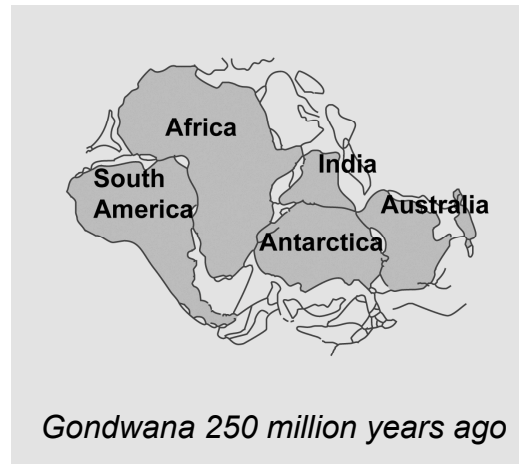


Tropical Factsheets

Ancient forests

- The Wet Tropics began to form 400 million years ago as sediment under the ocean, around the time the first plants left the water and began colonising land.
- Back then, the actual coast was about 100km inland (where Chillagoe is today) and was part of the ancient supercontinent of **Gondwana**.
- Plant and animal fossils tell us that Gondwana was once covered with lush forests like the Wet Tropics of today.
- Over millions of years Gondwana split into a **jigsaw puzzle** of pieces which became Africa, South America, India, Antarctica, New Zealand and Australia.
- The **closest relatives** of some Wet Tropics plants and animals live as far as away as South America, Madagascar and New Caledonia!
- Isolated from the rest of the world, Australian animals and plants evolved differently to the rest of the world.
- The green rainforests of Gondwana were gradually replaced by eucalypts, except along the north Queensland coast where regular rain and sunshine kept pockets of rainforest alive. These small green islands on high mountaintops developed their own unique plants and animals.
- On the isolated islands of Madagascar and New Caledonia, plants and animals from Gondwana survived and evolved in unique ways. Like the Wet Tropics of north Queensland, these islands experienced stable, reliable rain and sunshine.
- In the last two million years, **ice ages** have gripped the world every 100,000 years. During an ice age water freezes at the poles, sea levels drop and land bridges form between Australia and Asia. New animals and plants arrived in Australia, including the ancestors of today's **Rainforest Aboriginal people**.
- Today, the Wet Tropics is a **living museum** of ancient and rare plants and animals. Some are so unique they're in a family of their own, like *Idiospermum australiense*.





- South America, Asia and Africa don't have as many ancient families, but share some **common ancestors** with Wet Tropics species.
- In the past 10,000 years, the rainforest has expanded again into river valleys and along the coast.
- Humans are rapidly changing the earth's climate. The results are increasing temperatures (global warming), rising sea levels, changes in rainfall patterns and more extreme weather events like cyclones.
- These ancient forests have survived for millions of years, but the earth is changing too quickly for them to adapt. Just one degree increase in temperature is likely to result in extinctions in the Wet Tropics.



Pockets of ancient rainforest have survived in the Wet Tropics.