THE HISTORY

The name ‘Bellinger’ is a corrupted version of a Gumbaynggir word Boali-jin. Up until 1841, the island was just one of several other patches of lowland rainforest strung along the Bellinger floodplain in the traditional country of the Gumbaynggir people. Europeans first came to the Bellinger Valley in 1841, and began to take red cedar and run sheep and cattle later in the same decade. After the Crown Lands Act was passed in 1861, selection of farming land, particularly on the floodplain and terraces, followed quickly, and the Gumbaynggir were dispossessed.

Unlike the adjacent, and slightly higher floodplain, Belligen Island remained under Crown tenure and was not cleared for farming during the major period of selection and settlement. Instead it was used as a collection point for red cedar logs floated down the river. A small public area on the downstream end of the Island was cleared in the 1880s. Low and subject to frequent flooding, it quickly suffered erosion. The upstream or western end of the Island was sold as freehold and also partly cleared. Because of its susceptibility to flooding, most of the Island was still unsold and uncleared in 1900. By this time the people of Belligen recognised that it had become the last sizable remnant of the Bellinger Valley’s floodplain rainforests and it was reserved for “public recreation and the preservation of native flora.” From this period until the 1970s it was valued as a rainforest reserve as well as being a much used recreational area for swimming and picnicking.

After the 1974 flood, the Island became less frequented by people, camping flying foxes became a regular feature, and weed invasion and rainforest degradation became increasingly serious.

ON-GOING MANAGEMENT

The Island is actively managed by local volunteers. They meet and work every fine Tuesday morning, between 9am and 1pm. By far the bulk of their work consists in weeding.

There is also active monitoring of the bat colony as part of on-going research into their ecology and conservation.

Anyone interested in meeting with the volunteers, making inquiries about the Island or trying their hand as volunteers themselves should feel free to visit the Island on a Tuesday morning.

The best time to arrive is 10:30 am. Morning tea time.