

The Romani Life Society of Australia NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2008

Romani exhibit at the North QLD museum



The Romani Life Society of Australia has organised a Romani exhibit at the North QLD museum to present to the public our Romani history and culture to break down the misconceptions and stereotyping that's done to Romanies by the gadje. Also, to show the general public Romani issues like the holocaust and the prejudice and discrimination that Roma face in Europe and all over the world and to get heard here as a culture and to help stop the mystification that is happening here in Australia and elsewhere.

The Anti-stereotyping Romani exhibit in the North Queensland museum portrays the parts Romanies played in local history including jobs they did, things to do with our culture and history, the Romani holocaust, articles, maps, captions and pictures on big boards, our flag and our national anthem, Gelem Gelem. Music in Romani chib will be available to listen to plus a glass cabinet displaying Romani ornaments.

Many thanks to Professor Marcel Courthaide for helping with material. Also a thanks to Professor Ian Hancock and Lecturer Ronald Lee for helping with advice and information. A thank you to the museum director, Mr. Sim who made the exhibit possible and put it out there for the public to see and Professor Wegner for developing our display.

Also, I was invited by ABC radio North Queensland to do an interview on Roma Day about the exhibit and our Romani History and culture.









After the riots at Littleport, Camb. England in 1815, which were sparked by very low wages and the excesses of the wealthy, many people looked to Australia for a better life. Among the immigrants were Romanies who found work in butchers shops and livery stables.

The woman in this picture (circa 1912) was born in Victoria, Australia. Her grandfather was a Romani from Finland and her father worked as a curator of gardens. She lived in Queensland for some time and her grandson now lives in North Queensland with his wife and 3 children.



A Romani family camping at Nudgee Waterhole, 1937



Romanies arrived in Australia with the first fleet in 1788 from England. Very few were actually identified as Romanies as they travelled under the nationality of the country they came from. Centuries of persecution had made them very cautious and secretive about their true cultural identity. It's highly likely that this family in the photo from Queensland, which was taken around the turn of the last century, was from the Machwaya group. This group came to Australia from Serbia via Greece and travelled the country in horse drawn vans looking for seasonal work such as fruit picking, farm work, cane cutting, mining, laboring, blacksmithing, horse handling, leather work, metal work, timber mill work and tree felling.

A number of Romanies moved through north Queensland working in the cane fields, cutting trees and fossicking for gold during the gold rush on the Palmerston.



Romanichels, (English Romanies) were known for their blacksmithing skills. The photo (circa early 1900s) is of Romanichel blacksmiths working in a small country town.

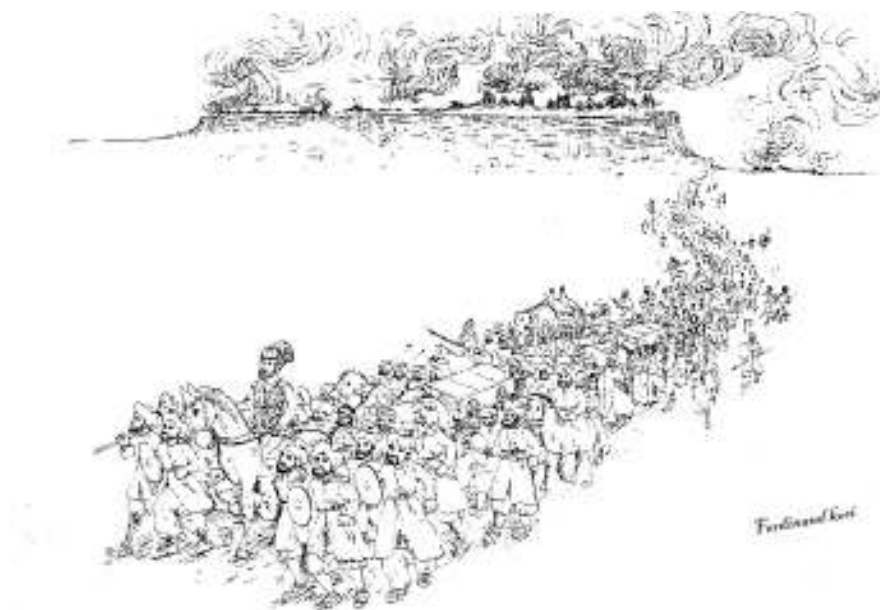


Romani History

A group of Indians numbering in the thousands were taken out of India by Mahmud of Ghazni in the early 11th century and incorporated as ethnic units, along with their camp followers, wives and families, to form contingents of Indian troops to serve in the Ghaznavid Emirate in Khurasan as ghazis and in the bodyguard of Mahmud and his successors. The existence of such troops is well documented in contemporary histories of the Ghaznavids, as is their participation in the battles in Khurasan. The theory goes on to explain that in 1040, the Ghaznavid empire was overthrown by the Seljuks and that the Indian contingency, numbering around some 60,000, were either forced to fight for the Seljuks and spearhead their advance in their raids into Armenia, or fled to Armenia to escape them. In any event, the Indians ended up in Armenia and later, in the Seljuk Sultanate of Rûm. These proto-Romanies remained in Anatolia for two to three hundred years and during that time they abandoned their military way of life and took up a nomadic lifestyle based on artisan work, trading, animal dealing and entertainment. Gradually, small groups wandered westwards across the Bosphorus to Constantinople and from there up into the Balkans to reach Central Europe by 1400, leaving local groups in all the regions they had passed through. Roma made their home in almost all countries of Europe where it has been, and still is, the failure of all of the governments of those countries to provide protection for Roma against persecution and massive discrimination by the police, local authorities and the local population that are the causes of the present conditions.

(The Romani history is based on ongoing research into recorded and factual evidence being prepared by noted Romani academics, including Professor Ian Hancock, University of Austin, Texas; Professor Marcel Courthiade, National Institute of Languages, Paris; Adrian Marsh, Greenwich University, London and Ronald Lee, Lecturer on Romani Diaspora, University of Toronto, Canada.)

(Read more on the origins of the Roma at http://www.geocities.com/romani_life_society/indexpics/HistoryOrigins.pdf)



Drawing depicting the forced exodus by Mahmud of Ghazni.
(circa early 11th century)

More Information on Romani culture and history can be found at the following:

Libraries

All state capital and north Queensland libraries have a copy of Yvonne Slee's book, Torn Away Forever and many of the north Queensland libraries also have e-book versions of Ian Hancock's, We are the Romani people.

Exhibits

There is a Romani exhibit at the North Queensland museum.

Websites

http://geocities.com/romani_life_society/

<http://rromaniconnect.org/>

<http://www.radoc.net/>

<http://www.kopachi.com/>

<http://www.voiceofroma.com/>

<http://www.imninalu.net/famousGypsies.htm>

<http://www.geocities.com/Paris/5121/patrin.htm>

<http://www.geocities.com/daveauss>

<http://www.geocities.com/romanivonnie/>



One of our international members, Tsetska Hadzhigeorgueva, (on the right) a Romani (Kalderash) from Bulgaria.