

Bondi's gypsies

Was Bondi Beach home to a gypsy camp in the late 19th century? Historian B. T. Dowd, author of *The History of the Waverley Municipal District (1859-1959)* claims that a Gypsy camp existed at Bondi from the late 19th century to the early 20th century.



A woman has her fortune told by Bondi gypsy women in the sand hills near Blair Street, Bondi c. 1899

"Here they did a thriving business, selling various kinds of goods and in telling fortunes. There appeared to be some people from Argentine and Mexico amongst them. The women wore a bright garb with much decoration in gold and silver ornamentation. Though living in tents and wagons they seemed to have plenty of money, goods and jewellery. With the party there were a number of children – very precocious – many asking if they would be allowed to read palms. The camp created a good deal of public attention while at Bondi."

But who were Bondi's Gypsies? Gypsies are usually dark-featured people, often described as being Romanies, or of Romany descent who traditionally live by seasonal work and fortune telling and are found across the world.

Dowd also describes the Gypsies as being 'Greek' while another early historian, Major W. Johnston, describes the Gypsies as 'Spanish', they could also be early Lebanese hawkers who were a common sight in the streets of Sydney at this time. Or, they could really be Romany Gypsies – a romantic tale indeed.

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Gypsy children late 19th century, Bondi