

THE TEA TREE OIL STORY

To trace the history of the “healing Tea Trees” we have to start on the North Eastern coastal region of New South Wales, Australia—the only place in the world where the *Melaleuca alternifolia* tree yields the “real” Tea Tree oil.

We then have to travel back centuries, long before Australia was “discovered,” and long before scientific evidence began, to a time when Australia belonged to its native inhabitants, the Aborigines. In particular, the Bundjalong Aborigines inhabited the wetlands around the Bungawalbyn Creek and, according to legend, were well aware of the medicinal qualities of their many “healing trees.” Although not documented, it is widely understood that they treated various wounds and skin infections with an early form of poultice made from crushed leaves and warm mud from along the banks of the creek. The poultice was excellent for drawing out infection and healing the skin.

These Aborigines also used the healing waters of the pools in the area which were surrounded by the trees. Falling leaves and twigs leached their “magical” healing liquid into the water, turning it a deep yellowish color. The Aborigines bathed and washed in this natural healing “spa” to treat any number of conditions from sore muscles to serious diseases. Maybe this is why they named the area “Bungawalbyn” in the first place. The name means “healing ground.”

The “healing trees” did not become commonly known as “Tea Trees” until around 1770 when Captain Cook, along with a botanist named Joseph Banks and the crew of *The Endeavour*, used the leaves with their distinctive aroma to brew a spicy and refreshing “tea.” It is most unfortunate that they did not “discover” and publish the unique healing qualities of the “Tea Trees.” But according to the account of that time, they drank the essence in varying concoctions, even alcoholic beverages such as a “Tea Tree beer.”

Thus the name “Tea Tree” became popular, especially with the first “white” settlers who colonized the low-lying areas around the Clarence and Richmond Rivers. From the 1790s on, they watched and learned from the Aborigines how to use the leaves and waters in various inhalations, poultices, and rubbing mediums. Because these first settlers rarely had medical or botanical backgrounds, there was no real “scientific” evidence recording the healing qualities of the Tea Trees. The European community was very skeptical of these “anecdotal stories.” It could not have helped that the Aborigines were often thought of as primitives from an uncivilized world. In the words of the settlers, “They didn’t want to work or better themselves... they were always disobedient and lazy.” Thus the healing remedies, along with the Aboriginal way of life, were treated with contempt.

As new settlers arrived, they struggled to clear the harsh native vegetation to make way for settlements and dairy farms. They cursed every Tea Tree for its hardy and persistent hold on its own natural habitat. The Tea Trees tenaciously survived drought, fire, flood, and

