

Worimis to preserve and record history

by
JENNY HAWKE



□ Lionel Ridgeway

Descendants of Port Stephens's original settlers, the Worimis, have clubbed together to preserve their history and culture.

A new group called the Worimi Descendants Historical and Preservation Society will document, preserve and restore significant Koori sites and collate and document the tribe's written and oral history.

The society, comprising 36 descendants of George and Charlotte Jane Ridgeway along with a number of interested non-Aboriginal people, formed in early September.

Wildlife Service offering help with the restoration program for Samurui dune and beach systems.

Members would take part in a replanting program at Samurui to restore the six native plant species used by the Worimi people as food, in canoe building and for shelter.

These had all disappeared as a result of severe erosion of the beach and dunal system caused by human influence, harsh climatic conditions in the early 1970s and the introduction and rapid spread of the South African bitou bush.

The society had also

'Worimis invented the fish hook 600 years ago'

The group's president, Lionel Ridgeway, said the society would try to preserve all aspects of the Worimi identity, the tribe's history and culture and foster in children a love for the earth.

Two members, Christine and Jim Kable, said that for many years now, descendants of the Worimi people living on the Tomaree Peninsula had been concerned about the continuing destruction and degradation of visual historical sites and lack of concern for the preservation of the numerous plant species used by the Worimis before white settlement.

There was still much visual Worimi history on the Tomaree Peninsula.

It was not only significant to the Worimi descendants but also had enormous visual, historical and educational value for the growing number of individuals, groups and organisations interested in our shared history.

The society appealed to Port Stephens residents for support in its efforts to preserve what remains on the Tomaree Peninsula of Worimi history.

So far it had written to the Federal Government's Coastal Dune Care Department, the State Government's Soil Conservation Service and to the National parks and

applied to carry out a koala food tree replanting program, allowing it to reintroduce the koala colony which existed on the northern end of the hind dune before the arrival of Europeans but which disappeared in recent times because of the erosion and destruction of the plants which ensured their survival.

The erosion of dunal sands had almost completely covered the midden and camp site on the southern end of the dunes.

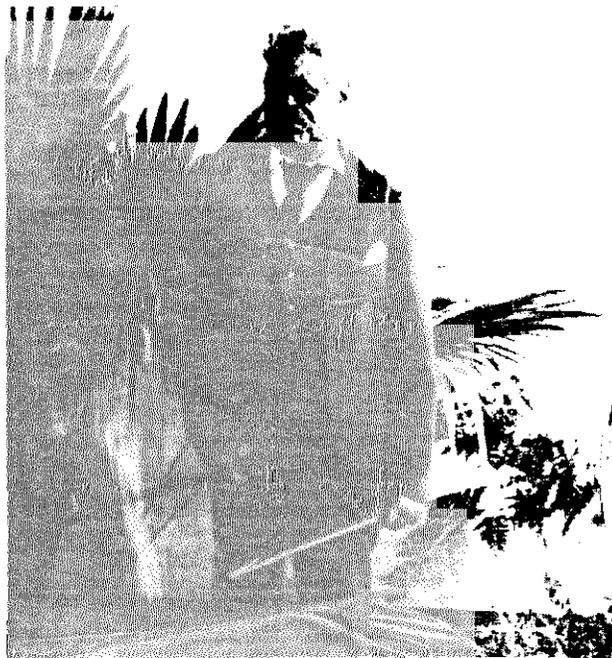
The site, carbon dated by Professor Dyall, was a minimum 1500 years old.

It also held many artefacts and stone tools made and used by the Worimi as well as fish hooks they invented and which were carbon dated to 600 years ago.

Society members said this was the oldest recorded invention of the fish hook on the Australian continent and considerably changed the Worimi lifestyle from that time.

Members had also collected studies and reports, formal and informal, done on Port Stephens and the Worimi people over the past 200 years.

Scientific, anthropological and archaeological studies in their possession included those by W J Enright, A P Elkins, W Scott and Boris A Sokoloff.



□ King Billy Ridgeway



□ Jim Kable — keen to record history