

Bunya Bunya

“The walks on either side of the Bunya Bunya is the most favourite promenade of the public, and the noble line of these splendid trees justly excites general admiration.”

Walter Hill - Annual Report on the Brisbane Botanic Gardens, 1878

The Bunya Bunya (*Araucaria bidwillii*) is a large evergreen coniferous tree (genus *Araucaria*, family *Araucariaceae*), which can grow up to 30-45m.

It is native to South-East Queensland and at the time of white settlement, occurred in great abundance, to the extent that a Bunya Bunya Reserve was declared in 1840 to protect its habitat. The tree once grew as large groves or sprinkled regularly as an emergent species throughout other forests on the Upper Stanley and Brisbane Rivers, Sunshine Coast hinterland (especially the Blackall Range near Montville and Maleny), and also towards and on the Bunya Mountains. Today, the species is usually found in very small groves or as single trees, except on and near the Bunya Mountains, where it is still quite prolific.

A. bidwillii was a sacred tree for the Aboriginal people. The vernacular name is *Bunya*, *Bonye*, *Bunyi* or *Bunya-Bunya*, from various tribes or European variations of the Australian Aboriginal name for the tree. It is often called Bunya Pine, but this is inaccurate as it is not a pine.

The cones are large, soft-shelled and nutritious, and the seeds are edible. Similar to pine nuts, they have been an important food resource for indigenous peoples - groves of the trees were

often under particular tribal/family ownership.

In what was probably Australia's largest indigenous event, diverse tribes - up to thousands of people - once travelled great distances to the Bunya Mountains and Blackall Ranges. They stayed for months, to celebrate and feast on the Bunya nut. The Bunya gatherings were an armistice accompanied by much trade exchange, and discussions/negotiations over marriage and regional issues. Due to the sacred status of the Bunyas, some tribes would not camp amongst these trees and in some regions, the tree was never to be cut.

Source: Wikipedia



People inspecting ships stranded in the Brisbane Botanic Gardens after the 1893 floods - Bunya trees are visible behind the ship H.M.S. *Paluma* (centre)