

3.5 In the Rainforest

Many places of spiritual significance to Rainforest Aboriginal people are, luckily, easily accessible to you and your family. Try to visit one of these locations and give yourself time to reflect on why this area may have been significant to the Traditional Owners of the Wet Tropics.

The Boulders – Babinda

How to get there:

The Boulders are 7km inland from Babinda. Turn off the Bruce Highway into Babinda and stop at the volunteer-run Babinda Information Centre for directions (open 9 to 4 pm daily).

The Babinda Boulders are part of the traditional lands of the Yidinjy people. Their lives, customs and beliefs are intricately entwined with the plants, animals and seasons of the tropical forest. The Traditional Owners ask you to respect the plants, animals and this place of special cultural significance.

Legend of the Boulders

A young Aboriginal woman, Oolana, was promised to a tribal elder but she fell in love with Dyga, a handsome young visitor from another tribe. Oolana and Dyga ran away and camped by the water under Churichilam (Mt Bartle Frere). But their angry tribespeople tracked them down. Dyga's people seized him, calling out they had been shamed and would travel away and never return.

Oolana's people dragged her back, forcing her to return with them to the rest of the tribe. In despair, Oolana broke free and threw herself into the water, throwing up huge boulders and the foaming, rushing waters that form the Babinda Boulders you see today. Some say Oolana's spirit still inhabits the Babinda Boulders and her spirit draws young wanderers to their death as she searches for her own lost lover.

Lake Eacham – Atherton Tablelands

How to get there:

About 5km east of Yungaburra is a signposted turnoff to Malanda, and about 200m down this road is a signposted turn to the left which leads to the lake.

Legend of Lake Barrine

Over in the Butchers Creek area near where Malanda is now, there once was a lake with rainforest around it. Yaminy the Rainbow Serpent used to live there. In winter, Yaminy lay beside the lake and lit a fire. Sitting close by were little birds trying to keep warm. More birds came and they tried to get the fire from Yaminy, but he chased them away. They kept going back and Yaminy kept chasing them away.

One day a black bird came along, which we call Budjin Jilla-Jilla (spangled drongo in English) and asked the little birds what they were doing. They said they were cold and

needed fire to keep themselves warm. Budjin Jilla-Jilla asked: "Why don't you go and ask Yaminy for some wood?" "When we tried to go there and get some burnt wood, Yaminy kept chasing us away," they said. Budjin Jilla-Jilla said that he would go and get some firewood for them. But when he flew down Yaminy got hold of Budjin Jilla-Jilla and chased him away. Budjin Jilla-Jilla flew back a couple of times and kept getting chased away. Budjin Jilla-Jilla flew back to the other birds. "I will fly down and get a piece of lit wood when Yaminy is asleep, but only if you keep a lookout for him," he said.

While Yaminy was asleep the other birds kept an eye on him, and Budjin Jilla-Jilla flew down and grabbed a piece of wood. He must have made a noise and Yaminy woke up. Yaminy hit Budjin Jilla-Jilla and split the back of his tail and knocked the feathers out. If you see these birds around here, those feathers are still missing. Budjin Jilla-Jilla flew away with the wood, and took it back to where the other birds were waiting. They made a fire, then they were all warm. Once the birds were warm they started to get cheeky and flew down and teased Yaminy, like birds do when teasing snakes.

Yaminy said "I've had enough, I'm going to leave this place." One night, Yaminy saw that the animals were all asleep and when no one was around, he left that place and made his way to Lake Barrine, this is where he settled down. Ngadjon people call this place "Burrin" because Yaminy arrived here about four or five o'clock in the morning (Burrin means "early hour of the morning" and was mispronounced by early colonists as Barrine). This is the story of how Lake Barrine got to be here.

Black Mountain – Cooktown

How to get there:

The boulders are about 30km south of Cooktown.

Legends of Black Mountain

The dark shadow of Black Mountain hugs the horizon about 30km outside Cooktown. Formidable granite boulders the size of houses stack precariously on one another, defying gravity as well as the laws of logic. It's no wonder people have been searching for an explanation for the origin of Black Mountain for thousands of years. Each Aboriginal language group in the region has its own rich stories about Kalkajaka and its meaning in the landscape. "Kalkajaka" means "the place of the spear" or more loosely translated as "mountains of death". One legend is that the mountain originated in the Dreamtime from a being similar to a medicine man or chameleon who had a taste for human flesh. He killed and ate a young chief and was banished and fled to the mountains, occasionally surfacing to eat a member of his own clan. On his last venture out of the mountains he turned into a goanna to escape his angry tribe members and was struck by lightning. He exploded and left large piles of charred rock everywhere.

Another legend about how the mountain was formed is that two brothers were fighting over a girl and were attempting to kill each other by rolling black rocks down from the hills. The rocks eventually piled up as more and more were thrown, creating Black Mountain.

Mossman Gorge – Mossman

How to get there:

Take the signposted turnoff in Mossman and drive 6km to the Gorge.

Legend of Mossman Gorge

When the Kuku Yalanji people first moved to the Mossman area they knew nothing about what was good to eat and what was poison. One day a man whose body shone like lightning appeared in front of the elders. He instructed them what was good food and how to process some of the bad foods to make them good to eat. The people called him Kubirri and after a while he went and was not seen again.

Years went by and one day the people began to hear strange noises at night and notice the food animals were getting scarce. They soon realised it was Wurrmbu the flesh-eater, he had the body of a man, the wings of a flying fox and large pointy ears and teeth like a dog. One day just at dusk a young boy wandered off into the scrub to look for his father who was out hunting. The boy became lost and it was soon dark – the frightened people called out to him and then they heard the terrible sound of Wurrmbu coming. He heard the boy's cries and swooped down and snatched him up, then the night was quiet once more. Next day a hunter was climbing a tree looking for honey, he looked up the gorge and to his horror saw Wurrmbu standing below the cliff devouring the young boy. Wurrmbu now had a taste for humans and would swoop down at night and snatch away anyone who strayed too far from the safety of their campfire.

One afternoon while getting ready for another terror-filled night, they heard someone calling out "Bama yurra wangkarji dungay, ngaykunku!" It was Kubirri, he had returned and was standing high up on the mountain calling to the people to come up and join him. "I am stronger than Wurrmbu and will protect you." The shy little Kadar (bush wallaby) crept up close and stood at the feet of Kubirri, Kurriyala the carpet snake went up, Julmbanu the kangaroo, Kurranji the cassowary, Ngankin the echidna, Walkar the goanna and Bakamu the pigeon all went up and stood beside Kubirri.

The people watched and talked amongst themselves, some said they would go but were told not to because of the lateness of the day. Eventually it was dark and no one had gone to stand by Kubirri. That night Wurrmbu came as usual and the next morning when they looked, there on the mountain, everything was as it was the day before only they had all been turned to stone. The people believe as long as the Kubirri rock stands there will always be food animals around but they are always troubled by the Dubu (demons) at night because they failed to go up the mountain. When the rock falls they believe their time is up and Wurrmbu is released to do his worst.