

# **Protecting Kennedy Bay: 25 years on. The History of the Conservation Movement at Mission Beach during the Modern Era from 1982 to 2007.<sup>1</sup>**

## **Introduction**

The struggle to save Kennedy Bay from development can be regarded as the symbolic start of the modern era of the Mission Beach conservation movement. It was marked by a defining event for rainforest conservation, Wet Tropics World Heritage Area (WTWHA) listing. This essay will examine the broad issues behind the Daintree Blockade, which initiated the WTWHA campaigns and which led to the WTWHA listing, and will establish the themes important for the modern era Mission Beach conservation activities. Within the context of WTWHA listing, this study aims to establish the themes, campaigns and personalities involved with saving Kennedy Bay from development, followed by the drive to build the Edmund Kennedy Bay Memorial Walking Track, an achievement which led to the successful reclassification of the Kennedy Reserve as a National Park.

These defining outcomes of the efforts of the conservation movement were important as unifying symbols of the struggle for the survival of the environment, embodied in the formal inauguration in 1990 of the Tully branch of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland and the Movement for Responsible Coastal Development (M.R.C.D.). This was followed by joint community and government focus on the plight of the cassowary, the purpose of the 1991 formation of the Consultative Committee for Cassowary Conservation (C4). Both Mission Beach based conservation bodies merged in 1994 to form the current C4 group. The aim of these groups was to establish a bond between the community and the environment by using the symbol of the vulnerability of the cassowary and the rainforest against the claims to progress by property development. The strategy succeeded in gaining public and government support and culminated in the Mission Beach Development Control Plan, a high point in the ability of government and

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<sup>1</sup> It would not have been possible to conduct this work without those whose kindness in participation in the research made this outcome possible, and whose objectivity and passion express the personal values and commitment of the people involved in the conservation movement in Mission Beach.

the community to work together in the interests of environmental conservation. However, the change in state government focus led to an era of greater environmental compromise, personal disappointment, group reorganisation and the ultimate acceptance of more limited environmental goals within the reality and inevitability of ever expanding property development.

The nature and importance of the roles that people have played over the past 25 years, in their own capacity, in their capacity as members of informal groups, and as part of the formal conservation movements, cannot be overstated. Although conservation continues to be constrained by legislation and state and local government policy, the activities of Mission Beach activists in the modern era of the conservation movement played a major role in shaping government policy to the ultimate benefit of the environment. Their vision, commitment and passion for conserving the beauty of the area were primarily responsible for the extraordinary environmental outcomes, supported by the WTWHA values. The principal themes of the movement were: the value and importance of symbols and icons, including the cassowary and individuals; the importance of the concept of “where rainforest meets reef”; the significance of Direct Action; the value of a common purpose by groups and networks; and finally, the understanding of, and participation in the political process.

This study examines the activities, campaigns and campaigners involved in the conservation movement from 1982 to 2007 in the Mission Beach area, defined as the area from Maria Creek in the north to Hull River in the south, and inland to the Bruce Highway. The area includes the settlements and surrounding environment of Garners Beach, Bingil Bay, Narragon Beach, Clump Point, Mission Beach, Wongaling Beach, South Mission Beach, and the Hull River and Kennedy National Parks.<sup>2</sup> The study period, from 1982 to 2007, is determined by the formation of the Tully branch of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland (WPSQ) and their first major conservation campaign in 1982.

## **Methodology**

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<sup>2</sup> For a schematic map of the WTWHA in the Mission Beach area refer to Appendix 1.

The Wet Tropics Management Authority (WTMA) *Annual Reports* and documentation were consulted, along with relevant legislation; newspaper articles; issues of the *Mission Beach Bulletin*, and *C4 Annual Reports*; issues of *M.R.C.D Newsletters* and their *Annual Reports*; personal comments from those who were involved; and, most importantly oral history. Ten people participated in interviews during the period 27<sup>th</sup> July to 9<sup>th</sup> August, 2007.<sup>3</sup> The interviewees comprised conservationists who still live in the area, those who have left the area, conservationists who were involved but did not live in the area, and a local government official. Interviews were conducted either in person or by telephone; interviews were taped, and will be stored in the James Cook University oral history archives. Respondents were chosen from an initial interview candidate list.<sup>4</sup>

## **Literature Review**

There is little published material available regarding the fight to save the Far North's wet tropical environment, and nothing specifically relating to Mission Beach. However, the 2000 publication *Securing the Wet Tropics?*, edited by Marcus Lane and Geoff McDonald, is a credible secondary source which establishes the themes and context of the WTWHA campaign, as well as the background and context of the modern Mission Beach conservation activities. This source details personal and organisational themes which were important to those who fought to save the entire Wet Tropics, including the value of conservation symbols, many of which in a different guise were and still are relevant to the Mission Beach conservation movement.

## **Context**

The early conservation campaigns of the modern era at Mission Beach and elsewhere in Queensland were conducted within the context of the Joh Bjelke-Petersen Government, conservative in nature and in the words of historian Raymond Evans "loaded down with hubris".<sup>5</sup> The state government constructed an agenda of economic growth and property

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<sup>3</sup> Norma Morgan (telephone), Bob Jones and Meryl Jones (pers.comm), Elaine Siddons, Brenda Harvey, Mark Gordon, Margaret Thorsborne, Karen Schmidt, Chris Mance, Len Staff (telephone), Sue Smith (telephone), Carolyn Muller (pers.comm).

<sup>4</sup> The interview list was provided by Tony O'Malley of Terrain NRM.

<sup>5</sup> Raymond Evans, *A History of Queensland*. (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 228.

development, “selling Queensland” for short term and limited local personal gain, supported by a police force which was instructed to oppose dissent, and which acted in a climate of secrecy and corruption.<sup>6</sup> Under these circumstances the conservation campaigns at Mission Beach and the Daintree can be regarded as particularly heroic. Individuals and organisations established lasting reputations, and their courage attests to the passion of those who believed that the conservation of fauna and flora in the Wet Tropics and the Mission Beach Area in particular were and still are a high priority. The themes and issues which dominated the Daintree Blockade and the subsequent campaign for Wet Tropics World Heritage Area listing are shared by those who were responsible for the WTWHA era conservation campaigns at Mission Beach. These were the ever present struggle between the divergent ideologies of development and conservation, even within conservation groups themselves; the emergence of the need for compromise; the importance of values, symbols and symbolic events; the authority and legitimacy of intent, all of which were and are encapsulated in the actions of groups, networks and individuals acting in what they believed to be the best interests of the environment.

### **The context: the campaign for Wet Tropics World Heritage Area listing**

In order to fully appreciate the conservation values of those who were involved in the Mission Beach area, it is important to understand the big issues that dominated the campaign for World Heritage Area listing. These were based on the twin pillars of scientific evidence and interpretation, ensuring that the campaign for listing established sympathy and legitimacy within as wide a group of people as possible. Scientific evidence established World Heritage Area legitimacy and determined the possibility of listing, which was grounded in the values of biological diversity. This proved successful, as in 1988 the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO judged that the Area met all four criteria, namely that the Area was an outstanding heritage example, which demonstrated the major stages of the Earth’s evolutionary history; secondly, that the Area represented continuing geological and biological evolution, coupled to human environmental involvement; thirdly, that the Area contained outstanding natural phenomena and areas of

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

The Fitzgerald Inquiry (1987-1989) established corruption by politicians and police.

exceptional natural beauty; and finally, that the Area contained the natural habitats of threatened species of animals or plants of universal value.<sup>7</sup> The Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, which comprises 894,420 hectares, is home to a great diversity of fauna species. These include 11 mammal species; 370 recorded bird species; 26 frog species; 170 reptile species; and 190 species of fish. Furthermore, the Area boasts 13 structural types and 30 broad community types of rainforest.<sup>8</sup> Dr. Steve Goosem defines rainforest as:

Closed, moisture loving communities of closely spaced trees distinguished from other canopy forests by the prominence of life-forms such as epiphytes and lianes, by the absence of annual herbs or grasses on the forest floor and by their floristic complexity.<sup>9</sup>

This ecological complexity, supported by world experts, proved the successful argument for WTWHA listing.

### **The Public Campaign for WTWHA Listing**

While the scientific argument was important, particularly in the struggle to motivate government policy, on the other hand public opinion was galvanised through the interpretation provided by the conservation movement, the power of symbolism, and their effective communication. The campaigns which led to the ultimate Wet Tropics World Heritage Area listing provide examples of the value of symbolism. The first instance was during the first Daintree Blockade in the period from November 1983 to January 1984, which saw people who were prepared to use their lives as bargaining tools in their determination to ensure that the Douglas Shire did not succeed in its plans to build a road

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<sup>7</sup> Geoff McDonald and Marcus Lane, "Securing the Wet Tropics - a Work In Progress", *Securing the Wet Tropics?*, Geoff McDonald and Marcus Lane, Eds., (Leichhardt: The Federated Press, 2000), 8.

<sup>8</sup> Steve Goosem, "Landscape, Ecology and Values", *Securing the Wet Tropics?*, Geoff McDonald and Marcus Lane, eds., (Leichhardt: The Federated Press, 2000), 16,18,19,23.

<sup>9</sup> Goosem, 19.

In 1975 Geoff Tracey and Len Webb classified the rainforests of the Wet Tropics. Their classification consisted of 13 broad structural categories, each of which contained sub-classes with specific rainforest characteristics. For example, class 3(a) has a dominance of Feather palms, whereas Fan Palms are most often found in class 3(b).

linking Cape Tribulation and Cooktown. The images of people practically buried in mud and others refusing to leave positions high in trees achieved world-wide media publicity and established a public sympathy for their cause. This Direct Action was spontaneous and involved local people as well as others from further afield, and was supported by individuals such as Margaret and Arthur Thorsborne, who were to play a leading and simultaneous role in the Mission Beach area. Further support was provided by organisations such as the Cape Tribulation Community Council, the Wilderness Action Group in Port Douglas, and the Nomadic Action Group. Timothy Doyle in his analysis of the Daintree Blockade suggested that “this demonstrates the connection between modes of action, goals which the environmentalists shared and the practice by which these were expressed”.<sup>10</sup>



Margaret Thorsborne with activists during the Blockade.

*Source: James Cook University Picture Archives.*

It clearly demonstrated the value of symbolism in

binding the will of individuals and groups and establishing public sympathy, a tool which was of equal importance to the conservation movement within the Mission Beach area.

A well orchestrated media campaign ensured that the symbolism of self-sacrifice and the story of the Daintree campaign associated the Wet Tropics Area with uniqueness and rapid disappearance. In 1984, and after the success of the road Blockade, those who were

<sup>10</sup> Timothy Doyle, “The Campaign to Save the Wet Tropics”, in *Securing the Wet Tropics?*, Geoff McDonald and Marcus Lane, eds., (Leichhardt: The Federation Press, 2000), 105.

physically involved in the campaign were asked to continue their vigil at the sites, and whilst this ensured continued media exposure, the major and sometimes competing environmental organisations at national and state level established future strategy. The Australian Conservation Society (ACF), at the time the prime mover as a national body, declared 1984 “The Year of the Daintree”, supported by The Wilderness Society which targeted the Daintree as its next focus area after their success at the Franklin River. However, The Wilderness Society was not convinced of the symbolic strength of the “Daintree” and commissioned Quantum Market Research, who presented their strategy that the two catch-phrases which would best influence public opinion were “uniqueness” and the “rapidly disappearing rainforest”. Subsequently this symbolism was extended and supported by the concept of “where the rainforest meets the reef”, linking the rainforest to the iconic status already established by the Great Barrier Reef. Furthermore, Quantum established that the word “Daintree” was unknown and could not be successfully marketed. Although the value of “Daintree” was preferred by the two national organisations, ACF and The Wilderness Society, the Rainforest Conservation Society of Queensland and other state based bodies preferred the term “Wet Tropics”. They carried the day and Quantum printed the publicity material which depicted the uniqueness of the Wet Tropics rainforests, subtitled with the now widely known “where the rainforest meets the reef”.<sup>11</sup>

Although the environmental movement established the narrative and symbolism regarding the rainforests in North East Australia, the process which initially resulted in WTWHA listing and which continues today was not without contest and inter-group conflict. At different stages of the campaign prominence and power were achieved by different networks of people and organisations. The networks established the agenda, as was the case in the subordination of the symbolism of the “Daintree” to that of the “Wet Tropics”, whilst the Wet Tropics campaign was unusual for the diversity of interest groups which were formed. The role which individual activists took during the 1984 Blockade, the mass mobilisation, the government lobby groups, the political parties and the corporate interest all interlinked to provide the platform for success.<sup>12</sup> For example, in

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.107, 108.

<sup>12</sup> Doyle, 103.

1981 the ACF had posted a project officer, John McCabe, to Cairns to attend to the conservation matters of Cape York; in 1980 the Tully branch of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland (WPSQ) was formed; and in 1982 so was the Rainforest Conservation Society of Queensland (RCSQ), which was the first organisation to concentrate solely on rainforest conservation. However, prior to the Blockade little was achieved, as the issues did not really exist in the public mind.<sup>13</sup> The public success of and public sympathy for the Daintree Blockade galvanised environmentalists through the RCSQ to lobby the federal government for World Heritage listing, supported by a scientific argument funded by the Australian Heritage Commission. Unfortunately, at the time the Labor Party appeared afraid of a voter backlash similar to that of the Franklin Dam affair, and so during an election year they declined the opportunity to submit the application.<sup>14</sup>

By August 1984 the wind had been taken out of the sails of the campaign, and many environmentalists lost heart. The national organisations such as ACF and The Wilderness Society backed off leaving the Queensland groups at the centre by default. In Brisbane the RCSQ, the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland and the Queensland Conservation Council took control, supported in Cairns by groups such as the Cairns and Far North Queensland Environment Centre (CAFNEC), which furthered the cause. However, by this stage the agenda was one of compromise, a concept which was to become an enduring feature of the conservation movement throughout Queensland. The environmental networks had begun to incorporate ecologically sustainable development in their strategy, establishing the notion that conservation and economic development could co-exist. Furthermore, the Queensland based organisations, which dominated the scene during this period, were driven by conservative policies.

However, by the second half of 1985 the national bodies had refocused and had placed the environment at centre stage, and in particular the Wet Tropics. Momentum was further established through the national election campaign of 1987, a period typified by the dominance of a small group of professional activists, which ensured that the

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

environmental movement became a key component of the election. The Labor Party took a key position by advocating the appointment of Jonathon West, personal secretary to Barry Cohen, the Federal Environment Minister, to the position of Director of the Wilderness Society, which was promoting the WTWHA listing application. Shortly after in 1989 Queensland elected a Labor Government. The change in government heralded the end of the High Court challenge to the WTWHA listing and the beginning of the era of greater cooperation on environmental matters between Commonwealth and State governments. However, antagonism towards the environmental movement increased in the ranks of the coalition parties, a sentiment which with their election in 1996 to Commonwealth government is still felt in some conservative factions today.<sup>15</sup>

While the campaign for WTWHA listing was a long and at times hotly contested affair, involving individuals, national and state groups and networks, and ultimately determined by politics, so the enabling legislation under which the listing is managed was a long time in gestation. Although it is beyond the scope of this work to establish the detail of the legislation, it is important to recognise that local area conservation is enabled under Commonwealth and State agreement and laws. The Management Scheme Intergovernmental Agreement, signed in 1990 between Prime Minister Hawke and Queensland Premier Goss, became known as the Wet Tropics World Heritage Management Scheme, and established the relationship between Commonwealth and State to support the values of WTWHA in accordance with the five strategic goals of protection, conservation, preservation, rehabilitation, and transmission to future generations. The Agreement was primarily structural in design and created the framework which was to ultimately establish an enabling authority, the Wet Tropics Management Authority (WTMA) under the Queensland legislation of The Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993 (Qld). The Act provides for protection of the Area and a prohibition against destruction of forest products in particular, but does not provide protection for scenic values, geological features, animal species or cultural heritage. An important element is the preparation of a management plan by the Authority. Ultimately and after several drafts the Wet Tropics Management Authority (WTMA) published the

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115, 116.

Wet Tropics Management Plan, 1998. The Plan primarily divides the Area into management zones, and determines the activities which are permissible in each zone, including the process for granting exemptions.<sup>16</sup>

### **Mission Beach conservation from 1982 to 2007**

The activities and themes which underpinned and supported the campaign for WTWHA listing, and in particular those relating to the Daintree, established the context of the conservation movement in the Mission Beach area from 1982 to 2007. The campaign for WTWHA listing included the identification of the ecological values of the total area, a concept which has proved to be a key determinant of the activities of the Mission Beach campaigns. Similarly, the Mission Beach movement found success by identifying and using symbols and icons, primarily the importance of the protection of the Southern Cassowary and the historical and environmental significance of Kennedy Bay and Clump Point. Furthermore, as specific Direct Action in the case of the Daintree Blockade was the catalyst for ultimate protection, so the struggle for the Kennedy Walking Track, which at times involved Direct Action, provided the catalyst for obtaining the Kennedy National Park Extension, and raising public awareness of the necessity for the protection of Kennedy Bay. The creation and development of plant nurseries was another example of achieving goals in the protection of the values of Wet Tropics Heritage, a campaign and activity which was soon to be extended into the activities of Queensland National Parks. Perhaps most importantly, as politics through the interaction of individuals, groups and networks established the WTWHA listing, so politics was and still is a key determinant in the success of the Mission Beach conservation activities and campaigns. This section will examine the activities of individuals and groups who played a key role in defending and furthering the conservation movement in the area from the early 1980s to the present day. The period is relevant as it is established by the foundation of the Tully branch of the WPSQ and the events concerning Kennedy Bay, which signalled the

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<sup>16</sup> Vicki Pattemore, "Legislation in the Wet tropics World Heritage Area - Tools for Protection", in *Securing the Wet Tropics?*, eds. Geoff McDonald and Marcus Lane (Leichhardt: The Federation Press, 2000), 132- 147.

start of the first modern day projects by courageous and tenacious people, many of whom continue to be active today.

### **Kennedy Bay - a place worth saving**

Kennedy Bay is significant in the history of conservation in the Mission Beach area. This episode occurred within the context of four distinct elements of individual and group conservation activity: firstly, the formation of the Tully Branch of the WPSQ in 1980; secondly, their successful campaign in the early 1980s to stop the development of a proposed marina and resort; thirdly, the successful campaign and activities involved with constructing the Kennedy Walking Track in the late 1980s; and finally the consequent 1991 declaration of the Kennedy National Park Extension. There can be no doubt that Kennedy Bay was the important focus and symbol of conservation in the area in the 1980s.

The Kennedy Bay narrative begins with the concern and involvement of people within the Tully branch of the WPSQ.<sup>17</sup> Margaret Thorsborne, who had first come to live with her husband Arthur at Meunga Creek in 1972, amongst other conservation work was involved in the Daintree Blockade, and soon after had the opportunity to travel down the Hull River to Kennedy Bay with fellow conservationist Joe Galeano. Margaret came to understand the breathtaking beauty of the place where Edmund Kennedy first landed at the start of his ill-fated expedition to Cape York in 1848.<sup>18</sup> Not only is the area one of natural beauty but the natural and historical importance of this undisturbed wilderness area had led to a proposal for classification as a National Park by the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service in 1972. It was thereafter listed by the Queensland National Trust in 1982, and subsequently listed on the interim register of the National Estate by the Australian Heritage Commission.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, it would come as no surprise

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<sup>17</sup> The documentation of the history of the Tully branch of WPSQ is a project in its own right and falls outside the scope of this work. Therefore, to avoid duplication, this work includes only a brief overview of activities, and by no means does justice to the pioneering conservation work of those who were involved at the time.

<sup>18</sup> Margaret Thorsborne, interview by author, Meunga Creek, Kennedy National Park, 31 July 2007.

<sup>19</sup> WPSQ, *Kennedy Reserve Under Threat*, pamphlet issued in 1983, 1.

that in 1982 the proposed development of a marina and resort at Tam O'Shanter Point at Kennedy Bay drew the involvement and opposition of the Tully branch of the WPSQ, which had proposed its classification as a National Park in 1980. At the time the local Tully branch included people such as Margaret and Arthur Thorsborne, Joe Galeano (Vice-President), Carolyn and John Muller, Suzanne Smith (founder of the branch, Secretary and Treasurer) and Pat Turner ( Founding President).<sup>20</sup>

Although the WPSQ had been very active in raising funds for conservation, particularly cassowary research through the work of Joan Bentrupperbaumer, a major project of the newly formed Tully branch was the consolidation of fragmented areas of National Park in the Hull River area to form the Hull River National Park. Prior to the formation of the WPSQ, Joe Galeano had succeeded in obtaining the declaration of the Mt Coom and Mt Mackay National Parks.<sup>21</sup> The goal of the WPSQ at this early stage was the ultimate declaration of the full area of the rainforest along the Hull River from Mt Mackay down to the sea at Kennedy Bay as a National Park, a vision which was enhanced by the fact that the northern side of the river was still pristine rainforest.<sup>22</sup> For all time “the rainforest would meet the reef”, a common symbol and theme of the WTWHA. Soon after the successful consolidation of the Hull River National Park, the WPSQ led the campaign against the Butler Pollnow \$98 million development at Tam O'Shanter Point at Kennedy Bay. This development would have resulted in the destruction of 70% of the Kennedy Reserve, in return for which Government would grant the developer deferral of rates and taxes, priority for road access and other services, and freehold ownership of the land.<sup>23</sup> Although there was support for the resort development in the Cardwell Shire Council, the WPSQ campaigned strongly and ensured that public sympathy lay with the conservationists; most of the small community at Mission Beach was against the development of what was to be the Tam O' Shanter Destination Resort. This position was supported by eminent national figures such as Edgar Beale, of *Kennedy to Cape York*

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The pamphlet states that “ the Public Reserve contains significant stands of virgin rainforest, complex tall melaleuca forest and foreshore vegetation. Cassowaries are a regular sight on the beach and in summer, the rainforests are busy with the noise of Torres Strait pigeons.

<sup>20</sup> Sue Smith, telephone interview by author, 9th August 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Carolyn Muller, Pers. Comm., 7th August 2007.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> WPSQ, *Kennedy under Threat.*, 1.

fame, who wrote to Arthur Thorsborne venting his outrage at the project and mentioning the lack of financial liquidity of the developers.<sup>24</sup> The conservation movement achieved a favourable outcome as their intervention activities delayed the project until ultimately the developers went into liquidation.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Edmund Kennedy Memorial Walking Track - a walk to the bay.**

Kennedy Bay had been saved from development. Soon thoughts moved to the task of ensuring that the wilderness would be protected for all time under reclassification as national park status. However, Kennedy Bay was only accessible by boat and the opinion at the time was that the only way that the Kennedy Reserve would achieve protection was to open the area to the people by constructing a walking track.<sup>26</sup> The concept of the walking track was the brain-child of Len Staff. In 1984 he submitted a funding proposal to the Bi-centennial Council, which was calling for submissions of interest from local communities for local projects to be completed in time to celebrate the 1988 Bi-centennial.<sup>27</sup> The public meeting was called, but only five people attended: Tip Byrne, the Shire Chairman; Bill and Norma Morgan; Len Staff; and his brother-in-law, Bruce Stevens. The Cardwell Shire Council was not interested in the Bi-centennial funding and the public meeting showed very little local community support. In cooperation with the Tully branch of the WPSQ, Len Staff prepared the only submission and applied for and received a grant in 1986 for \$40,000 to build the track; it was considered to be a Heritage Project, as it would acknowledge the 1848 Edmund Kennedy landing in the bay.<sup>28</sup>

Len Staff, who lived at Wongaling Beach, and Bill and Norma Morgan were the driving force for the next two years in the design, construction and organisation of the Kennedy Track. Norma and Bill Morgan had settled in South Mission Beach in 1979, and soon thereafter built a house on their beach-front block. Norma recalls that there were no shops, the post office was in a private house, and most of the houses were owned by

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<sup>24</sup> Edgar Beale, *Letters to Arthur Thorsborne*, dated 13<sup>th</sup> September 1982, and 5<sup>th</sup> August 1983.

<sup>25</sup> Thorsborne.

<sup>26</sup> Norma Morgan, telephone interview by author, 27<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*; Thorsborne.

<sup>28</sup> Len Staff. Interview by author, 5<sup>th</sup> August 2007.

sugar farmers, most of whom regarded the land at the time as “just a piece of dirt”.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, many in the community in the 1980s regarded those who had newly settled as outsiders, “Mexicans”, and the project as the work of outsiders.<sup>30</sup> They provided little support for the walking track. A particular obstacle was the negative attitude of Mr. Campbell who owned the land through which sections of the track were designed to pass, the consequence of which was that a section of the track had to be built along a precarious cliff-top and another along the beach.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, however, the organisers received considerable assistance from people such as Peter Stanton, who at the time was Director of National Parks, and who provided technical and logistical assistance, and from Margaret and Arthur Thorsborne, who in the words of Norma Morgan “were a great inspiration”.

Although certain sections of the community supported the track, as evidenced by a letter to the Editor of the *Tully Times* on 29<sup>th</sup> March 1989, there were those during the construction phase who were vehemently opposed.<sup>32</sup> The editor at the time had taken “an enormous dislike” to Len Staff, and some in the Cardwell Shire Council, in particular an official on the Bi-centennial Organising Committee, proved to be obstructive. At a meeting at the Council chambers it was decided that a little boat would be bought to transport people, materials and equipment around the headland. The boat, which was named Bungadoo, “turtle” in the local Aboriginal language, was purchased as the property of the Council. The official mistook the more substantial boat in the backyard of the Morgans’ property as that which had been purchased for the task, and accused the organisers of misappropriating Bi-centennial funds, and stopped the funding. In the words of Margaret Thorsborne the whole affair, which was a matter of mistaken identity, was “extraordinary, quite extraordinary”.<sup>33</sup> Needless to say, the official did not attend the opening ceremony. Further opposition to the track came from those who determined that it was dangerous and poorly constructed; in response Peter Stanton obtained official

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<sup>29</sup> Morgan.

<sup>30</sup> “Mexican” is a colloquial term used by Queenslanders to refer to people from south of the border.

<sup>31</sup> Morgan, Thorsborne.

<sup>32</sup> *Tully Times*, 29th March 1989. Margaret Thorsborne collection.

<sup>33</sup> Morgan; Thorsborne.

technical approval and to the designers' credit Cyclone Winifred in 1986 did not shift their work.

A condition of funding was that the Kennedy Track was to be hand built and that half of the work force would be Aboriginal.<sup>34</sup> Enthusiastic local people met as working bees on the weekend, and in Margaret's recollection for the promise of Norma Morgan's buttered bun with pink icing.<sup>35</sup> People came from near and far to volunteer, and work was not stopped by the wet seasons. Early on the decision was made that the track would bypass important stands of rainforest and to meet the conditions of funding, no machinery would be used, only sledgehammers, spades, forks and wheelbarrows. It must be noted, however, that a helicopter was necessary to transport the final batch of materials in the rush to meet the opening day deadline and bypass barbed wire which had been erected by those in opposition to the project.<sup>36</sup> The project took a full two years, and could not have been completed without the assistance of the Aboriginal workers, engaged according to the requirements of the Community Development Employment Plan. Bill Morgan, who was an electrician by trade, provided trade training along with organising the activities of the young workers. Norma recalls how the Aboriginal boys would arrive from the Camu community near Kennedy with their families: "there were babies, there were aunties, there were grandmas. It was a wonderful experience". Although the boys were so shy in the beginning that they would not look up, after a few weeks of Bill's technical training they became more confident. In accordance with custom and in respect for their Elder, the boys asked that they be instructed through an old man named Sam Franks. It is the opinion of all that without the help of the Aboriginal community the track could not have been built; Norma Morgan recalls with pride that one of the boys went on to become a ranger with National Parks.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Staff.

<sup>35</sup> Thorsborne.

<sup>36</sup> Staff. Ironically this Direct Action is in harmony with the symbolism achieved by the activists during the Daintree Blockade.

<sup>37</sup> Morgan.

On 29<sup>th</sup> May 1988 Kerry Goodall, Deputy Chairman of the Queensland Council of the Bicentennial, officially opened the Edmund Kennedy Memorial Walking Track.<sup>38</sup> Hundreds of the local community and dignitaries attended, and the events included a re-enactment of the Kennedy landing. By this stage the community benefits of the track were obvious, in that for the first time the beauty of Kennedy Bay was accessible for all. The completion of the track despite strong initial opposition was a symbol of the tenacity of a dedicated local group of conservationists. In the words of Norma Morgan:

It is hard to believe now that you can have such a good concept that so many people wanted, but yet have so much trouble politically.<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps the project is best summarised by Norma Morgan:

The main part about it that is so important, Bill, is the love that went into it. The love of the people who did it, the love of us all for each other, and it's a quality that is very hard to describe. I can feel tears coming in my eyes when I think of the people that were involved. The funny thing about it is that when we completed the first hundred yards people walked in a hundred yards, when we completed two hundred yards people walked in two hundred yards. They wanted that track. And as it was built, so people walked it until finally on the 29<sup>th</sup> May 1988 we had an opening of a track and literally thousands of people walked into Kennedy Bay that day.

National Parks have named an important point along the track Morgans Lookout.

Interestingly, an examination of the visitors' book reveals the following entries:

Unforgettable – Germany

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<sup>38</sup> Refer to an image of the original brochure in Appendix 2.

<sup>39</sup> Morgan.

I think that your idea of nature is great and there should be many more ventures of this kind undertaken. The world is ours to use wisely. - Peter Garrett – Midnight Oil.<sup>40</sup>

### **The Kennedy Extension to the Hull River National Park - realisation of the dream**

Public access to Kennedy Bay through the Edmund Kennedy Memorial Walking Track led to the opportunity to campaign for the Kennedy Extension to the Hull River National Park, which provides an important link for people and fauna such as cassowaries from the rainforests of the Hull River to the sea, and which for eight years been the vision of the WPSQ. Under the coordination of the WPSQ, through the Tully branch and under the leadership of Carol Muller, President of the Tully branch of WPSQ, “much lobbying, numerous submissions and constant badgering of government departments” resulted in the November 1990 announcement that the Kennedy Bay Reserve would be reclassified as a National Park early in 1991.<sup>41</sup> Five separate organisations had pledged their support for the re-classification: WPSQ, Mission Beach Chamber of Commerce, The South Mission Beach and Wongaling Beach Progress Association, Movement for Responsible Coastal Development (M.R.C.D.), and Mission Beach Tourism Authority.<sup>42</sup>

This important event, which was a symbol of the strength of a community overcoming hurdles, was complemented by encouragement in government circles. The Minister for the Environment and Heritage in the Goss Queensland Government, Pat Comben, supported the concept although it was dependent on the concurrent support of Bill Eaton, the local MLA and the Minister for Land Management. His decision in turn was influenced by the recommendations of the pro-development Nolan Report, the consequences of which are analysed below. Additional assistance was provided by the Townsville branch of WPSQ and from Don Henry, Director of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, based in Brisbane. The activities of the protagonists were summarised in a letter to the editor of the *Island Coast Advertiser and Tully Times*, a pro-

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<sup>40</sup> *The Wet Tropics Newspaper*. No.6, (Cairns: WTMA, Christmas 1994) 1.

<sup>41</sup> *The Island Coast Advertiser and Tully Times*, “Park status for reserve”, 9 November 1990, 1.

<sup>42</sup> *The Island Coast Advertiser and Tully Times*, 15<sup>th</sup> June, 1990.

conservation newspaper which was destined to have a short life, and which suggested that many people worked hard over the years: “stalwarts for the cause were Margaret and Arthur Thorsborne, Pam and Joe Galeano, Sue Smith, John and Carol Muller, Norma and Bill Morgan”.<sup>43</sup>

In keeping with the WTWHA values, the environmental values which the WSPQ researched and used in their submissions included: the fact that the Kennedy Reserve forms the last link in the Hull River cassowary corridor; the variety of vegetation types, which included substantial stands of the Fan Palm; significant distribution of rare plants, such as the Cairns Pencil Cedar; the importance of the habitat for the cassowary and Torres Strait pigeon; and the historical significance of the area. A joint announcement of National Park classification was made in 1990 by the Ministers Bill Eaton and Pat Comben. The Kennedy National Park Extension was officially opened by Premier Wagne Goss and Carol Muller in 1991, and is a further lasting testament to and symbol of the tenacity and vision of the Mission Beach area conservation movement during the 1980s.

### **The Movement for Responsible Coastal Development - a Mission Beach body**

The conservation campaigns, which led to the successful blocking of the Tam O’Shanter Point development, and which in turn led to the building of the Kennedy Track, and the successful classification of the Kennedy Reserve as a National Park, were achieved through the vision and joint action of local people and those in the Tully branch of the WPSQ. However, the role of local Mission Beach conservation organisations cannot be underestimated. The first Mission Beach based conservation organisation was the Movement for Responsible Coastal Development (M.R.C.D.). Karen Schmidt, who was born in and has remained in the area, was a member of WPSQ and was approached by Joan Bentrupperbaumer, who in turn had been approached by Lyn Overton in 1988 to help set up a conservation group at Mission Beach to oppose the Nolan Report. This was a land use report, produced during the Joh Bjelke-Peterson era, which recommended extensive development of Crown Land including marina developments at Garners Beach,

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<sup>43</sup> *The Island Coast Advertiser and Tully Times*, 9 November 1990.

Clump Point, the Hull River inlet, and even on the Hull River, and included high-rise unit development, all in the Mission Beach area. By word of mouth about a dozen people attended a meeting at Lyn Overton's house, described as "twelve really like-minded people".<sup>44</sup> The M.R.C.D. was officially founded on 17 April 1990, at which meeting the objectives were determined, office bearers elected and the name decided.<sup>45</sup> The name was chosen to ensure that the organisation would not be regarded as just another green group and that it would include the concept of environmentally responsible development.

The goal of M.R.C.D. was to ensure that the environment was protected through ecologically sensitive development, specifically through input into the Johnstone Shire Council Development Control Plan (DCP). This vision is best summarised in the first M.R.C.D. newsletter:

The Members of MRCD are not NIMBYs, nor are they radical greenies, they are simply a group of individuals who love the very special, unique environment in which they have chosen to live and work. What they want is responsible development. Development that takes into account HUMAN NEEDS and is sensitive to ENVIRONMENTAL NEEDS including the HABITAT of endangered species.<sup>46</sup>

The organisation soon took on a life of its own and the few members worked tirelessly to achieve their goals; initially Lyn Overton and Karen Schmidt worked two days a week, but "ended up working seven".<sup>47</sup> Lyn Overton and Joan Bentrupperbaumer believed that the group should also educate the community, a vision which would form a cornerstone of the present day activities of its offshoot, C4. Lyn Overton's business background proved useful in the early years, along with her substantial organisational and leadership abilities. Lyn had earlier organised a petition which stopped a proposed marina and canal development at Wongaling Beach. The founding group included Norma and Bill Morgan, and all members were responsible for financing the operation.

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<sup>44</sup> Karen Schmidt, interview by author, Bingil Bay, 3 August 2007.

<sup>45</sup> *MRCD Annual Report 1990/1991*, Movement for Responsible Coastal Development, 1.

<sup>46</sup> *MRCD Newsletter* No.1, 26 June, 1990. 7.

<sup>47</sup> Chris Mance, interview by author, Bingil Bay, 3 August 2007.

Steadily the organisation grew. The first M.R.C.D. office was at Lyn Overton's home, moving from place to place as the group grew. A monthly M.R.C.D newsletter was an early initiative, and membership quickly expanded to well over two hundred people, out of a total population of approximately 1,500.<sup>48</sup> Chris Mance stated that:

It would not be unusual to have well over one hundred people attend a monthly meeting, and Ben would always raffle one of his woodblock prints on hand-made Nepalese paper".<sup>49</sup>

Although the concept of the M.R.C.D. emerged in 1988, the first public meeting was held on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1990, at which David Cassells, Director of Parks and Recreation for the Townsville City Council, was the guest speaker.

### **The birth of C4 - the cassowary moves to centre stage as the symbol of conservation**

The election of the Goss Government proved helpful to the M.R.C.D. cause. The Minister, Pat Comben, was highly supportive and was suitably impressed by the level of commitment in the community. The M.R.C.D. organisation had operated for about a year before taking on the issue of the protection of the cassowary, lobbying government in tandem with the Johnstone Shire Council and the WPSQ. In December 1990 Pat Comben, who took a personal interest in the conservation of the cassowary, motivated and chaired a joint WPSQ/Government agencies meeting at the Mission Beach Resort, which established the requirement to set up a specific organisation which would protect the future of the cassowary.<sup>50</sup> A follow-up meeting was held at Tully, attended by Lyn Overton and Karen Schmidt on behalf of M.R.C.D, who offered the services of M.R.C.D. as the secretariat for the new group. Steve Goosem, who at the time was with the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service, assisted the planning. In the words of Chris Mance:

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<sup>48</sup> Membership numbers grew from 10 people in April 1990 to 208 by May 1991. *MRC D Annual Report 1990/1991*, 5.

<sup>49</sup> Mance. The early editions of the *M.R.C.D. Newsletter* had as a front page a copy of a wood-cut print.

<sup>50</sup> Muller.

The reason why the Consultative Committee for Cassowary Conservation (C4) was able to get off the ground was that there was a group of people who were on the ground who had the vision and put in the huge effort to oppose inappropriate development.<sup>51</sup>

C4, which was a Johnstone Shire Council responsibility, took on the main role of protecting the cassowary, allowing other organisations such as WPSQ to step back. C4's primary purpose was to promote the cassowary as an endangered species within the Wet Tropics, a species with a concentration of habitat in the Mission Beach area. The organisation was assisted by the secretariat services of M.R.C.D, primarily through the efforts of Karen Schmidt and Lyn Overton. Monthly meetings were held, starting in January 1991, with a model set up by Pat Comben to test the concept of bureaucracy working in tandem with the community on conservation initiatives. The important aspect of the model was that meeting decisions would form the basis of government policy; this was the only policy model of its type at the time in Queensland. The politicians seemed to view the opportunity as one of bypassing the frustrations of the wheels of government, which in turn provided strong personal motivation. However, not all government departments were as sympathetic: the Lands Department was pro development. The preferred business development model of the M.R.C.D. and C4 shifted to one of compromise and support for nature-based tourism and development, which would provide continuity of tourism opportunity through responsible development, whilst other areas in Queensland such as the Gold Coast were expected to decline as an ecotourism destination due to overcrowding.<sup>52</sup>

Activities of C4 expanded over the period from 1991 to 1994. By the end of 1991, the commitment of all C4 members resulted in significant WTMA funding, which in turn enabled the organisation to rent and equip an office at the Hub Shopping Centre and employ a project officer. A number of volunteers such as Elaine Siddons helped with activities, and some would come on holiday to the area, stay in the caravan park, and

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<sup>51</sup> Mance.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

volunteer to work at C4. As activities were growing it was becoming increasingly difficult for the few active members to cope. Joan Bentrupperbaumer asked a consultant to consider the C4 structure, who recommended that the activities be split into working groups. Thus the functions of the executive were split into five working groups: habitat, reforestation, rural, rescue and rehabilitation, and public relations. Membership numbers reached 219 and most importantly the purpose of the exercise was being realised: the cassowary numbers had stabilised.<sup>53</sup>

The C4 activities model, based on the protection of the cassowary within its habitat, in particular cassowary rescue and rehabilitation, was designed to be the model for other areas of cassowary habitat such as Innisfail. However, the resources were inadequate to cope with the needs of the extensive area. For example, if a cassowary was injured in any area, C4 received a call and people left their work and attend to the injured bird. Other initiatives included the development of cassowary friendly pig traps, led by the rural group under the leadership of tropical fruit farmer Peter Salleras, who had a strong conservation mentality and conveyed a positive cassowary-conscious attitude to the farming community. Furthermore, at the time the habitat group under Lyn Overton and Chris Mance had a very heavy work load as their task was to monitor all development applications. People such as Elaine Siddons would spend much of their time cutting articles about development out of newspapers.<sup>54</sup> Encouragingly at the time, in line with the values of compromise and environmentally responsible development, property developers and the tourism industry were invited to consult with C4 on future development proposals. The model was working.

### **Mission Beach Development Control Plan - realising the goal**

A substantial breakthrough in local government relations occurred with the appointment in 1993 of Ross Overton, Lyn Overton's brother, to the position of Johnstone Shire Mayor. He immediately conducted a conservation audit of the Shire in consultation with C4, and this with the advice of other governmental experts, resulted in the Mission Beach

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<sup>53</sup> *The Wet Tropics Newspaper*, No.6, 4.

<sup>54</sup> Mance.

Development Control Plan (DCP), the founding goal of the M.R.C.D. Both organisations, M.R.C.D. through Chris Mance, and C4 were represented on the DCP steering committee, which included one representative each from Cardwell and Johnstone Shires, a representative from National Parks, a representative from the Lands Department, others from the tourism industry, a representative from the real estate industry, a CSIRO representative, and a Chamber of Commerce representative.

The group worked hard and established through the DCP an environmentally strong planning regime, based on public input, with a specific plan for each area, one of which was Mission Beach. In turn each area was divided into precincts, the planning contents of which were negotiated on the basis of three points: firstly the protection of the cassowary, secondly the future of tourism, and finally the protection of lifestyle.<sup>55</sup> The councils and government were satisfied as they believed that if the community had been involved in the planning phase then future problems would be easier to resolve. At the time this was a unique planning scheme in Queensland, to the extent that people from elsewhere and even interstate would attend the meetings.<sup>56</sup> The Mission Beach DCP was one of only 21 environment development plans to win the international United Nations Local Agenda 21 Model Community Award. Lyn Overton, Elaine Siddons, Karen Schmidt, the Johnstone Shire Council CEO, and an Environmental Officers John O'Brien and Eddie McGeehan travelled to Thailand to attend the conservation conference and collect the award.

During 1993 C4 expanded their vision to include a strong emphasis on community education and ensured that the premises included appropriate display areas, which housed an interpretive display. At Easter 1994 the organisation moved into old school buildings, relocated onto land previously used as a sports ground. To equip the new premises the M.R.C.D. and C4 were successful in gaining \$50,000 funding from WTMA to refurbish the buildings and build another interpretive display.<sup>57</sup> The original building had been decorated by local artists, such as Chris Mance, who painted the murals in the C4 centre, whilst Helen Wiltshire painted the murals on the tourism centre. Molly Robson,

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Schmidt.

<sup>57</sup> Brenda Harvey. Interview by author. 29 July 2007.

Chairperson of the Wet Tropics Ministerial Council, officially opened the complex on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1994.

By 1994 M.R.C.D. had evolved into the conservation movement's main activist lobby organisation, whilst C4 was positioned as the community consultative group, although their roles sometimes became blurred and membership overlapped. The community, however, regarded the two groups as polarised, as they were perceived as separate environmental factions. The initial intention was that M.R.C.D. would remain separate but provide the secretariat function for C4, whilst Council was responsible for management of C4, with input from interested individuals and the community. Relationships between M.R.C.D. personnel and government officials were strong, which was an important element in the mix, and which reflected the personal vision and values of those who were involved.<sup>58</sup> However, there was considerable opposition from the rural sector, particularly in 1994 when the regulations against subdivision of prime agricultural land were introduced; they regarded the C4 and M.R.C.D environment groups as instigators.

### **Activities merge to form the Community for Coastal and Cassowary Conservation**

As many people had duplicate functions in the two bodies, the decision was taken to merge the activities of M.R.C.D. and C4, creating the new C4 organisation in June 1994, named the Community for Coastal and Cassowary Conservation Inc. The new name widened the activities of C4 from cassowary protection to include the activist and development activities, previously handled by M.R.C.D. The efforts of a number of organisations and growing public awareness ensured that by this stage the Southern Cassowary had been reclassified as an endangered species under the Nature Conservation

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<sup>58</sup> When the author asked Chris Mance what it was that drove his passion for conservation, he replied "My passion for justice. I have always had a passion for justice, and for me I saw things that happened and were happening that I felt were totally unjust. When I lived in Sydney I saw that people including developers were running rough-shod over people to get what they want...and so when I came up here I thought well this is a lovely place, and I am not anti development but I would like to see things done in keeping with the place. I could see that this was not going to happen and so the justice side of things provided my passion."

Act 1992 (Qld), whilst the Cape York populations were classified as vulnerable. Subsequent Commonwealth legislation, under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC), established the nationally endangered status of the Southern Cassowary.

Amalgamation of two groups can lead to arguments over organisational culture and priorities, and the new C4 was no exception. What was in 1988 an idealistic group begun as the M.R.C.D., with considerable community support, by 1994 had evolved into an environment movement which had become fractured and factional. For example, during the discussion of a marina proposal some supported a small-scale development whilst others totally opposed the idea, and likewise some believed that C4 should work in tandem with tourism, while others did not. Another example was the difference of opinion over the support for the Sanctuary Nature Refuge at Garners Beach; some believed that C4 should protect the interests of local residents who opposed the new road extension past their properties, whilst others believed that the conservation friendly development should be supported.<sup>59</sup> By this stage a number of the original people of influence in the Mission Beach conservation effort started to leave the merged organisation, and as is common to all groups, a new phase of the C4 body emerged.

On New Year's Eve 1994/95 the C4 building burnt down, an event which, although officially established as an electrical fault, is commonly believed to have been arson. The nozzle of the fire hose had been severed. Mission Beach community opposition to the Port Hinchinbrook proposed marina development was seen by some as the symbol of the standoff between development and conservation, and it appeared that for the first time the value of symbolism was to have a negative impact.<sup>60</sup> Margaret Thorsborne was the spokesperson for The Friends of Hinchinbrook group, which formed in 1993 to ensure that the environmental impact of the development at Oyster Point south of Cardwell was fully explored. The conservation aim, amongst others, was to ensure that during the

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<sup>59</sup> Schmidt.

<sup>60</sup> Thorsborne.

development of the marina the protective role of the mangroves would not be undermined.<sup>61</sup>

The tragedy of the 1994 fire, which destroyed the buildings and records of C4, galvanised the movement and provided a phoenix-style symbol of resurrection. On New Years Day 1995, C4 held a meeting on site and began to plan the rebuilding process, and out of the ruins emerged opportunity. Furthermore, WTMA had wanted a small theatre and had donated money, which coupled to the considerable insurance payout of \$500,000, provided the funds for redevelopment. By October 1995 the current expanded complex, which includes a resource room, the WTMA theatre, and a fire-proof archive room was ready to open to the public.



Brenda Harvey at C4, July 2007.

*Source: photograph by author*

Brenda Harvey, who is the current President of C4, and her husband Perry moved permanently to the Mission Beach area in 1959, and have since then played a leading role in the conservation of the area. In their earlier years the Harveys operated a boating business from the Clump Point jetty, and at the time had intended to build a small breakwater and moorings at Clump Point. However, as they were very friendly with

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<sup>61</sup> *M.R.C.D. Newsletter* Vol.2 No.2, August 1993.

conservationists John Busst and Hope West, they were persuaded that this was not the way to go. An illustration of the difficulties and disappointments which they and others faced is the instance when a tame grouper, which was a daily attraction at Viva Cay, was killed by fishermen, creating a public outcry. For Perry Harvey the focus of the business was teaching people the ecological values of the reef from the early 1970s until his retirement in 1989. Appropriately, Perry Harvey became instrumental in part of the Marine Park being protected.<sup>62</sup> Brenda, however, was more focussed on the rainforest, and as a conservationist had previously fought and beaten the Johnstone Shire Council casino and marina development at Boat Bay, and stopped the clearing of National Park areas at Dunk Island. In 1989 residents of Wongaling Beach asked an informal group of conservation activists, including the Harveys, to assist them in opposing the development of the marina at Wongaling Beach, the group convincing the developers not to go ahead. Various people had contributed funds to fight the development, which were then donated to the newly formed M.R.C.D.<sup>63</sup>

Brenda Harvey speaks of the challenges which the organisation has faced over the years. The task had become more difficult with a weakening of environmental focus at Council, particularly with the introduction of the new Shire Plans, which excluded the conservation provisions of the 1993 Mission Beach Development Control Plan (DCP). The task of political persuasion was now structurally blocked. Furthermore, the Cardwell Shire Plan was quite different from the Johnstone Shire Plan, with a greater development focus in the Cardwell area, influencing South Mission and Wongaling Beach areas. C4 had wanted to retain the key elements of the DCP, and lobbied Minister Desley Boyle, who held the dual portfolios of Environment and Local Government and Planning, but who believed that each portfolio should stand alone. Brenda Harvey recalls a recent meeting with Desley Boyle regarding the details of the FNQ 2025 Plan, at which the need for combined government portfolios was established.<sup>64</sup> Although the efforts of M.R.C.D had been successful in the creation of the Mission Beach DCP, state conservation planning policy had shifted back in favour of development, but without the previous level

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<sup>62</sup> Harvey.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

of community stakeholder consultation. The DCP initiative which had won international recognition was discarded, regalanising the Mission Beach community. An indication of the level of Mission Beach opposition to local government planning is illustrated when the 1994 Johnstone Shire Draft Planning Scheme called for community submissions. Approximately 70% of all submissions, including a 322 signature petition, were received from interested parties in the Mission Beach area. To the credit of local residents and the conservation movement most of the requested amendments were granted.<sup>65</sup>

The second issue which C4 has faced since 1995 was the steady drift of original members of C4 and M.R.C.D. from the area and from active participation in the group. For some the disappointment of the loss of the Mission Beach DCP was too much to bear, for others the level of anticipated compromise was too great, and for others their work was done. The loss of the contributions of people such as Mary Lang, who had continued Elaine Siddons' role of the newspaper clipping service, was potentially harmful as this function eventually fell away. Furthermore, the time line for response to development applications was decreasing, placing greater pressure on the process of gathering scientific evidence to underpin argument, and placing increased pressure on remaining and new volunteers. Although the loss of direct influence at State and Council level was difficult to replace, Brenda Harvey has since 2003 represented the Mission Beach conservation movement on the WTMA Conservation Sector Liaison Group.

Although everyday dealings with local government had become more difficult, there were elements of encouragement within the wheels of government. Firstly, in March 2007 the Cardwell Shire amended its Shire Plan to include consideration for density of development and conservation. Furthermore, the relationship between C4 and WTMA had strengthened, as shown by cooperation in objecting to excessive clearing post-Cyclone Larry, and the reduction in the speed limit of the El Arish- Mission Beach road from 100km to 80 km/hr. Brenda Harvey worked on the subcommittee with Main Roads for eighteen months to achieve the reduction in speed limit in the early 2000s, in the face of considerable public opposition. In addition, C4 had considerable input into the upgrade

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<sup>65</sup> *Mission Beach Bulletin*, No.103, October 2004, 1.

of the El Arish road in consultation with Cairns Main Roads, whose Environment Officer, Andrea Young, played a vital role in ensuring that the environmental values were protected and maintained, and ensuring that workers became environmentally conscious. Many trees were planted.<sup>66</sup> Although at present (August 2007) there are six developments in the area which are declared Controlled Actions under the EPBC, current concern is that there are too few people in the conservation movement to ensure that the developers comply with the conditions. However, on a positive note, in 1994 C4 applied for approximately 1000 hectares of Crown Land to be converted to National Park status under the State Lands Strategy, most of which has now been granted.<sup>67</sup>

### **Local government support**

The conservation movement has been at times supported by Council vision and Council employees who have kept the environment close to heart. In 1998 the Johnstone Shire Council appointed Mark Gordon as the Conservation Officer to negotiate voluntary conservation agreements on private land, a process by which land owners were offered incentives through rate rebates to include a conservation covenant on their land title.<sup>68</sup> Through the efforts of Mark Gordon, who now holds a permanent position in the Environment and Planning Department of the Council as Conservation and Environment Officer, this has resulted in the bulk of Mission Beach land titles incorporating covenants. Initially the task was to educate land owners in the mechanics of the rate discount scheme and to allay their fears of erosion of land use rights. In this role the Council in 1998 sent out approximately 300 letters, with few initial responses, although as word of mouth took its course, more started to apply for a covenant.<sup>69</sup> This has now evolved into current policy in which the land has a permanent covenant, and which is legally transferable on sale. The symbol of a conservation covenant is entrenched. When asked what drives conservation in Mission Beach, Mark Gordon replied:

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Bob Jones. Interview by author. 29 July 2007.

<sup>68</sup> Conservation for Coastal and Cassowary Conservation, *Annual Report 1997-1998*, 5.

<sup>69</sup> Mark Gordon. Interview by author. 31 July 2007.

There is a different mindset of people within the community, as they recognise that it is a beautiful area and they are prepared to stand up and fight in a way to try to maintain those values.<sup>70</sup>

The fight to maintain the values of Mission Beach has had its home from 1995 within the activities of C4, which has initiated many campaigns, too many to document within the scope of this work. However, there have been campaigns which symbolise both the success and failure of the movement. Milestones for conservation in the past ten years at Mission Beach include the first court case in 1995, which involved a large resort development proposal at Garners Beach, a case won by the conservation movement.<sup>71</sup> Another instance of success was the result of the campaign against the Oasis Subdivision Scheme, a campaign which began with a public meeting in 1994, and which ended after much activity in 1996 with a conservation development concession of part of the area.<sup>72</sup> Less success, however, was achieved in the fight against the 2005 Narragon Beach development proposal, a 105 acre subdivision of land north of Clump Point, zoned Rural Conservation, which was resolved in late 2006 in the Planning and Environment Court with an unfavourable outcome.<sup>73</sup>

### **The Norm Byrnes Arboretum - a lasting symbol of conservation**

Although the activities of C4, M.R.C.D. and other conservationists have been more typically viewed as environmental activism, much work has been done on building and revegetation. Environmental activist Margaret Thorsborne created a native plant nursery at her home in Meunga Creek, donating thousands of trees to the Wildlife Society, a nursery which she later transferred to Bill and Norma Morgan's property in South Mission Beach. In turn this function was taken up by the C4 nursery, which continues to grow native plants for replanting purposes. Coupled to this was the creation of the Mission Beach arboretum, situated along the foreshore alongside the current C4 buildings. This was the brain child and later life's work of Norm Byrnes, who arrived in

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Jones.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Mission Beach Bulletin*, No.126, Oct 2006, 5.

Bingil Bay in 1986 at the age of 65. Norm, in his capacity as Habitat Coordinator for C4, established the arboretum in the Ross Overton Park in 1994, which today boasts over 88 species. Norm Byrnes died in 1998, and in his memory in 1999 the arboretum was renamed the Norm Byrnes Arboretum.



C4 Nursery



Ross Overton Park & Norm Byrnes Arboretum

*Source: Photographs by author*

Bob Jones has since 1998 taken on the responsibility for the arboretum, maintaining Norm's passion, which cannot be underestimated, as shown in Bob Jones' 1998 eulogy:

Of his life here, of his participation in the community and especially in C4; of his tireless activities finding, identifying, documenting and propagating rare species; of his determination to regenerate rainforest wherever possible; of his ongoing mission as a teacher; of his daily courage in contending with a debilitating degenerative disease; of his bright spirit and wonderful sense of humour – of all of these things and more I'll say next to nothing, trusting to the tributes of others who knew the man longer and better than I did. Instead I'll focus on the one trait

that impressed me most about Norman: his wholehearted commitment to communication.<sup>74</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This eulogy to a man, who put so much into conservation, perhaps encapsulates the passion and vision of the Mission Beach conservation movement over the past 25 years. The values, symbolism and energy of the modern era of the conservation movement are bound up in the individuals and groups which had the courage to say no to development in the Daintree, and which ultimately led to successful Wet Tropics World Heritage Area classification in 1988. The aim of this research was to establish the continuity of themes and motivations of those who were involved in conservation at the Daintree and WTWHA listing with those in the Mission Beach area during the times of breakthrough success as well as the times of disappointment. The research has established the common themes.

The success of the conservation movement in Mission Beach in the modern era was founded on the strength of personal vision, personal passion and personal courage. Individuals in the earlier period of the 1980s and early 1990s fed on the shared values of their colleagues, organised not by structure but by the tight bonds of networks and like-minded people. Much was achieved in saving Kennedy Bay from development, much was achieved in building the Edmund Kennedy Memorial Walking Track, and much was achieved in the reclassification of the Kennedy Reserve as a National Park. This was all made possible by the courage and determination of people who would not flinch in the face of opposition, and whose success established the community symbols, which still carry forward conservation in the area today.

Likewise in the late 1980s individuals had the vision to realise that formal organisation was needed to sustain the conservation vision, and to influence people in the right places.

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<sup>74</sup> *Mission Beach Bulletin*, No.34, Dec 1998, 5.

The M.R.C.D was born, as was the original C4 to protect the endangered cassowary and its unique habitat, and provide a symbol on which the Mission Beach effort could be based, now that the Kennedy Bay campaigns had been won. Ultimately, as the individuals who were driving the activities of the two groups were the same, so the necessity for amalgamation became obvious. People have come into the movements, and people have left, to be replaced by other like-minded individuals, and some have established iconic status in the conservation movement. But for most people the rewards were not personal recognition, but rather the conservation of the beautiful natural assets and values which are obvious in the Mission Beach area. Above all, those who were and are involved in the conservation movement at Mission Beach were driven by the common values embedded in the symbols which they created, and which served as their reason for being. These were the building of the consolidation of the Hull River area into the Hull River National Park; the Edmund Kennedy Memorial Walking Track; the reclassification of Kennedy Reserve as a National Park, the plight of the Southern Cassowary, the Mission Beach Development Control Plan, and the Norm Byrnes Arboretum. These were symbols worth saving.

It is unfortunate that time and space was insufficient to interview all those who played a role in the movement. It was also not possible to include all the conservation initiatives or the names of the people who were involved during the 25 years under research. However, this does signal the opportunity for a more detailed exploration of the complexity of some of the themes, such as in the area of policy influence, and the historical role of the WPSQ, for which rich data exists.

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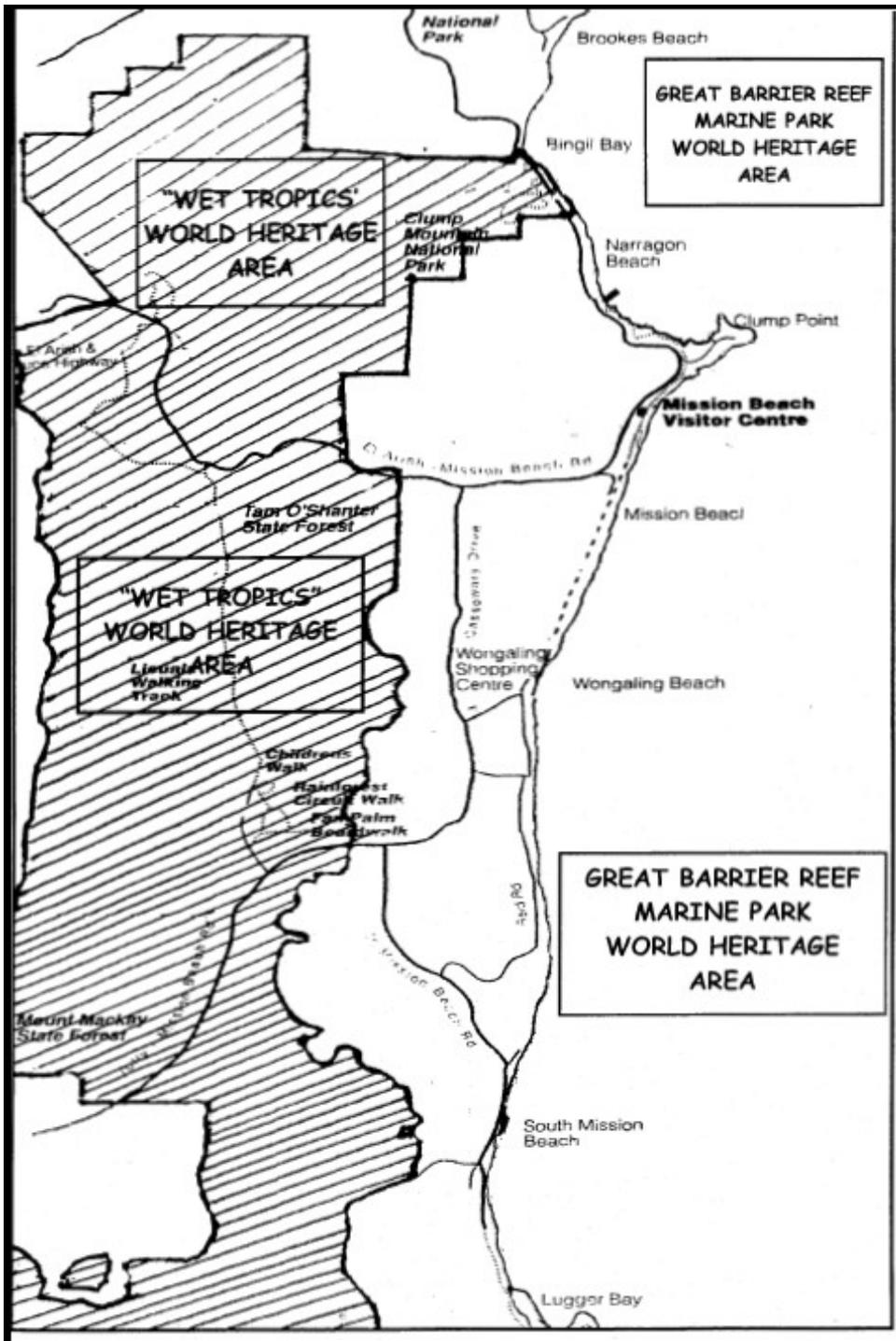
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**Appendix 1** – The Mission Beach area depicting the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area

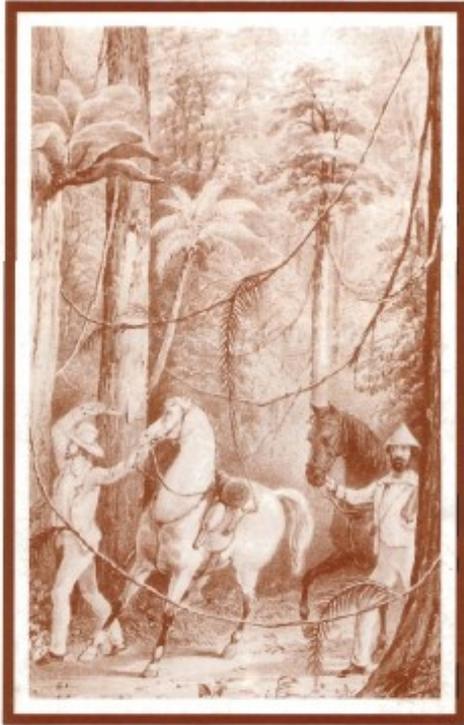


Source: Mission Beach Bulletin, Newsletter of C4

**Appendix 2 – Original 1988 Edmund Kennedy Memorial Walking Track brochure**

# The Kennedy Track

Access to Kennedy Bay



A tribute to an heroic  
feat of Exploration

*Source: Margaret Thorsborne.*

