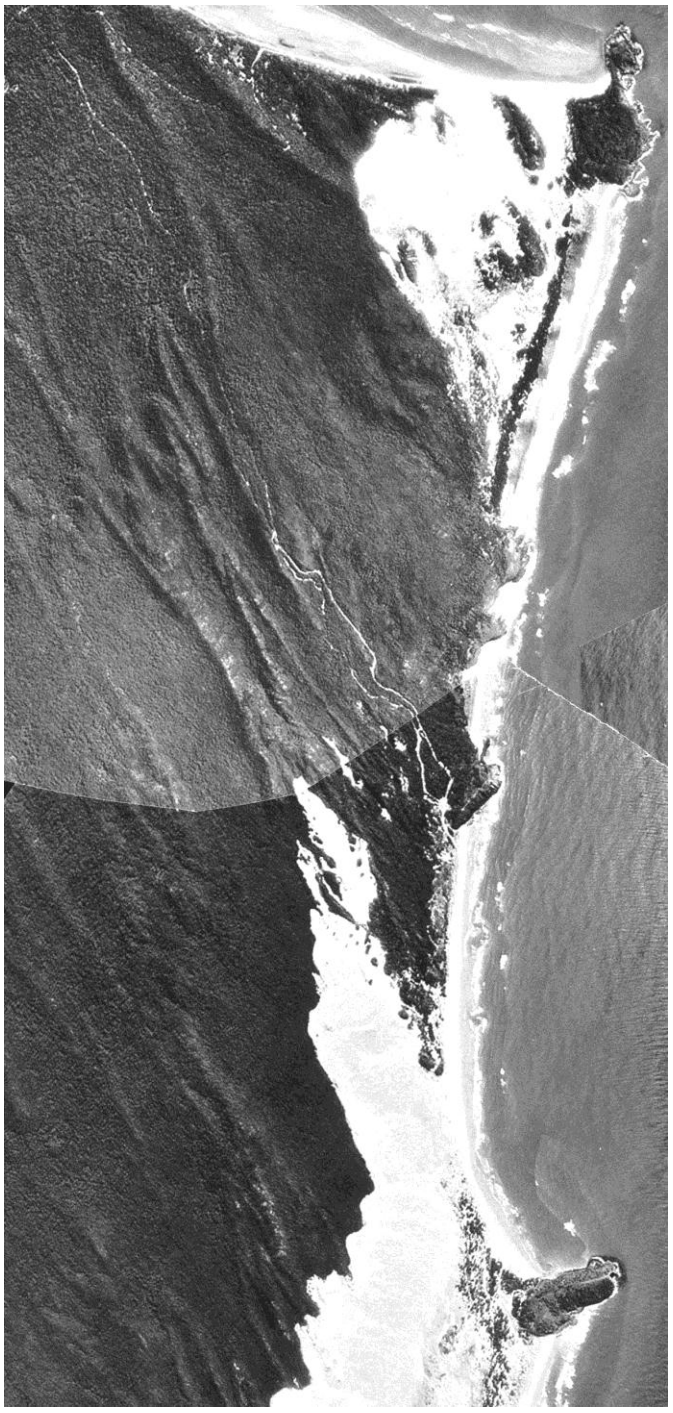


Indian Head-Waddy Point area — May 1958

Photo courtesy Qld Dept Natural Resources and Mines

There are several points to note:

1. There are no casuarinas behind Indian Head
2. There is no vegetation between the sandblows and the beach
3. The area at the back of Middle Rocks is surprisingly grassy
4. There is no bypass road. It was pushed through in 1968.
5. The sandblows are actively invading dunes to the west



Indian Head-Waddy Point area — June 2000

Photo courtesy Qld Dept Natural Resources and Mines

1. There is considerable vegetation along the foreshore area and behind the headland.
2. The roads bypassing Middle Rocks is surprisingly obvious as is the campground at Waddy Point and the track to the top of Indian Head and the "road" behind it.
3. There is little evidence of grassy areas at Middle Rocks
4. Sandblows behind Middle Rocks have shrunk.

Indian Head in August 1974

Photo by Cynthia O'Gorman

The top two photos on the left show Indian Head before the big climate change switch of 1978. There are no casuarinas growing along Corroboree Beach or behind Indian Head. These photos show no evidence of the now well-worn trail extending to the summit which is now spreading like a cancer especially bearer the summit. The fishers shack at the base is clearly visible and much smaller than at present. There was no spinifex growing along the foreshore and there were no casuarinas on the foredune or in the area behind the headland.

(Two Lower Left) **Indian Head 2003**

The vegetation behind the headland is rapidly turning into a forest. The forest extends along Corroboree Beach to the south and north of Indian Head almost lining the whole beach to Middle Rock. The area behind Indian Head is now an ever thickening forest of casuarinas which was once used as a campground. What was once a fishers shack behind Indian Head is now a complex of buildings with infrastructure impacting on the encircling National Park

FIDO attributes the ecological changes that are so obvious around these headlands to climate change, particularly a lessening of the impact of the formerly stronger and more prevalent south-easterly winds.

Cyclonic surge at Indian Head: On 31st December 1962 a small but strong cyclone hatched in Marloo Bay to the north of Waddy Point. It was undetected by the Weather Bureau because it was in a radar vision blind spot. This storm caused the sea to the surge right behind Indian Head, turning the headland into a temporary island. On New Year's Day 1963 John Sinclair Snr visited Indian Head in the wake of the cyclone. It was his first visit and he was impressed by the couch lawn that then extended right to the summit. He also clearly remembers the sand right behind the headland which was still wet from the surge and like a soft jelly when walked on. This he attributes to a cyclonic surge which occurred .during the previous 24 hours

(Above) **Middle - Waddy Point C1975**

The active sandblows to the west of Middle Rocks (Shown in the 1958 aerial photo on the previous page) are still clearly evident in this photo. Recent aerial photography and satellite images from Google Earth find these sandblows as many others rapidly disappearing. There was then no boarded road up to Middle Rocks from the southern beach. Vehicles would have to climb (or be winched) up a rock face.