

Yarong to Eurong

This FIDO Backgrounder (No 63 September 2013 by John Sinclair) traces the background and development of Eurong. It one of the few permanent human settlements on Fraser Island from its known origins to the present with a resident population believed to be fewer than 30. However the number of houses and gardens have made it one of the major centres of weed infestation on the island. Kingfisher and Eurong are the two most visited sites on Fraser Island. 2013 marks the 50th Anniversary since land in what is now Eurong village was first sold to establish this settlement.

Name: Although many fancy names have been suggested the official description for the meaning of Eurong says "yurong means rain or rainforest." This accords with the explanation given by old-timers who said it meant "raincloud". They pointed out that it was very rare that from Eurong you couldn't see a cloud on the south east horizon.

Aldridge's Yarong: Although most of Fraser Island was sought early for grazing, the timber interests were well entrenched from the 1860s. In 1881, one of Maryborough's pioneers, Harry Aldridge sought two leases each of 25 square miles at an upset price of \$2 per square mile. He was only allowed land that did not intrude on the tall forests. A minute at the time noted, "In both descriptions it has been necessary to give a large frontage to keep clear of the timber lands." Aldridge's Yarong and Indian Head runs were never fenced but they gave Aldridge basic rights to raise horses along the island's east coast which he regularly mustered to sell off to the British Indian Army as Australian Walers. When Aldridge gave up the leases, some of his horses became brumbies that freely roamed Fraser Island for the next 100 years. Two other legacies of Aldridge's era in Eurong remained for almost a century. Some strainer posts of the enclosure of the "Horse Paddock" used to hold mustered horses in the south of where the Beach Houses are now located and one of the island's only two established coconut trees grew in the same area until it was cut down in the 1950s.

Access to the Ocean Beach: For many years the main way across the island from west to east was to head to the Back Beach via Eurong. It continued to be the defined route even after Aldridge abandoned his run. In "Early Days on Fraser Island" Rollo Petrie describes how when the Forestry Department HQ was established first at the mouth of Wanggoolba Creek and then at Central Station, his family would make their way to Eurong by horse or wagonette for picnics or to travel north along the beach,

Forestry and Forestry occupational leases: Until 1960, the Queensland Forestry Department controlled virtually all of Fraser Island in what was then State Forest 3 (SF3). There were five significant but relatively small exceptions. The Commonwealth controlled the Sandy Cape Lighthouse reserve and a very small light keepers reserve at Hook Point. There were also three freehold blocks of land located at Wathumba Estuary (160 acres) Moon Point (640 acres), and the Collieries Block at North White Cliffs. That meant that all of the ocean beach and fore dunes were part of the State Forest. Some people just ignored the title and in the Australian squatting tradition built their shacks in the optimum positions such as Indian Head and Waddy Point even though the Forestry had designated this and Eli Creek as a Beauty Spot. As the Forestry Department began to clamp down on squatters, they began to be besieged by many applicants for Occupational Leases. These were

nominally for 12 months but were invariably renewed on an annual basis. The Forestry Department whose core business was managing the forests was embarrassed by the number of applications for Occupational Leases along the Ocean Beach and they were also concerned that this was evolving into a form of ribbon development. The tipping point arose when Sir Reginald Barnwall began lobbying to secure land in the northern part of the island where he subsequently built the Orchid Beach resort.

Eurong taken out of SF3: In 1962 the Queensland Government made a decision to excise a coastal strip half a mile wide between Sandy Cape and Eurong to create a corridor of vacant Crown Land to be thereafter managed by the Lands Department. It also resolved that all future land releases should be concentrated in two nodes, each of approximately 300 hectare, Eurong and Happy Valley which are where the strip of crown land was widened out to a mile in depth. In 1962-63 Lands Department surveyor, Geoff Andrews carried out the survey and pegged out a number of subdivision lots. There was an exception stopping the Vacant Crown Land (VCL) following the coast all the way. The Indian Head-Waddy Point Beauty Spot remained part of the State Forest.



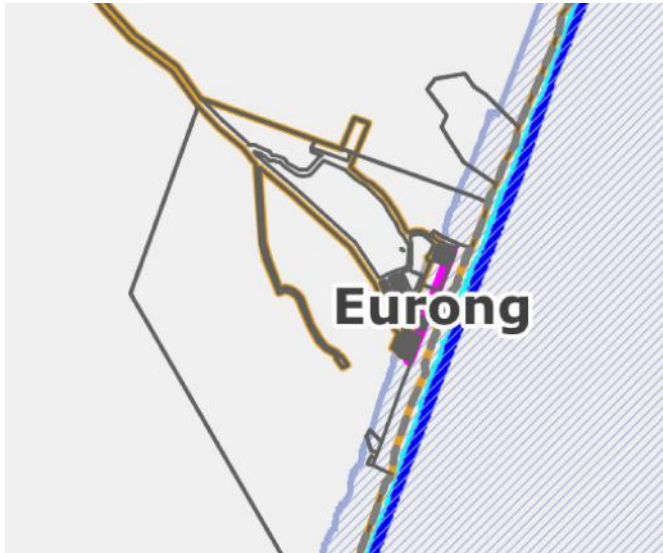
Photo of Forestry hut in 1985 (Keith Sinclair)

Forestry Hut: Fishers and others weren't the only ones wanting a shack on the Back Beach. Forestry workers banded together and provided a hut for the recreational use of Forestry workers and their families. When the Forestry lost control of the coastal strip from Eurong north, this Forestry hut remained part of the State forest. However the shack fell into disrepair and was little used. When the southern part of Fraser Island was incorporated into the Great Sandy National Park in 1998 the site of the forestry hut became the site of the HQ for the QPWS.

Land sale: In May 1963 there was a land auction of the Eurong subdivision at the Maryborough Court House. The bidding was for the annual rental to be paid for a lease that had to have a building placed on it within two years. Later blocks that had complied with improvements conditions were able to be freeholded. There was much collusion

Yarong to Eurong — A FIDO Backgrounder

amongst the bidders at the auction. Many people had chosen their preferred sites and there was no competition for these sites. This applied to a few people who already had occupational leases in Eurong such as Bob Oldfield who was then able to acquire more secure tenure for his block. While working for Forestry on the island, during his time off, instead of going to Maryborough Bob Oldfield had gathered a lot of good timber washed overboard from ships that landed on the beach. From this he built a very substantial house that has now been replaced by a new house named, “Ray’s Place”.



The map above shows the town reserve area of Eurong and the roads leading into it. The large area to the north is the QPWS and Police HQ on Fraser Island and the rectangular extension north is the area of the rubbish tip. The two lower roads are the “Down” road and the incomplete road to the south was the “Up” road, now little used, that cuts across what was once the Horse Paddock. The residential areas occupies a very small part of the township reserve.

Street Names: Many of the first people to build on their blocks in Eurong have been honoured by having the Maryborough City Council name streets after them, Oldfield, Easton Williams, Anderson, Buffey, Roper and Jarvis. The name Sinclair was conspicuously omitted.



The above stylistic map of Eurong courtesy Fraser Island Holiday Lodges shows the actual residential buildings in Eurong Village

Two special Leases: Two much larger blocks were set aside for special tourist developments. The one to the south which is now covered by the Beach House estate was granted to the Wide Bay Shipping Company that ran a

weekly shipping freight service on the “Sarawak” between Brisbane and Maryborough. “Sarawak” occasionally delivered vehicles to the Ungowa wharf in passing. This became part of the Williams family estate and was never developed by them. The other lease was allotted to Don Adams’ company Queensland Airplanters. This was subsequently passed to Sid Melksham to develop. This resort did develop and Sid Melksham applied for and gained additional ground to expand the resort area.



Northern Eurong 1972

Note: The large sandblow at the top of the photo that has since almost disappeared as have other sandblows along Fraser Island’s east coast has been colonized due to climate change.

Development of the resort: In 1972 the Eurong Resort consisted of just a few cabins. The two “A” Frames in the lower centre with two cabins on front are identifiable and still part of the resort. Buildings in the lower left are also still part of the Resort but the pub had not then been developed nor had the shops. All of the streets were unformed sand tracks. The aircraft parked on the beach belonged to Sid Melksham who took over the resort special development lease from Queensland Airplanters. Sid Melksham built all of the buildings in the current resort. His aircraft was parked at the end of Oldfield Street that is still the main entrance to Eurong. At the lower left of the photo are a series of on-site caravans on a large open grassy area. This area was subsequently added to the Special Lease and is site where the main Eurong Resort is now located.

Opposing sides of Fraser Island’s two great land-use conflicts both used Eurong as an island base for their respective campaigns. The disputes were over sandmining in the 1970s and logging throughout the 1980s

Eurong 1963 - 2013 — A Golden Anniversary

From the time that the first subdivisions were released in May 1963 development has slowly evolved and the some land has passed through many sets of hands. While the landscape has changed due to the buildings, roads and the deliberate anthropogenic modifications of the vegetation regime, Nature has also changed. During the last 20 years the active sandblows within the village have been colonized by vegetation and have almost been stopped in their tracks. Many innocent looking garden plants introduced to provide colour around the houses have escaped and this now poses a challenge to help regain the wild natural character that marked the early decades of Eurong.

Anyone who has photos, stories or information to add to this history can forward them to: john@fido.org.au