

Life on the border oral history project

Accession number 28930

Date 2012.

Author / Creator

Gibson, Heidi interviewer.

Akiba, Suzannah, interviewee.

Aragu, Ciccie Lala, interviewee.

Samai, Manan, interviewee.

Warusam, Mebai, interviewee.

Abstract Oral history interviews with four residents of the Torres Strait, three from Saibai Island and one from Thursday Island. Interviewees are Mebai Warusam, Ciccie ("Sisi") Lala Aragu and Suzannah Akiba from Sabai Island, and Manan Samai from Thursday Island. The interviewees discuss their Papua New Guinean and Australian heritage, life before and after PNG independence and the establishment of the border between the two countries. Photographs accompany all interviews. The Saibai Island interviews and photographs are available digitally, the interview with Manan Samai and accompanying photographs are not. Saibai is located just over three kilometres from Papua New Guinea's southern coastline and is one of the Torres Strait's northernmost islands. The island is home to around 350 people whose social, economic and cultural heritage spans both sides of the Australian-PNG border. PNG gained independence from Australia in 1975.

System of arrangement Arranged into 4 series.

Description 1 oral history;

Administrative / Biographical history This collection is the result of research by Heidi Gibson's 2011 John Oxley Fellowship project "Border Ties" that looked at the impact of Papua New Guinea's independence on the traditional, familial and social networks of the Saibai and Boigu island communities. The project explores whether there have been changes in the perception and roles of PNG nationals within the Saibai and Boigu island communities since independence; and how any such changes may have impacted upon relationships within families and other social networks that span the border divide.

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Notes This material contains traditional knowledge or cultural expression which is Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP).

Preferred citation

28930, Life on the border oral history project, John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.

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Series 1: Suzannah Akiba (2012)

Series number 1

Series title Suzannah Akiba

Date 2012

Scope and content

Oral history interview with Suzannah Akiba. Photographs of and relating to Suzannah Akiba.

Author / Creator

Heidi Gibson

Suzannah Akiba

Adrian Akiba

Description

Description 7 digital photographs 1 video file

Locate OMDIG

Access

Access restrictions Some restrictions apply.

Copyright status In copyright

Items in this series:

Photographs (2012)



Unit ID 28930/1

Date 2012

Scope and content

7 digital photographs showing: one of the first aluminium dinghies used to travel between Sabai and what is now Papua New Guinea; Suzannah Akiba, her house and garden and the view from her house; and Suzannah and Adrian Akiba.

Author / Creator

Heidi Gibson

Description

Description 7 digital photographs

Locate OMDIG

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Oral history (26 January 2012)



Unit ID 28930/2

Date 26 January 2012

Scope and content

Oral history interview with Suzannah Akiba, interviewed by Heidi Gibson and assisted by Adrian Akiba. Suzannah was born on the island of Sabai in 1939. She migrated from Sabai to

Bamaga post World War II in search of water and then returned in 1963 when married and has lived there since. Her ancestors came from New Guinea but her more recent family, such as her grandmother, came from Sabai. In the 1960s and 1970s the people of Sabai and New Guinea traded together and were able to pass freely into each other's territories. They travelled by canoes which were later replaced by aluminium dinghies. During this time trade accounted for most needs but some money was made working in the pearling industry or by travelling to northern Australia by plane and boat for work. Later in the mid 1970s an air strip was built on Sabai. Sabai and other islands were represented during the border dispute with Sabai islanders wanting to remain part of Australia, rather than Papua New Guinea. After the border had been finalised in 1975 it gradually became more difficult to freely move into each other's territories to the point where a pass must now be obtained from the council. Since then more people have been using money. Sabai islanders feel more supported by the Australian government than their counterparts are by the Papua New Guinean government. Papua New Guineans cross the border to Sabai for trade and for employment.

Author / Creator

Heidi Gibson

Suzannah Akiba

Adrian Akiba

Description

Description 1 video file

54 min. 30 sec.

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(2 digital)

Series 2: Manan Samai (2012)

Series number 2

Series title Manan Samai

Date 2012

Scope and content

Transcript and notes from an oral history interview with Manan Samai. Photographs relating to Manan Samai.

Author / Creator

Heidi Gibson

Manan Samai

Description

Description 10 photographs 1 document

Locate OMBOX Box 14893

Access

Access restrictions Some restrictions apply.

Copyright status In copyright

Items in this series:

Photographs (2012)

Unit ID 28930/3

Date 2012

Scope and content

10 colour photographs showing Manan Samai, her house and examples of weaving.

Author / Creator

Heidi Gibson

Description

Description 10 photographs

Locate OMBOX Box 14893

Oral history (29 April 2012)

Unit ID 28930/4

Date 29 April 2012

Scope and content

Transcript and notes from an oral history interview with Manan Samai, interviewed by Heidi Gibson. Manan was born in 1961 and grew up in the village of Siga (Sigabadura) in what is now Papua New Guinea. She went to primary school in Kodoro then returned home to work on the family farm growing fruit and vegetables. She was 13-14 in 1975 when Papua New Guinea achieved independence and feels that most people at the time accepted the change but were unsure about what changes would come. She married a village man named Koro in 1980 and briefly discusses courtship rules. Following complications with her third child she moved to Thursday Island, on the Torres Strait side. Koro initially worked diving for pearl luggers until 1987 before finding work fishing for crays and in a bakery shop. Manan was a full-time mother then became a child care worker in 2009. Manan became an Australian citizen in 1992 and all her relations still reside in Sigabadura. Since she left, there have been many changes to Siga. Most houses now have iron roofs and tank water and there is a larger health clinic, however traditional culture is decreasing and less children are attending school. Manan is currently helping build a Uniting Church in Siga.

Author / Creator

Heidi Gibson

Manan Samai

Description

Description 1 video file

54 min. 30 sec.

Locate OMDIG

Series 3: Ciccie 'Sisi' Lala Aragu (2012)

Series number 3

Series title Ciccie 'Sisi' Lala Aragu

Date 2012

Scope and content

Oral history interview with Ciccie 'Sisi' Lala Aragu and notes from an additional unrecorded conversation. Photographs of and relating to Ciccie 'Sisi' Lala Aragu.

Author / Creator

Heidi Gibson

Ciccie Aragu

Description

Description 10 photographs 1 document

Locate OMBOX Box 14893

Access

Access restrictions Some restrictions apply.

Copyright status In copyright

Items in this series:

Photographs (2012)



Unit ID 28930/5

Date 2012

Scope and content

10 colour photographs showing Manan Samai, her house and examples of weaving.

Author / Creator

Heidi Gibson

Description

Description 10 photographs

Locate OMBOX Box 14893

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Notes (2012)

Unit ID 28930/6

Date 2012

Scope and content

Notes from an additional conversation with Ciccie Aragu that was not recorded as part of the oral history video.

Author / Creator

Heidi Gibson

Cissie Aragu

Description

Description 1 document

Locate OMBOX Box 14893

Oral history (23 January 2012)



Unit ID 28930/7

Date 23 January 2012

Scope and content

Oral history interview with Ciccie Aragu, interviewed by Heidi Gibson. Ciccie 'Sisi' Lala Aragu

was born on Sabai. The border became official in 1975 and around that time an airstrip was built in Sabai. It was a difficult time during the border dispute with some people wanting to be part of Australia as they believed this would bring better jobs and living conditions, while others preferred Papua New Guinea as there was more food and land there. Ciccie talks generally about access to medical aid on the island and how help has improved over the years. Since 1975 Sabai has gained new houses, tap water and increased law and order. Sisi talks about the importance of garden food, how conditions in Sabai are better than those across the border and how there is still interaction across the border, but passes are now required.

Author / Creator

Heidi Gibson

Ciccie Aragu

Description

Description 1 video file

31 min. 19 sec.

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(2 digital)

Series 4: Mebai Warusam (2012)

Series number 4

Series title Mebai Warusam

Date 2012

Scope and content

Oral history interview with Mebai Warusam. Photographs relating to Mebai Warusam.

Author / Creator

Heidi Gibson

Mebai Warusam

Description

Description 10 photographs 1 document

Locate OMBOX Box 14893

Access

Access restrictions Some restrictions apply.

Copyright status In copyright

Items in this series:

Photographs (2012)



Unit ID 28930/8

Date 2012

Scope and content

5 digital photographs showing Mebai Warusam, the view from his house and a monument outside his house dedicated to the remembrance to Garami and Jawai Mamoose.

Author / Creator

Heidi Gibson

Description

Description 5 digital photographs

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Oral history (24 January 2012)



Unit ID 28930/9

Date 24 January 2012

Scope and content

Oral history interview with Mebai Warusam, interviewed by Heidi Gibson. Mebai was born on the island of Sabai in 1924 and has spent most of his life there. Before the border the people on Sabai and New Guinea traded together. After the border was in place things changed - dinghies with outboard motors replaced canoes and people used money rather than trading goods and services. The border has formed a boundary separating the people with less intermarriage across the border and with the people in that country seen more as foreigners. Mebai has strong family connections across the border in Papua New Guinea. Mebai talks about early settlers and visitors on Saibai Island and the surrounding area and shares Torres Strait Islander traditional stories. He talks about the impact of World War II. He also talks about the loss of unity amongst the young and the more recent drug and alcohol problems the island faces.

Author / Creator

Heidi Gibson

Mebai Warusam

Description

Description 1 video file

1 hr 6 min.43 sec.

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(2 digital)