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# Paluma

THE FIRST EIGHTY YEARS  
1870s – 1950s

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**PALUMA**  
*The First Eighty Years*  
*1870s-1950s*

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Thuringowa City Council 2001

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Cover photograph: Pay day, Mt Spec Road, after the Christmas payroll hold up.  
Wilfred Hector McCelland from the Paluma Collection. Thuringowa Heritage Services

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is not the definitive history of Paluma; I have limited my retelling of the story of the Mt Spec-Paluma area from first European exploration to the 1950s.

The opportunity to gather this slice of history into one publication was initiated by a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency with support from Gai Copeman, Thuringowa's Heritage Services Officer, who provided back up and extra research from the State Archives, and Ray Berry who drew the map the City of Thuringowa.

The history is well illustrated with photographs from the Paluma Progress Association and my own collection.

I am indebted to those who have freely shared their stories of Paluma with me over the last twenty years.

I hope my retelling portrays the Paluma they recalled, and I acknowledge that many stories remain to be told.



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## FORWARD

It is important for all communities, large and small, to retain a sense of history. That is why the Thuringowa City Council has encouraged local collections of oral and written records which chart the development of our region.

Old letters and diaries, official documents and the memories of early settlers and their descendants bring life and colour, as well a sense of community to places such as Paluma.

Paluma must rate as one of the most attractive locations in Thuringowa, nestled in a rainforest environment on the peak of a scenic coastal range. It is one of my favourite places.

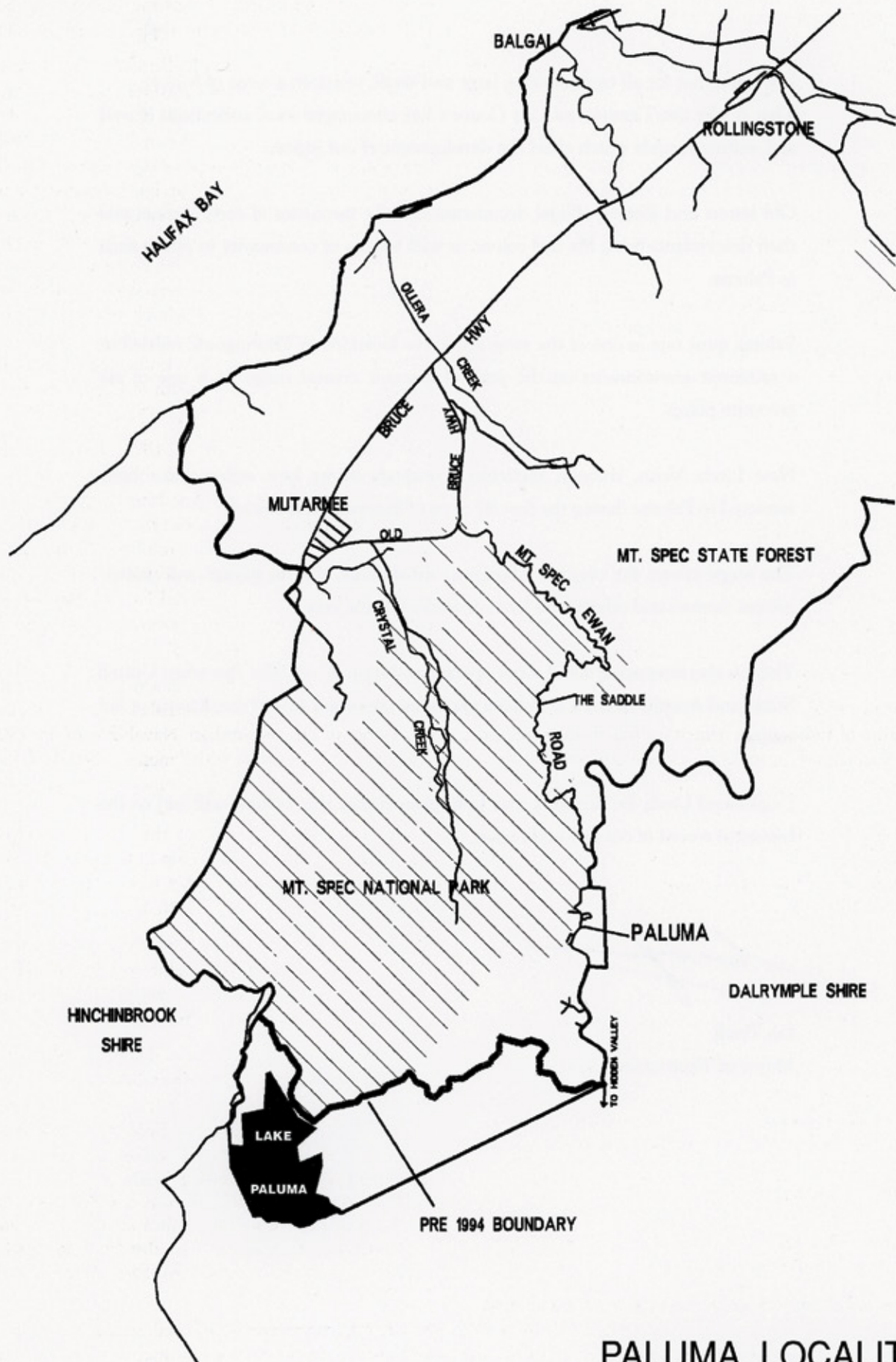
Now Linda Venn, through meticulous research shows how others have been attracted to Paluma during the first 80 years of European settlement.

The scope covers the original Aboriginal inhabitants, the tin miners and timber-getters, farmers and others who lived or worked in the area.

There is also interesting detail about operations during World War Two when United States and Australian units at Paluma played an important role in the defence of our nation.

I commend Linda for her work and I am pleased that this volume will add to the historical record of our city and region.

Les Tyrell  
Mayor of Thuringowa.



## Thuringowa Geographic Information Services

## PHYSICAL LOCATION

The Mt Spec- Paluma area sits astride the boundaries of Thuringowa City and the Dalrymple and Hinchinbrook Shires. Today's Paluma township, in an area originally called *Cloudy Clearing*, is wholly within the boundaries of Thuringowa City and has been unaffected by the changes that reduced the area of Thuringowa over time. (Vance & Copeman 1997, pp. 5-16) The Paluma Range, an offshoot of the Seaview Range, forms the north-western boundary of Thuringowa City. Crystal Creek, just to the north of Paluma, is Thuringowa's northern boundary. The coastal plain at this point is only about five kilometres wide. The proximity of Paluma Range to the sea results in the Mt Spec-Paluma area receiving much heavier rainfall than the rest of Thuringowa. (Vance & Copeman 1997, p.5).

Land at the foot of the range was first taken up as pastoral leases, then small crops (particularly pineapples and sugar cane) flourished as transport improved. By the time miners were moving east into the Paluma Range from Charters Towers and Ravenswood, the coastal plain below was dotted with settlers as far north as Crystal Creek. (Vance & Copeman 1997 p.14)

## PLACENAMES

Few aboriginal placenames remain to commemorate the presence of *Paluma's* original inhabitants. The local aboriginal name for the range (Nawagi linguistic group) is 'Munan Gumburu' or 'Misty Mountain'. **Gumburu** is the name now given to the Catholic Environmental Education Centre that opened in *Paluma* in 1994. (Gumburu Environmental Education Centre Handbook 2000, p.4)

The ***Paluma Shoals*** in Halifax Bay, the ***Paluma Range*** and the township of Paluma are named for the HMS (sometimes HMQS) *Paluma*, a Queensland colonial government survey ship that worked along the North Queensland coast in the 1880s and 1890s. Four vessels have borne the name Paluma. The link between the ships and Paluma continues today, almost 120 years on. The naval crew of the fourth HMAS *Paluma*, a purpose-built survey vessel, was given freedom of the City of Thuringowa in a weekend of celebrations in October 1989. Their maiden posting was to Cairns, from where *Paluma* continued the work begun by her namesake over 100 years ago.

The original *Paluma* and her sister ship *Gayundah* were 400 h.p. steel gunboats built "at Armstrong's famous yard" (Daily Telegraph 23 January 1889) in Newcastle on Tyne in 1884 at a cost of 27 750 pounds each. (Pixley 1946, p. 672;; Feakes 1951, p.75; Australasian Maritime Historical Society 26 September 1984, Personal Communication) Pixley gives the specifications of the gunboats as:

Length	120 feet
Beam	26 feet
Draught	9.5 feet
Displacement	360 tons (1946, p. 678)

For their size, *Paluma* and *Gayundah* were heavily armed, with six guns mounted and provision for two more. (Pixley 1946, p. 678) In recognition of their firepower, *Paluma* and *Gayundah* were said to be Aboriginal words for *thunder* and *lightning* respectively, though the language from which this originates is not recorded. (Feakes 1951, p.75) Their coal carrying capacity was 75 tons, giving each a steaming range of 700 to 800 miles. *Gayundah* was launched on 13 May 1884, *Paluma* a few days later. Following sea trials in September 1884, both sailed for Brisbane. (Pixley 1946, pp. 678-679)

By the time *Paluma* arrived in Brisbane on 7 May 1885, the threat of invasion had diminished following the signing of an agreement between England and Russia only the day before. (Australasian Maritime Historical Society 26 September 1984, Personal Communication; Sunday Mail Magazine 24 November 1968) *Gayundah* remained fitted out as a gunboat, but *Paluma* was immediately converted to a coastal survey vessel. A deck-house replaced the 6-inch gun on the quarter deck, and a work room replaced the 8-inch gun. (Pixley 1946, p. 679) *Paluma* commenced survey work with the Royal Navy in June 1885, based in Townsville. Over the next ten years until March 1895 when she reverted to the Queensland Government, *Paluma* made a valuable contribution to maritime knowledge, working from Townsville among the reefs north to Cape York and south to Whitsunday Island. (Lack 1959, p. 137; Pixley 1946, p.715)

On a refitting trip south in 1893, *Paluma* endured the indignity of being flung up into the grounds of the Botanic Gardens during a cyclone that caused great loss of life and property in Brisbane. (Armitage 1972, pp. 62-63) The price to refloat her was considerable, resulting in the Premier, Sir Thomas Griffith, delaying his decision. Before a canal could be dug, a second flood refloated *Paluma* and she was towed back to her moorings by the government steamer *Advance*. (Feakes 1951, p.75; Pixley 1946, p. 715)

Following Federation, the twin-screw gunboats *Paluma* and *Gayundah* were part of Queensland's contribution to the formation of the Australian Naval Forces in 1901. The gunboats were refitted with "modern 5-inch B.L. and 4.7 B.L.Q.F. guns under the supervision of Lieutenant-Commander J.A.H. Beresford, C.N.F." (Feakes 1951, p. 106) In 1911, both were still part of the Royal Australian Navy. *Gayundah* served as a patrol ship in the First World War, but was converted to a gravel barge soon after, and was working along the Brisbane River in 1946. (Pixley 1946, p.718)

She finished her days as a hulk on the foreshores of Redcliffe. *Paluma* also had a less-than-noble end, being broken up and sold for scrap in the mid-1950s after working for many years in the Port of Melbourne as the lighthouse tender S.S. Rip.

Other local placenames have developed during *Paluma's* recorded history. There are several theories for the origin of the name Mount Spec, as the district surrounding *Paluma* has always been known. In the Benham family history *Our Benham Children*, Ilma Dance (one of Jesse's children), claims the naming of Mt Spec for the Benhams

We always understood the brothers named Mt Spec. There were two mountains which they called Mt Certainty and Mt Spec (speculation?). As it turned out, they found no payable tin at Mt Certainty, but had success at Mt Spec. (in *Our Benham Children* 1986, p.87)

Mrs Allingham of 'Muralambeen', near Ingham, gave Arthur Benham credit for the peak's discovery and naming after a good 'spec' (speculation) of tin. Townsville jeweller Mr J Anderson said the mountain was named for a packer's lead horse 'Old Speck' that worked the area bringing in supplies. (May 1961, p.1) As the pack team arrived, its white blaze could be seen through the forest. Ingham resident FA Rankin, the owner of the horse, was supposed to be responsible for the naming of MT SPEC - being called after the name of his favourite horse 'SPEC', which faithful animal used to carry him to and fro during the old Tin Mining Days. (Royal Commission on the Development of North Queensland 1931, QSA A/6419)

More likely the peak was named during the late 1880s by the hydrographers on HMS *Paluma* after a Cleveland Bay lighter (size unknown), called *Spec*. Before the construction of Townsville harbour, larger vessels anchored in the lee of Magnetic Island. Goods and passengers were ferried up to Ross Creek wharves by lighters the *Wonder*, the *Rose*, and the *Spec*. HMS *Paluma* used Townsville in the late 1880s and 1890s as a base for her marine surveying operations, so it is possible this *Spec* delivered supplies to the gunboat anchored in Cleveland Bay. (Townsville Bulletin, 4 May 1996) Unfortunately, *Paluma*'s logs have not been located to settle this.

Another maritime contender is the local coastal trading brig *The Spec*. Sydney May (1961, p.2) was convinced the commander of the *Paluma* would have been familiar with this ship *The Spec* and had named the peak after it. *The Spec* in question was the second Robert Towns had owned, the first being sold in 1844. *The Spec* worked the Pacific trade from the 1850s.<sup>1</sup> May was given details by the State Library of Victoria of arrivals

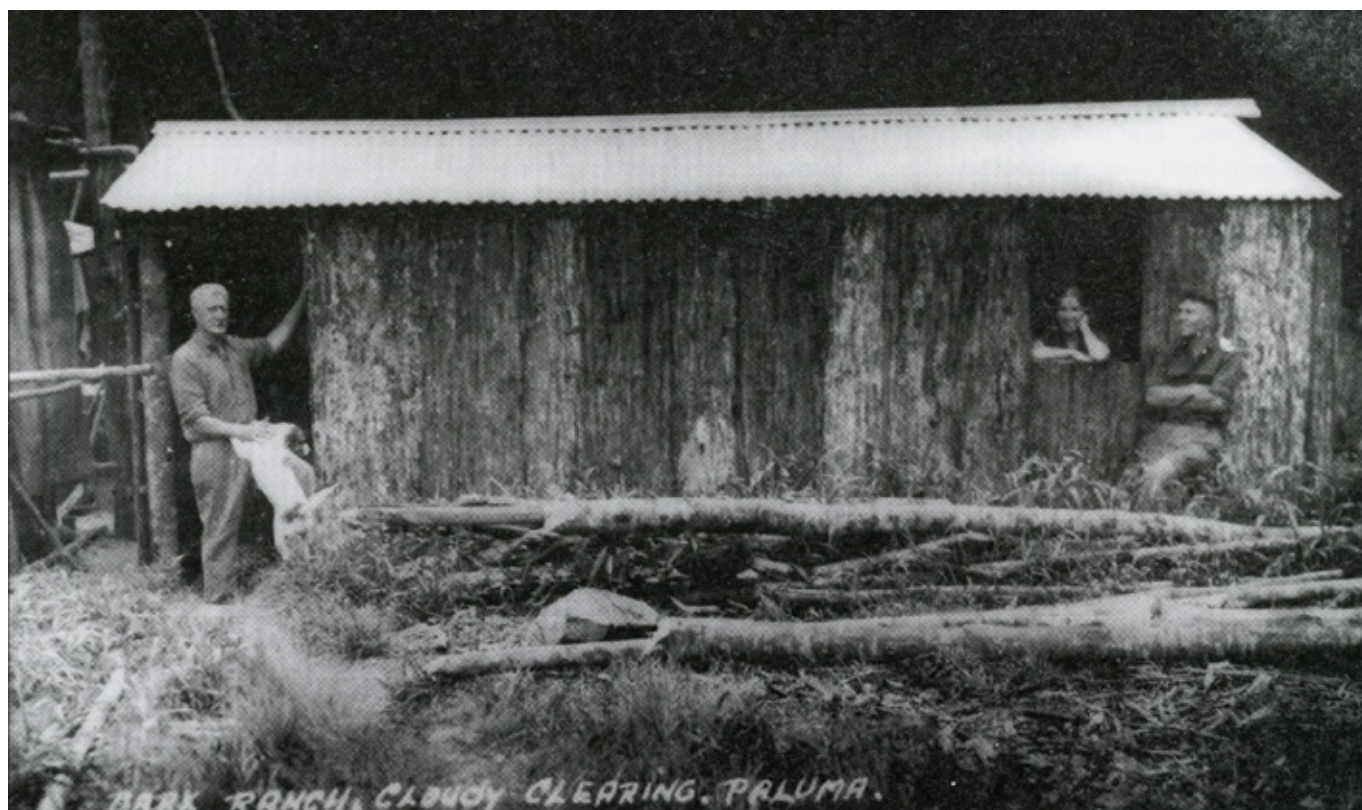
<sup>1</sup> May (in Burla p.2) mentions two ships as recorded in the 1910-1911 Register of Australian and New Zealand Shipping - the *Spec*, a 9hp steamship built in Port Adelaide in 1876, and the timber hulled, schooner rigged *Speck*, built on the Clyde River, NSW in 1867. Given her work as a tender vessel in the harbour, the former *Spec* is more likely to have been the vessel in question.

and departures of *The Spec* on her voyages up the east coast between Sydney and New Caledonia. "R. Towns and Co" were given as the agents for all the voyages. It is possible that the brig *The Spec* was involved in Towns' notorious 'black-birding' trips to the South Sea Islands, bringing back 'kanakas' to work on the sugar plantations. Local historian Keith Kennedy wrote

Then the play of "Bobbie" Towns, of Sydney, was still mightily in the south seas... Bluff bowed old wave punchers like *The Spec*, the *Lady Alice* and *E.R. Bateson* plunge their clumsy hulls into the rolling swell of the mid-Pacific, carrying their loads, of knives, axes, guns, bad rum and good tobacco... (May 1961, p.3)

It is certainly possible that Mt Spec was named after a local vessel (or a 'speculation' on mining potential, or even a pack-horse).

F.H. Brazier, former Townsville City Engineer and keen historian, wrote to Sydney May that Cloudy Clearing, the original name for the *Paluma* township area, was given because "no trees grew in the vicinity and it was clear of clouds". (May 1961, p.1) In my experience, Cloudy Clearing was so-called because it is very often cloudy. At almost one thousand metres (3000 feet) above sea level, cloud often settles along the range tops, with afternoon mists common.



17 April 1938 Cloudy Clearing (*Paluma*). Arthur Benham with Darcy and Winifred Benham (nee Houston) at Arthur 's bark ranch.

W J Laurie , Venn Collection



Many local placenames in the area commemorate members of the Benham family who were among the first Europeans around Mt Spec. Mt Benham is in the Paluma Range near Mt Spec. Benham's Lookout (a scenic lookout near Witts Lookout in the Mt Spec National Park) was unfortunately closed by the Department of Environment in 1999.

Benham's Creek runs to the north of Paluma behind the Recreation Reserve and forms the southern boundary of Mt Spec National Park. This creek was originally called Ethel Creek by the Benham brothers. Later, a surveyor erroneously gave the name Ethel Creek to a larger stream that joins Benham's Creek further north. An official decision was made in 1939 to rename the original Ethel Creek as Benham's Creek. (Unsigned Report dated 19 January 1939, p.5) Today's Ethel Creek and Ethel Creek Falls are behind the acreages to the west of Paluma and are only accessible through private property. Cloudy Creek was originally given as on the headwaters of the Star, possibly in the vicinity of today's Bluegum Creek. Cloudy Creek today is a small creek on the other side of the divide that flows into Big Crystal Creek. Prospector's Creek is now called Hermit Creek because of confusion with another creek of the same name elsewhere. Benhams' tin-mining camp near Mt Spec appears on today's maps as Hermitville. Benham's Track from Cloudy Clearing to Hidden Valley via the present site of the Paluma Dam is a four-wheel drive road trafficable for part of its distance only under Forestry permit. When the Paluma Dam was constructed in the 1960s, Benham's Track (and the part of it that had been widened by the Gorrings brothers into a wagon road) was used as the basis for access to the Swamp Creek dam site. The current road to the Paluma Dam still follows Arthur's track. An exercise held for army reservists around the Dam in 1966 discovered a sixty-foot waterfall, which was named Benham Falls in Arthur's honour by Captain Bob Burla of Ingham.

More recently, McClelland's Lookout was named after the Main Roads Commission officer-in-charge, W H McClelland, who supervised the construction of the Mt Spec Tourist Road. This area is a popular picnic spot in Mt Spec National Park near Paluma.



*Late 1930s Paluma. Arthur Benham and the Cavills at Cavill's shed, before the "Cavilcade" Guesthouse was built.*

Coulthard, Venn Collection



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## ‘EARLY TRACKS’ - *into the ranges*

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The first peoples to climb the Seaview Range and its offshoot the Paluma Range were local Aboriginal groups. In her 1977 James Cook University PhD Thesis (later published in 1990), Helen Brayshaw provides the most detailed information on the area’s original inhabitants. Much has to be generalised from her conclusions on the Herbert/Burdekin district, as little information refers to the Mt Spec-Paluma area specifically. There are no reports of Aboriginal occupation of the Seaview Range, or its offshoot the Paluma Range, in the ethnographic literature Brayshaw surveyed and the only reported material culture nearby is rock art at Crystal Creek in the coastal foothills. The lack of evidence specific to the ranges forces an unavoidable reliance on Brayshaw’s conclusions for the wider Herbert-Burdekin region.

To the turn of the nineteenth century, none of the exploratory expeditions passed any closer to the Paluma Range than the Palm Islands. Cook mentioned some people and canoes near the Palm Islands. King visited Cape Cleveland, the Palm Islands and Gould Island north of Hinchinbrook Island, making some useful observations but not of this locality. Wickham and Stokes’ observations of Cleveland and Halifax Bays were disappointing compared with the amount of time they spent there. Leichhardt travelled up the Suttor and Burdekin Rivers to the west of the Paluma Range through drier and more open country. The Gregory brothers retraced Leichhardt in the opposite direction, but moved so quickly that any observations were only fleeting glances. Dalrymple crossed the coastal range from Rockingham Bay to the Valley of Lagoons, but provides little information on the inhabitants of the time. Jukes, a naturalist on the Fly, visited Cape Cleveland, Hinchinbrook and Gould Islands, recording a little more information. Carron’s information on Rockingham Bay and the Cardwell Range was useful for comparison with similar topographical areas within the Herbert/Burdekin district, being peripheral to Brayshaw’s study area. (Brayshaw 1977, pp. 38-41, 44, 349-350)

Later records are also deficient, not only in references to the Paluma Range area, but to the Herbert/Burdekin district generally (Brayshaw 1977, pp. 47-50). Lumholtz provides the most complete record, being a trained observer who spent ten months on the Herbert River in 1882-1883. He extended his observations beyond the obvious to include “social relationships, attitudes, the role of women, and details of day to day existence” (Brayshaw 1977, p. 45). W.E. Roth, Northern Protector of Aborigines from 1897 to 1905, is an excellent source for information about North Queensland’s indigenous peoples but only occasionally refers to the Herbert/Burdekin region. (Brayshaw 1977, p. 46). Roth’s information must be inferred to apply to areas of similar geography, as direct evidence is missing. Other literature sources must be approached with caution; for example, Hives’ and Robertson’s reminiscences were written long after some events took place, and Curr’s information was collected by questionnaire.<sup>2</sup>

Contemporary references provide population estimates in only a few cases, and none for the Paluma Range. Geographically, the nearest population estimates were for Palm Island (at least 200 in 1875), Halifax Bay (500 at the time of the first European settlement), the lower Herbert River (up to 250, at a time when European contact was already taking its toll) and the ranges about the Herbert River (90 maximum in 1887-88). (Cassady 1886, in Curr 1938, p. 424; Lumholtz 1890, p. 182; Hives 1930, p.73) Lumholtz estimated 250 people occupied an area of 3100 square kilometres around the Herbert River. Lumholtz’ low estimate may have been caused by a reduction in the original population by the time he visited. The low figures may also reflect a genuinely lower population density in “very rough and mountainous” topography that perhaps offered “little in the way of subsistence”, a possibility suggested by Meston’s 1889 observations of habitation of the Bellenden Ker Range. (Meston 1889 in Brayshaw 1977, p. 66) Despite the lack of specific local evidence, it is reasonable to assume that the Paluma Range with its high rainfall supported a substantial Aboriginal population. Brayshaw calculated the population density of nearby Halifax Bay using Cassady’s figures, producing a density of one person to 3.84 square kilometres and 6.25 persons to each kilometre of coast. (1977, p.65)

The lack of material culture remaining today to commemorate Aboriginal occupation of the forests surrounding Paluma may have several causes. Within the Herbert/ Burdekin district, the coastal ranges in the vicinity of Paluma appear to have been a boundary not only of linguistic groups, but of general cultural associations. (Brayshaw 1977, pp. 170-171) Aboriginal groups to the south and south-west of Paluma were associated with the culture extending to the Carnarvon Ranges. Groups north of the Herbert River were more closely associated with the rainforest Aborigines. The area between the Herbert River and Townsville shows some features of both groups, as a continuum between the two cultural types. As an example, there is an overlap in the Townsville region of two distinctly different types of shields - the larger decorated type from the rainforest and the smaller club shield of the inland and south-east coast of the Herbert/ Burdekin district. (Brayshaw 1977, pp. 167-168) A similar diversity is found within the rock art sites found within a thirty kilometre radius of Crystal Creek. The five sites belonged to three different language groups - Crystal Creek was Nawagi, as was Jourama. Hidden Valley was Wulgurukaba, while Deception Creek and Thunderbolt Creek were Gudjal. (Brayshaw, 1977 pp. 360, 565-567) The lack of a dominant cultural influence may have limited the examples of material culture recorded.

It is also possible that the rainforests of the ranges were not permanently occupied. Linguistic groups may have lived mostly on the nearby coastal plains or western slopes in more open forest and only visited the scrub-covered ranges. A comparison of the rock art sites shows all are in either open forest or open woodland. Art sites found within the rainforest are unusual within the Herbert-Burdekin district. Of fifty-three rock art sites at thirty-two locations within the Herbert-Burdekin, Brayshaw records only five sites within closed forest. (1977, pp. 565-567) The only known rock art sites near Paluma are paintings on granite

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<sup>2</sup> Brayshaw gives the bibliographic references for Hives (1930) as *The Journal of a Jackaroo*, Robertson (1928) *Coo-ee Talks* and E.M. Curr (1938) *The Australian Race*.

in open forest at Big Crystal Creek at the foot of the range. The thirty-eight drawings there are all red, and are mostly linear. Only one of the five separate sites at Crystal Creek has solid drawings. Crystal Creek art included stencilling, and shield-like figures. Only two sites showed any surface signs of occupation. (Brayshaw 1977, pp. 573, 585)

Another possibility is that remaining material culture evidence has deteriorated over time. Paluma's high rainfall would not be conducive to the preservation of artefacts or paintings. This area is within a high rainfall belt. Mean annual rainfall at Crystal Creek is 1000-1500mm, while Paluma's annual rainfall is more than 1000mm greater.<sup>3</sup> Thick scrub covers the valleys where a myriad of creeks fall either towards the Coral Sea or the Burdekin River, cutting their way through pink granite. A more extensive art record may have survived the rainfall and humidity had engravings been made as well as paintings, but Brayshaw found none within the Herbert/ Burdekin. As well, more than seventy percent of the material culture items Brayshaw identified as collected from the Herbert/ Burdekin were made of perishable materials and more use was made of perishable materials by groups on the coast than inland. (1977, p. 194) Perhaps the available evidence of indigenous occupation was lost to the climate.

Finally, it is possible that artefacts await discovery, as the topography is rugged and the forest floor covered with thick leaf litter. Much of the Mt Spec-Paluma area, now within the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, is still relatively inaccessible. However, the possibility of locating items still in the field today in such an area must be slight.



*Mid 1930s Mutamee. Jack Hood supplied fresh fruit and vegetables from his farm at the foot of Mt Leach to the construction camps on Mt Spec Road.*

SB Davies. Venn Collection

Palmerston and Dalrymple, in their experiences with the rainforest peoples farther north, recorded the Aboriginal system of footpaths and camp clearings throughout the forest.

Although the Aborigines had paths enabling them to move through the forests of the ranges, the permanent huts noted by Carron and Dalrymple were all in lowland rainforest. (Dalrymple, 1865; Carron, 1849) Arthur Benham is widely credited with having cleared 'Cloudy Clearing' (Paluma). (Herbert River Express 20 November 1982) To set up his camp in Cloudy Clearing further clearing may have been necessary, but it is possible that the Benhams were simply improving upon an Aboriginal campsite.

*Our Benham Children* (Digweed & Hammond 1986) is a collated history of the Benham family. Although members of this family were among the first Europeans in the Mt Spec-Paluma area, this detailed record contains few oral history reports of contact with local Aboriginal peoples. Edwin Benham's story records how:

they [the Benhams] would try to avoid the aboriginals in the area rather than face the possibility of an attack. On one occasion Edwin and Arthur had been caught out in a storm and had come across an aboriginal camp. The men were all out hunting, and the women took pity on the two brothers, inviting them into the camp, and giving them a hot drink. The hunters returned unexpectedly, and Edwin and Arthur were hidden by the women. The next morning when the men left their camp, the women helped the two men out of hiding, and they left very quickly. (p. 133)

Not all contact was friendly. Jesse's son, Frank Benham, wrote: On another occasion he [Jesse] told of his escape from death at the hands of Fat Tommy, an aboriginal. Supplies were running low. Dad was elected to go into Ingham for more. He was up before daybreak, and set out at first light carrying his rifle at the ready as he hoped to shoot a scrub turkey or two. He was listening intently for any movement in the scrub, and so heard a movement behind him. He swung around to face Fat Tommy, with his tomahawk raised. He marched him back to camp and after some argument as to what they should with him, Dad persuaded them to let him go with a warning. They had no further trouble with him. (p.86)

Pappin's Miner's Rest Hotel at the foot of Jacobsen's Track reputedly had rifle slits in the walls as a precaution against attack, but the widow of 'Bullocky Tom' Andrews used subterfuge to quell unrest:

Mrs Andrews would tell how on one afternoon at Big Saltwater, the marys (lubras) working for her, were restless and she felt there was trouble in the air. Mrs Andrews told one of the lubras to make up a bed on the verandah. Of course the black woman was curious and Mrs Andrews told her it was for the Inspector of Police coming along later who was to stay the night. This inspector had a reputation with the blacks of being very tough. As soon as the lubra could manage, she got down to the black's camp and told them. Mrs Andrews never heard what happened to the aboriginal who was doing all the threatening, but as all were very frightened of the inspector, the aboriginal was never heard of again. (Mutamee State School Golden Jubilee October 1973, p.18)

There is no record of conflict in the immediate area around Mt Spec-Paluma. (Herbert River Express 20 November 1982) The closest and most serious recorded incident was at Kangaroo Hills, and is more the result of an argument over a disputed contractual arrangement than the direct result of cultural conflict. The *Queenslander* (5 November 1892) reported that the body of miner James Hewson had been found at Kangaroo Hills. Hewson had been mining silver and tired of it, deciding to move camp to the tinfields. He had engaged two aboriginal "boys" to carry his swag and kit, agreeing to pay them on arrival. When they asked for their payment he refused, and was murdered with tomahawks. Though "known to police", the two were successful in avoiding arrest. These men may not have been local as no mention is made of their origin.

<sup>3</sup> Paluma's mean annual rainfall to the end of 1988 was 2643mm.

The earliest European accesses to the present site of Paluma probably followed Aboriginal paths for at least some of their lengths. R L (Bob) Shepherd, wrote a series of articles in the *Herbert River Express* in the 1980s on the history of Mt Spec-Paluma. Shepherd listed nine main tracks in the Herbert district, with six of those providing direct access to Mt Spec. Following spurs and ridges wherever possible, the pack horse tracks were still distinguishable in the 1980s from more recent logging ('snig') tracks by the hoof marks on the buttress roots. The tracks mentioned by Shepherd were

- » *Jacobson's* (Jacobsen's) *Track* - provided access from Ingham to the mining town of Ewan. It passed near Mount Jacobson to Hidden Valley and was the earliest of the Mt Spec tracks and the one most used.
- » *Bullocky Tom's Track* - blazed by 'Bullocky Tom' Andrews, it connected Mt Spec with the coast at Mutarnee and followed the southern slopes of Mt Leach.
- » *Foxlee's Track* - also connected Mt Spec with Mutarnee but followed the northern slopes of Mt Leach.
- » *Bambaroo Track* - connected Benham's Track near Shay's House [guesthouse] with Bambaroo.
- » *Benham's Track* - eventually connected Hidden Valley with the coast, passing near Mt Spec and on to Cloudy Clearing (Paluma) with later connection made to the coast at Moongobulla (Ollera Creek).
- » *Gillis' Track* - provided access from the Star River Basin to Hidden Valley, where it connected with either Benham's or Jacobsen's tracks to the coast. (*Herbert River Express* 18 November 1982)



1909 Red Hill Battery, Mt Spec. Mr and Mrs Frank Fraser and child at the Red Hill Battery. Fraser had offered to build a road to Mt Spec from Ingham in the early 1900s. Ilford Studio Ingham, Thuringowa Collection

After Jacobsen's Track, Bullocky Tom's Track was the most-used pack-track up the coastal escarpment. It was named by Tom Andrews whose property was at the junction of Big and Little Saltwater (now Crystal) Creeks, Mutarnee. Andrews butchered and packed fresh meat and supplies to the tin-miners working around Mt Spec and Hidden Valley.

Bob Brown told the author that Jesse and Arthur Benham were of the opinion that this track had been shown to Andrews by an Aboriginal boy, and had almost certainly been used as "an escape route" for one "tribe" to get away from another. (28 July 1984, Interview) The Crystal Creek rock art sites recorded by Brayshaw are behind the Andrews' property. Bullocky Tom's Track ran from Big Crystal Creek up the ridges to Mt Spec and existed in April 1984 as an unmarked walking trail within Mt

Spec National Park. Bullocky Tom planted the mango trees along the track at a location now shown on maps as the 'Mango Tree'. Two orange trees mark his grave on Mt Ruth, a small hill half a mile from Mutarnee, and the small creek bordering the Andrews property is now called Bullocky Tom's Creek after this early settler. (*Mutarnee State School Golden Jubilee* 1973, p.18)

Henry Bell also had a butchery and store near Moongobulla in the 1890s. Miners would place orders with him when they had sufficient tin to cover costs, and Henry's sons would deliver the stores with packhorse teams. The tracks Bell used are not recorded, but are likely to have been up the ridges in the vicinity of today's range road. Bell's store was resupplied by a charter boat which came up Ollera Creek from Townsville to a landing to unload stores and backload tin. (*Herbert River Express* 20 November 1982)

Foxlee's Track was marked by Philip Foxlee, tin-miner and packer, who blazed his own trail from Mutarnee to Mt Spec on the northern side of Mt Leach as he and Andrews were not on the best of terms. A natural lookout near the top of Foxlee's Track offers a magnificent panoramic view of the wilderness and still bears his name on today's maps. Foxlee's Track proved too steep and arduous, and the lower section beyond the lookout was not obvious in 1984.

The first portion of Benham's Track was cut from Hidden Valley into Mt Spec in the 1890s. The next section connected Mt Spec with the Benham brothers' mining activities in Cloudy Clearing. A section of this was further improved to wagon road standard by the Gorringer brothers. This was one of few roads of that standard through the local rainforest. (*Herbert River Express* 20 November 1982) Arthur Benham is also credited with blazing a track from Cloudy Clearing down to the coast, connecting with Bullocky Tom's Track at the 'Mango Tree'. Shepherd (*Herbert River Express* 20 November 1982) gave the location of the 'Mango Tree' as being on the present range road to Paluma, but the 'Mango Tree' is shown on a 1977 Parish map as being on Bullocky Tom's Track at the junction of Big Crystal Creek and Nolan's Gully. This map also shows a track connecting the 'Mango Tree' with 'The Saddle' on the range road above the Little Crystal Creek bridge. (Department of Mapping & Surveying January 1977, Parish of Waterview Map)

These historically significant tracks are increasingly difficult (perhaps already impossible) to locate 'on the ground'. While some still exist as dotted lines on various maps, there appears to be little official interest in mapping or marking them. The tracks around Mt Spec-Paluma, used 120 years ago by European pioneers who borrowed them from local Aboriginal groups, are today overgrown and in danger of disappearing altogether.

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## ‘A GOOD SPEC’ - the Tin-Miners

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As *HMS Paluma* was exploring the waters of Halifax and Rockingham Bays, members of the Benham family were exploring the rainforest around Mt Spec. The Benham family can lay claim to being the European ‘pioneers’ of the Mt Spec-Paluma area. George and Sarah Benham of the English garrison city of Winchester, had fifteen children. George and eleven of his children migrated to Australia between 188 and 1900. Fred, Emily and Arthur Benham arrived in Townsville on the *Hereford* on 25 August 1883. Jesse arrived in Townsville in December 1884 on the *Roma*. George (Junior) arrived in Brisbane in April 1885 on the *SS Merkara*, followed by his father George, brother Edwin and sister Sara in March 1886 on the *SS Dacca*. Edith, Marion and Ethel arrived in Brisbane on 4 March 1889 on the *SS Jumna*. The youngest son, Henry, jumped ship as a merchant seaman in Brisbane about 1900. Of the eleven Benham children in Australia, at least six spent time at Mt Spec-Paluma over seven decades from the 1880s to the 1950s. (Digweed & Hammond 1986, pp. 5,7,11,16)

Fred, Arthur and Edwin discovered tin in the Mt Spec area in 1889. (Digweed & Hammond 1986, pp. 11,21) As well as being a miner, Fred and his wife Annie were storekeepers at Cloudy Clearing (Paluma) and Prospector’s Creek (near Mt Spec). (North Queensland Register 12 January 1980; Digweed & Hammond 1986) Members of the Benham family held mining claims and leases from September 1892, the date of Fred’s first recorded mining lease, the *Lady Susan Starkey* mine near Bosworth’s Hotel between Hidden Valley and Mt Spec. The last Benham lease was sold in 1945 when Arthur sold his lease “for the whole of Paluma” to Townsville businessman J C Butler. (Digweed & Hammond 1986, pp. 23,104; Department of Mines Transfer Certificate Alluvial Tin Claim No. 12831) The cancellation of Arthur’s lease was urgently requested in 1939 to allow further subdivision of the new township, including setting aside 100 acres for a golf course. (Unsigned Report dated 19 January 1939, pp. 3-4) Despite cessation of mining in Cloudy Clearing, plans for the golf course never went ahead.

Of the Benhams around Mt Spec, the most well known is Arthur (“Possum”) Benham. Arthur lived for sixty-five years in the Mt Spec-Paluma area, many in “the famous bark hut” in Cloudy Clearing that he made from ironbark trees he cut at Running River. (Australasian Post 8 February 1962, p.25) Following their discovery of alluvial tin at the headwaters of the Star River, Arthur and Fred formed a camp at Cloudy Creek and called it Cloudy Clearing. Arthur had registered interests in at least thirteen claims and leases. His photo appears in many articles on local tourism and history. Arthur is remembered as something of a character, having once cleared the bar of the Hidden Valley Hotel by riding his horse through it. (Digweed & Hammond 1986, p.104) Of all the Benham family members who passed through the Mt Spec-Paluma area, Arthur and his brother Edwin never married. They spent their whole lives living as bushmen and miners, although in the 1902 Post Office directory both gave their occupations as “Farmer, Hidden Valley” (Digweed & Hammond 1986, p. 134)

Sisters Emily and Ethel also lived in bark huts in Cloudy Clearing. Nearby Benham’s Creek was first named Ethel Creek at the time Ethel, while only sixteen, assisted Emily with the birth of her daughter, Ethel Dyer at Cloudy Creek Tin Mine, Cloudy Clearing.

Ethel later moved to Brisbane, returning to Cloudy Clearing to recuperate for several months from a serious illness.

Jesse’s name features in the mining records of seven claims and four leases at either Hermitville (Mt Spec), Running River or Ewan. Jesse and his new wife, Margaret Reid, settled in Ewan in 1904. Their newly built bark hut had an iron roof - the first in the district. Jesse eventually became a cane farmer, but took his older children on a camping trip through Mt Spec and Hidden Valley in 1922, following the original paths and tracks. At the time, Arthur and Edwin were working on an alluvial tin claim at Prospector’s Creek. Jesse also spent eighteen months at Mt Spec on his retirement in 1941. (Digweed & Hammond 1986, pp.83-85)

The Mt Spec-Paluma area fell mostly within the Kangaroo Hills and Star River Mineral Fields. (Annual Report of the Department of Mines 1913, Sketch Map) These fields were mined for gold, silver, copper, lead, iron, molybdenite, tin, tungsten (wolfram), bismuth and manganese but the latter four minerals are the most significant in Mt Spec-Paluma history, especially tin. (Ingham Rotary Club 1947, Pamphlet) The geology of the Kangaroo Hills Field is of altered sedimentary rocks and younger granite. (Cameron 1901, pp. 2-3) R L Jack in his 1892 report wrote:

The whole of these rocks are highly inclined, frequently vertical, and so much broken up by faults, that it is impossible to trace any individual bed for more than a few chains. (in Cameron 1901, p.3)

The granite “is perfectly normal in character, being composed for the most part of pink or white orthoclase with quartz and biotite mica”. (Cameron 1901, p.3) The granite is highly intrusive into the older sedimentary rocks, and examples of this can be seen along creeks in the area.

Total tin production for the Kangaroo Hills Mineral Field from 1885 to 1962 is estimated at 8 281 tons, of which about 4 675 tons came from lode mining. (Bureau of Mineral Resources 1965, p. 22) Early tin production was mainly from alluvial deposits, including deep leads of tin in the form of cassiterite. Lode mining only came to the fore after 1914. The tin lodes were typically small rich shallow lenses and pipes, rarely persisting to depths of more than 70 feet, and generally associated with pink leucocratic biotite granite. The lodes are controlled by steep, mostly east and north-east trending joints and fissures. Although the majority of the mines are within granite, the most important lodes are in altered sedimentary rocks. (Bureau of Mineral Resources 1965, pp. 21-22)

After the easier, richer alluvial deposits were mined out, prospectors turned to tin-bearing gravels found capping the ridges. Of these, the deeper gravels were richer. Extraction was by way of sluicing, sometimes “hampered by lack of sufficient water”. (Bureau of Mineral Resources 1965, p. 21)

The movement of miners into the Mt Spec-Paluma area is part of the early history of mining in North Queensland. Following a reward being offered for the first discovery of gold in Townsville’s hinterland, several claims of success were made in late 1865. ‘Star River’ Station overseer James Gibson claimed part of the reward in January 1866, a more believable claim than that made by Michael Miles from Robert Towns’ Sydney head office only



weeks after the reward was offered. Either way, it seems the first alluvial gold was discovered in 1865, the year the boiling-down works was built on the banks of Ross Creek and one year after the selection of a site for the port at Townsville. (Bell 2000, p.25; Bolton 1972, p. 44; Vance & Copeman 1997, p. 7) Bob Brown, 1980s owner of the Gards' Battery lease, claimed that mining around Mt Spec was initially for gold at Gold Creek. (Brown 28 July 1984, Interview)

Mining for tin at Mt Spec-Paluma commenced in the 1880s and expanded in the 1890s. The first record of alluvial tin at Running Creek was in the Mining Warden's Annual Report of 1883, although tin may have been found in that locality as early as 1875. (Annual Report of the Department of Mines 1883, p. 178) The North Queensland Mining Annual of 1891 claimed the discovery of tin on 'Kangaroo Hills' Station (north of Running River) for prospectors Regner and Neven in about 1879. (The North Queensland Mining Annual 1891, p. 39) Notes supplied to Bob Brown by the Mines Department in 1948 noted that:

alluvial tin was first discovered on Running River in 1875. Early production is not recorded, but must have been considerable. Only the poorer ground now remains.

(Department of Mines 1948, Notes provided to Bob Brown)

The official date of discovery of alluvial tin at Running River and many of the creeks in the Kangaroo Hills Mineral Field is now given as 1875. (Bureau of Mineral Resources 1965, p. 20; Herbert River Express 18 November 1982; Pike 1960, p.38)

Digweed and Hammond's *Our Benham Children* gives credit to the Benham brothers for the discovery of lode tin in the late 1880s at Mt Brown near Ewan. Arthur, with partners MacDonald and Unsworth, is credited with finding alluvial tin at Cloudy Creek at the head of the Star River in December 1892, although his first recorded claim was not registered until July 1894 at Mt Benham. (1986, pp. 21, 103)

The *Queenslander* in 1891 noted that little notice had been taken of this new tinfield, where "at Mt Benham (twenty miles east of Kangaroo Hills) 150 men are doing very well [in] country covered with dense scrub". (*Queenslander* 26 September 1891) By November, machinery had been ordered for the Pineapple lode. (*Queenslander* 28 November 1891) The 1892 Mining Warden's Annual Report mentioned old and new tin camps in the ranges at the head of Running River and branches of the Star. The area employed 130 miners sluicing in deep trenching and gullies. Some shafts had also been dug. (Annual Report of the Department of Mines 1892, p. 94) The 1894 Annual Report highlighted the abundance of tin within the ranges of the Kangaroo Hills Field

During the year 1894 the headwaters of the Star River have been prospected and worked with the result of producing about half of the tin got on the whole field. This place known as Cloudy Creek is on the headwaters of the Star and Running Rivers and Saltwater [Little Crystal] Creek, a distance of about ten miles from the coast, and a height of 2900 feet above high water. The workings are all in dense scrub. (Annual Report of the Department of Mines 1894, pp. 105-106)

Though early prospectors opened foot and pack tracks down the coastal face of the ranges in the 1880s and 1890s, the easiest access to the closed forest was from the west. (Shepherd in Burla n.d., p. 2) Government geologist Cameron in his 1902 report noted:

The coast range forms the boundary of the mineral country on the north-east. It presents an abrupt front to the sea at a distance of from 8 to 30 miles from it, and has a general elevation of nearly 2,000 above it. It is at present

impracticable for vehicles wherever it is approached from the mouth of the Herbert River, and all conveyance to the field from the coast at this point has to be undertaken by means of horses. (Queensland Government Mining Journal 15 January 1902, p. 21)

Miners and mining capital came first from Ravenswood and Charters Towers, with prospectors following the tributaries of the Burdekin like the Star and Running Rivers to their source. (Annual Report of the Department of Mines 1883, p. 178; Shepherd in Burla n.d., p. 2) Gold discoveries at Cape River (1867), Ravenswood (1868) and Charters Towers (1871) had provided further impetus for prospecting over the whole district. (Levingston 1971, p. 1)



1922 Mt Spec. Phillips' Hut. Huts such as these were built by tin miners in clearings throughout the forest.

Casey, Thuringowa Collection



Townsville and Ingham were vying for the trade of the new Kangaroo Hills Mining Field, but both towns could only be reached over bad roads, each with a steep ‘jump-up’ the coastal escarpment. (Shepherd in Burla n.d., pp. 2, 7, 9; *Herbert River Express* 2 November 1982). Ingham was closer, but the tracks from there were steep and hard to maintain. The Benham family history clearly shows the early links between Mt Spec-Paluma and Townsville, Ingham and Charters Towers, with many of the Benham family eventually making their homes in ‘the Towers’. (Digweed & Hammond 1986)

Miners moved into the Paluma Range from the Star River, Hidden Valley and Oakey Creek fields. (Annual Report of the Department of Mines 1886, p.62; 1891, p. 60) They certainly came looking for gold, and fortunately their gold-mining technology was suitable for what they found most of - tin. The prospecting techniques of Charters Towers had to be adjusted in areas with thick vegetation cover. Stream tin was located simply by following the creeks up into the ranges. Stream tin and alluvial deposits in the creek banks were collected using panning dishes, cradles, sluicing, races, hydraulic sluicing or dredging. As tin was heavier than other minerals likely to be encountered, putting it into motion with water led to the heavier particles sinking to the bottom of the dish, cradle, etc or becoming caught on the riffles, while lighter particles of gravel were washed away.

A distinctive feature of mining operations around Mt Spec and Paluma are the ‘races’ constructed along the contours through the rainforest. One such race at Gards’ Battery (Mt Spec) was surveyed in the 1980s and found to curve for approximately 150 metres through thick rainforest. Often attractively stone-pitched, these races were either used as long sluices in themselves, or to deliver water from a permanent creek to sluicing operations elsewhere. By increasing the gradient, races could deliver water under pressure to hoses used to hydraulically mine alluvial deposits in creek banks by washing the tin-bearing soil.

Lode tin was located by prospecting the creek beds with a panning dish, then following potential creeks upstream until returns tailed off sharply. Miners then climbed the creek banks, making small trenches along the contours until ‘floaters’ of tin lode were found. About the size of a grave, these trenches are still common along creek banks throughout the rainforest. If tin ore was found, a trench was dug looking for the lode.



1911 Mt Spec. Jack Johnstone’s Hut. The walls and roof are made of maple slabs. In the mid 1980s, the gravel foundations were still discernible.

Hinchinbrook Shire, Hinchinbrook Collection

Initially, rock was crushed using a dolly pot, a simple mortar and pestle arrangement. Once crushed, it was washed in the dish like an alluvial deposit to test for its tin content. If the lode was rich enough to work, a vertical shaft was sunk or a horizontal tunnel dug into the hillside. Horizontal levels or drives were then dug. As the drives were put in, testing continued to ascertain the quality of the ore. Stopes were dug above or below each level as the ore was broken out. Small four-wheeled tram trucks were used to move the ore to the shaft, where it was winched up using buckets. Winding was provided by manpower (windlass), horsepower (whip or whim) or machinery (a winding engine using a whip or poppet head). Bob Brown recalled poppet heads still standing at Mt Spec in the 1920s. (Brown 28 July 1984, Interview)

Once brought to the surface, ore was stored in a bin, or more usually on a cleared piece of ground, until it could be carted to a battery or mill. At the mill, ore was crushed in a mortar box by dropping heavy stamps onto it. Water was introduced to the mortar box and the crushed ore, now like fine sand, was washed through screens in the side of the box. Tin was then separated from the sand using separators such as the Wifley table, jigs or buddles. Dried tin was then bagged for sale.

When tin occurred in very clayey soil, it was puddled. These rough concentrators were often just a circular pit filled with water. Pits might be lined, with timber, stone-pitching or bricks. The clay mixture was stirred using feet, animals, or paddles turned by horses. The heavier tin fell to the bottom, and the dissolved clay was drawn off with the water. The tin concentrate could then be shovelled out and bagged. (Wegner 1984, Notes provided to author; Menghetti 1982, pp. 1-30)

Mt Spec was not a great company field. A company called Mount Spec Tin Mines was floated in 1892, supported mainly by Ingham capital. (*Queenslander* 7 May 1892) The first working of lode tin at Mt Spec is also recorded in 1896, though alluvial prospecting had been going on there for some years. (Annual Report of the Department of Mines 1892, p. 94; 1893, p. 98; 1896, p.110) Low tin prices, transport difficulties, excessive water and uncomfortable working conditions forced the leases under exemption. (Wegner 1982, pp. 199-200) The lodes were taken up by another company, the Mount Spec Mining Company that was formed in Charters Towers in 1901, apparently on the suggestion of the Gorringer brothers. (*North Queensland Herald* 24 August 1901) The Gorringer brothers were “surveyors who left their jobs when they found a tin lode in the mountain scrub”. (*Herbert River Express* 20 November 1982) A battery was erected with great difficulty, only to be moved to Mount Brown near Ewan in 1900 when the lode proved unsatisfactory. (Annual Report of the Department of Mines 1902, p. 85; 1903, p. 89; *Queenslander* 19 April 1902; *North Queensland Herald* 1 March 1902, 12 April 1902, 26 April 1902)

Other minerals were mined in the district, often in association with tin. The first discovery of tungsten (as wolframite, known locally as wolfram) at Ollera Creek was in 1895. In the Warden’s Annual Report of 1896, Ollera Creek was being worked for bismuth and molybdenite. (Annual Report of the Department of Mines 1896, p. 110) Mining for wolfram was recorded at nearby Saltwater (Crystal) Creek in 1898.

(Annual Report of the Department of Mines 1898, p. 37; Levinston 1971) Wolfram, bismuth and molybdenum were also mined at the Horseshoe Mine and Pink Lilly at Horseshoe Bend, Running River. (Bureau of Mineral Resources 1965, p. 23) Wolfram really only became payable after 1900. (Levingston 1971, p.2) In the early 1900s, a ten-head battery was crushing at Ollera Creek. Alluvial deposits were worked in the early years, then lodes were mined. In this area, wolfram is:

contained in short irregular high-grade shoots in near-vertical chloritic lodes and quartz reefs occupying fissures or joints mainly in granite. (Bureau of Mineral Resources 1965, p. 23)

In 1904, there was a new rush at Ollera Creek, with 200 miners working for wolfram in two main camps. (Shepherd in Burla n.d., pp. 7-8) One mine on upper Ollera Creek (120 feet above sea level) had about fifty men working it. The main camp was on the eastern branch of Crystal Creek. (*Herbert River Express* 2 November 1982) In 1905, a township was surveyed and a tender for the construction of a school was accepted. (*North Queensland Register* 15 May 1905) The year 1905 was the peak of the boom for the whole district, with mining for all minerals declining after that. The mining of wolfram and associated metals was wiped out by a slump in prices in 1920. Some small-scale operations resumed from 1937 to 1957, but total production of wolfram for these twenty years was only 81 tons compared with more than 400 tons from 1900 to 1920. (Levingston 1971, p. 2)

The ten-head battery at Ollera Creek was the largest brought in to the Mt Spec-Paluma area. Most crushing batteries were smaller, perhaps due to the lack of large company interests, as well as the difficult terrain. Cameron's 1901 Report to Parliament noted the presence of:

parties of working miners, having not reached the company stage. On one lode only has machinery as yet been employed, none of the workings being over 100 feet in depth. (Cameron 1901, p. 4)

A five-head battery, steam-powered, was erected at the *Mount Spec* mine, nine miles from Hidden Valley. This battery was capable of treating ten tons of ore a day. The 1901 Annual Report of the Department of Mines commented on the expense of getting the battery, with all plant and machinery, on-site:

Little has been done in development during the last twelve months, but the company may be congratulated on the pluck and energy they have shown in bringing machinery on the ground in face of great difficulties and heavy outlay. (p. 89)

Heavy water prevented the working of a promising chute of ore to a greater depth than seventy feet unless improved pumping machinery was brought in. (Annual Report of the Department of Mines 1902, p.82) This venture survived only a few years, with the removal of the battery to Mount Brown in the drier open forest being foreshadowed in the 1902 Annual Report. (p. 85) No production was recorded after the machinery was removed.

(Brown 28 July 1984, Interview)

Transport was especially a problem, and expensive at six to nine pounds per ton. (Annual Report of the Department of Mines 1901, p. 90; *North Queensland Herald* 12 April 1902) Stories of crushing batteries carried in through 'the jungle' in pieces on men's backs have passed into local folklore. (*Herbert River Express* 20 November 1982) In 1902, the miners at Mt Spec asked the government for a mail service, but were told their service to Hidden Valley (fourteen miles away) was sufficient. Mail was brought to Mt Spec from Hidden Valley by the occasional visitor or traveller. The thirty to forty men at Mt Spec were living in tents and were existing on corned

or tinned meat, bread and tea. Some fresh meat deliveries were being made to the field, and miners had gardens of fresh vegetables. (*North Queensland Herald* 12 April 1902)

Access to and from Townsville was originally via Thorton's Gap. Arthur Benham first used teamster William James to transport his bagged tin to Townsville down through Running River and over the range at The Pinnacles. This road was also very steep, and required a large log tied to the back of the wagon as a brake. (Digweed & Hammond 1986, p.103) Bringing in the five-head battery for the Mt Spec Tin Mines took six weeks over Harvey's Range via Waverley Tin Mines. (*North Queensland Herald* 12 April 1902) A road down the coastal escarpment from Cloudy Clearing to Townsville was eventually put through as The Mt Spec Tourist Road, more than thirty years after the mining of tin in the district had peaked. Through the 1940s and 1950s, a mule team was still being used on the mail service from Stone River to Hidden Valley. (*Herbert River Express* 2 November 1982; *North Queensland Register* 20 September 1980)

By 1905, some miners were threatening to take all their business to Townsville unless the roads to Ingham were improved. (*Herbert River Express* 2 November 1982) As late as the 1920s, the Bambaroo Track was still only suitable for teams of donkeys to negotiate down to the Bambaroo railway station, where the panniers of tin ore were off-loaded onto a train. (May 1961, p. 4) Buyers would meet the miners at Bambaroo, or sometimes go up into the mountains themselves on buying trips. Bambaroo buyer Herman Hecht paid half London quotations on the price of tin. (Brown 28 July 1984, Interview) The 1900 Mining Wardens Annual Report noted:

All goods and produce to and from the field are carried from Ingham by means of packhorses, and were a trafficable road opened up, a great difficulty would be surmounted and the success of the field assured. (Annual Report of the Department of Mines 1900, p. 100)

In 1916, government geologist Saint-Smith reported:

the cost of packing stores from Ingham to Ewan (via Pappin's Selection, Jacobsen's Track, Hidden Valley and Boomerang) [as] five pounds per ton, the distance being 50 miles.

(Queensland Government Mining Journal 15 November 1916, p. 538)

Packing charges to Phillips' alluvial tin claim at Prospector's Creek, Mt Spec, were six pounds per ton. (p. 539) An ambitious plan for a tramline from the head of the Stone River through to Ewan had not eventuated. (*Queenslander* 4 March 1899; June 1899) The shortest route to the larger service centre of Townsville lay down the face of the Paluma Range, but Divisional Boards, while wanting the field's trade, seemed loathe to spend a lot of money on the tracks. (*North Queensland Herald* 29 August 1901; *Queenslander* 21 September 1901) The 1901 Annual Report of the Department of Mines noted:

There are three tracks crossing the range [from Ingham]; that to the left is known as Jacobsen's; that to the right - via Stoneleigh - as Fanning's. The centre track, branching off some 10 miles from Jacobsen's, is the track leading to what is called "the old tinfield". Jacobsen's and Fanning's are the tracks most used, and on the latter the Hinchinbrook Divisional Board has expended some money in the hope of making it practicable for wheeled traffic; the result, however, has not been satisfactory. The passes over the range present considerable difficulties, being in many places very stony and precipitous. Carriage of goods to, and ore from, the mines is entirely by pack-horse, which will convey some idea

of the obstacles attending mining enterprise in this district. By dint of great exertion, and haulage by block and tackle, and the use of teams of eight or ten mules, a few empty drays have, however, been successfully piloted across the range, but not a few such ventures have ended in disaster. (p.88)

Despite the transport difficulties, Ingham did well from the mines at Mt Spec. In July 1902, A J Cobcroft, Manager of the Commercial Bank in Ingham had received fourteen tons of stream tin and seven tons of lode tin to be despatched to Sydney during the four months to 30 June. (*North Queensland Herald* 19 July 1902) The same year, the Hinchinbrook Divisional Board announced they were going to spend one thousand pounds, including a government grant, making Jacobsen's Track trafficable to Mt Spec Tin Mines. This would give the thirty men employed there access to a mail service and fresh meat. (*Queenslander* 19 April 1902)

Working conditions in the rainforest were also difficult and sometimes dangerous.

At Mount Benham the mining is all in dense tropical scrub, which adds terribly to the difficulty of prospecting and mining, and also of getting the tin away from the claims.

(Annual Report of the Department of Mines 1893, p. 85)

Miners suffered plagues of fleas, ticks, leeches and snakes. (*North Queensland Herald* 12 April 1902) In event of injury, help was a long way off. Jack Johnstone had to walk out of the scrub with an arm shattered in a shotgun accident. (*Herbert River Express* 20 November 1982) In March 1904, a two wheeled horse drawn ambulance made the round trip from Ingham to Ewan via Jacobsen's Track in thirty-six hours, including twelve hours for the horses to rest at Pappin's Miner's Rest Hotel at the foot of the range. The patient with sciatica must have suffered as the litter bounced its way over the rough tracks. (*Herbert River Express* 2 November 1982)

The Mt Spec-Paluma area remains relatively inaccessible today, and workers in the forest face similar challenges almost a century later. In the early 1980s, Ingham timber-cutter Mollenkamp drove his vehicle over the rough track from Taravale Road to Paluma seeking help. His upper arm had been smashed by a falling 'widow-maker' - a large branch left suspended high above the ground in the canopy when a nearby tree is felled. In a similar incident, tin-miner Leo Rule drove himself from Gracie Creek (beyond Paluma Dam) into Paluma suffering from burns after his petrol-driven water-pump exploded during refuelling. (Venn, Personal reminiscences)

Water was not often a problem for the miners, unless there was too much of it, a direct contrast to the annual shut-down that occurred each Dry season farther west. (Annual Report of the Department of Mines 1894, pp. 105-106) In 1901, Arthur Benham sold the Midnight Queen, a reef tin claim at the head of Saltwater Creek, to Charles Edward and Samuel James Allen. (Department of Mines Registration of Claims 1 to 459; Annual Report 1902, p. 84) Arthur had already applied for an exemption from work:

The heavy rain causing too much water to contend with and therefore I am unable to work the ground. (Digweed & Hammond 1986, p. 109)

Benham's tunnels, dug in an attempt to drain off water, could be located in the early 1980s by the collapsed air pipes. (Brown 28 July 1984, Interview)

Many miners had permanent water in the ranges, a boon during most of the year. (Cameron 1901, p. 2) By damming small, fast flowing creeks and channelling the water through races, miners could carry on sluicing operations single-handed. Johnstone was working this way when visited by government geologist Saint-Smith in 1916. (Queensland Government Mining Journal 15 November 1916, p. 539) On one such creek known as The Spec, a small waterwheel was used to power a two-head battery. (Brown 1961, Letter from previous owner of Gards' Battery) During the Wet season however, heavy downpours could destroy stockpiles of ore set aside for crushing or washing as water became available. Unscrupulous neighbours could also make use of sudden downpours, as Fred Benham's son Alfred wrote in 1980:

One funny incident which happened while we had the store at Prospector's Creek: Dad used to do tin scratching when he had time and one year he stacked a lot of dirt ready for the wet season. At this time he did his own packing, taking delivery in Ingham. On one trip he went down for goods and it rained inches and all creeks were bankers. It was over a week before we could get home and the old boy was worried about his stacked dirt getting washed away - tin and all. When we got home he unloaded the packs, got on his horse and tore over the gully, only to find someone had made good use of the rain and had washed all his stacked dirt and taken the tin. Away he went to find out who might have found such a good patch. Tent poles were all that was left of one bloke's camp so he went over to Bosworth's Store at Hidden Valley and found out that the chap had sold the tin and "done a bunk", leaving us with a store bill of around nine quid. The old boy could not do anything about it and it was a long time before he could see the funny side of the incident. (North Queensland Register 12 January 1980; Annual Report of the Department of Mines 1896, p. 110)

Rare droughts slowed tin production and miners could not pay their debts, many working without licences or leaving the district with debts unpaid. (Digweed & Hammond 1986, p. 22) Several years of unusually dry weather coincided with the last few years of the 1890s Depression. Alluvial mining ceased and miners were "barely making rations". (Annual Report of the Department of Mines 1897, p. 108; 1898, p. 99) One woman and her children nearly died of thirst.

My stepfather was going to go to a place called Hallow to get some tin and the packer was to take us. He came once in three months. He was taking us and he got so lost he unpacked the horse and left us in the bush. We were there three days without water. It was during the 1902 drought. The horse fell down in a gully and broke his leg and my mother cut his throat and we drank his blood. We drank our own water. We drank vinegar. We licked the dew off the leaves early in the morning. My mother went through a lot.... Our tongues were swollen. Our lips were cracked. We were in a hell of a mess. (*Townsville Bulletin* 4 May 1996)

Apart from the short-lived companies, most mining ventures around Mt Spec-Paluma appear to have been small, consisting of single 'scratchers', family partnerships, or small groups of men. Some of these were Johnstone and Phillips, the Benham brothers (four of whom - Frederick, Jesse, Arthur, Edwin, with brother-in-law Arthur Dyer - are recorded as having held leases on the Kangaroo Hills Mining Field) and the Gards. Many of the original prospectors moved among ventures on adjoining fields over a lengthy period. Tom Gard was at Mt Spec with his brother at the turn of the century, and again with his sons in the 1920s. (Annual Report of the Department of Mines 1903, p. 90, 1904,

p. 82; Queensland Government Mining Journal 1927, p. 469) Johnstone (sometimes Johnson) came from Denmark as a young man in the 1880s, spending fifty years around Mt Spec. (*Herbert River Express* 20 November 1982) In 1916, he was “engaged in sluicing in dense scrub country at the head of Spec Creek” and had been working alluvial tin at Mt Spec for twenty years. (Queensland Government Mining Journal 1916, p. 539) Johnstone’s Hut clearing, containing some lilies and the gravel foundation of his small hut can still be located near Mt Spec. Phillip Foxlee also spent many years at Mt Spec. He was “getting out good stone” at Mt Spec in 1901, and was still there in 1925. (*North Queensland Herald* 22 June 1901; Foxlee 12 January 1925, Letter to Theodore) As previously mentioned, the Benham family had a seventy-year association with Mt Spec.

Despite its isolation, there were advantages to living and working around Mt Spec. The altitude, combined with the cooler climate, allowed the cultivation of fruit trees, vegetables, lilies and roses, some of which still survive in the old camp clearings. Saint-Smith wrote in the 1916 Queensland Government Mining Journal:

Johnstone has succeeded in establishing an excellent fruit and vegetable garden here, probably more by reason of the good rainfall than for any inherent value in the poor granite soil on the hillslope. (p. 539)

In 1913, Townsville businessman and lobbyist for access to Mt Spec, McKimmin, had also visited ‘Mr Johnson’ and had seen:

The following fruit trees and vegetables: Lemon, passion fruit, Peach, Banana, Grape Vine, Strawberries, Apples, Pear, Mulberry, Pineapple, Corn, Cabbage, Peas, Beetroot, Beans, cauliflowers, and Sweet Potatoes. (Evidence to the Royal Commission of the Development of North Queensland 1931, QSA A/6419).

The richness of ore crushed from the Mt Spec area is also commented on. (Annual Report of the Department of Mines 1901, p. 89; Queensland Government Mining Journal 1916, pp. 538-539) Walter Cameron reported “a three-head Park and Lacy prospecting battery with hand buddle...in the hills about the sources of the Running River” in his 1901 Report to Parliament. In the first three months of 1901, this battery crushed seventy tons of ore from various leases, returning eleven tons of black tin, and a trial crushing from Lease No. 111 went four per cent black tin. (p. 6) In 1902, Mount Spec Tin Mines produced 100 tons at Mt Benham, crushed at six percent black tin. (*North Queensland Herald* 26 April 1902) The company had been formed since Cameron’s visit to the Kangaroo Hills Field. Cameron foreshadowed the difficulties they would face, despite the “good lodes”:

As they were reported to be heavy with water, and so inaccessible, I did not visit them. (Cameron 1901, p.6)

The Mines Department 1948 summary commented that “the ore they raised was of relatively high grade”. (Mines Department 1948, Notes) Phillips at Prospector’s Creek, Mt Spec, in 1916 was getting “tinstone assaying 72 percent for metal”. Johnstone, working Spec Creek, was obtaining “assays as high as 76 percent, with the average 74 percent”. (Queensland Government Mining Journal 1916, p. 539) Despite the richness of the ore, some disappointing prospecting and the costs of working in such an area halted the promising shaft operations at Mt Spec before the end of 1902. (Annual Report of the Department of Mines 1902, p. 82)

Tin prices at the turn of the century were good, maintaining the production of alluvial tin which was easier as long as water was available. Production for 1901 was 148 tons of black tin and seventy-five tons of stream tin, worth 14 207 pounds. Average

production of alluvial tin for 1903-1905 was about 187 tons per year, worth about 54 000 pounds. Another ninety-four tons of stream tin was produced in the Star River Mining District. (Queensland Government Mining Journal 15 May 1906, p. 241) Around 1905, there was another small rush in alluvial tin at Cloudy Creek, fifteen miles from both Ollera Creek and Hidden Valley.

Up to fifty men were established here with a tramway of 200 to 300 yards running from the workings to the dam. The workings were at the 3000 feet level and loam carrying tin had been excavated from the surface to a depth of thirty-six feet. Another minor rush occurred in dense scrub country around Ethel Creek. “Settlement” there consisted of fourteen huts. (Burla, Notes supplied to Digweed & Hammond)

In the Depression, men turned to tin-scratching to supplement their family incomes. In 1933:

a number of prospectors won alluvial tin at Hidden Valley, Hermitville, Mount Spec, Running Creek, Spring Creek, and Stockyard Creek. (Parliamentary Papers 1934, p. 14)

Others who wished to remain in the district long-term (for example, members of the Rule and Smith families) sought seasonal paid employment in other industries, especially the timber industry, returning solely to mining if prices justified it. Tin production dropped to only eleven tons in 1931, recovering to 118 tons in 1941. Although tin was still mined at Mount Spec and Cloudy Creek and on adjacent streams as late as the 1950s, and west along Running River into the 1980s, transport difficulties and the fluctuating price of tin made prospecting an activity that was pursued on a part-time basis. To some, ‘tin-scratching’ was a hobby that just might pay its way. (Brown 28 July 1984, Interview) Between 1941 and 1971, annual tin production was less than 100 tons. (Levingston 1971, p. 2) The collapse of world tin prices in the mid-1980s saw the end of the tin-miner around Mt Spec. (Brown 28 July 1984, Interview; Shepherd in Burla n.d., p. 9)

The ‘scrub’, with all its disadvantages, had suited the small man.

Beyond the bounds of mineral leases...the alluvial tin “fossicker”, in average season, has a wide range in which to exercise his industry, alluvial tin being found in more or less payable quantities in all the watercourses...not a few rich ‘pockets’ of ore have been unearthed in this way. It is an ideal poor man’s diggings; the climate is good, the food supply plentiful, and given a fairly sufficient rainfall there is a certain return for the labour expended. (Annual Report of the Department of Mines 1901, p. 89)



*Date Unknown Running River. Cavill's battery.*

W J Laurie, Venn Collection



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## ‘A PURELY PLEASURE PARADE’

### - *deciding to build a road*

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From the days of the pioneering miners and packers, the scenic beauty and temperate climate of the ranges was remarked upon, as was the need for a good road.

In the 1901 Annual Report of the Mines Department, Warden G.H. Newman promoted Jacobsen's Track as access to the ranges:

A road by Jacobsen's track would...strike the divide between Oakey Creek and Running River on which watercourses all the principal mines...are situated. A thoroughly practical man - Mr Frank Fraser, of Ingham - who was the first to take a dray over the range, assures me that a very good dray road could be made on this track at a cost of some 1500 pounds (p. 90)

The Assistant Government Geologist's Report to Parliament on the Kangaroo Hills Mineral Field (Cameron 1901) compared the relative costs and benefits of the existing steep road from Townsville via Thornton's Gap (Hervey Range) with two proposed roads from the Ingham-Stone River tramline terminus farther north. He noted that "the construction of a road up the range behind Ingham has been reported on by three engineers", favouring the road which gave the best grades for wheeled traffic. (Cameron 1901, p. 2) Cameron acknowledged that the mines in the ranges needed to be better established to justify the capital cost to the Ingham Divisional Board of between 2000 and 5000 pounds. Most of the early tracks investigated connected Mt Spec to Ingham. The North Queensland Herald reported the finding of a "serviceable track" connecting Mt Spec and Byabra (near Mutarnee), which would:

bring the mining traffic in direct touch with Townsville as deep water can be got within a few miles of the scrub. (29 August 1901)

A good road was needed not only by the miners but also to allow visitors access to the ranges. The earning potential of the area as both a tourist and health resort was officially promoted before the First World War. As early as 1902, a correspondent for the *North Queensland Herald* visited the Mt Spec Tin Mines, noting that the area would be good for a health resort. (1 March 1902) In July 1913, the North Queensland Register reported on a trip to Mt Spec, suggesting that a township be gazetted at Cloudy Clearing. The article also proposed a sanitarium in the ranges and the protection of "the scrub". (28 July 1913) Debate in the North Queensland Register raged for almost a year over the relative merits of sanitarium sites at Mt Spec, Mt Fox and Wallaman Falls. (28 July 1913, 15 September 1913, 10 October 1913, 1 December 1913, 8 December 1913, 9 March 1914, 4 April 1914) Mt Spec was claimed to be the superior site. (North Queensland Register 10 October 1913)

Hinchinbrook Shire Council favoured a health resort at Mt Fox, and wanted the Lucinda Point Road funded as a Tourist Road before the Mt Spec Road, but strong representation from influential Townsville businessmen secured the Mt Spec Road's inclusion in the Tourist Roads category. (Wegner 1982, pp. 21-22; McClelland 19 March 1989, interview) In 1924, Shire Clerk Drury wrote to H Bruce MLA, seeking his support for an Ingham to Ewan road via Jacobsen's Track. Bruce passed this request onto the Public Estate Improvement Branch of the Department of Lands,

but no funds were available. (Public Estate Improvement Branch July 1924, Annotated letter) Hinchinbrook Shire Council later wanted the Mt Spec Road to exit at Bambaroo, so that Council could keep its hinterland trade. Ingham resident, Buffa, had proposed a sanitarium on the Bambaroo Track, perhaps in the vicinity of the eventual Shay's Guest House. (Hinchinbrook Shire Council Minutes 10 December 1929, 8 March 1932, 20 April 1934) Hinchinbrook Shire Council eventually relented and agreed to support a road and national park at Mt Spec, as long as it incurred no financial liability. (*Herbert River Express* 7 August 1913, 7 May 1914; Hinchinbrook Shire Council Minutes 12 August 1924, 12 December 1933, 20 July 1934, 1 November 1934; Report of the Department of Labour and Industry 1932)

Public interest in mountain retreats continued throughout the 1920s, a time when opening up the countryside to settlement was defined as progress. Even in the 1930s Depression, the economic potential of tourism was being realised.

In the midst of a trade depression which has paralysed every other industry, the tourist traffic to North Queensland is developing apace and at the expense of overseas touring by Australians....The tourist trade to North Queensland is yet in a rudimentary stage, but it was worth one hundred thousand pounds in 1930, and could be organised to one million pounds a year, without resort to...subsidies. (Daily Mail 19 July 1931)

The Main Roads Board (later Commission) was charged with the responsibility of investigating health resort proposals. Access roads, as in the case of Mt Spec-Paluma, formed the major expense in setting up such resorts. (Annual Reports of the Main Roads Commission 1926; 1928; 1932)



22 March 1922 Near Foxlee's Lookout, Mt Spec. Over several days in March 1922, Townsville's Mayor Green (second from right) with water engineer Mr Longley, led a party on an exploratory trip up into the Paluma Range looking for reliable water supply for their growing local authority. The party was guided by local miner, Phil Foxlee, and is shown here resting after lunch at Foxlee's camp near his lookout at 2950 feet asl. W J Laurie, Venn Collection



The 1926 Annual Report of the Main Roads Commission acknowledged public demand for access to cool, wild places and suggested inclusion in its funding of a “tourist road vote to open up National Parks, waterfalls, and camping grounds at high elevation in various parts of the State”. (p. 7) The idea of a retreat to the mountains was a leftover from colonial days where the summer heat was to be avoided rather than endured. As late as 1928, medical opinion was still undecided as to whether a healthy white race (excluding those of Italian extraction) could prosper in the tropics, given the clustering of settlement in the “low-lying littoral of tropical Queensland”. (Barrett 1928, p. 425)<sup>4</sup> In the 1920s, it was common practice to send tuberculosis sufferers to recuperate at higher altitudes, another reason for establishing mountain resorts. TB patients were still recuperating privately in Paluma during the Second World War.

The scenic attractions of Mt Spec had long been noted. Philip Foxlee, a Mt Spec miner, wrote to Queensland Premier Theodore in 1925 about the scenic beauty of the ranges, quoting W H Green (Mayor of Townsville City Council) in part:

All the water comes pouring through this Gorge in one channel at the mouth...this Gorge [is] two miles wide for almost its entire length, or at least west of the Tin Hut and [is] crammed full of waterfalls on every side...I think eventually we will have people from all parts of the world through that Gorge and circle round back to Mt Spec...it is likely to be a National Park. (Foxlee 12 January 1925, pp. 1-2)

Foxlee even offered to mark out a range road, but his offer to Theodore was not taken up. (1925, pp. 1, 2, 13, postscript) Foxlee’s Track was eventually abandoned as too steep. (May 1961, p. 4) In

<sup>4</sup> Barrett was writing in rebuttal to a letter written by Dr Andrew Balfour and published in the British Medical Journal, who claimed that the only Europeans to prosper in tropical Queensland would be the Italians.

1984, it could only be followed from Mt Spec as far as Foxlee’s Lookout.

Tourists were accommodated in the mountains in a series of ‘ranches’ and guesthouses long before the road was constructed. The Shay family provided guesthouse accommodation near Mt Spec itself. Visitors were taken on guided tours, on foot or on horseback, of the many creeks and waterfalls along the Bambaroo Track. (Cummins & Campbell Monthly Magazine September 1930; Shepherd in Burla, n.d.) Shay’s Guest House was only a hundred metres from the source of Waterfall Creek, and tourist advertising of the day claimed the visitor would see seventy-five waterfalls on the trip up. The small building consisted of two dormitories, a common room and kitchen. The guesthouse was in good condition until 1965 when a bushfire destroyed much of what remained. (Townsville NFC Bushwalkers Newsletters, October 1965, July 1966) Before the fire, citrus trees, crotons, hydrangeas and roses could be seen growing around the clearing.

Public advocacy for construction of the Mt Spec Road took place against a broader background of “progress”, “settlement” and of regional lobbying for “farmers access roads”. (Queensland Agricultural Journal 1 July 1927, 1 December 1929) Community leaders promoted the role of government in financing the necessary infrastructure, of which roads (then as now) were so important.

Find the men, men of the right class, open up lands for settlement, provide the roads, and all will be well. It is not suggested that the Government should spoonfeed its settlers, but it is suggested that roads be made to enable the pioneer farmers access to their farms, and to their markets, for most of this is wet country, and anyone who has seen it in the wet season, knows the impassibility and horrors of those country roads...(Evidence to the Royal Commission on the Development of North Queensland 1931 QSA A/6420)



24 March 1922 Upper Saltwater Falls (Big Crystal Creek). Mayor Green’s party found abundant clear, fresh water racing towards the plunge into the gorge below.

W J Laurie , Thuringowa Collection



1929-1931 Mt Spec Road Main Roads Commission surveyors.

Casey, Thuringowa Collection

Most roads at the time were the responsibility of local governments. An admission of State responsibility for some roads led to the formation in 1921 of the Main Roads Board. The Board was anxious to prove itself and regional lobby groups across the state exploited this. At the time of the establishment of the Main Roads Board, there had been a shift in policy for the funding of roads, from it being the responsibility of the general taxpayer to that of road users. Thus began the perennial arguments about vehicle registrations, licences, and fuel taxes collected in one district but spent in another. This shift in policy and the growth of motor vehicle traffic spawned organisations like the RACQ. These financially successful vehicle owners lobbied for the expenditure of funds in their own districts, and for the construction of specific roads. (Queensland Agricultural Journal 1 July 1927, pp. 80 -81) Members of the Townsville RACQ club were particularly active in the late 1920s, cutting the track up Castle Hill using tools borrowed from Townsville City Council. (Townsville City Council Minutes 20 December 1928, pp.242-243) Throughout the 1920s, Shire Councils, car clubs and other private groups campaigned for the construction of their favoured roads. The inclusion of a 'Tourist Roads' category in the government's 1928 road aid program provided further encouragement for such lobbyists. (Wegner 1984, p. 21) At that time, the State government was considering a number of proposals for 'health resorts'. (Annual Reports of the Main Roads Commission 1928, p. 17; 1930, p. 14; 1931, p.11; Wegner 1984, p. 21) Many of these sites were within the coastal ranges, where the temperate climate was thought to be of therapeutic value. (Queensland Government Intelligence and Tourist Bureau 1924; Annual Report of the Main Roads Commission 1928, p. 17; Barrymore 1933, p. 21; Cummins & Campbell Monthly Magazine April 1935, February 1939)

The Townsville and District Development Association had been actively lobbying the State Government to open up Mt Spec in the early years of the century. In 1911 the Mt Fox Road was put through. (*North Queensland Register* 28 July 1913, 8 September 1913, 10 October 1913) Later, Mt Fox was subdivided into 5-10 acre lots, with a reserve set aside for a sanitarium. (*North Queensland Register* 9 March 1914) Association member and successful Townsville businessman, REA McKimmin was instrumental in convincing the relevant authorities to open Mt Spec up to settlement. His report on the six-day trip to Mt Spec in 1911 waxed lyrical about the natural attractions of the ranges. His enthusiasm is obvious: I have been all through this District on three different occasions (sic) and can honestly say this report is not exaggerated....I have seen most of the Southern Beauty Spots...and have no hesitation in stating that Mt Spec would surpass them all in every way if properly opened up....the wonderful change of climate compared to Townsville during the summer months is difficult to describe.... (McKimmin 1913, p. 13)

McKimmin in 1911 was already thinking of road access and township sites:

Cloudy Creek would probably be the best country to locate a township....The southern spur of the range leading to Cloudy Creek looks very promising country for construction of a road of easy gradients. (1913, pp. 7, 10 -11)

Local print media like the *North Queensland Register* supported the Development Association in its attempts to have Mt Spec opened up to settlement. After the First World War, Mt Spec-Paluma became a popular weekend destination for visitors from Townsville and Ingham. Although the area was criss-crossed with tracks dating from the 1890s, the easiest packhorse access to Mt Spec itself was gained via the Bambaroo Track. A party led by McKimmin cleared the old wagon road from Shay's to the summit of Mt Spec in 1930 and:

After a little trouble and exertion the top of Mt Spec was reached about mid-day and the two cars Pontiac (Mr Bert McKimmin) and 4-cylinder Dodge (Mr Fred Hoffensetz) were thus the first cars to reach the summit. (*Cummins & Campbell Monthly Magazine* September 1930)<sup>5</sup>



1931-1935 Mt Spec Road. Mt Spec Road Main Roads Commission engineer J Young and overseer W H McClelland (hands on hips) inspect progress.

McClelland, Thuringowa Collection

<sup>5</sup> Sydney May (1961) credits Townsville jeweller Anderson with bringing the first vehicle to the summit.



Although the Mt Spec-Paluma area lay within the Thuringowa and Hinchinbrook Shires, Townsville City Council was keen to get access to a water supply for its growing city and was the road's greatest champion at local government level. The majority of patrons of a 'health resort' at Mt Spec would be Townsville City Council ratepayers. The Easter 1930 Visitor's Book from Shay's Guest House was submitted to the 1931 Royal Commission, recording the stay of twenty-five boarders "mostly Townsville people who came via Bambaroo". (QSA A/6419) Townsville was a smaller community in the 1930s, so membership of the various groups lobbying for the Mt Spec road overlapped.<sup>6</sup> Council's professional staff also supported Mt Spec. FH Brazier, Council's Engineer from 1925, had a personal interest in Mt Spec, retaining property in Paluma until his death in 1989.

Townsville City Mayor W H Green was another influential individual with a continued interest in Mt Spec. He saw Mt Spec as a potential water catchment for Townsville and made several excursions into the ranges. In the 1920s, Townsville's water supply could not meet demand, necessitating restrictions and threats of fines for "persons found wasting or misusing water". (Townsville City Council Committees Report Books 7 June 1922, p. 333, 6 September 1922, p. 293) Townsville City Council had considered a report on Mt Spec from the Department of Public Lands in 1921. The report was referred to the Water Works Committee, a special subcommittee consisting of Mayor Green and Aldermen Smith, Roberts, Douglas, Hopkins, and Clegg. Townsville City lent its support to the idea of development at Mt Spec, giving the chairman of the Water Works Committee permission to consult with members of the Townsville and District Development Association. (Townsville City Council Minutes 1 December 1921, p. 465) In 1922 the committee recommended that the State Treasurer be approached to send:

an officer of the Hydraulic Engineers Department to visit and report upon Mount Spec as a probable place for a future supply of water for the city. (Townsville City Council Committees Report Book 4 January 1922, p.322)



*1929-1931 Mt Spec Road. Main Roads Commission surveyors. The survey took two years to complete 1929 - 1931.* Casey, Thuringowa Collection

Although Treasury notified Council on March that no officer was available, Mayor Green took visiting Sanitary Engineer F F Longley of the Department of Public Health to Mt Spec for three days in March 1922. (Townsville City Council Minutes Book 14 March 1922,

p. 564, 1 June 1922, p.580) Foxlee acted as their guide. (Foxlee 12 January 1925, p. 1) Given the time of year, the visitors were probably left in no doubt as to the amount of water going to waste over the waterfalls. Council received Longley's report in June 1922. (Townsville City Council Minutes 1 June 1922, p. 580) In February 1924, the City's water supply had deteriorated such that reticulation was cut off between the hours of 8pm and 6am. (Townsville City Council Committees Report 4 February 1924, p. 317) Lands Administration Board surveyor W W Campbell reported to Council on the potential of the Mt Spec catchment in 1929. (Townsville City Council Minutes 21 November 1929, p.344) When surveying Mt Spec's timber reserves, Deputy Forester L S Twine also commented on Mt Spec as a water catchment.

As a possible future water supply for the City I have not seen anything in the district that can approach that part of the area drained by big Saltwater Creek, there is a never failing supply of beautiful clear water in this creek all the year round. (Royal Commission on the Development of North Queensland 1931 QSA A/6420)

The quality of Mt Spec water motivated Townsville Council to gain access to Mt Spec, as throughout the 1920s it also faced problems with pollution of its supply.<sup>7</sup> Further encouragement came from later reports by visitors to Mt Spec.

But Oh! What wonderful crystal clear cold water compared to our hot and filthy Townsville water; and billions and billions of gallons of it going to waste, when we should be using it in Townsville and saving thousands of Pounds per annum for the costly pumping and filtration schemes - so much for the wisdom of our City fathers. (McKimmin 1930, p. 2)

However, financial constraints meant Council was loathe to commit its own funds to the scheme. Progress was therefore slow over the next two decades, as Council tried to get financial support for the scheme from State Treasury. (Townsville City Council Minutes 1 March 1923, p. 27; Committees Report 19 November 1923, p. 314) Alderman Clegg represented Council on an RACQ trip to Mt Spec in June 1924, following which Council passed a motion

That the Main Roads Board be approached with a view to having a survey made of the road to Mount Spec. (Townsville City Council Minutes 11 September 1924, p.127)

An amendment inviting the Thuringowa and Hinchinbrook Shires to participate was lost. The Hinchinbrook Shire Council was not interested in the Mt Spec road proposal, an attitude its Townsville supporters found hard to understand. Another trip to Mt Spec was organised for November 1930. The Townsville participants were:

amazed to learn that the Hinchinbrook Shire Council had been advised of the trip about a month previously, and invited to send one or more Representatives with the party. NONE of the Councillors accompanied the party, nor did the Council have the common courtesy to even acknowledge the letter. So much for their progressive spirit, and is it any wonder that such a wonderful district is lying dormant, unknown and unpopulated... Thank God, they discovered a road to Mt Spec, and the Tableland in the Townsville area, or the country would lie dormant for another 100 years. (McKimmin 1930, p. 4)

<sup>6</sup> Compare the Townsville City Council Minutes and Committee Books with Mt Spec Development Association's October 1913 Report and the Townsville and District Development Association's 1930 Report.

<sup>7</sup> See Townsville City Council Minutes and Committee Reports Books from 1923 to 1928.

Five years after deciding not to involve the neighbouring shires, in October 1929 a conference between Townsville City Council and Thuringowa Shire recommended that an:

application be made to the Main Roads Commission to have a road from Townsville to Mt Spec declared a Tourist Road.

(Townsville City Council Minutes 17 October 1929, p.337; Thuringowa Shire Council Minutes 21 December 1927, pp. 352-352; 18 September 1929, p.85)

Thuringowa's support for the Mt Spec Road, while only lukewarm, did not damage Townsville's case. Thuringowa Shire Council did fund repairs to Ingham Road prior to the November 1930 RACQ trip to Mt Spec. (Thuringowa Shire Council Minutes 20 November 1929, p. 94) Thuringowa Council was initially concerned about the level of liability it would incur from the construction of the 5.8 miles of the road that was within their shire. As it wound up the range, most of the proposed road was in fact within Hinchinbrook Shire Council's boundary. Hinchinbrook Shire Council's attitude went beyond a simple lack of enthusiasm to rejection of a road to Mt Spec in favour of roads closer to Ingham. As Councils were then responsible for both capital works and maintenance of roads within their boundaries, this lack of support must be viewed within the context of the campaign by local government authorities across the state for the declaration of Main Roads. Hinchinbrook Shire Council was eventually relieved of construction costs of a road they claimed was of no benefit to their Shire. Most of the cost would be covered by Unemployment Relief funds, and Thuringowa Shire Council would contribute the rest. (Report of the Department of Labour and Industry 1932; Hinchinbrook Shire Council Minutes 12 August 1924, 12 December 1933, 20 July 1934) The Main Roads Commission gazetted the proposed road from Moongobulla to Mt Spec a 'Tourist Road', giving it the power to: arrange with the Local Authority as to its share of the cost of Permanent Works and Maintenance. (Thuringowa Shire Council Minutes 21 May 1930, p. 127)

Thuringowa Shire Council finally gave formal approval for its portion of the Mt Spec Road in September 1934. (Minutes 21 September 1934, p. 325)

Mayor Green's vision of Mt Spec as a water catchment for Townsville was realised on 11 December 1954 when the first pipeline from Big Crystal Creek to Townsville was officially opened as the Mt Spec Water Supply Scheme. This pipeline was eventually duplicated, and the Paluma Dam constructed in the 1960s on Swamp Creek near Mt Spec. Today, water from Mt Spec barely reaches Townsville, being taken off by the suburbs that have developed along the northern beaches of Thuringowa.

In 1931, a Royal Commission was held into the development of North Queensland. Submissions made to the Royal Commission provide valuable evidence of contemporary opinion on the Mt Spec Road and the future gazettal of Paluma. McKimmin raised the issue of inequitable road funding for the north. (Royal Commission on the Development of North Queensland 1931 QSA A/6420) He presented statistics for the Townsville, Charters Towers and Herbert-Burdekin regions to show a total of 5555 cars registered to 30 June 1930. Since road taxes were enforced, the region had contributed 375 000 pounds to State revenue. When Federal Aid Money not yet spent in those districts was included, 469 000 pounds of expenditure was due to the district. Spending to date was estimated at under 75 000 pounds, leaving an amount of 394 000 pounds owing to the region which contributed "approximately one-sixth of

the Registration Moneys of the State". (Royal Commission on the Development of North Queensland 1931 QSA A/6420) McKimmin's oratory strikes a chord today:

I consider that if all the Revenue of North Queensland had been spent in the North, all the roads that have [been] advocated and considered necessary would have been built many years ago....The bulk of the money, no doubt, has been spent on Roads in the South, and a good deal of our Cash is also embodied in the great Public Buildings which adorn the Capital and have now made it so famous. Yes alas, our Funds have gone! and will continue to go until we become Decentralised, and thus control our own affairs and our own Funds and thus develop the District more speedily. (Royal Commission 1931 QSA A/6420)



1929-1931 Mt Spec Road Main Roads Commission surveyors.

Casey, Thuringowa Collection

In February 1931, as the Mt Spec Road survey line was completed, the Townsville branches of the Country and Progressive National Party wrote to Deacon, Minister for Lands "that the time is ripe for a survey of land at the top of the range". (Royal Commission on the Development of North Queensland 1931 QSA A/6419) Much was made of potential timber reserves to be accessed by the road, though their extent was still unknown, as Deputy Forester L S Twine was still surveying the recently created Mt Spec State Forest. (Royal Commission on the Development of North Queensland 1931 QSA A/6420) Forest Officer J R Dawson, in his submission to the Royal Commission a few months later, recommended a road for access to timber reserves, but decried the suitability of land for settlement, preferring to secure "the remaining timberlands" for the timber industry. (Royal Commission on the Development of North Queensland 1931 QSA A/6420)





1931-1935 Mt Spec Road, Roadworks from Moongobulla (Ollera Creek) to Cloudy Clearing (Paluma) took over four years.

Unknown, Thuringowa Collection

The local timber industry was in its infancy and the tin-mining industry was past its peak. A submission from of the Townsville and District Development Association stressed the possibilities for farming on the tableland, but their only evidence was of fruits and vegetables grown in miners' clearings around Mt Spec. (Royal Commission on the Development of North Queensland 1931 QSA A/6419)

Despite the enthusiasm of the Development Association, Henry Madden of Black River bitterly challenged the funds being allocated to the Mt Spec Road, advocating instead for the construction of the Hervey's Range Road, which he believed could easily be financed:

without any additional expense to the Government...this important bit of range road can be completed by merely transferring the relief workers, now employed upon an absurd road to Cloudy Clearing (a purely pleasure parade 50 miles up the coast) to Hervey's Range. (Royal Commission on the Development of North Queensland 1931 QSA A/6420)

W E McIlwaine, President of the Townsville Chamber of Commerce, diplomatically rejected any comparison of the two roads, stating that the Chamber supported both. He concluded:

Mt Spec will be most valuable as a health resort for North Queensland people. It will also be of value as a tourist attraction and... in the rich scrub lands on top it is hoped to establish a small farming community. (Royal Commission on the Development of North Queensland 1931 QSA A/6420)

The Report of the Royal Commission, issued later in 1931, was scathing of the Mt Spec Road:

Townsville already has an expensive tourist road to Cloudy Clearing...and no good purpose will be served by reporting

on it. We think...that Cloudy Clearing will be found unsuitable as a tourist and health resort, and that the road will not pay interest nor maintenance costs. Its continuance from Cloudy Clearing to Mount Spec we consider to be unjustified. It has no merits from the point of view of land settlement. (Report of the Royal Commission on the Development of North

Queensland Land Settlement and Forestry 1831, p. 318)

After all the glowing submissions on the value of Mt Spec as a health resort, a Royal Commission remained unconvinced.

When opening the road in July 1937, C.G. ('Nugget') Jesson (member for Kennedy), publicly announced that the government's objectives in building the range road were (besides the obvious benefit of providing employment) to provide the citizens of Townsville with a mountain resort and to establish communication with the back country.

(Townsville Daily Bulletin 20 July 1937, pp. 9, 20)

The Main Roads Commission had recognised the needs of industries like those of the 'back country' mining, timber, pastoral and proposed small crops for more direct access to Townsville and southern markets. However, as construction commenced in June 1931, the potential of these industries was unproven. Given greater priority was the provision of a quick and scenic access to Paluma, gazetted primarily "to provide the citizens of Townsville with a mountain resort." (Townsville Daily Bulletin 20 July 1937, p. 9; Annual Report of the Main Roads Commission 1928, p. 17, 1930, p. 14; Annual Report of the Department of Labour and Industry 1931, p. 39) Again, this potential was still unproven in 1931. The Mt Spec Road did not have a specific destination, nor the proposed township a name, for the letter to Deacon from the Country and



Progressive National Party made suggestions on both:

Mt Spec and Cloudy Clearing (the present names) are not very suitable for such a Beautiful Scenic Health Resort, and the submitting of more fitting and appropriate names is under consideration.

The letter also recommended:

that Quarter Acre Blocks on either side of the [Mt Spec Tourist] Road be made available for Building Sites, whilst the higher Sites be surveyed and Reserved for a Sanitorium and Boarding Schools, etc. (Royal Commission on the Development of North Queensland 1931 QSA A/6419)

The gazettal of a township in the ranges and the construction of its access road were two long-term local projects in the first forty years of the twentieth century. It is not generally realised that the Mt Spec Tourist Road from Moongobulla (Ollera Creek) to Cloudy Clearing (Paluma) was built **before** the northern highway from Townsville to Ingham was constructed. In fact, it was government policy in the 1920s not to gazette Main Roads parallel to the State owned railways. Main Roads could

only be constructed to connect a railway's hinterland with a railhead. This had the effect of disallowing the construction of most regional 'main' roads. Political party branches and local Councils complained about locally collected funds being used to subsidise roads elsewhere. (Royal Commission on the Development of North Queensland 1931 QSA A/6419) The policy restricting competition between new Main Roads and existing railways meant that the Mt Spec Road was one of few roads in the Townsville area that qualified for funding as a Main Road. Later rescinding of the policy permitted the upgrading of the Townsville to Ingham road, known then as 'the Townsville to Moongobulla section of the Mt Spec Road'. (Thuringowa Shire Council Minutes 21 September 1934, p. 325) An unsigned 1939 report on the Paluma township (presumably by a Lands Administration Board surveyor) noted that the Main Roads Commission was:

completing the last section of the 38 miles stretch from Townsville and in a few months a good main road will extend from Townsville to six miles beyond the Paluma township.

(Unsigned Report 19 January 1939, p.1)



18 July 1937 Little Saltwater (Crystal) Creek Bridge, Mt Spec Road. The Hon. C G 'Nugget' Jesson cuts the ribbon to officially open the Mt Spec Road. The well-attended opening ceremony was organised by the Townsville and District Development Association, without the 'official' sanction of the Main Roads Commission. President REA McKimmin stands near Jesson with his hat under his arm. Professional photographer W J Laurie was also a member of the T&DDA. Main Roads overseer W H McClelland (dark coat) is in the background at the base of the tree on the left hand embankment. Mrs J C (Margaret) Butler is the woman in the striped jacket.

W J Laurie, Thuringowa Collection

Work on this section of the coastal highway, particularly bridgeworks, brought Mt Spec closer to Townsville. (Cummins & Campbell Monthly Magazine April 1935, pp.27,29; February 1939, p.26; Annual Report of the Main Roads Commission 1936, pp.7,15) A major deviation from the original alignment of the coastal highway was approved solely to be a more direct route to the beginning of the Mount Spec Tourist Road at Moongobulla. (Annual Report of the Main Roads Commission 1934, p. 8) The highway from Ollera Creek to Crystal Creek now follows the planned route.

The Great Depression paradoxically boosted expenditure on such developmental roads through the application of Unemployment Relief Scheme funds. (Annual Report of the Main Roads Commission 1930, p. 14) In the lead-up to the Depression, the cost of relieving Queensland's unemployment had more than doubled between 192and 1929. (Grove 1932, p. 84) Relief Scheme funds were raised by a levy on all incomes (first threepence then sixpence in the pound). (Grove 1932, p. 88)

The Labor opposition claimed that relief funds were being misused to "develop the private property of some of the Government's supporters". (Costar 1974, p. 39) Funds could only be spent through local government authorities, and no evidence has been found of direct political patronage in the case of the Mt Spec Tourist Road.

Despite the defeat of the Labor government in May 1929, and the intention of the Moore Country Party National government to slash government expenditure, Main Roads Commission surveyors were soon on site at Moongobulla. (Peut Letter to Ron McKergow; Grove 1932, p. 86) The construction of the Mount Spec Tourist Road was an ambitious project, the largest Unemployment Relief project in the region. (Annual Report of the Department of Labour and Industry 1931) It was a long-term project that would absorb hundreds of men. The government's policy of non-competition between Railways and Main Roads supported funding for the road. Such funding may not have eventuated had the government not been so desperate to deliver unemployment relief. However, in its rush to fund public works, the State government put its money into a difficult project that eventually took five years to complete and was of little immediate benefit. (Colwill 1977, p. 29; Royal Commission on the Development of North Queensland 1931, QSA A/6419 & A/6420) The decision to build had already been made, so any doubts as to the utility of the road were overlooked in the necessity to provide growing numbers of men with work.

The assumed benefits of opening up new country to settlement had justified many a doubtful project. Although the road did allow substantial timber reserves to be cut, these reserves were not guaranteed at the time the decision was made to build the road. Small farms, to grow "cold country fruits", were not subdivided until 1949 and are no longer worked commercially. (McKimmin 1913, pp. 4, 9-10) Another objective for building an access road, though it often went unstated, was Townsville City Council's desire to secure a water supply. The long-term importance of Mt Spec as a water catchment for Townsville-Thuringowa brought together an influential group of businessmen with varied commercial, political and personal motives for ensuring the road's construction. Memberships overlapped among the Townsville City Council, the Chamber of Commerce, the Townsville and District Development Association, the Country and Progressive National Party, even the local RACQ club. The political and economic climate of the depression

provided further motives for funding. Construction of the road eventually took longer than expected and cost more than estimated. (Royal Commission on the Development of North Queensland 1931, QSA A/6419) Today, many tourists use the road, but Paluma has not expanded to the extent of Kuranda, Cairns' 'hill retreat'. Paluma is still a summer haven for the people of Townsville, but most recent building projects only replace dwellings that once existed. The decision to build the Mt Spec Tourist Road was not taken for utilitarian reasons and its construction had commenced amongst some controversy.



ca 1930s Ream Falls, Mt Spec. The Ream Falls were most likely named by Townsville and District Development Association President, R E A McKimmin. These falls may also be the foundation of the Paluma Dam spillway.

W J Laurie, Thuringowa Collection



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## **‘THE MT SPEC TOURIST ROAD’**

### *- a township created*

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A report dated November 1930 presented to the 1931 Royal Commission records the beginnings of the Mt Spec Road:

About five miles of the track had been cleared of all trees and stumps; and the first cuttings at the foot of the Range were well in hand, whilst a considerable amount of blasting had also been done at the foot of the Range. (QSA A/6419)

The Main Roads Commission was responsible for the survey, design and supervision of construction. (Annual Report of the Main Roads Commission 1931, Appendix III p. 72) Apart from some men under contract (for example truck owner-drivers) Commission staff were the only permanent employees. A new supervisor, W H McClelland, was transferred onto the construction site in July 1931 to quell industrial unrest among the relief workers.

Although the Spec road had then only been started a few months, the man in charge of the job was having trouble with the men who threatened to strike - so that's how we came north. (McClelland 2 July 1986, Personal Communication)

The yarn that got around was that...some Italian had been placed in charge of a selection of men and this lot of men objected to him being their boss...they were going to call a strike....So he told them straight, that that chap, providing he's working and does his work correctly, it didn't matter what nationality he was.

(McClelland 19 March 1989, Interview)

McClelland remained as Officer in Charge until 1942, and no further record of unrest has surfaced.

Main Roads staff consisted of McClelland and seven gangers including one in charge of the pipeworks at Ollera Creek and another in charge of bridgeworks at Little Saltwater (Crystal) Creek. The Commission also employed three of its own truck drivers, some powder monkeys and a cost clerk, pay clerk and timekeeper in the office. Labour was drawn from the region's unemployed men, who were engaged for a maximum of three months. Men could be re-employed if they chose to re-register with the Department of Labour and Industry and wait. (McClelland 19 March 1989, Interview)

Despite the poor economic climate of the early 1930s, there was often a shortage of workers on the road. Causes for this were the rotational nature of employment coupled with hard working conditions and isolated living conditions. (Annual Report of the Main Roads Commission 1934, p. 13) The Intermittent Relief Scheme had been formed in March 1931 from the amalgamation of existing schemes providing rotational relief work and supply of relief rations. The new scheme was aimed primarily at families, the amount of work granted being proportionate to the number of dependants. 'Traveller's walking rations' continued to be issued to single men who were expected to travel looking for work until June 1932, when the travel stipulation was removed. (Colwill 1977, pp. 29 - 30)



1931-35 Mt Spec Road. Main Roads Commission work cart with petrol powered compressor bogged in sand.

Casey, Thuringowa Collection

The incoming Moore government refused to distribute ‘dole’ money “on the grounds that it was morally degrading for a man to receive charity in lieu of work”. (Costar 1974, p. 38) Only men prepared to work would receive public funds. To quell feared unrest among the growing numbers of vocal unemployed, police stations and courthouses were used as the administrative centres of these schemes. (Colwill 1977, p. 31)



1931-35 Mt Spec Road. Roadworks construction camp with tents and equipment. Casey, Thuringowa Collection



1931 -35 Mt Spec Road. Tents, wagons and piping on road construction. Casey, Thuringowa Collection



ca 1933 Mt Spec Road at 45,000 feet through chainage. Stone cutting during construction. Mrs McClelland noted that it was their car. McClelland, Thuringowa Collection

As the road gained altitude, the rainforest had to be manually cleared. From 47500 to 72500 feet through-chainage, the prevailing vegetation is marked on the working drawings as “vine scrub” or “jungle”. (Main Roads Commission 1930 - 1934, Working Plans and Sections) Two tractors and a few trucks, small by today’s standards and two air compressors were initially

the only mechanical aids. Cuttings were blasted through the granite using gelignite. The softer earth under the rainforest was ploughed up by horses once the trees were cleared. (Plant 24 May 1987, Interview) Once broken up, the overburden was removed using horse-drawn scoops, wheelbarrows or mining trolleys on small pieces of portable track. Blasting powder was used to loosen sections of gravel. Later, small scoops known as ‘tumbling tommies’ were towed behind one of the crawler tractors. (Linton June 1987, Reminiscences) Most work was done with picks and shovels. As the most significant Unemployment Relief project near Townsville, it was certainly labour-intensive. (McClelland 19 March 1989, Interview)



ca 1933 Number 3 Camp at “The Saddle”, Mt Spec Road. Road workers in front of “Barretts” Guesthouse and “Number Three Camp” on Mount Spec Road. Number 3 Camp at 46,000 feet through chainage was the largest and longest-lived of all the construction camps along the length of the Mt Spec Road. McClelland, Thuringowa Collection



ca 1933 Mt Spec Road. View of a large maple balanced on the edge of Mt Spec Road during construction. Note the use of mining technology - tramlines and trolleys. Unknown, Thuringowa Collection

Initially, all workers were located in one large camp near the base of the range. Hollimans, merchants of Townsville, maintained a galvanised iron ‘store’ here for the life of the camp. (Plant 24 May 1987, Interview) Near No. 1 Camp, a pipeworks was erected on Ollera Creek. Over four years until its removal in November 1934, the small gang of men living near this plant made the hundreds of concrete pipes that form most of the culverts under the road. (Main Roads Commission Job History Sheet 117-501-19 November 1934) As work progressed, smaller satellite campsites were established near significant projects, for example the construction of a masonry arch culvert or the blasting of a granite bluff. This makes it difficult to arrive at



an accurate total for the number of camps, but there were four major campsites and probably at least as many single gang camps. The Main Roads site office and most permanent Commission staff were located in the main camps, often spending years living at a particular site.

Each main camp is remembered for the significant events that took place there. Camp No 1 had a payroll hold-up. On Wednesday 9 December 1931, Pay Clerk Michael Killoran and driver Jim Stewart drove the utility truck from the camp to Moongobulla railway siding, where they collected the payroll and escort Constable O'Brien. As the men working on the road were about to be stood down for the Christmas season, the payroll was almost four hundred pounds. On the return journey, the road to the camp was found blocked by a felled tree:

The party got out...to remove the obstacle and just as they were about to do so, a voice called on them, "Put up your hands." The party then looked around to see where the strange voice had come from, and observed a man partly concealed behind some rocks and bushes, with a shot gun pointed at them. As they demurred in complying with his peremptory demand, he fired two shots at them in their direction. One of the pellets struck Mr. Killoran just above the temple, but no injury resulted. The offender then made off into the bush, but Constable O'Brien fired some shots at the retreating figure without effect. (Townsville Daily Bulletin 10 December 1931)



*ca 1932 Mt Spec Road. Looking back from 18,600 feet through chainage.*  
MRC, Main Roads Commission Collection

One tyre was shot out, but the pay was distributed, then Townsville Police were informed. A party of six police officers and two Aboriginal trackers arrived that evening but it was not until Friday afternoon that Townsville horseman Charles Henry

Edmonds was apprehended and charged. (Townsville Daily Bulletin 12 December 1931) Edmonds pleaded guilty to being found with an unlicensed pistol in his possession. (Townsville Daily Bulletin 14 December 1931) He was also committed in February 1932 to stand trial on a charge of attempted robbery while in possession of a dangerous weapon, namely a shot gun, but was later found not guilty. (Townsville Daily Bulletin 8 February 1932; McClelland 19 March 1989, Interview) An unfortunate consequence of the trial was the temporary unserviceability of the Main Roads utility.

Ford Truck No. 146 has given a good deal of trouble lately owing to some of the tyres being old and also the Police requiring a tyre and tube as exhibits in the Mt Spec case, however I am obtaining some new ones. (Main Roads Commission Weekly Report Ending 8 January 1932)

The shift to No. 2 Camp at the head of the works was completed on 18 March 1932. A temporary timber bridge had just been erected over Little Crystal Creek, providing access to works beyond there. (Main Roads Commission Weekly Report Ending 18 March 1932) No. 2 Camp was below Little Crystal Creek, about three kilometres from the bottom of the range, and was not a popular site. (Plant 24 May 1987, Interview) Blasting of hard rock continued nearby. On one occasion, a sharp shard of granite sliced through McClelland's tent and landed in the baby's cot. (McClelland 19 March 1989, Interview) The tents issued by the Main Roads Commission were erected in open forest on sloping ground. This campsite was subject to bushfire, plagued with spiders and water needed to be carted in. (McClelland 19 March 1989, Interview) Snakes were also a problem.

I can remember the snakes were very bad at one stage and every night while I was sitting at the table I used to put my feet up on the stool and sit on them so the snakes wouldn't bite me. (Linton June 1987, Reminiscences)

The site office was moved in late 1932 to No. Camp site at 'The Saddle' about ten kilometres from the bottom of the range. No. Camp was very well organised and lasted five years. This was an excellent campsite, and for years afterwards, Main Roads maintained it as a lookout and picnic area. Today, a track leads down onto the rare flat area below the road, but it is overgrown and the shelter shed has been removed. After the trees were cleared, there was enough ground at this campsite to stable horses and build a rough tennis court. (Main Roads Commission Report 22 February 1932; Weekly Reports Ending 26 February 1932, 4 March 1932) Ships water tanks up on the roadside held a back-up supply for when the small creek running through the camp ran dry. Communications with the outside world were through a telephone line down the 'Lemon Tree Track' which connected the camp to the Post Office at Mutarnee.

Families were encouraged to live at this camp by the communal amenities that were maintained by Commission staff. Single men's 'ranches' were set up near all significant campsites to cater for the men. Single men at No. Camp were catered for at Barrett's Guesthouse (sometimes Ranch). Barrett's became popular with weekend visitors from Townsville. The scenic attraction of the new road, noted in Main Roads Commission Annual Reports, led to the establishment of a series of guesthouses and camping grounds along its length while construction continued. (Annual Report of the Main Roads Commission 1931, p. 16; Barrymore 1933, pp. 21 - 22; McClelland 19 March 1989, Interview; Cummins & Campbell Monthly Magazine April 1935, pp. 27, 29)

Queensland's Governor, Sir Leslie Wilson, left his train at Moongobulla and travelled up to No. Camp for lunch and to view progress on the roadworks, such as the significance of the Mt Spec Tourist Road project to the State's unemployment relief efforts. Just after the Governor's visit, Costello, a cook at one of the ranches, went wallaby shooting one Saturday afternoon and never returned. Despite a police search involving the relief workers and Commission staff, no trace of Costello was ever found. No. Camp eventually moved to Paluma in 1938, three years after the road was trafficable by car for its full length.

(McClelland 19 March 1989, Interview)



*ca 1932 Mt Spec Road. Rock fill through chainage approximately 19,900 feet. Note the use of tramlines and trolleys and rope to mark the line of construction.*

MRC, Main Roads Commission Collection

Access roads were the main cost in developing tourism in the 1930s. The Main Roads Commission then assumed responsibility for all kinds of tourist facilities. The Commission's 1934 Annual Report detailed draft legislation to amend the Main Roads Acts giving the Commission authority to construct access tracks to lookouts and:

the power to erect buildings, landing stages, wharves, etc in tourist areas, and to let or lease them or charge a toll for their use.(p. 5)

The Commission proposed a network of walking tracks within the rainforest. Some of these have since disappeared, while others formed the basis of the present National Parks and Wildlife Service tracks. An undated map (c.1939) held in the Main Roads office in Townsville shows a walking track to McClelland's Lookout, and a proposed track to another lookout along a spur east of McClelland's Lookout. The Commission constructed a deviation from the intended alignment of the

road as it entered Paluma (The Loop), providing access to a lookout named in 1987 for their Officer-in-Charge, Wilfred Hector McClelland. (Annual Report of the Main Roads Commission 1938, p. 10; McClelland 19 March 1989, Interview) McClelland, along with other permanent Main Roads staff and families, spent almost ten years supervising the construction of the Mount Spec Tourist Road to Paluma, then its extension the Gregory Highway from Paluma to the mining town of Ewan.

Deliberate attention was paid during construction to the aesthetic appeal of the road. No better example of the far-sighted attitude exists than the pleasing design of the masonry arch bridge across Little Crystal Creek. (Annual Report of the Main Roads Commission 1932, pp. 14 - 15) The Main Roads Commission was also innovative in its establishment of a "motor camp" at Paluma, possibly the first motel in Australia. (Annual Report of the Main Roads Commission 1937, p. 14; 1938, p. 14) Tenders for construction of the motor camp (now Mithaven Units) were called in 1937. Work was limited to the construction of four units before the pressures of war intervened. (Annual Report of the Main Roads Commission 1941, p. 7) These tourist facilities at Paluma continued to be managed for some twenty years by Main Roads. In the 1980s, long-term Main Roads Department employee, W. Van der Heyden, recalled the department refurbishing the cabins in the mid-1950s.

Consistent with overseas experience, the Railways Department also consciously developed tourism, giving protection to scenic features along its tracks for future enjoyment. The Railways Department encouraged roads to scenic areas if these roads connected with a railway line, thereby developing its tourist hinterland. In conjunction with the Railways Department, the Main Roads Commission enthusiastically promoted Mt Spec. (Annual Report of the Main Roads Commission 1931, p. 11; 1932, p. 7; Wegner 1982, p. 22; Barrymore 1933, p. 22) By the late 1930s, tourists could travel by car or rail to Paluma for a day trip to the mountains, privately or in a party organised through the railways. (Barrymore 1933, p. 22) Visitors staying overnight were accommodated at Barrett's, then later at the Main Roads Cabins or at "Cavilcade", a private guesthouse in Paluma run by former Main Roads employee Bert Cavill. (Cummins & Campbell Monthly Magazine February 1939, p. 26; McClelland 19 March 1989, Interview)

With increased visitation came further lobbying for the gazettal of a township. The head of works on the Mt Spec Tourist Road was still two miles from Paluma when the first lots were auctioned on 22 December 1934. (Townsville Daily Bulletin 24 December 1934) Other townships in the Kangaroo Hills Mining Field had been established and disappeared before Paluma was gazetted. The shifting nature of alluvial tin mining or the difficulties of the climate at Cloudy Clearing may have caused the delay in gazetting a township and the establishment of facilities in the early days of European settlement (no pub, general store, post office or police station).

At the auction held at Townsville's Land Office, upset prices for the lots ranged from twenty-five to fifty-five pounds. These were all residential blocks, with the largest being almost thirty-nine perches. (Queensland Government Gazette Volume CXLIII No. 144, p. 1425) On the morning of the auction, the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* compared the:

somewhat unpleasant conditions in Townsville [to the] considerably more comfortable conditions...at Cloudy Clearing on the Mt Spec Road. (22 December 1934)

Main Roads Commission staff had visited the newly surveyed township a few days before the auction and "at mid-day



experienced practically chilly conditions” (*Townsville Daily Bulletin* 22 December 1934) Monday’s Bulletin reported that ten of the blocks had sold at upset prices, while the rest available to the first bidders after 11am that morning. Among the original landholders were Albert (Pop) Cavill, and two of the Paluma’s protagonists - John Anderson and R E A McKimmin. All blocks sold faced the Mt Spec Tourist Road which was still a temporary track through the village. (*Townsville Daily Bulletin* 24 December 1934)

By February 1935, the formed Mt Spec Road was:  
within a mile and a half of Paluma, and the rest of the distance was compassed on foot, along a good track.

(Cummins & Campbell Monthly Magazine April 1935, pp. 27, 29)

All forty-one available allotments had been taken up. The full length of the road was trafficable twelve months later, but not opened by J G Jesson MLA for another eighteen months. The Townsville District Development Association (President R E A McKimmin), without much support from the Main Roads Commission, sponsored the opening ceremony on 18 July 1937. (*Townsville Daily Bulletin* 17 July 1937; *Townsville Bulletin* 26 June 1982) The reason for reluctance on the part of Main Roads is difficult to understand. Perhaps as a decision had been made to continue the road on to Ewan, the job was regarded as still incomplete. Perhaps too much time had elapsed since the road from Moongobulla to Paluma was actually made trafficable. Despite the lack of support from the Commission, about 200 hundred people are estimated to have attended the celebrations. Following the ceremony, Jesson wrote to the Main Roads Commission informing them that he had “unofficially” opened the road.

The new township grew quickly. By 1937, there were twenty buildings in Paluma. (Wegner 1982, p. 7) Land was sold as Perpetual Leases and was subject to certain conditions. If these conditions were not met, the lease could be jeopardised. The pace of road construction was not fast enough for some of the new owners of allotments at Paluma, who claimed poor access as a reason for not fulfilling their lease conditions. The new road was subject to landslides, while photographic evidence suggests that even clearing the thickly forested blocks would have been a major undertaking. (Cummins & Campbell Monthly Magazine

April 1935; February 1939) New owner T.G. Melrose rebuffed this:

I trust some future public occasion will give an opportunity for voicing of sentiments quite at variance with the adverse criticism which was used publically (sic) as a reason for nonfulfilling of the terms of land purchase in Paluma. I particularly desire to disassociate myself from the criticism then levelled against the condition and progress of the road.

(Melrose 16 August 1937, Letter to District Engineer Main Roads Commission)

Lands Department surveyors were active in the new township, setting aside land for government purposes. A Health Purposes Reserve (R.393) was gazetted in 1936 and only disposed of in the mid-1980s. This block has never been built on. While Paluma’s sanitarium was never constructed, the cool climate and altitude have aided the recovery of many invalids, particularly during the operation of the RAAF Medical Rehabilitation Unit during the Second World War. Governments of the day obviously had high hopes for Paluma, for a Courthouse reserve was set aside adjacent to the reserve for the Police Station. A Police Station was not actually built in Paluma until 1961 following the relocation of the station from the dying township of Ewan. This Police Station lasted thirty years before relocating yet again to Rollingstone. The Courthouse block is still for sale.

An undated Lands Administration Department map entitled “Design of Sections V to X” shows that Paluma was originally intended to be much larger. (Lands Administration Department n.d.; Map) Another six sections were added to the township subsequent to this design, but were not subdivided or sold. Paluma in 2001 includes Sections One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Eleven, Fifteen and Sixteen. An unsigned report dated 19 January 1939 report appears to relate to this design. This report recommended an accurate contour survey before any more sections were opened up. As the Mt Spec Tourist Road follows the ridge running east-west through Paluma, the sections of land subdivided either side of the road fall away to the north and south. This fall is more pronounced in some sections than others. Most of the proposed sections proved unsuitable for subdivision, given their location on steep slopes and watercourses. The broad ridge north to Witt’s Lookout was at different times recommended for residential subdivision or as a golf course, but was eventually included in the Mt Spec National Park.



ca 1932 Mt Spec Road. Rock cutting between 20,000 feet and 20,200 feet through chainage.

MRC, Main Roads Commission Collection

The 1939 report had noted “tourists and week-enders cannot ensure a stable development of a town” and recommended that ten small farm lots be set aside for “fruit and vegetable crops such as citrus, passion fruit, strawberries, tomatoes, etc”. (Unsigned report 19 January 1939, p. 3) Further subdivision to the west of Paluma took place in 1949, when ten lots of land ranging in size from five to ten acres were auctioned as Special Leases. (Government Printing Office June 1949, Sketch Map of Portions 74 to 83) These small farms were intended to fulfil the proposed “small crops” idea of the 1930s, for Paluma to become Townsville’s “tableland” exporting “cold country fruits” as far as Winton. This idea was first flagged in Johnstone’s Statements made by residents of upwards of twenty years included in McKimmin’s

Report on a Trip to Mt Spec 1913, later submitted to the Royal Commission on the Development of North Queensland (McKimmin 1913, pp. 4, 9-10) For the next twenty years, fruit, vegetables and flowers were grown at Paluma for the Townsville market. The Williams Logging Area just west again was suggested for dairying, but this never eventuated commercially. (Unsigned report 19 January 1939)

In 1952, the first of several Recreation Reserves (R. 471) was gazetted, under the control of private trustees. Private trustees drawn from the membership of the Paluma and District Progress and Development Association managed this reserve until Thuringowa City Council assumed that role in the early 1990s, enabling Council funding of the new Community Hall. Reserve 471 exists today as 'the village green'. An adjacent area of about 11 acres 2 roods 20 perches in Portion 95 was gazetted as a Reserve for Park and Recreation Purposes (R.519) in July 1959. This Recreation Reserve was similarly under the control of private trustees, in this case William Little, Eric McKimmin, Michael Nielsen and Leonard Crouch. In the same Government Gazette, another Reserve for Recreation (R.520 - 'The Loop'), about one acre 2 roods, was placed under the control of the same four trustees. Reserves 519 and 520 no longer exist.

In the 1990s, the Lands Department planned to subdivide the remains of the original Cloudy Clearing (Balance Portion 95) into sixteen residential blocks. Following the excision of a portion for the construction of the Gumburu Catholic Environmental Education Centre, public opposition to further development led to the shelving of these plans. Thuringowa City Council rezoned the balance as Public Open Space. This zoning is in keeping with the sentiments of the 1939 report:

A park area embracing the open space known as Cloudy Clearing has been left. This area if properly developed will allow a large swimming pool to be constructed, and with the systematic clearing out of part of the undergrowth a beautiful scenic spot would be left fringing the pool, leaving ample room for a sports ground and children's play ground adjacent to the motor camp. (Unsigned report 19 January 1939, p. 2)

The Mt Spec Tourist Road has provided access to a "health resort" as promised during the thirty-year campaign its proponents waged to secure construction. It was an expensive road to build, and is expensive to maintain. The construction of this road was a project for its time. It would not be built today, and would not have been built during the Depression without the energy and sheer persistence of the Townsville lobbyists, the impetus of providing desperately needed unemployment relief or the physical efforts of men working largely with picks and shovels.



11 March 1931 Mt Spec Road. Job Number 117-501-6. Looking back through chainage 23,950 feet.

MRC, Main Roads Commission Collection



11 March 1931 Mt Spec Road. Looking forward through chainage 23,950 feet.

MRC, Main Roads Commission Collection





ca 1933 Mt Spec Road. Construction of this section was under ganger Birmingham.

McClelland, Venn Collection



ca 1934 "Barrett's" Guesthouse, Mt Spec road. Mrs Barrett and her children at the guesthouse, "The Saddle".

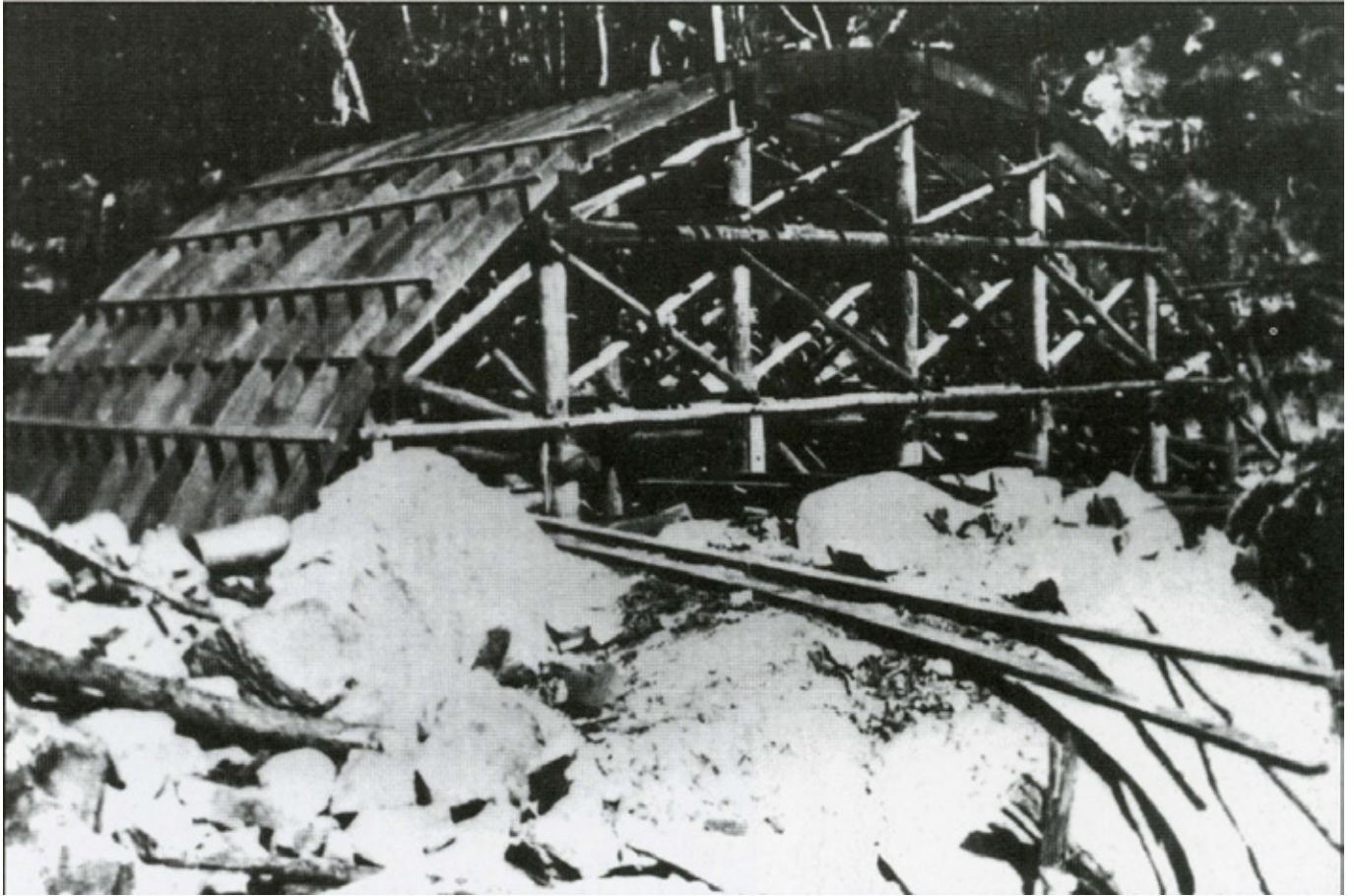
Unknown, Thuringowa Collection



ca 1933 Little Saltwater (Crystal) Creek, Mt Spec Road. Ford truck on temporary bridge over Crystal Creek. This timber bridge was created to provide access to works beyond Little Crystal Creek while masonry arch bridge was still under construction.

Casey, Thuringowa Collection





*ca 1933 Little Crystal Creek, Mt Spec Road. Timber framework for the masonry arch bridge, Little Crystal Creek.*

Casey, Thuringowa Collection



*ca 1933 Little Crystal Creek, Mt Spec Road. The masonry arch bridges nears completion.*

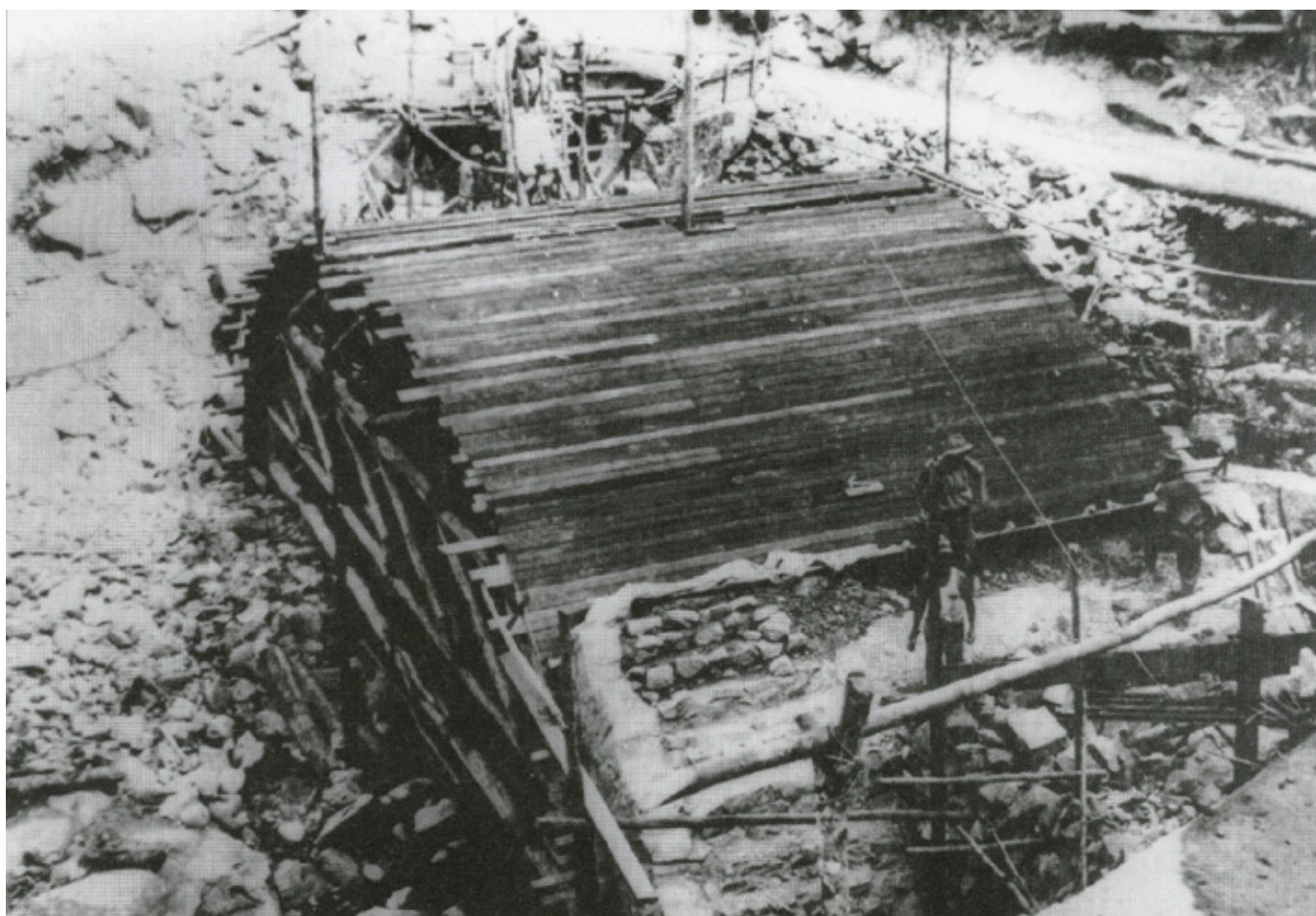
Unknown , Thuringowa Collection





*ca 1932 Mt Spec Road. A smaller masonry arch culvert at 17, 100 feet through chainage. Through chainage was measured from the beginning of the project at Moongabulla (near today's turnoff at Ollera Creek). There are several stone culverts like this. This particular one is at the base of the range. This was Job Number 117-501-4.*

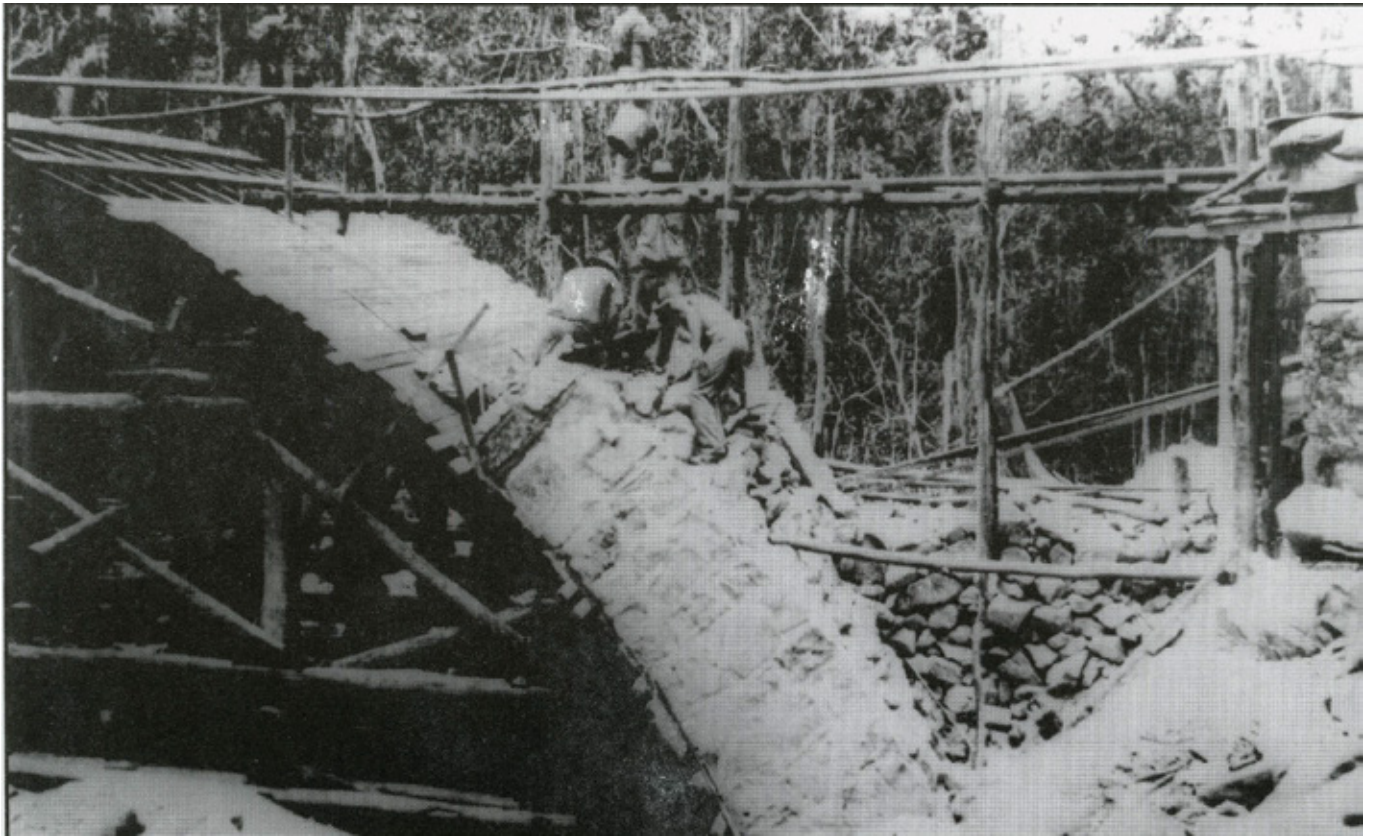
MRC, Main Roads Commission Collection



*10 October 1932 Little Crystal Creek, Mt Spec Road. Construction of the masonry arch bridge. Abutment 'B' in the foreground. Note the use of sawn hardwood for the final formwork. Work was delayed while stocks of sawn timber were delivered on site.*

MRC, Main Roads Commission Collection





10 October 1932 Little Crystal Creek, Mt Spec Road. Abutment 'B' looking due South. Note the rock fill behind the arch. MRC, Main Roads Commission Collection



10 October 1932 Little Crystal Creek, Mt Spec Road. Abutment 'B' looking due south. Note the lagging put down on the formwork to haul the concrete when it was poured over the rock fill.

MRC, Main Roads Commission Collection





*Early 1932 Little Crystal Creek, Mt Spec Road. Note the use of the round timbers for the initial framework of the masonry arch bridge.*

Casey, Thuringowa Collection



*1932 Little Crystal Creek, Mt Spec Road. The masonry arch takes shape.*

Page, Venn Collection





1933 Little Crystal Creek, Mt Spec Road. Both abutments almost complete.

Page, Venn Collection



1933 Little Crystal Creek, Mt Spec Road.

Page, Venn Collection





1933 Little Crystal Creek, Mt Spec Road. Bridgeworks were completed in 1933.

Page, Venn Collection



ca 1934 Little Crystal Creek, Mt Spec Road. At a cool elevation of 1086 feet asl, the bridge soon became a tourist attraction in itself. Note the mango trees planted by MRC staff.

Unknown, Venn Collection





1932 Ollera Creek Pipe Works, Mt Spec Road. Ganger Albert Kerr was in charge of casting the hundreds of concrete pipes that carry water under the Mt Spec Road. The photograph shows the assembling of the inner and outer moulds.

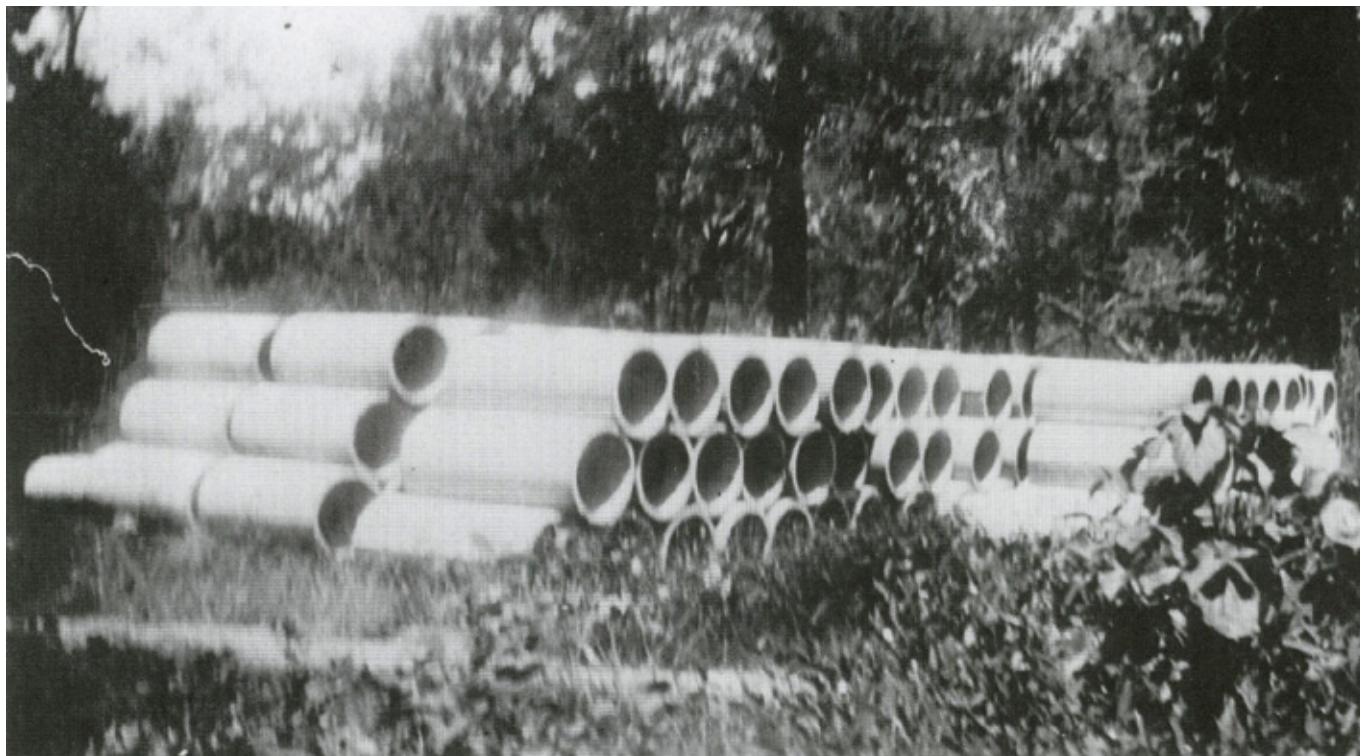
McClelland, Thuringowa Collection



1932 Ollera Creek Pipeworks, Mt Spec Road. Pipeworks curing shed with stored pipes. Note the bough shelter over the curing concrete pipes. If the concrete dried too quickly, its strength was effected.

McClelland, Thuringowa Collection





1932 Ollera Creek Pipeworks, Mt Spec Road. Once the pipes were cured, they were stacked awaiting transport to the construction sites.

McClelland, Thuringowa Collection



1933 Mt Spec Road. Roadworkers camp with tents in open forest. The relatively level site indicates this maybe Camp Number 3 at "The Saddle" (1933-35).

Unknown, Thuringowa Collection





1931-35 Mt Spec Road. Workers using hand tools and wheelbarrow.

Unknown, Thuringowa Collection



ca 1934 Mt Spec Road. Mrs Reagan and her children Eileen, Danny and Kathleen and friends Colin, Winifred and Allan McClelland (on the left), with one of the misses Cavill in the construction camp at "The Saddle". Note the bark construction of the hut.

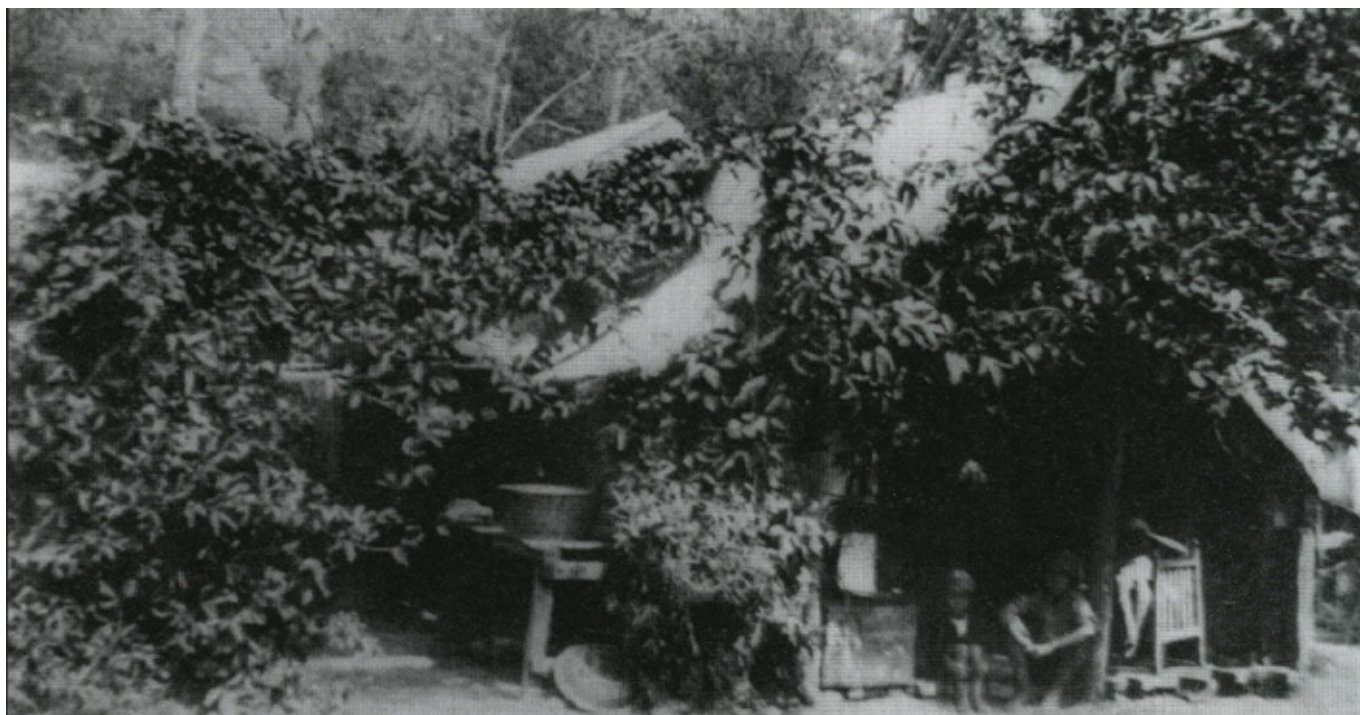
McClelland/Coulthard, Thuringowa Collection





ca 1934 "Barrett's" Guesthouse, "The Saddle", Mt Spec Road. "Barrett's Guesthouse" at Boomerang Park, 2200 feet asl.

W J Laurie, Thuringowa Collection



1933-38 Overseer McClelland's camp at "The Saddle", Mt Spec Road. Camp Number 3 was at through chainage 45 ,500 feet. Permanent MRC staff often had their families living with them on the road. Note the passionfruit vine and the wash stand.

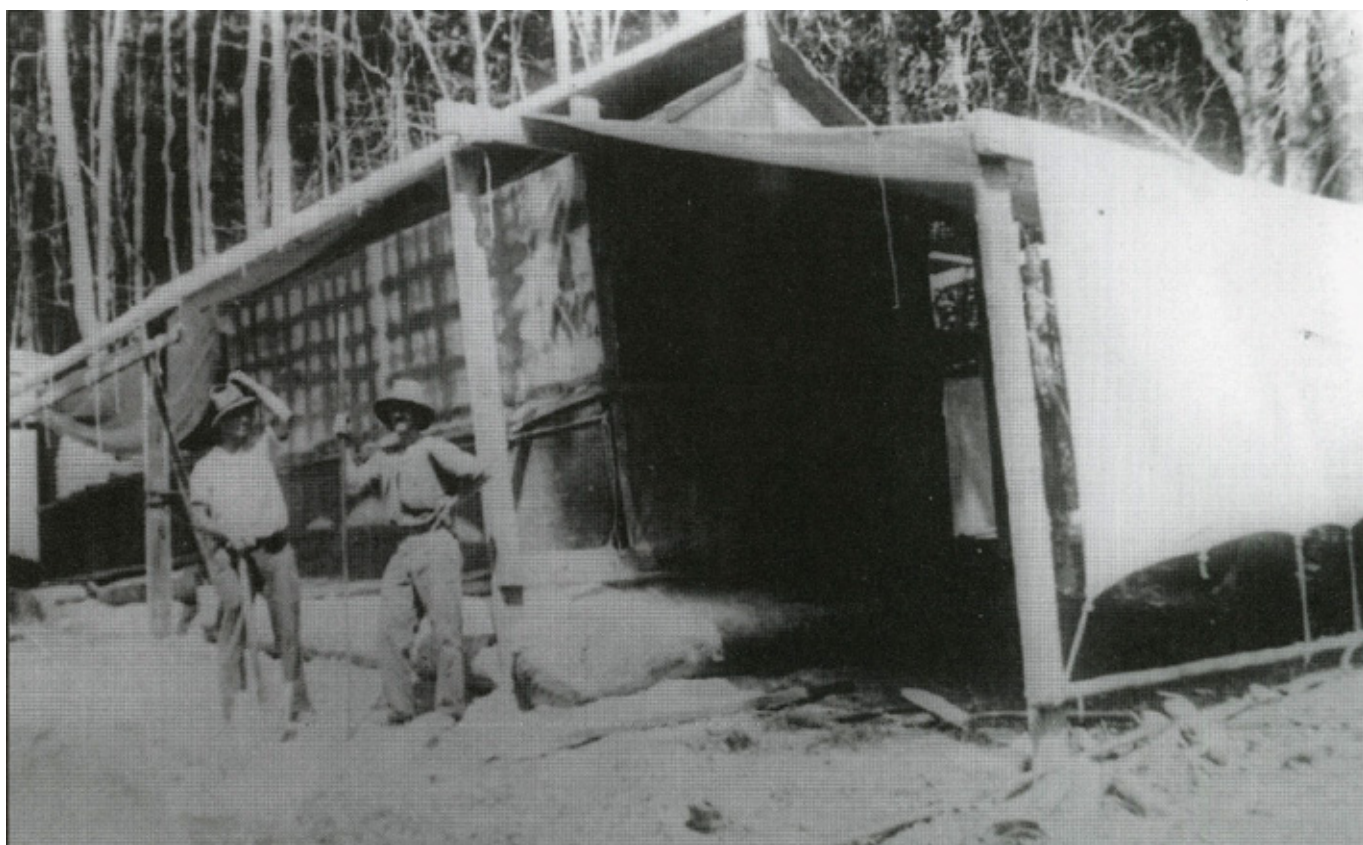
McClelland, Venn Collection





*ca 1935 Number 8 Camp, Mt Spec Road. No 8 Camp was near the top of the range, possibly on the flat ridge above Windy Corner.*

McClelland, Venn Collection



*1935 Cloudy Clearing (Paluma), Mt Spec Road. McClelland's fourth camp was located in Paluma on Allotment 1 Section 5. The photographs shows McClelland and Campbell erecting the family camp and MRC site office.*

McClelland, Venn Collection





1937 Cloudy Clearing (Paluma), Mt Spec Road. Overseer W H McClelland and family taken outside their No 4 campsite in Paluma. The Main Roads Office is on the left. L to R: Colin, Allan, Lorraine, Mrs Linda McClelland, Win, Mr McClelland (holding Neville) and "Whiskey" the dog. Note the use of tent flies in construction of the camp.

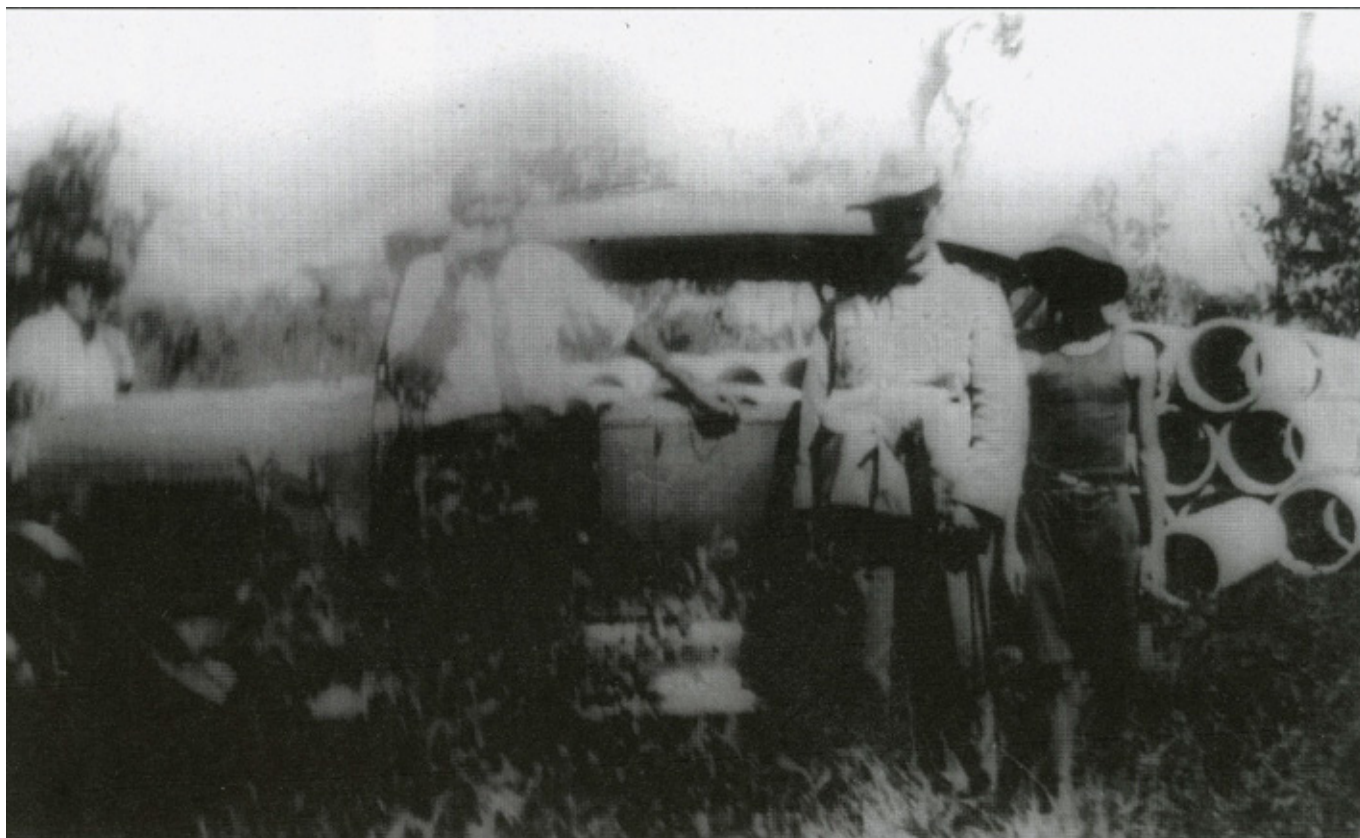
WJ Laurie, Venn Collection



1932 Mt Spec Road. This is the vehicle involved in the 1931 Christmas payroll holdup. Stewart was the driver of the ute, "Old Lizzie". The child is W H McClelland's son, Colin.

McClelland, Thuringowa Collection





1932 Mt Spec Road. Pay escort at the Pipe Works, Ollera Creek. L to R: Overseer McClelland, Killoran the Pay Clerk, Constable O'Brien and ganger Albert Kerr's son. Killoran, Stewart and O'Brien were all involved in the payroll holdup in December 1931 . McClelland's vehicle was pressed into service while awaiting delivery of a tyre as replacement for the one shot out during the robbery.

McClelland, Venn Collection



Christmas 1936 Paluma. W H McClelland, MRC Supervisor, is driving the tractor to pull out cars bogged near the top of the range. Allan McClelland in foreground, "Whiskey" the dog. Note the size of the tractor. The freshly cut road was difficult to traverse in wet weather, leading to complaints from some new landowners.

W J Laurie, Venn Collection





Early 1940s Star Valley Lookout, Mt Spec Road. The lookout is west of Paluma and overlooks the Star River Basin. As the roadworks continued westwards, attention to its aesthetics was maintained.

W J Laurie, Venn Collection



Early 1940s. The Mt Spec Road was extended towards Hidden Valley and Ewan.

W J Laurie, Venn Collection



ca 1942-43 Paluma. In this streetscape, the house in the centre belonged to Anglican Bishop, John Oliver Feetham. Note the posts with insulators to the left and right and possible tennis court posts in the background (constructed by the RAAF during the Second World War).

W J Laurie, Thuringowa Collection



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## THE 'WORTHLESS LANDS HYPOTHESIS'

### - *State Forest 268 and the Mt Spec National Park*

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State Forest reserves were declared around Mt Spec, Cloudy Clearing and Blackfriars in the early 1920s, but:

no systematic survey or working plan for timber reserves was made until the formation of a Provisional Forestry Board under the Lands Department. (Wegner 1984, p. 26)

Submissions to the 1931 Royal Commission on the Development of North Queensland highlighted the importance of the timber reserves. A report on an expedition to Mt Spec by Townsville businessmen in 1930 noted:

Much fine timber is to be seen in the vicinity of Mt Spec, including Maple, Silky Oak, Silkwood, Beantree, Crowsfoot Elm, Cedar, and Satin Wood. (Royal Commission on the Development of North Queensland 1931, QSA A/6419)

In his submission, Deputy Forester Twine lamented the lack of sufficient timber reserves set aside to serve the developing Townsville district. Timber Reserves Nos. 268 and 28 contained only approximately 65000 acres. Twine praised these reserves, rejecting their alienation for settlement as agricultural land:

This area contains a very large quantity of valuable timbers, both building and cabinet...Personally I consider that this area will be of greater value to the Crown and State as a reservation for National Park and State Forest purposes, than it would be from an agricultural viewpoint....the area will produce more revenue from timber and tourist traffic, than it will ever do from agriculture. (Royal Commission on the Development of North Queensland 1931, QSA A/6420)

Mt Spec State Forest (SF 268) was rich in cabinet timbers. The silky oak here was favoured against that obtainable farther north because its lighter colour allowed the grain to be highlighted, making it popular for furniture. Both hardwoods and softwoods were logged from within the rainforest and the eucalypt forest along its margins, with an average yield between thirty and fifty cubic metres per hectare. This yield was average for North Queensland native forests but not outstanding. The softwood yield was locally important, representing about twenty percent of supply. (Hawkes 1 September 1989, Personal communication) Softwood species provided cabinet timbers and veneers to mills at Ingham and Townsville. (Wegner 1984, p. 26; Shepherd n.d., p. 10) Eucalypt hardwoods were more likely to be prepared on site into bridge timbers, harbour piles, poles and railway sleepers. (Shepherd n.d., pp. 10 - 11)

Timber from the reserves around Mt Spec first went to Ingham mills via Mount Fox or Jacobsen's Track. The opening of the Mt Spec Tourist Road in the late 1930s linked the new township of Paluma at Cloudy Clearing with the coastal highway and railway siding at Moongobulla providing better access to Townsville mills.

The construction of the Mount Spec Road focussed attention on the rainforest there, and by 1937, Mt Fox and Mt Spec timbers were supplying four mills and logs were exported over the railway. (Wegner 1984, p. 26)

From then on, most timber left the Mt Spec area via the range road and was loaded onto trains at Moongobulla siding.

(Blackford 1990, pp. 29 - 49) In the 1940s and 1950s, there was so much activity at Moongobulla that a loading contractor, Rolly Machetta, lived on site ready to load logs onto the railway wagons as they were delivered to the siding. (Blackford 1990, p. 43)

Timber-cutters working in the forest faced many of the same problems as the tin-miners - heavy rain, scrub ticks, stinging trees, unmade roads, the dangers of working alone. (Blackford 1990, pp. 29 - 49) Many timber cutting operations were just temporary camps in the forest, but some like Beedell's camp at Star Valley Lookout were very substantial, with a log cabin and machinery sheds. Godwin's camp at Birthday Creek had huts accommodating five families. Other timber cutters with families rented cottages in Paluma or stayed in the Main Roads cabins so their children could attend the Paluma State School which opened in the early 1950s. (Blackford 1990, pp. 33, 37, 38, 44 - 46)

Like the miners, many of the timber-cutters worked in the area for years, with several generations involved in the industry. John Pelleri (Senior) and two sons cut timber on the Paluma and Swamp Creek blocks from 1932 to 1975. The family's hut on Birthday Creek remains today. Two notable contracts were the cutting of 84 - foot turpentine harbour piles during the Second World War, and the clearing of logs with Bill Beedell from Swamp Creek for the Paluma Dam site. (Blackford 1990, p. 31) Four Whalley brothers worked the forests from 1939 to 1963, living in a weatherboard building in a permanent camp on Puzzle Creek. Whalley brothers also cut turpentine for harbour piles and later softwoods for Brown and Broad Ltd, Sawmillers, carting logs to the first timber mill built in Townsville around 1932. (Blackford 1999, pp. 34 - 36)



1943 -45 Paluma. Truck carrying a six foot diameter silky oak log. Note the 'gate' to the left. This was the western boundary of the RAAF No 6 Medical Rehabilitation Unit.

W J Laurie, Thuringowa Collection

Ben Whalley recalled two teams of twenty-four bullocks each snigging logs on slopes so steep that they:

had to cut steps into the slopes with shovels and mattocks so the bullocks could climb up. (in Blackford 1990, p. 36)

In the Depression, cheaper teams of twelve horses replaced Whalley's bullock teams. Caterpillar-tracked tractors and trucks soon replaced the horse teams, though these vehicles were small by today's standards. The walking track south of Paluma known as the 'H' Track Loop follows one of the Whalley brothers' logging roads.



1930s/ 940s Mt Spec State Forest. Driver with Dodge truck bearing timber logs.

Unknown, Thuringowa Collection

During the Second World War, sawmills, plant and workers in the area were placed under the compulsory control of the Civil Construction Corps. Construction Corps timesheets for

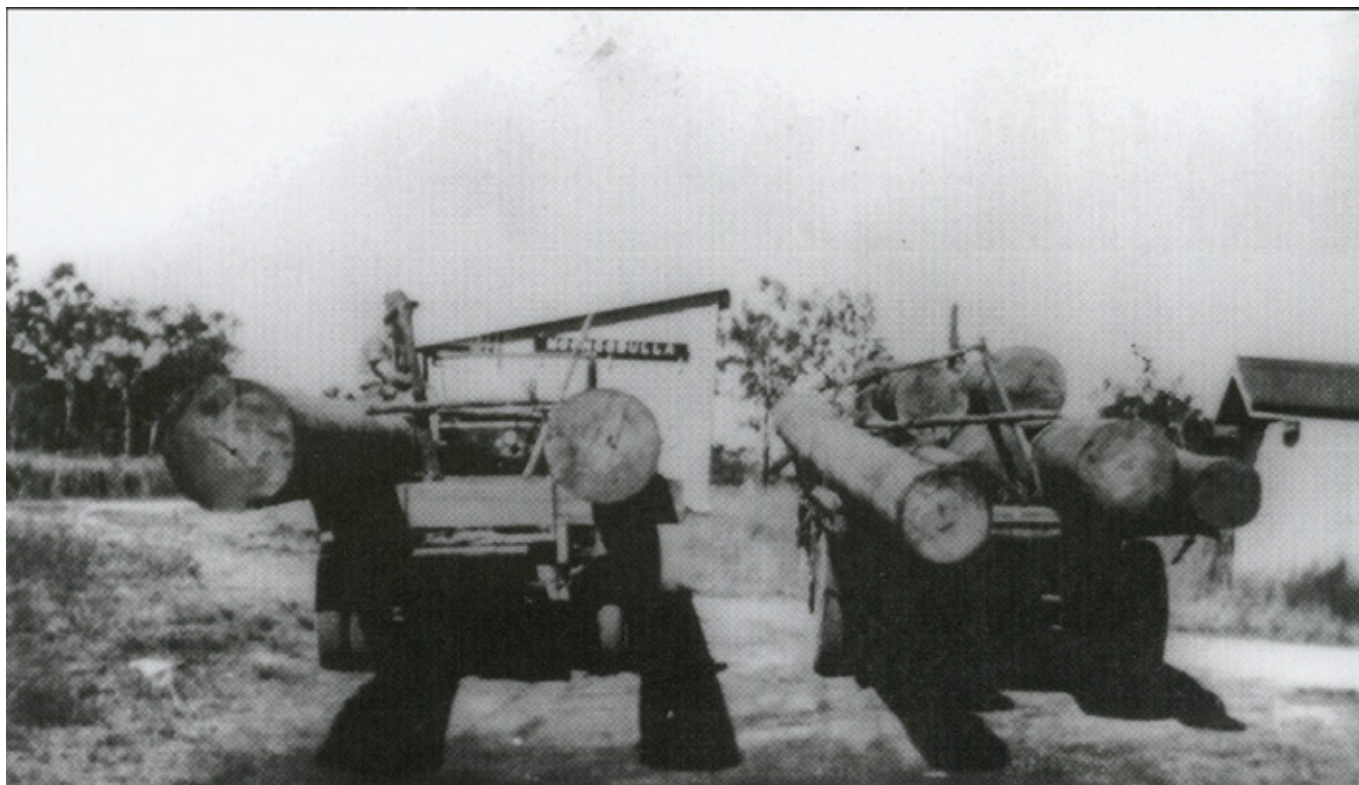
November 1944 record seven cooks, seventy-five men, and another eighteen men seconded across from the Main Roads Commission, the last two groups all being involved in falling, milling and hauling timber. (McKergow 2 November 1943, Timesheets) Many men were working locally before the war, or were owners of the twenty-two trucks and items of plant requisitioned. The eucalypt timbers were used for harbour piles, bridge timbers, railway sleepers, electricity poles and radio masts. (Blackford 1990, p. 29) Archie Taylor cut two turpentine logs over one hundred foot long (one was 128 - foot long) for an American radar station. It took several days to get the logs down the range to Moongobulla, using wallaby jacks to lift the trailer up and across the corners. (Advertiser April 1986) A large camp was set up near Puzzle Creek on Taravale Road as part of the Allied Works Council project. This camp housed up to 200 people in married quarters as well as dormitories for single men, and boasted its own school. Standard army rations were supplied, with additional deliveries of meat and groceries by Jim Devine's bus service on Wednesdays and Sundays. (McKergow n.d., Copy of 1980s newspaper article) Today, the location of the camp-site is marked by a monument erected in the 1980s by former Construction Corps workers.



Late 1930s Moongobulla Railway Station (Ollera Creek). Henry Hussey, Vince Elliott, Mrs Elliott and Sam Clark standing on a pile of railway sleepers at Moongobulla Station.

Unknown, Thuringowa Collection





ca 1939 Moongobulla Railway Station (Ollera Creek). Timber trucks at Moongobulla Railway Station.

Illin, Venn Collection

Post-war logging was undertaken on a selective basis, with trees marked out for felling by Forestry officers who then visited the loading ramps to mark the ends of logs or sleepers with a hammered stamp. Royalties were paid by the timber-cutter to the government on the amount of 'crowned' timber. The selective nature of timber cutting operations was designed from the 1920s onwards to allow for a sustainable yield, with a second cutting cycle due to commence in the early 1990s.

(Hawkes 1 September 1989, Personal communication) Inclusion of much of Mt Spec State Forest in the new Wet Tropics World Heritage Area in the 1980s precluded this. The obvious benefit has been the preservation of those forest areas included within the Wet Tropics. Disadvantages to the Mt Spec-Paluma area have been the loss of income and population locally, leading to the closure of the last school in the area at Running River in 1994. Valuable infrastructure like roads, previously maintained by the Forestry department, has degenerated and some roads have been closed altogether. Locally, there is a perception that additional logging pressure now exists upon the remaining forests outside of the Wet Tropics.

In 1947, snigger Keith Blackford was convinced he saw a Tasmanian Tiger near his Birthday Creek timber camp. (Blackford 1990, p. 47) While no other sightings have come to light, a WJ Laurie postcard of a 'Native Cat' records the local disappearance of another species. (Laurie 1936, Postcard) The Spotted Tailed Quoll was shot after destroying poultry in Paluma. With most of the rainforest areas now under World Heritage protection, hopefully the preservation of other rainforest species is assured. The presence of koalas and the discovery of several mammal and bird species previously unknown to the eucalypt forests west of Paluma highlights the need to sensitively manage timber getting in those forests if these populations are to survive.

Plans for a National Park at Mt Spec were mooted in the 1920s, but not until 1937 did the Forestry Department finally recommend that an area of 22430 acres be set aside as National

Park. (Foxlee 12 January 1925) The Second World War disrupted the gazettal process, while allowing the logging of some areas that may have been included in a National Park. Only 18560 acres were finally gazetted in the postwar period. Three reasons had been given by the Forestry Department in support of their submission for a National Park around Mt Spec. The area was of outstanding scenic attraction, there were natural lookouts with magnificent panoramic views, and the virgin state of the watercourses and 'jungle' made the area ideal for preservation. (Shepherd in Burla n.d., pp. 10 - 11)

Little mention was made of protecting biodiversity. McKimmin's submission on Mt Spec to the 1931 Royal Commission reflected a general community desire to protect the environment.

I consider that each selection should have against it the same area as a Forest Reserve so as to keep the balance of Nature....If the timber is cut down in large quantities the effect will be an altered climate, poor rain and an unattractive place. All running streams up and down each side should have about 20ft. of Crown Land left from the water's edge to make Tourist walking Tracks. Small reserves should be made around each Lookout and Waterfall. All Bird Life, Ferns and Orchids should be strictly protected. (Royal Commission on the Development of North Queensland 1931, QSA A/6420)

Unfortunately, the 1930 report on the expedition to Mt Spec mentions the party of Townsville businessmen collecting ferns and orchids. (Royal Commission on the Development of North Queensland 1931, QSA A/6419) Similarly, WJ Laurie postcards from the 1930s show tassel ferns in hanging baskets. Tassel ferns are now rarely seen in the wild. The Mt Spec Orchid, an endemic species of phalaenopsis, is now considered rare and vulnerable. It has disappeared from much of its range, not because of habitat destruction but through illegal collecting. (Lavarack & Gray 1992, p. 12; Williams 1979, p. 228) Plant collecting by nurserymen continued throughout the 1960s, with the last known prosecution in the mid-1980s after a large quantity of epiphytes and tree ferns

were removed from around the Paluma Dam. (Venn, Personal experience) In the last ten years of the twentieth century, staffing levels of both forestry and national parks rangers were decimated. With very few rangers active around Mt Spec-Paluma, it is highly likely that illegal collecting continues.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the value of a national park was primarily in its aesthetic features and the recreational opportunities it provided to tourists. Government's role was seen as identifying areas needing National Park status and in providing the necessary infrastructure for access. The *Daily Mail* in 1931 berated the State government for not moving quickly enough.

Unless we conserve our forests and streams we cannot hope to get tourists. It is useless to think in parsimonious specks and patches. The American is wide awake enough to dedicate his National Parks by the million acres and he knows that it pays. (19 July 1931)

J R Dawson, Forest Officer from Atherton, shared this opinion in his submission to the 1931 Royal Commission.

To develop the tourist trade all existing lands of scenic attraction must be dedicated National Parks and organised to meet requirements of tourists by constructing tourist roads and walking paths. (Exhibit 38 p.1)

To a certain extent, the selection of specific areas for gazettal as Mt Spec National Park fits the 'worthless lands' philosophy, whereby admittedly scenic areas with no other economic use (often steep or mountainous areas) are set aside from agricultural or other development. (Hall 1988) McKimmin described the areas around Mt Spec that he considered suitable for settlement and concluded:

surrounding each area mentioned is scrubland of good quality but in my opinion is too steep for agricultural purposes, but is beautiful from a Tourist point of view. (Royal Commission on the Development of North Queensland 1931, QSA A/6420)

The unsigned report from 1939 on the further subdivision of Paluma confirms this contemporary thinking.

The Star River Fall on the whole is much steeper country and is, therefore, less suitable for township purposes.... the design cannot be maintained beyond the areas I have dealt with, and a further National Park area, embracing the rougher creek country on this fall may be considered... .A further area embracing Witt's Lookout...is also recommended. (Unsigned Report 19 January 1939, pp. 2 % 5)

However, as transport capabilities through the forest improved, much of the Star River Basin west of the coastal range was omitted from the National Park and remains today as part of Mt Spec State Forest 268.



ca 1939 Mt Spec Road. Timber trucks negotiating Mt Spec Road.

Illin, Venn Collection





1943-44 Mt Spec State Forest. Timber cutters Joe Miguel ( right) and Bill Alford (left).

McKergow, Venn Collection



1943 Mt Spec State Forest. Mt Spec Timber Camp. Ron McKergow and Martinie Martinez.

McKergow, Venn Collection





1939-41 Hidden Valley. Timber Cutter's Camp, Hidden Valley between 1939-1941.

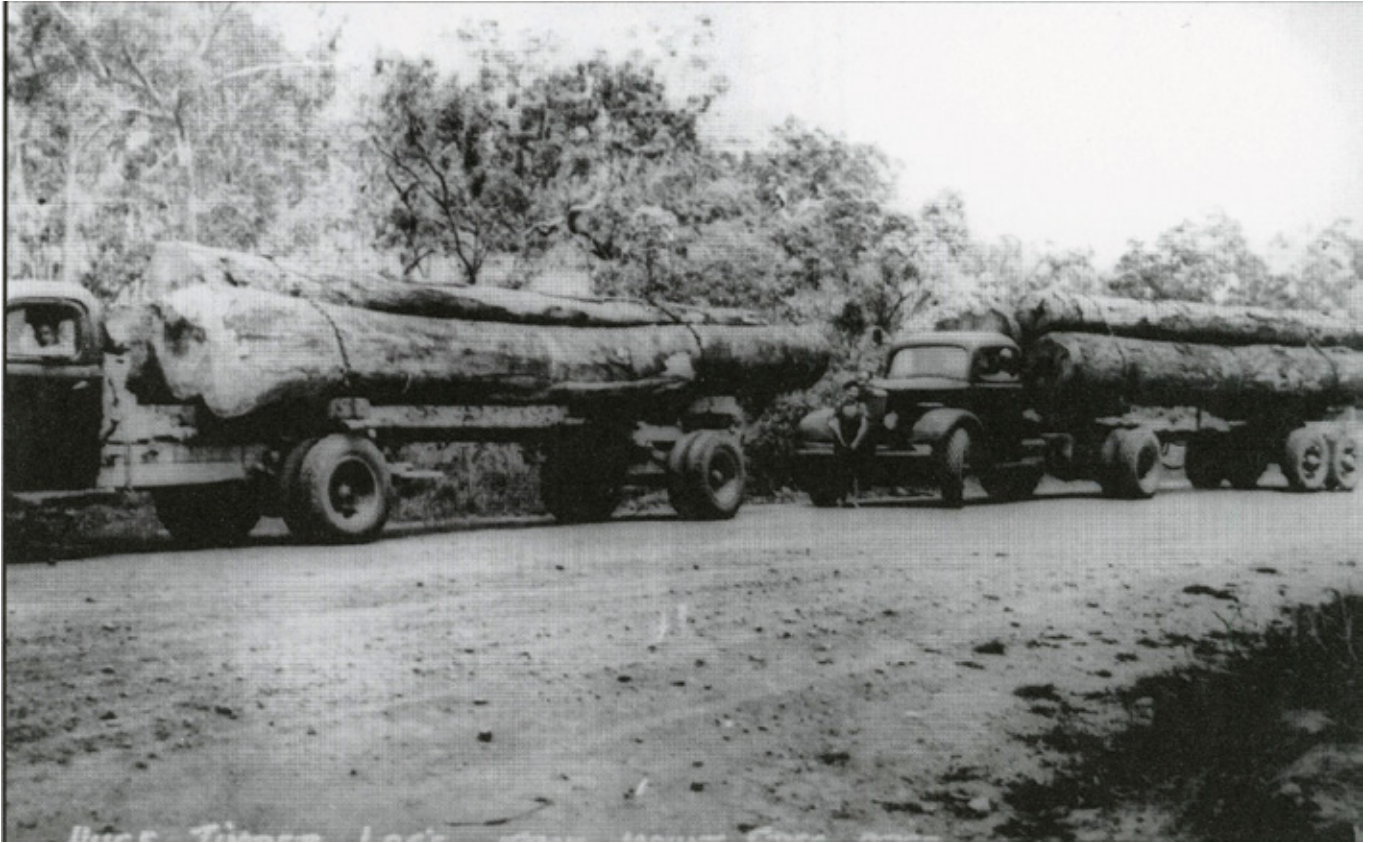
Illin, Venn Collection



1930s/1940s Mt Spec State Forest. Large felled tree, possibly in *Eucalyptus grandis* area west of Paluma.

W J Laurie, JCUNQ NQCo II212





1940s Mt Spec State Forest. Huge timber logs from the Mt Spec Area.

WJ Laurie, JCUNQ NQColl418



1943 Mt Spec State Forest. Mt Spec Timber Camp War Time.

McKergow, Venn Collection





1943 Civil Construction Corps Timber Camp, Taravale Road. One of the huts at the Mt Spec Timber Camp. Nola McKergow and Delorus Martinez.

McKergow, Venn Collection



1942 Civil Construction Corps Timber Camp, Taravale Road. The timber camp supported its own school.

McKergow, Venn Collection





*1942-43 Mt Spec State Forest. The logs cut for the war effort by the timbermen of the Civil Construction Corps attracted local attention. One log was said to be 128 feet long.*

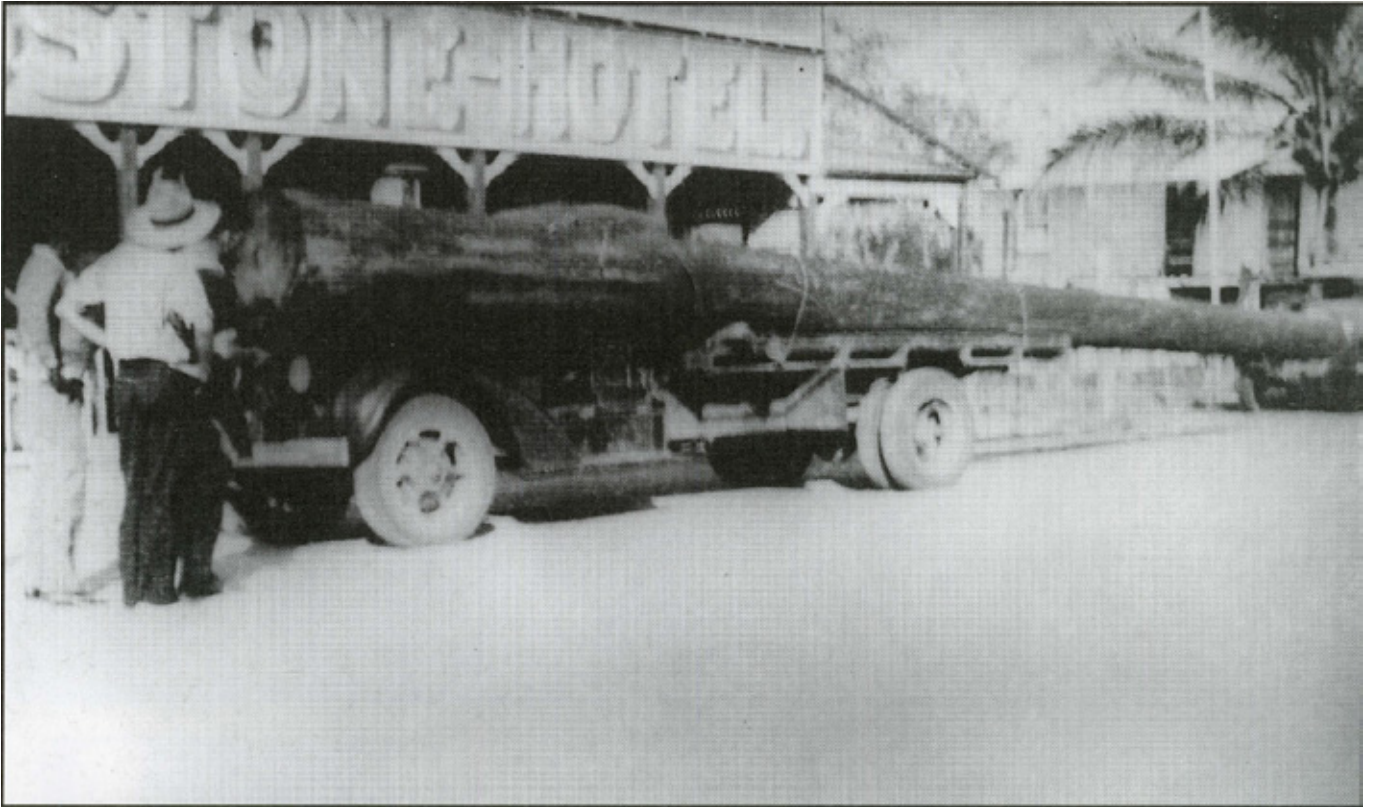
Coulthard, Venn Collection



*1943 Mt Spec Road. 100 foot White Gum. Logs for wartime radio masts had to be lifted around the many comers of the Mt Spec Road. Once at the bottom of the range the logs were loaded onto railway wagons at either Moongobulla or Rollingstone Stations.*

McKergow, Venn Collection





1943 Rollingstone Hotel. Timber at Rollingstone Hotel. This log is probably one of two over one hundred feet long cut as radio masts for the war effort.

Illin, Venn Collection



1943 Mt Spec Road. Timber hauling from Paluma, Mt Spec. 100 foot White Gum on the Mt Spec Road.

McKergow, Venn Collection





ca 1943 Civil Construction Corps Timber Camp, Taravale Road. Houses and residents at the Civil Construction Corps camp located near Puzzle Creek on the Taravale Road, west of Paluma.

Unknown, Thuringowa Collection



ca 1943 Civil Construction Corps Timber Camp, Taravale Road. Timber camp at Running River with Devine's Bus and passengers headed for Mount Spec, Paluma. This service ran three times a week.

W J Laurie, Thuringowa Collection





ca 1943 Civil Construction Corps Timber Camp, Taravale Road. Devine's Bus Service to Paluma timber camp, Running River.

W J Laurie, Thuringowa Collection



19 30s Mt Spec. Platypus, Mt Spec area. Platypus can still be seen in local creeks.

W J Laurie, Venn Collection





1930s Mt Spec. Tassel Fern, Mt Spec. These are rare around Paluma today.

W J Laurie, JCUNQ NQColl414



1930s Paluma. Native Cat, Paluma. 33 inches nose to tail. Killed 51 fowls in three weeks. These are no longer found around Paluma.

W J Laurie, Venn Collection

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## ‘16TH PLATOON COMPANY E’ - *the American Army in Paluma*

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Although there had been European activity in the Mt Spec district for fifty-five years when the Second World War broke out, the township of Paluma was only five years old. Paluma’s location at an altitude of almost three thousand feet overlooking Halifax Bay was soon recognised as strategically attractive - “for radar it was tremendous” (Raschak 4 August 1984, Interview) This author was fortunate to meet, interview and correspond with two American servicemen who were stationed in Paluma in 1942 and 1943. Joseph Raschak was a private in the platoon, and George Stuart was the Lieutenant in charge. Their reminiscences provide much of the detail following.



1942 Paluma. First day US Army unit arrived. Bert and Grace Cavill on the left, their daughter in the centre with the army doctor (who played violin) and Sgt Afferton.

Coulthard, Venn Collection

In March 1942, as Townsville schools were being closed down and women and children evacuated south, the 16th Platoon Company E of the United States Army’s 565th Signal Battalion arrived in Paluma. (Raschak 4 August 1984 Interview; Moles 1974, p. 216) The company had been hastily formed and sailed from New York with only a few days notice on the Cristobal, a former Atlantic passenger ship. The Cristobal was in convoy to New Caledonia via Melbourne. (Stuart 1988, pp.19, 23) Most of the Company were not technicians, so were given basic training in the operation of radio and radar by Lieutenants Hunt and Stuart during the long sea voyage.

Stuart had been a ham radio operator as a student and graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering in June 1940. He was an army reservist before Pearl Harbour and was working as a radio design engineer when ordered to report for active service with the signal company in February 1941. In June, Stuart was directed by the US Army to attend Harvard University “to learn about this new thing called Radar”. (Stuart 1988, p. 12) Radar at the time was a new and secret weapon and “was looked upon by the army in general as being close to black magic”. (Stuart 1988, p. 18) After the fall of Pearl Harbour, Stuart was ordered to Fort Dix:

a good place to leave the states from as wherever you ended up it would be better. (p. 16)

Stuart judged his new Company as grossly inexperienced.

Meeting the company and my new officers didn’t do much to improve things....the two captains were retreads from World

War!! They were all set to do their thing in the trenches and hadn’t the foggiest what radar was all about. In fact they had never been in an airplane and had only a science fiction idea of any aspect of military aviation....I judged the CO to be totally useless on first sight and for my money he never changed....There were also 150 enlisted men from many walks of life some of whom had had some training in operation of an air warning center but none in the operation or maintenance of a radar station. The word was out that this “well trained and smoothly working organization” was to go overseas in a matter of hours but no one knew to where. (pp. 16 -17)

Stuart and Raschak disembarked in Melbourne early in March 1942. Stuart travelled to Townsville by train. (Stuart 1988, p. 24; Raschak 4 August 1984, Interview) The equipment and stores arrived soon after on the Torrens, and Stuart supervised its unloading and movement to a paddock set aside as a staging area for American personnel and equipment. (Stuart 12 May 1987, Interview; 1988, p. 27)

There were:

eight large and very special trucks plus an estimated five or six truck loads of crates that would have to be identified from the manifest. There was also a bag of mail....I don’t remember signing anything for the whole shipment of equipment....This “can do”, “will do”, “trustworthy” atmosphere prevailed in Townsville... (pp. 27 - 28)



1942 Paluma. US Army soldiers building ramp to unload US Army generator. The workers are members of the 16th Platoon, Company E. This was on Loop Road, now closed and part of McClelland’s Lookout picnic area. Private Joseph Raschak on the left. Main Roads huts (Misthaven Units) in background.

Raschak, Thuringowa Collection

Following a successful reconnaissance of Paluma, the rest of the troops arrived in Townsville by train and a tent camp for approximately fifty men was set up in Cloudy Clearing. Security around the radar unit was maintained by a guardpost checking all traffic coming into the village. A portable ‘LeRoi’ generator powered their whole camp within six months, as well as providing electricity for the portable radar units. After only a short time, a doctor was assigned to the platoon, the first of three during their eighteen month stay. (Stuart 1988, p. 33).





1942 Paluma . American servicemen building ramp to unload generator. The generator was used to power the radar unit . Servicemen are American. Private Joseph Raschak back right.

Raschak, Thuringowa Collection

In October 1942, Major Quanrud from General Macarthur's Brisbane headquarters visited the unit. Stuart was interested in the effects of temperature inversions on radar waves, and told Quanrud of his research. As a result, Stuart flew to Sydney on Christmas Day to assist in the procurement of the new LW/ AW (Light Weight Air Warning) radar station being developed by AWA. The LW/AW was the only man transportable radar station in the Pacific. (Stuart 1988, pp. 46 - 48) Stuart and some the platoon from Paluma spent several weeks in Parramatta learning how to assemble and test the new units.

The whole concept of this machine was to provide a ground radar that could be broken down into small enough pieces that it could be carried by men, mules, or small trucks. In other words usable in a place like New Guinea. It had its own petrol driven generator which was also transportable by manpower although I was always glad I was not one of the men. (Stuart 1988, p. 48)

Stuart brought an LW/AW back to Paluma in March 1944 for comparative testing alongside their existing radar unit. He remembers the LW/AW unit performing well, not at the full range of the SCR 270 as it only had one-third of the power and a much smaller antenna, but at a range sufficient enough to give "a very adequate warning". (pp. 48 - 49). Raschak remembers the LW/AW seeing active service at Finschhafen in New Guinea. (Raschak 4 August 1984, Interview) An LW/AW unit is held today in the Australian War Memorial, Canberra. (Stuart 19 July 1987, Personal communication) Stuart was subsequently transferred to Sydney in September 1944 to continue oversight of American procurement of electronic equipment. (p. 53)

Paluma in 1942 had very limited civic infrastructure. The American army, and later the RAAF, hastily provided reticulated water and electricity to those sections of the township they occupied. The Americans installed telephones to link various points within their camp and direct wired the only outside telephone line in Paluma (in Cavill's guesthouse) to the RAAF plotting room located in the Grammar School in Townsville. (Stuart 1988, p. 32; 1987, Annotated photographs) The telephone line at the top of the range was partially relocated during the War, a project the Americans enjoyed compared to the relative monotony of watching the radar. (Brown 28 July 1984, Interview; Raschak 4 August

1984, Interview) An earlier telephone connection between the Main Roads camp at 'The Saddle' (1932-33) and Mutarnee was mentioned by Linda McClelland. (McClelland 1987, Reminiscences u.p.) Being in the vicinity of Arthur Benham's track from Cloudy Clearing to the coast, it is likely the original telephone line was installed along the existing track. In 1942, the line from Cavill's through the forest was not very reliable. A Mr Porter, Townsville manager of the Post Master General's telephone services, offered to provide all poles and fittings if the 16th Platoon would cut a new swathe through the forest. Apart from having to mount an extra shift to cover the project, clearing the eucalypts farther down the range with axes was hard work.

I remember one time I was down with the gang and one of the men ask (sic) me if I wanted to try a swing with an ax. I did and found out that the ax just bounced off the tree with a TING!! That made it feel like steel. (Stuart 1988, p. 40)



1942 Paluma. American soldiers with huge python. The python was team mascot for the Americans' baseball team, "The Pythons".

Raschak, Thuringowa Collection



1942-43 Lennox Crescent, Paluma. US soldiers standing in front of "Blitz" Wagon, at Paluma. Private Joseph Raschak with tin hat.

Raschak, Thuringowa Collection

The US Army platoon found living in tents unbearable in the tropical Wet season. The tents were not weatherproof and were eventually replaced by portable barracks and home-made "log cabins". (Raschak 4 August 1984, Interview) The climate made operating electronic equipment difficult. Stuart described Paluma as:

a very hostile electrical environment...far from ideal with respect to humidity, temperature and just plain rain of which there was plenty. (p. 32)

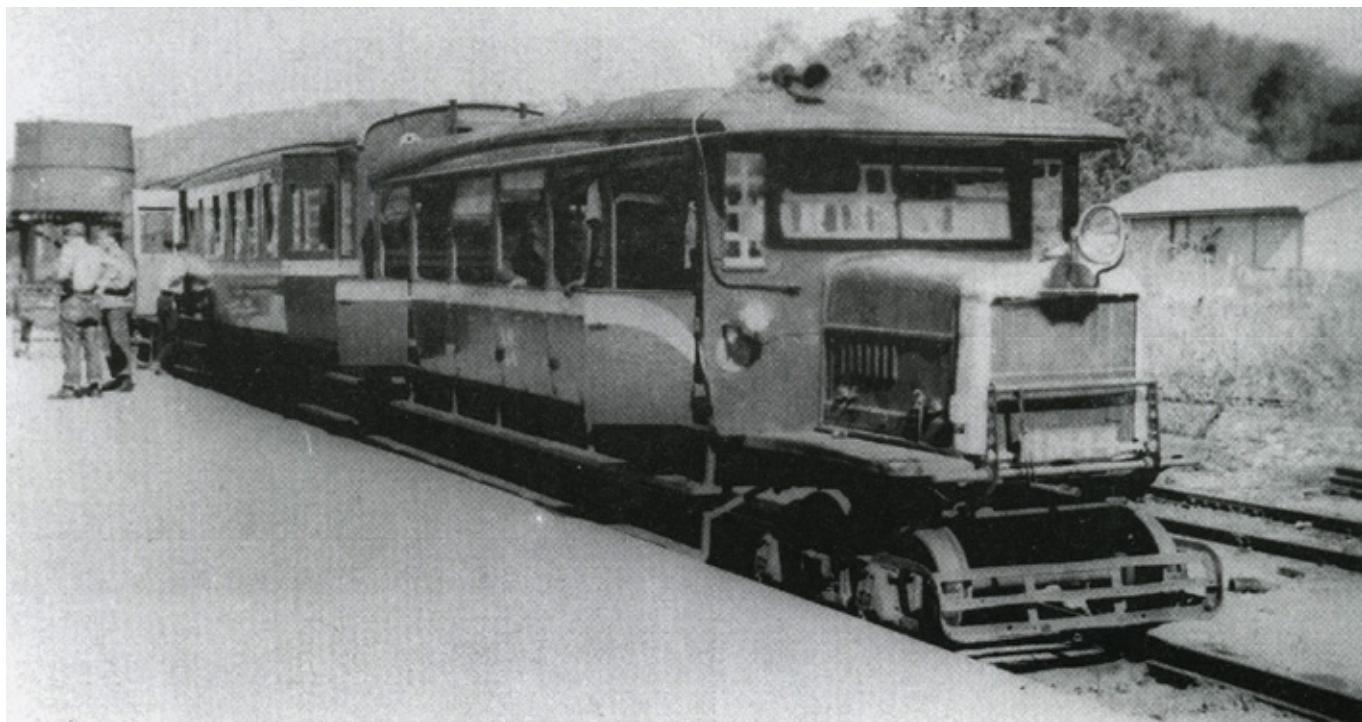
He described the weather as:

quite a problem at times. Just to sum up a year I would say that it was one third terrible, one third fine, and one third gloomy. (p. 39)

Boardwalks were laid down through the mud and a suspension bridge was hung over the creek between their accommodation and the mess hall. (Raschak 4 August 1984, Interview) A more substantial log cabin was built about the end of 1942, using their tents as lining. (Raschak 4 August 1984, Annotated photographs).

When completed it was a very first class American log cabin. It was about 20 by 40 feet, had a hard wood floor, a stone fireplace, a bar in one corner and furniture also fashioned from local material. (Stuart 1988, p. 52)

Only towards the end of their stay did the men move into the portable barracks, each providing accommodation for twenty-five men. (Raschak 4 August 1984, Interview) The Main Roads cabins were requisitioned by Joe Raschak and other clerks, so Billy Stewart the Main Roads patrolman moved out. (Stuart 1988, p. 36; Map inserted at p. 35)



1942-43 Rollingstone. This railmotor was used to deliver supplies for the US Army at Paluma daily. Supplies were sent by rail to Rollingstone and transported from there to Paluma by truck. Note the water tank for steam locomotives.

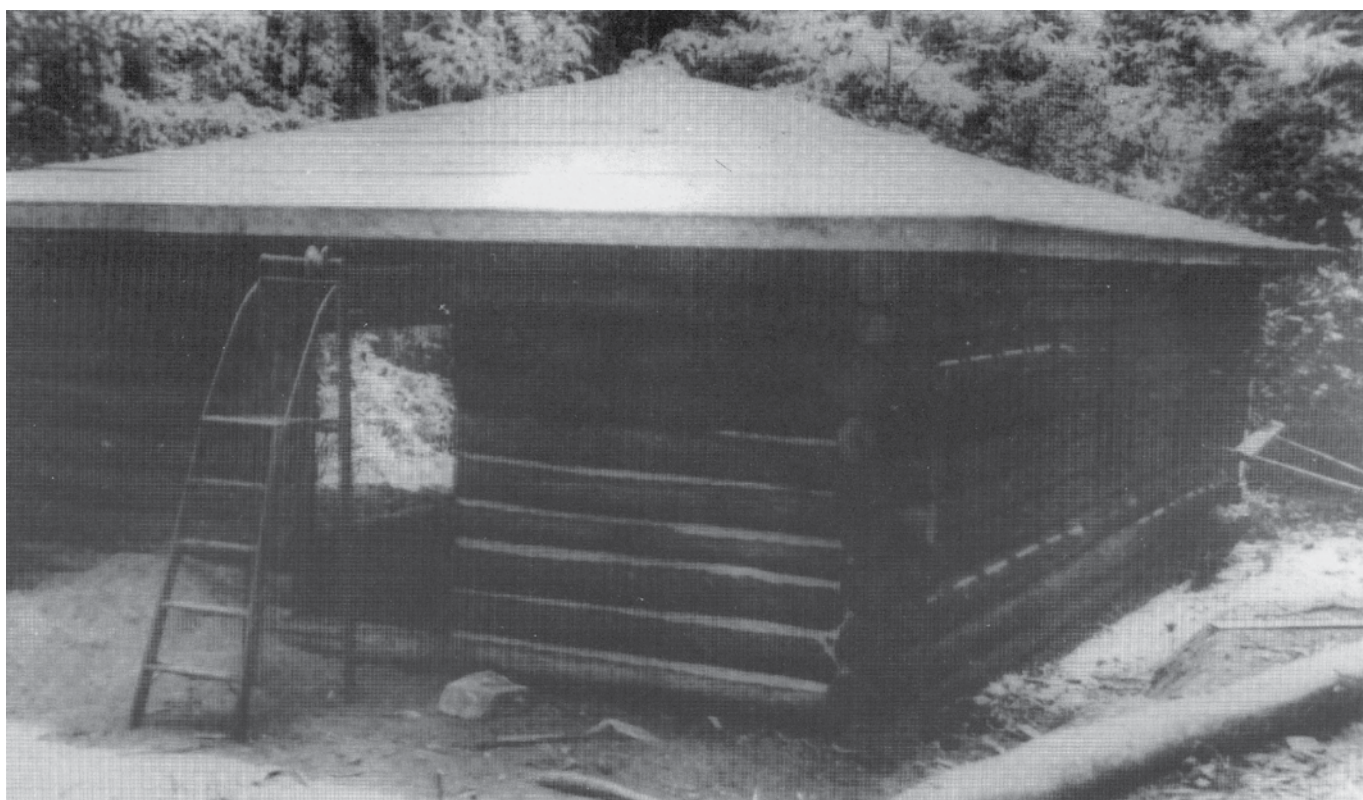
Raschak, Thuringowa Collection





1942-43 Paluma. US Army team mascot for "The Pythons" baseball team. The mascot travelled with the team whenever they played 'away'.

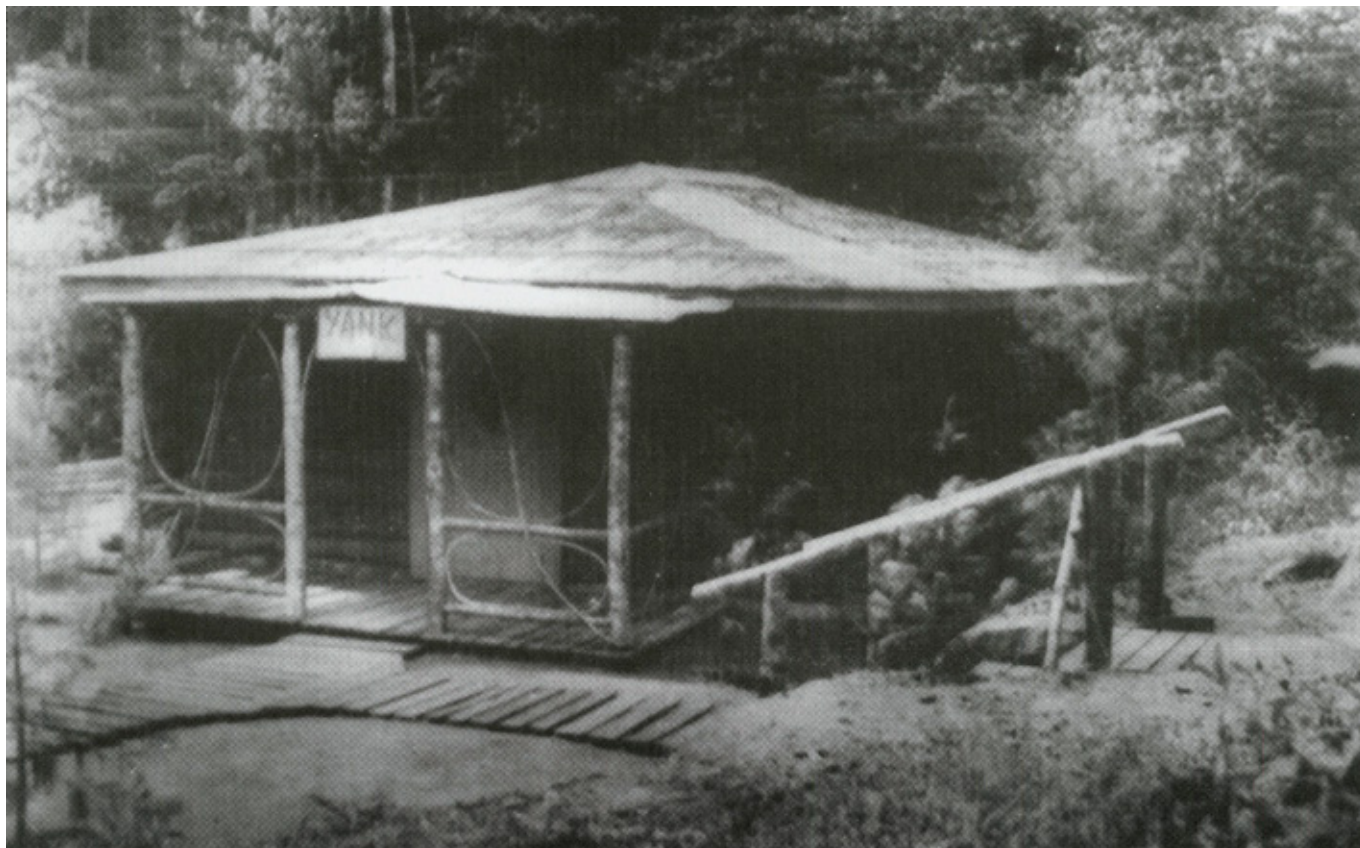
Raschak, Venn Collection



1942-43 Paluma. US Army log hut under construction opposite "Cavilcade" Guesthouse. The hut was built after their tents proved useless against the tropical wet season.

Raschak, Thurin gowa Collection





ca 1943 Paluma. US Army log hut in Cloudy Clearing opposite "Cavilcade" Guesthouse.

Raschak, Thuringowa Collection

Lieutenant Stuart became friendly with the local police constable, Joe Clay.

The constable's headquarters was in Ewan and his territory was totally beyond comprehension. I don't remember the square miles but I do remember thinking that this one man, his black tracker, and a couple of horses were the sole police force for an area not much different than the State of Rhode Island! When we got to know each other Clay turned out to be a fine fellow.

I'm sure he would put his own mother in the clink for stealing a loaf of bread but aside from that he was as I said, indeed a fine fellow. (p. 37)

Despite the importance of maintaining radar vigilance, the American servicemen had time to enjoy their recreation. They went to Saturday night dances in the Ingham Shire Hall. On Sundays, any man who wanted to attend church in Ingham could do so. Church was followed by a spaghetti dinner at a local café or the East Ingham Hotel, then a drive to the beach at Moongobulla for a swim, before returning to Paluma in the evening. (Raschak 4 August 1984, Interview) A shed across from Cavill's guesthouse, the foundations of which can still be seen, was used as their mess hall. Local girls visited for dances until the truck returning them to Townsville "went over the mountain" and further visits were forbidden. (Raschak 4 August 1984, Interview) They cleared a volleyball court near Cavill's guesthouse, and formed a baseball team called the 'Paluma Pythons'. The team mascot of course was a scrub (amethystine) python of impressive proportions (about twelve feet) that accompanied the team to matches against another American radar unit stationed in Ayr. (Stuart 1988, p. 40)

The families who remained in Paluma during the war are remembered for their hospitality by the American servicemen. Both Joe Raschak and George Stuart remember the Cavills with

affection (Cavill's hospitality was also commented on by Linda McClelland). Bert and Grace Cavill built the guesthouse in the late 1930s (now owned by the Sisters of Mercy) and called it 'Cavilcade'. Apart from providing meals and accommodation, the Cavills sold fuel and the guesthouse was a staging post for Jim Devine's bus service that ran at least twice a week from Townsville to Hidden Valley during the war years. Grace Cavill used to sing and play the piano, while the Americans played dice and cards. Stuart wrote in his reminiscences:



ca 1942 Mt Spec. "Dad's Army", C Reserve. The forests around Paluma were used to train soldiers for the conditions found in the Pacific theatre of the Second World War.

Nulley, Thuringowa Collection





1943 Paluma. "Yank" hut with seven US Army men. The hut was constructed in "Cloudy Clearing" opposite "Cavilcade" Guesthouse - about Allotment 10, Section 16.

Coulthard/Raschak, Venn Collection

Mom Cavel (sic) and her Guest House were as uniquely suited to us as we were to her....For our part nothing could be finer than to be able to go across the road and have a sandwich and tea. Also with or without any paying guests we had a great many singing sessions around her piano. Every once in a while there would be a bus load of WAAFs or civilian women arrive and of course this did not draw any complaints from us. (p. 36)

'Mom' even baked a pumpkin pie for them on Thanksgiving, but not being familiar with the recipe, omitted all the spices. Her second effort, baked for Christmas, is remembered as an outstanding success. (Raschak 4 August 1984, Interview)

Apart from the weather, which was wet for most of the eighteen months they were in Paluma, the Americans enjoyed their stay. Like other American servicemen stationed in North Queensland, the men of Company E were well catered for. Fresh rations came via railmotor to Rollingstone almost daily, and a truck went down to collect them, affording an opportunity for the drivers to have a drink at the pub and a swim at Little Crystal Creek.

This was no problem most of the time but during the monsoon season we sometimes had our problems with mud slides or trees fallen over the road. One season the road really slid and created a gap of about 75 or so feet where there was no road. (Stuart 1988, p. 39)

Procedures within the camp were not formal, with dress parades only held every Saturday afternoon. One week, the relief was bored, so all men on the shift shaved their heads and paraded for a photograph they titled 'Murderer's Row'. (Raschak 4 August 1984, Annotated photographs)

The American portable radar unit was "an SCR 270 type number made mostly by Westinghouse". (Stuart 1988, p. 42) The unit was

mounted on three trucks, two with closed bodies. One of these was a power van. The six-cylinder LeRoi engine and generator produced 20000 Volts for the main transmitter. A second LeRoi unit was placed on a concrete slab on the ground. The third truck had carried the antenna.

When erected it formed a rotating tower 60 feet high and about 15 feet wide. There was a ring of numbers about 4 inches high on a band around the base. These numbers were visible from the operating van and was our means of telling in which direction the antenna was pointed. (Stuart 1988, p.42)

The antenna looked like a giant Hills hoist and was located in what is now the picnic area at McClelland's Lookout. With almost 180 degrees of efficient radar operation, four men on each four-hour shift scanned the Coral Sea. (Stuart 1988, p. 42; Map inserted at p. 35) In event of the phone line going down, an emergency radio telegraph station was set up, but not continually manned, at Witts Lookout. (p. 43) On three occasions in July 1942, Japanese bombers were detected flying south and tracked for some 150 miles, giving Townsville approximately an hour's notice of each impending attack. (Raschak 4 August 1984, Interview; Stuart 12 May 1987, Interview). The retreating bombers were also tracked returning north.

RAAF historian Bob Piper, researching the raids in 1985, does not record any notice being given of the first raid "about midnight on July 25/26" In fact, Piper wrote:

Townsville, caught completely by surprise, didn't retaliate. We had been caught well and truly flat-footed and unprepared, even though the Pacific War was then in its eighth month. (Townsville Bulletin 24 July 1985)

Piper makes no mention at all of input from any US radar stations, with the credit being given to RAAF Radar Station (No 104) for “an outstanding one hour 50 minute warning” of the second raid on 28 July. (Piper *Townsville Bulletin* 24 July 1985) Private Joseph Raschak and Lieutenant George Stuart were both very proud of the notice their radar station had given the plotting room in North Ward. In his memoirs, Stuart wrote:

We had picked up a multiple target at about 100 miles north of us or about 160 mile north of Townsville. We had tracked it to about 15 miles south of us where we normally lost contacts. We had also tracked a multiple target coming out of T’ville a little while later and had followed it to about the same 100 miles north of us. I next called the CO at the plotting center who confirmed the above but didn’t want to give me much more info over the phone....To give the complete story of the Townsville raids there were three all told. They all occurred (sic) late at night ie approximately 0100 hours. I think they occurred over a period of four days with no raid on the second night. Bombs were dropped each night but none had done any damage....I do not know anything as to the local counter measures but I do know exactly what we tracked from Mt Spec....The next four or five nights I was in the van most of the night or on call when I went back to quarters. As I said nothing happened on the second night but at about 0100 on the following night we picked what looked like a weak multiple target at about 175 miles. (This exceeded our design range of 150 miles but if conditions are good and the target is multiple there is a fair chance of picking up targets on what we called a double hop) In any event in a few minutes this was identified as an “unfriendly” and we tracked it in to near T’ville. The third raid was about the same time the next night except that I think we made the initial contact at a little over 100 miles. In each case we also tracked the return flights to at least 100 miles north of us... In summary we warned of all three raids on Townsville, we gave at least 45 minutes on most and something over 60 minutes on one. I don’t which raid it was but the next day I listened to a newscast from San Francisco which concluded by saying that the Japs were last seen loosing (sic) altitude. I could only think “bully for the newscast” but if they were loosing altitude they sure had a hell of a lot of it left when they were 160 or more miles north of Townsville. I got quite a few slaps on the back for the warnings we had given which I passed on to the men. (Stuart 1988, p. 41)

Soon after the raids on Townsville, the Australian Army tried unsuccessfully to assume command of Paluma’s American radar unit. Stuart’s response was typical of the sometimes strained relations between the allies:

I do remember one cold raining day (approx. July Aug 42) when an Australian Army Lt. [Lieutenant] came to my tent and ask (sic) me to come over to the guest house that the Col [Colonel] wanted to see me. I went over and was not too pleased to find out that the Col. was going to take over the entire mountain and that I would be working for him. I told him I would wait for orders from my commanding officer and proceed accordingly. He left in a few hours and I am still waiting for orders! It all seems [seems] a bit odd now but at the time I felt I was in total command of Mt Spec and that was that! (Stuart November 1987, Personal Communication)

During the Battle of the Coral Sea, the radar unit tracked a target coming in over the ocean, crossing the coast perhaps thirty miles north of Paluma.

We lost it still proceeding inland which was not a route to anywhere. As I remember this was in the early afternoon. Late that night a couple of trucks stopped at our camp. They had on board some of the crew of a B17 that had crashed out in the bush west of us. I never knew where. Our doctor went down to T’ville with the remaining crew and we gave them some food while they were with us. They had been out over the ocean trying to give a hand in the Coral Sea battle. I don’t know where their home base was. (Stuart 1988, p. 44)

Construction of four reinforced concrete igloos to house the RAAF radar units took place in 1943. (Raschak 4 August 1984, Interview) The 16th Platoon was eventually replaced at the end of 1943 by RAAF Radar Station No 58. (Raschak 4 August 1984, Interview; Allied Works Council 24 September 1943, Men Employed on RAAF Works) Company E broke camp in October 1943, setting up a temporary quarters at Armstrong’s Paddock in Townsville until December that year. From Townsville, the platoon was sent on to New Guinea then to the Philippines. (Stuart November 1987, Personal Communication; Raschak, Letter to Stuart included in Stuart 1988, pp. 54 - 55) Only the stone fireplace from one of their log cabins now remains.





*ca 1942 Paluma. Mt Spec bus with gas generator fitted. Petrol supplies were strictly rationed during the war.*

Stuart, Venn Collection

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## **‘THE DOOVER, JUNGLE TRAINING AND JUNGLE JUICE’**

### *- the Australian Services in Paluma during the Second World War*

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For such a small township, Paluma contributed significantly to the local war effort during the Second World War. The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) was probably the most significant contributor, operating both radar stations and a medical rehabilitation unit at opposite ends of the village. On Taravale Road about fifteen kilometres west of Paluma, men accommodated in a large timber camp under the control of the Civil Construction Corps cut eucalypt hardwoods for the war effort. The Australian Army also used the forests around Paluma as a training ground for similar conditions overseas.

The Army was the first of the Australian services to move into the Mt Spec-Paluma area. Bill Cameron, 17th Australian Field Regiment, AIF was Survey Officer in 1942 to an artillery unit earmarked for overseas service. He described an exercise set up near Paluma to acclimatise the troops to “the jungle”.

I had to come up and make a reconnaissance, and this involved a sort of compass traverse along a very pretty little walking track....We came up, and I think it was for about three weeks....Then we had the job of clearing out along the track that I had reconnoitered. We were split into three parties - a clearing party, with axes and brush-hooks and machetes, a dragging party and then there was a carrying party for water and food....The first week, as I remember it, when the exercise started it rained day and night....Then the second week, I think it just rained all night, and the third week it was only just on and off, and it was pretty cold also... And so the exercise went off quite well....When we got to the escarpment, we lowered the guns, and as I remember it, there was a 25-pounder, an 18-pounder, and an anti-tank gun which might have been a 6-pounder, I'm not sure. And they had to be lowered [in one piece] by block-and-tackle to get down the escarpment...A 25-pounder weighs three-quarters of a ton and even dragging it was quite an effort.... it was practice for New Guinea....we learnt a great deal from that. (Cameron September 1987, Interview)

A Medical Rehabilitation Unit patient who spent six months in Paluma in 1944 remembers the “original jungle training in the world” set up west of Paluma “just out past the forested bit”. The obstacle courses there were eventually transferred to Canungra. (Cheesman 28 July 1987, Interview) Although the army now has a specialist jungle training unit at Tully, as the Mt Spec area adjoins the army's High Range-Dotswood Station training area, it is likely that Paluma's historical links with the army will continue.

The RAAF radar station was established in Section Five of the township as the Americans were preparing to leave Paluma. Construction by the Allied Works Council of four concrete igloos to house the RAAF radar station was almost complete by September 1944 and personnel from No. 58 Radar Station moved to Paluma on 19 October 1943. (Allied Works Council 24 September 1943, Men Employed on RAAF Works) Unit strength was thirty-four men under the initial command of Flight Officer H C Harrison. Technical equipment was installed a few days later, but the generator set was “not in fit condition to operate”. Following the repair of “numerous components”, satisfactory operations commenced on 30 October 1943. (RAAF Operations Record Book 1943, Sheet 3) Existing telephone and power services were further upgraded. Camouflage officers

visited Paluma early in November to give advice on the clearing of ground around the operations building. The Civil Construction Corps undertook this work in January 1944. The igloos were also to be protected by a camouflaged heavy anti-aircraft battery. (Kenny 23 July 1986, Personal Communication)



*1944 Paluma. Sleeping quarters of “A” WAAAF radar operators, No 58 Radar Station, Mt Spec. This building became the Catholic Church on Allotment 6, Section 5, Lennox Crescent (Now a private residence).*

Renew, Thuringowa Collection

In December 1943, inspections of the WAAAF quarters were undertaken, “prior to the installation of WAAAF personnel”. (RAAF Operations Record Book 1943, Sheet 5) Unit strength in January 1944 was forty, including one officer and eight WAAAFs. (RAAF Operations Record Book 1943, Sheet 6) With the drain on resources by operations in the Pacific theatre of the war, unit strength fell to thirty before the arrival of another fourteen WAAAFs in March 1944. (RAAF Operations Record Book 1943, Sheet 8) By the end of April 1944, unit strength was up to forty-one, of which twenty-one were women. With the appointment of a WAAAF officer, the station now had two officers. WAAAFs comprised more than half of the unit's strength over the next sixteen months.

Resumption of existing facilities and construction of additional buildings provided accommodation for the airmen and airwomen. The Main Roads Commission cabins were ‘taken



over' and private cottages were 'hired' and improved by Allied Works Council labourers. (RAAF Operations Record Book 1943, Sheets 9, 10 & 11) There was concern over the standard of living conditions. Numerous inspections were made, with the result being the installation of two water tanks and septic systems in July 1944, with "hygiene and sanitation satisfactory" by August. (RAAF Operations Record Book 1943, Sheet 12) Additional septic systems for the WAAAF barracks were commenced in October.

A second Radar Station. No 342, operated at "Mt Spec" for about six weeks between February and March 1944. (Phillips 1984, RAAF Flying Units Located at Various NQ Bases during WWII) In June 1944, another radar unit (No 34 Radar Station) temporarily moved to a site several hundred metres away and:

commenced twentyfour hours a day operations with LW/AW Radar Equipment and Ford 10 h.p. supplies. Plots passed in conjunction with 58 Radar Station over same plotting line to No. 10 Fighter Control Unit. (RAAF Operations Record Book 1944, Sheet 11)

This allowed No 58 Radar Station to reduce its hours of operation, providing time for maintenance inspections, while still providing "constant coastline Radar coverage". (RAAF Operations Record Book 1944, Sheet 11) No 34 Radar Station moved back to Townsville in August. (RAAF Operations Record Book 1944, Sheet 13) Again Paluma was involved in testing equipment vital to the war effort. With No 58 Station now fully operational, tests were carried out:

to observe and report the result of jamming of the Radar Equipment by an American testing plane....The effects of most of the jamming could be sufficiently reduced by manipulating the controls of the equipment....The OIC, senior mechanic and operators attended a lecture in Townsville...on methods of counteracting jamming. (RAAF Operations Record Book 1944, Sheet 13)

Plots of targets were made against the newly installed Air Defence Grid map. Hours of operation were reduced to four hours a day then increased to eight hours a day with the Station working in with other stations around Townsville on the request of the Fighter Control Unit. During a run of technical faults in September and early October, hours of operation were sometimes little more than an hour a day. (RAAF Operations Record Book 1944, Sheets 14&15) Operating the station in the humid conditions of Paluma must have been extremely frustrating as one component after another failed and parts were unavailable in Townsville. Jean Renew (nee Stevenson) was a WAAAF radar operator with the first group of staff to move to Paluma. If oral history is believed, the RAAF radar station was plagued with problems.

Hidden in the trees, crouched the starkly new concrete dome, the 'Doover' that housed our secret Radar equipment....It was newly installed but apparently (sic) not quite working yet. We were all, female operators and male mechanics, veterans of many efficient Radar stations. This station turned out to be different....We ran through the rain to breakfast, marched in squashy order to the Doover, and sat on the damp concrete floor yawning while the mechanics fiddled with the Radar set. Far below us, beneath the cloud, planes would murmur softly to or from the airport, but never an indication of them did we see on our radar screen. Unseen ships plied the coastal run but did not sail for us. (Renew 1988, p.1)

Like the Americans before them, the WAAAF radar operators endured deluges they were not prepared for.

Raining days became raining weeks, our clothes did not dry before they mildewed. Our shoes were never dry.

Narrow duckboards were laid along each pathway and now floated on a sea of thin mud....Part of the slope above the access road slipped and our supply truck was hidden in the rainforest behind a heap of soil and rocks....Our cook went into a state of depression and our meals were now unashamedly still in the moulded shapes of the tins from whence they sprang....The soles peeled off our shoes and we tied them on with flex wire discarded by the mechanics as they dismantled, re-sorted and reassembled the Radar.... Now the rain poured down incessantly, running in a brown torrent where the path had been. The duckboards had been washed away and lost. We removed our shoes and waded knee-deep through the mud, then had leech counting contests. Green frogs clung like creeper buds to the inside walls of our huts, centipedes slept in our dreadful shoes. (Renew 1988, pp. 1 - 2)

Routine and discipline was hard to maintain in such conditions. The guards soon gave up the pretence of guarding the Doover with its secret equipment and drifted into the fringe of the surrounding jungle, using their rifles to take pot-shots at the harmless and uneatable scrub turkeys....Two of the guards brewed 'jungle juice' from unknown ingredients, ran amok in the jeep, using their rifles to shoot the insulators off the telegraph poles. They raced down the mountain road and crashed into the stranded log truck and had to be painfully lifted over the jinker into an ambulance and taken away to oblivion. Morale was low. Uneasily we watched each other and wondered, who next? (Renew 1988, pp. 1 - 2)

Given these difficulties, acting officer in charge J K Paterson was pleased to report on 4 October 1944:

Outstanding number of targets plotted in four hours. Total of 58 targets. One of best since station became operational for four hour periods. (RAAF Operations Record Book 1944, Sheet 15)

Operating conditions improved later that month with the installation of a ventilating system and better lighting in the operations room. (RAAF Operations Record Book 1944, Sheets 15&15a)

At the western end of Paluma, five men were employed extending and remodelling requisitioned cottages as convalescent quarters. (Allied Works Council 24 September 1943, Men Employed on RAAF Works) Number 6 Convalescent Depot, later Number 6 Medical Rehabilitation Unit, was located along Mt Spec Road in Sections One, Two and Three of the township. As these were the original sections of the township auctioned, the resumption of dwellings for the duration of the war meant that almost all of Paluma was under RAAF control.

Despite their testing living conditions, RAAF personnel of both units were well looked after. Chaplains of various faiths made regular visits, and dances and social events were organised. Concerts were held and the YMCA and the RAAF mobile cinema visited. Living conditions came under scrutiny of Department of Interior staff, with improvements continually being made. RAAF officers on educational or welfare business visited regularly. Christmas Day luncheon in 1944 for Radar Station personnel consisted of roast turkey and ham beside a Christmas tree with presents for all. At 5pm, cocktails and Christmas Tea were had with the No 6 Medical Rehabilitation Unit at their Recreation Hall. The party continued on Boxing Day with a joint picnic at Running River and a poultry dinner and midnight dance on New Year's Eve. (RAAF Operations Record Book 1944, Sheet 17; Kenny 20 July 1986, Personal Communication)

These social events often led to romance, although contact outside of these allocated times between the opposite sexes at opposite ends of the village was strictly forbidden. Though the WAAFs at the Radar Station and the RAAF nurses were all chaperoned by female officers, many service personnel who spent time in Paluma tell of 'secret' tracks (that must have been known about) through the forest that linked romancing couples.

The CO if he knew, never let on. But his assistant was a real mongrel. We used to call him 'Tojo', he was just like that Tojo. He was a mongrel fellow he was, but Jim Conquest, he was a real gentleman. He was only about twenty-six/ twenty-seven. (Cheesman 28 July 1987, Interview)

No-one has a kind word to say about the adjutant at the Medical Rehabilitation Unit.

...even the CO called him 'Tojo'. He was a little martinet - he didn't swear, he didn't drink, he didn't smoke, he objected to us playing penny poker (Beaumont 29 August 1988, Interview)

Despite contact being forbidden, several romances ended in marriage. A fighter pilot "convalescing from bad malaria and dengue fevers, with a nerve condition from which he still suffers" fell in love with a radar operator. (Author's name withheld 29 September 1988, Personal Communication) A Radar Station diesel mechanic married another radar operator. A recuperating sailor married another WAAAF. (Piper 6 August 1986, Interview) Another couple married in one of the requisitioned cottages.

The Radar Station shared facilities and personnel with the Medical Rehabilitation Unit. The Radar Station used the medical staff of the Rehabilitation Unit from October 1944, with regular medical and dental examinations being carried out. Vehicles were frequently borrowed in event of breakdowns, and following the takeover of the direct line to Townsville by the PMG, the two RAAF establishments shared a party line in the Paluma telephone exchange. (RAAF Operations Record Book 1944, Sheets 14, 15&15a)

By the beginning of 1945, the defence of northern Australia was less of a priority. On 6 January, No 58 Radar Station was placed on a "care and maintenance basis" by No 10 Fighter Control Unit, with operations to cease as of 8 January. (RAAF Operations Record Book 1945, Sheet 18) Unit strength at the beginning of 1945 was much as it had been throughout operations - about twenty-three personnel. Following the movement to "care and maintenance", administration of the remaining six personnel (two guards, a clerk, a radio mechanic a diesel fitter and a cook) was passed in February to a WAAAF officer with assistance from the Medical Rehabilitation Unit. (RAAF Operations Record Book 1945, Sheet 19) The vacated WAAAF barracks were inspected for their suitability as a Women's Services YWCA hostel. (RAAF Operations Record Book 1945, Sheet 18)

Although the Radar Station was all but closed down by February 1945, No 6 Medical Rehabilitation Unit continued operations in Paluma until at least 20 August. A RAAF list Units other than Operational Squadrons during Second World War gives the dates between which the Medical Unit was in Paluma as 1 November 1944 to 8 October 1945. RAAF medical personnel staffed the Medical Rehabilitation Unit. The Unit's patients were servicemen recovering from disabilities received in the South-West Pacific Theatre of the war. (Phillips September 1984, Personal Communication)

The Medical Rehabilitation Unit had been formed in Victoria

in July 1943, under the initial command of Flight Lieutenant James Conquest, a newly graduated physician. Establishment strength was for twenty-two personnel, mostly RAAF nurses. In October that year, the Unit was deployed to the North Eastern Area, arriving at Mt Spec (Paluma) on 1 November 1944 (barely a fortnight after Radar Station personnel had arrived). Unit strength at the end of 1944 was eighteen. Conquest had at his disposal a command car, a truck and an unserviceable ambulance. (Kenny 20 July 1986, Personal Communication)

The Medical Rehabilitation Unit faced similar problems with the excessive humidity of Paluma. The Unit requisitioned cottages in the established sections of the township, but due to climate conditions it was necessary to paint the interior of the houses to counteract deterioration before patients could be moved in. (Kenny 20 July 1986, Personal Communication)

The Rehabilitation Unit at this time had fifty-eight convalescent patients. (Kenny 20 July 1986, Personal Communication) Patients were drawn mostly from the RAAF, but also included serving personnel from the Army and Navy. These patients were not receiving acute care - many by their own admission were "emotionally drained" and recovering from 'shell shock' - "not too many injuries, basically sick leave". (Cheesman 28 July 1987, Interview) Some needed specialist treatment not available at Paluma.

There was one young chappie here, he had a beautiful voice... We used to get him singing and it was the only way we could ... keep him calm. The CO confided to us he'd have to send him down south because if he didn't, he was going to really go around the bend being away from home.

(Beaumont 29 August 1988, Interview)

James Conquest believed in the therapeutic value of work. Those patients needing it were sent to No 20 Medical Clearing Station for a weekly skin clinic or other clinical meetings. (Kenny 20 July 1986, Personal Communication) Otherwise, a busy routine was organised for them. Considering the time of year, an ambitious construction program commenced, with the following projects completed by the end of February 1944:

- Erection of Theatre
- Power house for Generator
- Extra lighting installed
- Meat storage and refrigeration
- Glass windows in administration block
- Paint interior of houses
- Erection of three large prefabricated huts for staff
- Equipment store
- Swimming pool in nearby jungle [the weir was located on a rock bar previously identified as "an ideal dam and bridge site combined"] (Unsigned Report 19 January 1939, p. 4)
- Archway and boundaries at end of camp
- PA system throughout camp

PT (physical training) was arranged by resident physiotherapist Poole. Weekly picnics were held at Crystal Creek, weather permitting. WAAFs (and sometimes WRANs) from Townsville visited fortnightly (later weekly) for Saturday afternoons followed by a dance held in the evening. To avoid an early return to Townsville, the women stayed overnight in the log cabin recently vacated by the US Army platoon. 'Yank hut' became 'Maidens' Manor'. Fishing trips to Moongobulla were organised three times a week, and patients had access to a piano and full size billiard table. The Red Cross donated three hundred pounds for the improvement of recreational facilities and sent up supplies



every fortnight. 'The Gadabouts' came from Townsville for a concert in the recreational hall. (Beaumont 29 August 1988, Interview) Occupational therapy was offered (weaving, felt and leather work, rug making, cane furniture, carpentry and gardening) and patients were expected to take an active part in construction projects still underway:

- Clearing for a vegetable garden
- Gardens around houses
- Clearing of an area for PT
- Construction of tennis courts
- Fencing of camp area
- Concrete areas at rear of mess [now 'Ivy Cottage']
- Flyproofing of kitchen
- Septic drainage
- Building of gym equipment
- Prefabrication of hut for Occupational Therapy
- Erection of large transport block
- Drying rooms (Kenny 20 July 1986, Personal Communication)

Electricity was reticulated from a 7KVA generator set to the requisitioned cottages at the western end of Paluma. (Cheesman 28 July 1987, Interview) Winged gates were erected at either end of the Rehabilitation Unit advising all traffic to 'keep moving'. (RAAF Museum Townsville, Allied Works Statistics; Photographs held by author) A 16mm cinematograph was installed in July 1944, as the RAAF's mobile cinema was not always able to traverse the roads. The Rehabilitation Unit raised its own pigs and poultry and attempted to grow large quantities of vegetables, but used a local dairy for milk. In May 1944, the dairy was requested to test its herd for tuberculosis. (Kenny 20 July 1986, Personal Communication)

Rehabilitation Unit strength at the end of June 1944 was twenty-four personnel. A canteen had just been erected and construction of concrete tennis courts was well underway, with a Civil Construction Corps concrete mixer set up on the creek. (Cheesman 28 July 1987, Interview) Two more houses within the bounds of the camp, 'Grand Villa' and 'Ascotville', were taken over. The ambulance was once more unserviceable, following an accident at the Bohle River that resulted in minor injuries for driver and passenger. The end of June medical summary shows twenty-one skin cases, eighteen surgical cases and twenty-three medical cases. (Kenny 20 July 1986, Personal Communication) During December 1944, Flight Lieutenant J I Sinclair took over as commanding officer. James Conquest became skin specialist for the North Eastern Area and is reputed to have followed the interest he developed while at Paluma to become a skin specialist after the war. (Cheesman 28 July 1987, Interview) Improvements at the Medical Rehabilitation Unit continued during 1945. Bathroom 'chip heaters' were installed, the

generator was overhauled and the physiotherapy section was extended. The large hut for occupational therapy craft works was completed post-war, becoming Paluma's first 'town hall'.

Despite the focus on activity and the attention of the adjutant, there were a few lapses in discipline among convalescent patients. A former patient remembers how the drinking of spirits was banned after an exuberant group set the chimney alight and nearly burnt the house down.

We had a ritual in the Sergeants' Mess - when you got sufficiently drunk, and you were accepted as one of the mob, the lights were switched out except for one spotlight put on you and you were held, because you couldn't stand still - you were held still, and the soberest then would draw your outline and the next morning when everybody sobered up that would be filled in and your name put under it. But then we got this crazy Flight Sergeant... who was a firebug and he stoked the fire so high the whole thing went up and we lost our [fireplace] ...That was when the CO declared that patients were no longer allowed to drink spirits. They had to content themselves to drink beer. That was the night when we ran out of everything except gin, including softdrinks, and we were drinking gin broken down with more gin. (Beaumont 29 August 1988, Interview)

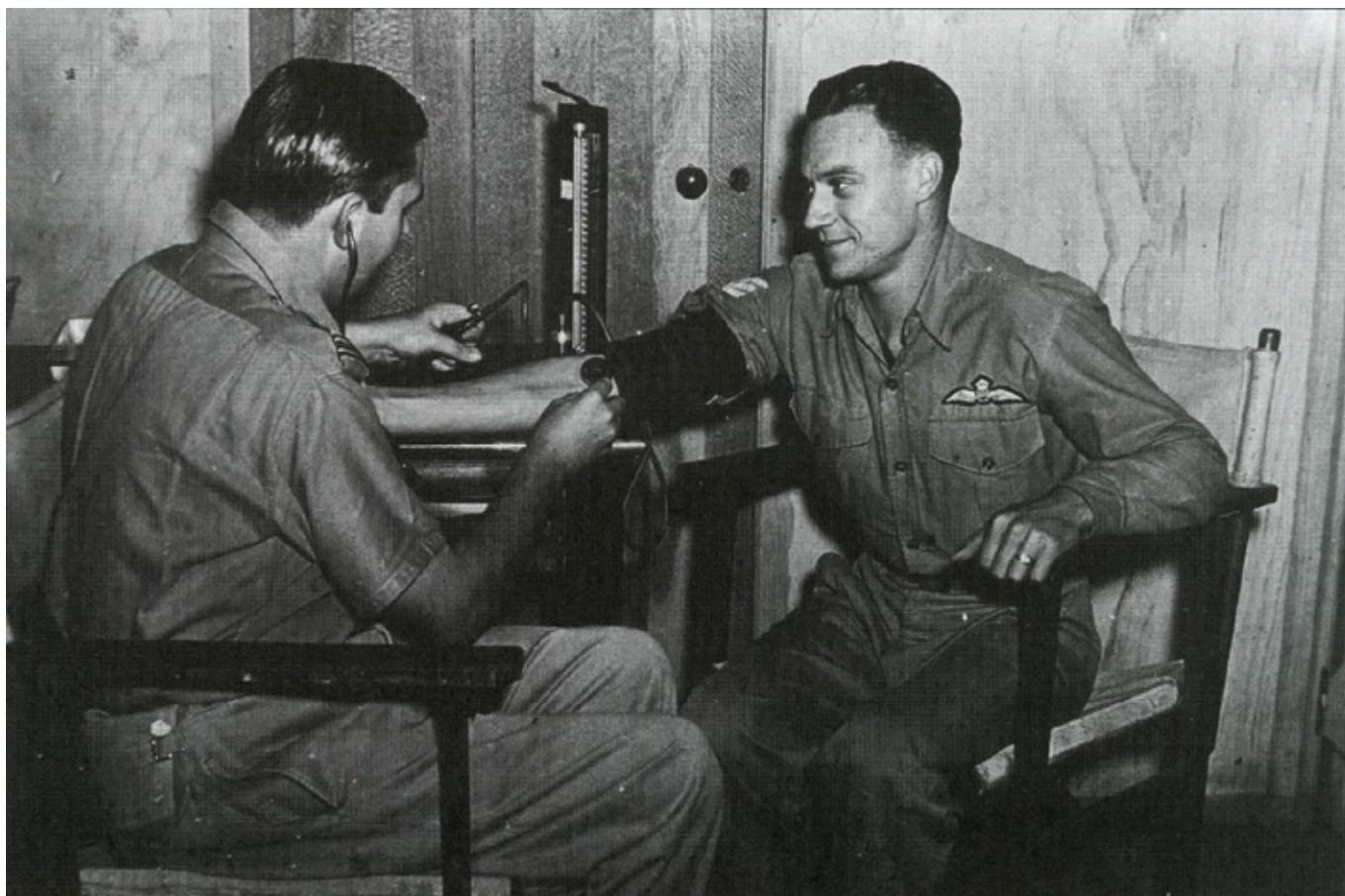
Much was made of Paluma's temperate conditions. It was found that "convalescents benefit greatly by the climate in this locality". (Kenny 20 July 1986, Personal Communication) However, one would have to question the kindness of placing shell-shocked men from the jungle theatres of the Pacific war into a tiny village completely surrounded by rainforest at the end of a road that was easily cut by the incessant heavy rain. At the radar station, the WAAAFs "idly...speculated on the illnesses that could be overcome by a stay in this environment" (Renew 1988, p.2) Given the fond memories of those servicemen who have revisited Paluma, the therapy offered seems to have been successful.

By the end of July 1945, the daily average number of patients had dropped to seventeen, the lowest on record. The Unit that month also provided five civilian patients with minor surgical attention. (Kenny 20 July 1986, Personal Communication) Following the dropping of atomic bombs on Japan, the No 6 Medical Rehabilitation Unit ceased to function on 20 August 1945. Personnel from the Radar Station had already left. Of the Rehabilitation Unit's nineteen remaining patients, five were transferred to other medical units and sixteen were returned to duty. An estimated 800 to 1000 patients had passed through the Medical Rehabilitation Unit during its short operational life. The Unit had fulfilled one of the original motives for the establishment of Paluma - to be a 'sanitarium' in the mountains.



January 1946 Paluma. "War Over". Tourists (Ben Renew on left) at entrance to RAAF Convalescence Depot (No 6 Medical Rehabilitation Unit). The winged gates were opposite Allotment 6, Section 3. Sections 1, 2 and 3 were taken over by the RAAF MRU until 1945

Renew, Thuringowa Collection



1944 Paluma. RAAF Convalescent Depot, with Flight Lieutenant James Conquest of St Kilda, Victoria, taking blood pressure of Flight Sergeant Bill Renew of South Townsville.

Unknown, Thuringowa Collection





1944 Paluma. RAAF Convalescent Depot, Mt Spec, with Charles (Ben) Renew playing accordion for Department of Air friends. Above the mantelpiece are patients' silhouettes, painted only after the subject was sufficiently inebriated. This fireplace was set alight through over-enthusiastic stoking of the fire, resulting in the banning of spirits from the unit.

Unknown, Thuringowa Collection



1944 Paluma. "Hotel Australia" (now "Ivy Cottage Tearooms") used as the combined ranks mess for the RAAF Convalescent Depot (MRU).

Renew, Venn Collection



*1944 Paluma. Rehearsing for concert with WAAAFs from No 58 Radar Station, Mt Spec. L to R: J Stevenson (now J Renew), J Miller, H Benson and C Phillips outside the RAAF Recreation Hall.*

Renew, Venn Collection



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## GOING UP THE SPEC'

### - rest and recreation

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In 1933, as soon as the bridge over Little Crystal Creek was trafficable, visitors drove to 'the Saddle' and later to 'Cloudy Clearing' to camp for the weekend. These visitors were given permission to use Main Roads Commission tents before the township was gazetted and cottages were built. Among Paluma's eventual property-owners were many of the road's supporters and some of the Commission's permanent staff.

(McClelland 2 July 1986, Personal Communication)

Photographs displayed in the windows of McKimmin's store in Flinders Street fostered people's interest in Paluma. Every weekend, vehicles drove north to 'the mountain', on a journey that took three to four hours. The 'highway' from Townsville to Moongobulla was mostly unformed and there were no bridges over the tidal creeks. Travellers consulted the tide charts before leaving town to minimise delays. Even after the Second World War:

the bitumen ceased about the Bohle River and so did the bridges over many of the creeks. The Bohle, Black, Bluewater and Rollingstone were the only waterways with bridges. At all other creeks it was necessary to drive down the bank across the bottom and up the other side no matter how stony, wet or dry. (Bourke 1987, Reminiscences)

Despite the difficulties, many saw a trip to 'Mt Spec' as a real family adventure. (Farrelly June 1987, Reminiscences) Paluma on weekends and holidays was home to many young families enjoying simple pleasures.

We had as children wonderful Christmas holidays (six weeks) when there seemed to be plenty of young folk. We would all go off exploring old tin mines, walking to swimming pools and waterfalls learning of life in the rainforest. We played endless games of monopoly (new game). Dad had a table tennis table in a shed behind our cottage and the young folk used to gather most evenings, 10pm curfew. We also had an antbed badminton court beside the house. Quite often the adults would arrange a day's picnic to Running River or some beaut swimming spot. A convoy of cars would head off for a wonderful day's fun. (Klumpp 1987, Reminiscences)

After the 1934 land auction, many houses were constructed. Leasehold conditions demanded one hundred pounds worth of improvements, not including the value of clearing. This usually meant the erection of "a liveable dwelling". (Farrelly June 1987, Reminiscences) Some houses were built on site from timber brought from Townsville or Ingham mills, other cottages were cannibalised from shrinking mining towns like Charters Towers.

My father fell in love with the mountain and bought the block one down from Melroses. Dad bought an old miner's cottage from Charters Towers and had it pulled down, numbered, and rebuilt on the mountain. (Klumpp 1987, Reminiscences)



ca 1936-37, Paluma. Melrose, Farrelly and Brown families and friends on a picnic.

Unknown, Thuringowa Collection



*ca 1930s Paluma. The Brown family home on Mt Spec Road with family and friends playing quoits in yard. The Brown's house was a relocated miner's cottage on Allotment 5, Section 2, Paluma.*

Unknown, Thuringowa Collection

The Anglican bishop, John Oliver Feetham, built a cottage near the present Community Centre but slept outside in a hammock "due to a breathing problem". (Klumpp 1987, *Reminiscences*) As the bishop often brought some Bush Brothers or students with him, his Evensong services were well attended. Thus began the association between Paluma and many of the churches which have owned property in the village over the years.

By 1946, most of the cottages requisitioned for the duration of the war had been returned to their owners. The initial 'development' of the new township had lost momentum for almost ten years. The new roadworks were still settling, and Paluma was often cut off during wet weather by landslides. (Linton June 1987, *Reminiscences*) Jim Linton, former Main Roads employee, moved to Paluma and started a store and Post Office in the abandoned RAAF cinema building. (McKergow 1985; Klumpp 1987 *Reminiscences*) Devine's bus service brought the mail and more visitors. The town had few other services. Each family had a path down to the creek, and each house had its own 'midden' on the forest's edge. Water was carried up to the houses in "kerosene tins...Chinese style on a pole" from the creeks that run each side of Mt Spec Road. (Klumpp 1987, *Reminiscences*) A small pool on Ethel (now Benham's) Creek was used for bathing. Modesty was preserved by allocating an hour in the afternoon for each gender to soap up and rinse off under the waterfall. While the township now has a chlorinated water supply, sewage disposal is via an assortment of systems ranging from the war-time septic trenches to modern composting systems, some more efficient than others.

The human history of the Mt Spec-Paluma area has swung alternately between activities with a passive or active impact. Despite advances in technology and positive changes in attitude, our very presence continues to have an impact on the forest. Aboriginal occupation of the rainforest appears to have left little physical impact around Mt Spec-Paluma. The tin-mining and timber industries left lasting impressions, though the forest has recovered well. Paluma's popularity as a health or tourist retreat is a theme that runs through the village's recorded history. The village has never supported a large resident population, but holiday visitors numbered in the hundreds even in the 1930s. Over 500 visitors were recorded at Paluma for Christmas-New Year 1938-1939. (Cummins & Campbell Monthly Magazine February 1939) Population numbers fell in the mid-1960s when the first cut of softwoods was completed. The district's population fell again when world tin prices plummeted in the

1980s. Over the twenty years from 1981 to 2001, Paluma's resident population has remained static at about thirty, though the average age of those residents is increasing. Today, ownership of the western acreages and most of the cottages in Paluma still remains with 'weekenders'. Of the four economic possibilities suggested for Paluma in the 1939 report, only the first two remain:

- Mountain resort for Townsville residents
- Tourist resort
- Fruit growing
- Dairying to a minor degree

Paluma in 2001 suffers many of the problems found elsewhere in regional Australia. Over development should not be a problem as land is simply not available. The village is totally surrounded by the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. However, the resident population is aging and government services are being withdrawn. The Paluma State School closed for the last time in the mid-1970s, the Police Station relocated to Rollingstone in 1993, and the last National Parks Ranger moved to Jourama Falls in 1999. Recent corporatisation of road maintenance contracts has not always delivered the best possible service. As government's presence in Paluma winds down, visitor numbers increase. However, given adequate infrastructure, the Mt Spec-Paluma area of Thuringowa City will continue to provide a scenic destination and respite from summer's heat. Paluma's future now lies in providing educational and recreational opportunities for its visitors.



*ca 1936 Paluma. Paluma Township, Mt Spec Road. 2925 feet above sea level.*

W J Laurie, Venn Collection





*ca 1946 Paluma. Bert Cavill and Jack Cluff of the Ewan Police with a post-war jeep, refuelling in front of "Cavilcade" Guesthouse.*

Coulthard, Venn Collection



*ca 1940s Paluma. Mrs Grace Cavill (on right) at "Cavilcade" with guests.*

Coulthard, Venn Collection



*ca 1940s Paluma. Arthur Benham and Cavill family at Cloudy Clearing, post-war. Arthur on left, Bert Cavill in centre, Grace Cavill on right.*

Coulthard, Venn Collection





ca 1930s Mt Spec Road. Bill Cordwell, a truck driver with Main Roads Commission, Mrs and Miss Cavill and Mrs Fallon (whose husband worked in the Main Roads Commission office) at "The Saddle".

Coulthard, Venn Collection



ca 1940s Paluma. Smithy (Harold Smith) and Bert Cavill (on the left) going shooting down the Star River Basin.

Coulthard, Venn Collection





ca 1942 Paluma. Paluma bus arrives. Main Roads Huts on left. Note the Mt Spec Road speed limit of 12 miles per hour.

Stuart, Venn Collection



ca 1943 Paluma. Cavill's Guesthouse with Shell petrol bowsers. On Allotment I, Section 4.

Stuart, Venn Collection



1940s Paluma . "Cavilcade" Guesthouse with Mt Spec bus service.

W J Laurie, JCUNQ NQColl417



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## ENDNOTE

During my research, I was often reminded of the long-term associations between individuals and families and this area that even today throws challenges at its residents. The miners, the timber getters, more recently those involved in tourism - many seem to come and just stay. In thirty-five years of operation, Ivy Cottage Tearooms has had but seven sets of proprietors, four sets of which still live in Paluma. Some families boast a continuing association with Paluma over four generations, going back to before the road was completed. As a child, like many others in Townsville-Thuringowa, I enjoyed a summer swim in Little Crystal Creek or a picnic at McClelland's Lookout. With my husband, I spent some very wet days here on my honeymoon, and nearly ten years after that I came here to live. That was nearly twenty years ago, and I have often wondered why we are so attracted to 'Mt Spec'. In very wet weather, the Mt Spec-Paluma area is less than hospitable, but when it is fine and sunny, the dark green forest against the clear blue of the endless sky is incredibly beautiful. Many of my correspondents spoke or wrote with the same passion as McKimmin had before the First World War. In this brief retelling of their stories of 'the Spec', I hope I have been able to share some of that passion.

## ‘TWO PETTY GUNBOATS’

### *HMAS Paluma*

The Paluma Shoals in Halifax Bay, the Paluma Range and the township of Paluma are named for the HMS (sometimes HMQS) *Paluma*, a Queensland colonial government survey ship that worked along the North Queensland coast in the 1880s and 1890s. Four vessels have borne the name *Paluma*. The link between the ships and Paluma continue today, almost 120 years on.

In the 1870s and 1880s, Britain was preparing for war with Russia. British colonies were likewise preparing to defend themselves. Sir William Jervois had drawn up a scheme for the defence of Australia, an interpretation of which was submitted to the Colonial Secretary for Queensland on 24 April, 1882. Moreton Bay was to be protected by a gunboat and one or more torpedo boats, with another gun-vessel purchased for the general defence of the coast. In time of peace, this second vessel would be available “for general Government purposes”. (Pixley 1946, p.669) Queensland’s colonial government paid 2500 pounds a year for the official use of *Paluma*. (*Daily Telegraph* 2January 1889)

The decision to purchase two gunboats was not an easy one, given their combined cost of 60 000 pounds. Opinion in Queensland Parliament was split on this commitment, which would set a funding precedent and establish a Navy for Queensland. Argument for the purchase of the gunboats focused on the usefulness of a Naval Brigade, which could not function without vessels for training, and on the preparations Russia had already made. Russia had a small flotilla of vessels based in the Pacific ready to prey on Australian trade, even though privateering was outlawed. The gunboats could escort coastal shipping trade. An expeditious decision was sought for the gunboats could not be supplied for two years and the Empire could find itself at war within that time. In comments that would be echoed sixty years on, the Honourable Mr. Groom remarked that “it appeared for some time past those in charge of the Naval defence of the Colonies had forgotten that there was such a place as Brisbane and such a coast as the Queensland coast. It was very seldom that they saw a British man-of-war in these waters - they seemed to be occupied exclusively between Sydney, Melbourne and Auckland”. (in Pixley 1946, p.765) The Premier, Sir Thomas McIlwraith, noted that England’s political leaders had indicated to him that English taxpayers would not take kindly to protecting colonies not helping themselves. McIlwraith spoke favourably of a firepower demonstration that he had witnessed of similar guns to those proposed, which could pierce 16-inch armour plate and hit a mark at 7 600 yards. Potential damage to Queensland could be many times more than the proposed expenditure. (in Pixley 1946, pp. 675-677)

Arguments against the expenditure centred on the cost and suitability of the vessels. Money had just been allocated for purchasing a Government steamer, and one member wanted to know “what duties the gunboat based at Moreton Bay would perform that could not be done by the new steamer”. (Pixley 1946, p. 674) Another reason given for not approving the expenditure

was the imminent arrival of six fast cruisers for the Australian Station. The colonies would not need additional protection. The modest size of the gunboats was ridiculed. Specifically designed for manoeuvrability along the coast, the fear was expressed that if captured by an enemy, they would run up the rivers and attack the towns they were supposed to protect! (Pixley 1946, pp. 674-765) The Honourable Mr. Miles thought it ridiculous that “two petty gunboats” could defend 1 500 miles of coast, while Mr. Brookes thought the use of the telegraph would prevent the privateering of the past. A motion to drop the gunboats from budget estimates was defeated 27 votes to 10, and the order was placed. (Pixley 1946, pp. 677-678)

*Paluma* and her sister ship *Gayundah* were 400 h.p. steel gunboats built “at Armstrong’s famous yard” in Newcastle on Tyne in 1884 at a cost of 27 750 pounds. (Pixley 1946, p. 672; *Daily Telegraph* 2January 1889; Feakes 1951, p.75; Australasian Maritime Historical Society Notes 26 September 1984) Almost identical with the *Albert* under construction for the Colony of Victoria, Pixley gives the specifications of the gunboats as

Length	120 feet
Beam	26 feet
Draught	9.5 feet
Displacement	360 tons (p. 678)

For their size, *Paluma* and *Gayundah* were heavily armed, with six guns mounted and provision for two more. (Pixley 1946, p. 678) In recognition of their firepower, *Paluma* and *Gayundah* were said to be Aboriginal words for thunder and lightning respectively, though the language from which this originates is not recorded. (Feakes 1951, p.75) Their coal carrying capacity was 75 tons, giving each a steaming range of 700 to 800 miles. *Gayundah* was launched on 13 May 1884, *Paluma* a few days later. Following sea trials in September 1884, both sailed for Brisbane. (Pixley 1946, pp. 678-679)

*Gayundah* arrived in Brisbane first. The *Brisbane Courier* commented on her lack of beauty. (Pixley 1946, p. 682) As it was less than forty years since the British Navy started building iron ships, perhaps the technology for working with steel was still basic. Despite her utilitarian lines, the Queensland cabinet was well pleased. The cabinet meeting on 13 April 1885

decided to send to Lytton fifty [men] from the naval brigade, to man the gunboat *Gayundah*, which will be commissioned for active service. (Rhodes 1936, p.242)

The Governor himself inspected *Gayundah* a few days later and expressed his satisfaction at the arrangements.

By the time *Paluma* arrived in Brisbane on 7 May 1885, the threat of invasion had diminished following the signing of an agreement between England and Russia only the day before. (Australasian Maritime Historical Society Notes 26 September 1984; *Sunday Mail Magazine* 24 November 1968) *Gayundah* remained fitted out as a gunboat, but *Paluma* was immediately converted to a coastal survey vessel, the decision to employ her in survey work



having been announced by the Admiralty on 28 July 1884. A deck house replaced the 6-inch gun on the quarter deck, and a work room replaced the 8-inch gun. (Pixley 1946, p. 679) *Paluma* commenced survey work with the Royal Navy in June 1885, based in Townsville, continuing the marine survey work begun in Queensland after Separation. Over the next ten years, *Paluma* made a valuable contribution to this knowledge base, working from Townsville among the reefs north to Cape York and south to Whitsunday Island until March 1895 when she reverted to the Queensland Government. (Lack 1959 Royal Historical Society of Queensland Journal Vol 6 No 1, p. 137; Pixley 1946, p.715)

On the refitting trip south in 1893, the *Paluma* endured the indignity of being flung up into the grounds of the Botanic Gardens during a cyclone that caused great loss of life and property in Brisbane. (Armitage 1972 Walkabout No 4, pp. 62-63) There was “considerable haggling over the price to float her”. The Premier, Sir Thomas Griffith, delayed giving his decision and before the canal could be dug, a second flood refloated her and she was towed back to her moorings by the government steamer *Advance*. (Feakes 1951, p.75; Pixley 1946, p. 715)

In 1889, *Paluma* sailed to Sydney to pay off her existing crew under Lieutenant G. Richards, and to await the arrival of her new crew, men from the Imperial Navy on their way from England. A Sydney Daily Telegraph article described her in detail.

The *Paluma* ...is a sister ship to the *Gayundah*...Both vessels were turned out at the same yard and in build and equipment are a facsimile of each other. They belong to the most useful class of gunboats, and although of limited dimensions would prove destructive enough in an engagement. The *Paluma* is built of steel throughout and measures 115ft. in length between perpendiculars and 25ft. in breadth. This gives her a displacement of 400 tons. Her armament consists of two guns of heavy calibre besides the usual complement of machine guns, &c. The big guns were taken out of the ship some time ago and landed at Brisbane to make more room on board for the surveying operations. When in the ship, one a 12-ton 8in. B.L. gun is mounted forward, and the other, a 4 1/2-ton 6in. B.L. gun, aft. The forward gun has a good range, the hull being cut down to facilitate its working. The *Paluma* is propelled by compound engines from Messrs. Hawthorne and Co.'s works, capable of driving the vessel at a rate of 10 knots per hour. The *Paluma*, of course, is fully equipped with modern improvements, and she is kept in excellent order, the motto 'A place for everything and everything in its place', being strictly observed. The ship has a complement of 50, all told, the officers' names being Lieutenant G. Richards, commander; Lieutenants Wheeler, Combe and Bowden-Smith; Dr. Thorpe, surgeon, and Mr. Hudson, engineer.

(23 January 1889)

The relationship between the Imperial Navy and the Queensland colonial government was not always smooth sailing, a situation repeated in other colonies at the time. The colonial navies worked in isolation, “neither cooperating with the Admiralty vessels nor among themselves”. (Feakes 1951, p. 76) Each colony had its own Defence Act and placed its own contracts for construction of vessels. This situation continued until the formation of the Commonwealth. *Paluma* and *Gayundah* were attached to the Australian Squadron, under the command of an English Rear-Admiral. (Daily Telegraph 23 January 1889) In 1888, the

Naval Commandant in Brisbane, Senior Naval Officer Captain ‘Cocky’ G. Wright, R.N., disagreed with the Queensland Defence Minister over payment for his leave. While neither Feakes (1951) nor Pixley (1946) mention the involvement of *Paluma*, Corfield (1921) wrote that Captain Wright:

ordered the two war vessels, the *Paluma* and *Gayundah* to put to sea, contending he was under the control of the Admiral in charge of the station, and defied the Minister. Steam was up on the vessels, when a rather large body of police, fully armed, was marched down to the Botanic Gardens, and lined the river banks ready to fire on the ships if they were moved. Meanwhile, the wires were at work. The Admiral disclaimed control over the vessels, as it was a time of peace, and the Commandant retreated from the stand he had taken. The matter quietened down, but the Commandant shortly afterwards retired from the service of the State. (pp. 121-122)

The twin-screw gunboats *Paluma* and *Gayundah* were part of Queensland's contribution following the formation of the Australian Naval Forces in 1901 as part of Federation. Queensland's other donations to the infant navy were the *Midge* and *Mosquito*, both torpedo boats. (Pixley 1946, p.717) The first Naval Director was William Rooke Cresswell, charged with “the mobilization of his ancient specimens of naval architecture”. (Feakes 1951, p. 105) The gunboats were refitted with “modern 5-inch B.L. and 4.7 B.L.Q.F. guns under the supervision of Lieutenant-Commander J.A.H. Beresford, C.N.F.” (Feakes 1951, p. 106) In 1911, both were still part of the Royal Australian Navy. *Gayundah* was a patrol ship in the First World War, but was converted to a gravel barge soon after, and was still working along the Brisbane River in 1946. (Pixley 1946, p.718) She finished her days as a hulk on the foreshores of Redcliffe. The first *Paluma* also had a less-than-noble end, being broken up and sold for scrap in the mid-1950s after working for many years in the Port of Melbourne as the lighthouse tender *S.S. Rip*.

The subsequent association of other ships of the same name with marine survey operations commemorates *Paluma's* hydrographic history. *M.V. Paluma*, a 45-tonne timber launch built at Matt Taylor's shipyard in Ross Creek in 1941, was requisitioned during the Second World War:

by the Australian Navy for use by the Coastwatchers and served with the famous ‘Z’ Force from 1941-46. She covered thousands of miles in hostile waters and was engaged in survey operations within 50 miles of the Japanese who took no notice of the insignificant vessel plodding, apparently aimlessly about. What they didn't realise was that the *Paluma* was opening the back door for sea transport that would later bring tanks and guns into the fray. (MV *Paluma* Tourist pamphlet 1995)

MV *Paluma* was refitted several times after the war, working as a lighter, tow boat and reef charter boat. (Sunday Mail 1 September 1996) In the mid-1980s, MV *Paluma* was working out of Cairns, part of the bankrupted *Paluma Fisheries*. An advertisement for the disposal of plant and equipment describes the second *Paluma* thus:

Length 36.04m, beam 7.24m, depth 2.22m....Currently operating as a mother ship and maintained in Marine Board Survey as a passenger and coastal cargo vessel, class 11-B and is a registered fishing vessel. (Townsville Daily Bulletin November 1984)

Following her stint as a fishing vessel, *M.V. Paluma* was fitted out as a tourist cruise vessel. In 1986, Moreton Bay cruises on board the *Paluma* cost \$160 per person for a three-day cruise. (Queensland Country Life 2 January 1986) By the 1990s, she was back in North Queensland waters, offering a cruise on Cleveland Bay to observe Townsville's VP50 celebrations. (MV *Paluma* Tourist pamphlet 1995) She continued to work North Queensland waters as a tourist cruise vessel until burning to the waterline in the Whitsundays in August 1996. (Sunday Mail 1 September 1996)

The third *HMAS Paluma* was an 180-ton, 120 foot motor vessel built for the Army in 1943. In 1945, she was working as a stores lighter, but was modified for the Royal Australian Naval Surveying Service in 1956. After a major refit in 1958, she was commissioned into the Navy as *HMAS Paluma*. (Northern Services Courier November 1989) In 1959, she was operating off Western Australia and arrived later that year "to chart the Great Barrier Reef waters, as did her namesake seventy years ago". (Lack 1959 Royal Historical Society of Queensland Journal Vol 6 No 1, p. 138) She was sold off in 1974 after steaming 184 000 miles undertaking coastal surveys. (Northern Services Courier November 1989)

The fourth, and current, *HMAS Paluma* is a purpose-built hydrographic survey vessel. She was built in Port Adelaide by EGLO Engineering Pty Ltd, and was the first of a new class of vessel within the Royal Australian Navy. Other ships in the same class are the *Benalla*, the *Shepparton* and the *Mermaid*. Like all naval survey vessels, *HMAS Paluma* is not the traditional battleship grey, rather she is painted white. Her most striking difference however, is that she is a catamaran, with steel hulls and an aluminium superstructure. *Paluma* is 36.01 metres long, 13.08 metres across the beam, is 318 tons dead weight and draws only 1.9 metres. Her shallow draft and the stability provided by twin hulls make her an ideal vessel for charting the reefs and shoals of the Great Barrier and other reefs. *Paluma* is powered by two Detroit GM 12V92TA diesels, developing 550hp at 1800 rpm, with a top speed of 12 knots. (Royal Australian Navy News Pictorial 1989 Vol 32 No 4, p.1; Northern Services Courier November 1989)

*HMAS Paluma* has a much smaller crew than her predecessors - two officers, two senior sailors and eight sailors. She is designed to run with unmanned engine rooms, with engine performance monitored from the computerised bridge console. Steering can also be on autopilot along a predetermined survey line. Survey data is collected automatically from a range of computerised instruments. Her first commander upon launching in February 1989 was Lieutenant Commander Mark Sinclair RAN. (Invitation to Commissioning of *HMAS Paluma* 27 February 1989) In a weekend of celebrations upon her maiden voyage north, the crew of the *Paluma* was granted "freedom of the city" of Thuringowa at *Paluma* in an official ceremony in October 1989. In the cricket match that followed, the sailors suffered "what local businessman Mr Andy Bishop described as a mild walkover". (Townsville Bulletin 24 October 1989) Her first posting was to Cairns to survey in the Australian charting area that covers nearly 12 million square nautical miles of ocean, including the waters of Papua New Guinea. From Cairns, *Paluma* continued the work begun by her namesake over 100 years ago.



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