



AIATSIS
Australian Institute of Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander Studies

MEDIA RELEASE

Further understanding of Australian Indigenous cultures, past and present through undertaking and publishing research, and providing access to print and audiovisual collections

A snapshot of Taree/Purfleet - courtesy of AIATSIS

11 April 2011

Hundreds of members of the Aboriginal community in the New South Wales township of Taree and nearby Purfleet were able to look back on their history recently- when Australia's biggest repository of Aboriginal history – the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) brought a snapshot of their archives to the community.

Staff of AIATSIS' Pictorial Access Unit travelled to the Purfleet Community as part of three day AIATSIS Community Access visit (29-31 March), bringing with them hundreds of photographs of the Purfleet community –and photographs from the surrounding regions – some which date back more than 40 years.

“It was an outstanding success,” said Audiovisual Archive Access Manager, Tasha Lamb.

“We were worked off our feet – we had well over 200 people a day wanting to access our material and this has generated well over 1,500 audiovisual materials being requested.”

“In fact the visit is still generating requests,” she added.

Ms Lamb said that community Elders were bussed in from Kempsey to access the collection as well as visitors travelling from surrounding areas such as Foster, Wingham, and Oldbar. Pre-visit consultations with community representatives and one of the key organisers of the on-ground arrangements, Ms Katrina Russell, had been particularly beneficial.

“Everyone knew of the visit,” Tasha said. “We were based in an out building of the Purfleet Aboriginal Medical Service and there was a community barbecue every day.”

Tasha said the nine-strong AIATSIS's team brought with them relatively recent photographs of community members – while also having access to the organisation's much wider in house data base – Perfect Picture which holds over 65,000 images relating to Indigenous Australians.

“Clearly the fact AIATSIS is the caretaker of the world's largest collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiovisual material is not well known by the general public.

“When people are made aware what’s available and how to access the collection they are blown away - few realise that our collection comprises of almost one million items”

Ms Lamb said the photographic display that was on show throughout the visit included specific photographs from Taree/Purfleet taken by photographer Gerry Orkin for AIATSIS’s 1988 publication “*After 200 years –photographic essays of Aboriginal and Islander Australia Today*”.

“We had many requests by people wanting to see all of these photographs – as well as many others. One lady was able to see a photograph of her mother who had previously passed away. Others saw images of themselves they never knew existed,” she said.

Of particularly to the community was vision from a 1987 ABC TV program featuring Taree’s very first Aboriginal debutante ball.

“This rare footage is part of the AIATSIS collection and we had people visiting us seeing themselves from nearly 25 years ago that they never knew existed in the first place.”

AIATSIS also made available sound recording packs relating to the Biripi language, which many community members were provided with free of charge under the Institute’s Return of Materials to Indigenous Communities program.

“Throughout the visit we were given the rare opportunity to interview local Elders and community members to record their oral histories and photograph how life is in Purfleet in 2011.”

Community representative and event co-ordinator Katrina Russell expressed her heartfelt thanks to the Biripi AMS and other organisations- such as Biripi Aged Care, Ghinni Ghinni Youth and Culture Aboriginal Corporation and the Greater Taree City Council – who had been wonderfully supportive.

“Biripi AMS catered each day of the visit and hosted a free community barbecue,” Ms Russell said.

“All of which added to the visit being such a big hit.”

If community members wanted further information on this visit – or information about the AIATSIS collection – they should ring 02 62614212 or e-mail AIATSIS on audiovisual@aiatsis.gov.au.

Further information John Paul Janke 0408 600867 or Katrina Russell on 0438 941212