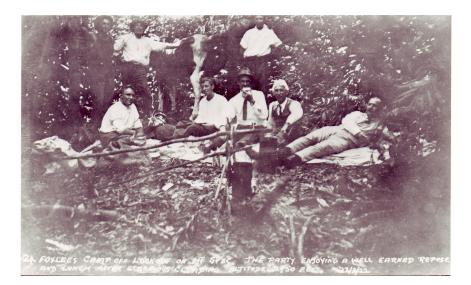


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## HERITAGE SERVICES INFORMATION SHEET NUMBER 26 MT SPEC: A RETREAT IN THE MOUNTAINS



In the mid-nineteenth century colonial governments began to enact laws to reserve and protect scenic areas for public pleasure and recreation. National Parks were established as an escape from hectic city life. While they were calming havens from the pressures of day-to-day existence, they were also interesting from a scientific perspective as they preserved segments of the natural environment in a relatively untouched state.

Today much of the natural environment of the Mt Spec-Paluma rainforest is recognised as worthy of preservation and is located within the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. However its beauty and climate is such that it has been longappreciated as a health retreat and tourist destination. In the early decades of the twentieth century a debate was conducted in the newspaper on the possible location of a sanatorium in the area as mountain areas were considered ideal recuperative sites for patients with tuberculosis.





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By 1930 a series of guesthouses had developed in the area where visitors were accommodated. Guests were provided with guided tours to waterfalls, creeks and other scenic places in the vicinity.

In the 1920s due to public pressure for the establishment of health resorts, the Main Road Commission began to investigate the possibility of constructing a tourist road to Mt Spec-Paluma. Prior to construction of the road the only access to the mountain was by foot or on horseback which often took days through the steep and thickly vegetated terrain.



All that changed when relief workers built the road. The work was hard and living conditions were difficult and isolated. Few mechanical aids were used and workers cleared the rainforest with picks and shovels. Explosives were used to blast areas of rock and horse drawn scoops, wheelbarrows or mining trolleys on small pieces of portable track removed the rock. The gravelled road was officially opened on 18 July 1937.

Since that time the area has continued to be seen as a tourist destination and health resort. During World War II, the RAAF operated a medical rehabilitation unit for servicemen from all three services. In recent years a number of interpretative signs have been erected in Paluma township which highlight the history of the region.

## Acknowledgements:

• Linda Venn, *Paluma the first Eighty Years 1870-1950s*, Thuringowa City Council, 2002.



