

Cataloguing private artefact collections

Mamu Rangers

Artefacts in private collections

Thousands of Aboriginal artefacts have been found in the Innisfail/Johnstone River area. Many landholders have collections on their properties, often found through farming in the rich basalt soils or close to water sources. While these artefacts have little financial value, they are highly significant to Mamu bama (people) and have important research and scientific values.

The distribution of axes, grindstones and other artefacts can reveal information about how Mamu bama survived and thrived in the rainforest before Europeans. Our project aims for the Mamu Rangers to inspect, identify and catalogue stone tools held privately and store them appropriately.

- Our aims are to catalogue artefacts held in these private collections to:
- Gain a deeper understanding of how Mamu used the landscape in the past.
 - Train Mamu Rangers in stone tool identification and recording.
 - Know where the artefacts are held and build relationships with landholders.
 - Store the objects appropriately to ensure their long-term preservation.

Mamu RNTBC and Mamu Rangers

Mamu bama were granted native title in 2013 recognising their deep connections and responsibilities to the Innisfail region. Five clan groups make up the Dyirbal speaking Mamu Nation: Waribarra, Dulgubarra, Bagirgabarra, Dyiribarra and Mandubarra.

The Mamu Rangers were established in 2022, in partnership with Terrain NRM and with support from the Queensland Indigenous Land and Sea Program. The Mamu Rangers, work under the guidance of Elders and the Mamu Aboriginal Corporation Board of Directors. The Mamu Rangers focus is looking after cultural heritage sites, monitoring biodiversity, pest and invasive plant control and leading a water monitoring program.



Outcomes

- In 2024, we
- Recorded 290 artefacts in 8 private collections.
 - Designed and commissioned a ute tray to use for site recording and travelling displays.
 - Designed and completed permanent displays of Mamu heritage at the Mamu office.
 - Made replicas of artefacts to show at schools and community events.

- Patterns emerging from the collections
- Nearly half the artefacts recorded are ground edge axes.
 - One quarter of artefacts recorded are unmodified or modified pebbles.
 - Include only a small number of T-shaped ooyurkas and slate incised grindstones.
 - Over half (58%) of the artefacts are in good or excellent condition.
 - 29% of the artefacts are in fair condition and 13% are in poor conditions.

Working with our museum specialist and archaeologist has given us new insights into the management, identification and recording of Mamu artefacts.

Acknowledgements

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