

ABSTRACT

Gumbaingirr Aboriginal people of the Corindi area on the mid-north coast of New South Wales are believed to have left their traditional homelands around 1890, not returning until 1916. Through interdisciplinary research, and by following one Gumbaingirr family, the Skinner family, over this time, it was found that Aboriginal people did, in fact, leave the area. They followed a strategy that many Aboriginal people throughout New South Wales were employing at the time, quietly and persistently taking charge of a small piece of their own land by squatting on Crown Reserves and unoccupied private land.

The Skinner family went to the Ulmarra and Tucabia district in the north of the Gumbaingirr Nation. It seems they remained in that area until mounting pressures from the Aborigines Protection Board intensified after the 1909 amendments to the Act, giving them more power over Aboriginal people, and calling for a new type of response. For the Skinners, this came in the purchase of their own property in 1911, an innovative move that saw them living on two blocks on the outskirts of Tucabia where they stayed for five years. The renewed actions of the Aborigines Protection Board, particularly against Aboriginal children after 1915, as well as the death of a child in the family, sent them home to Corindi where they settled on the land they had left thirty years before. They called the place the 'Old Farm'. Now, more than one hundred years after the original Skinner family left Corindi, the Garby Elders, many of whom are descendants of these same people, are in the final stages of negotiation to buy back the Old Farm.

The disciplines of oral history, archaeology and documented history have been used in this research, and a major part of my investigations has been directed at examining the different ways these diverse disciplines were able to be used to complement and contradict each other during the journey to uncover the knowledge that allowed this small group of

Gumbaingirr people to be traced through a short thirty-year time span. Of most importance was the use of each discipline's ability to pass knowledge back and forth in a three-way process that found new areas to examine that might have been overlooked by one discipline alone. This not only hastened the investigation, but expanded it into different sources of inquiry. This ability also enabled both specific and broad fields of knowledge to be gathered from sources where often only fragments of knowledge existed.

Because it is often difficult to determine from publications just how researchers have applied interdisciplinary methodology in their work, I have recorded the methodological processes used in my research in a thorough and detailed manner, in order to assess their successes and their failures, and to see where they might be improved.

This research has productively applied interdisciplinary methodology in all of its phases. Individual disciplines were allowed to play out their own unique and valuable role, while collectively, they were linked to present a full and compelling story of Gumbaingirr people's movement at the end of the 19th century.