

**Report of the History (since European settlement)
And Cultural Heritage Values
Of the Julatten-Mount Molloy-Mareeba Stockroute
And
Associated Reserves**

**Report to
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1. Introduction

This report represents the results of a brief study on the post-European settlement history of the Julatten-Mount Molloy-Mareeba Stockroute and associated reserves conducted as part of an audit commissioned by Mitchell River Watershed Management Group Inc.

1.1 Terms of Reference of Study

The terms of reference of this study focused upon:

- documentation of this history to trace the role of the route and associated reserves in the early history of settlement of the area,
- collation of available information on the history of the area,
- writing an integrated history from this material,
- source material to be primarily from literature and document research complemented with selected interviews of key individuals and local historians as required.

The desired outputs were described as:

- a report that provides a clear narration of the history of these lands,
- written as a document which can be published for general readership,
- a record of historical and cultural sites,
- a public workshop early in the project to inform local people of the work and to encourage their input.

The author participated in a workshop held at Mount Molloy Hall in October 2000 where a presentation of the proposed study was made. Those in attendance were encouraged to participate in the information gathering.

1.2 Study Area

The study area includes the Julatten-Mount Molloy-Mareeba Stock Route from "The Bump" through Julatten and Mount Molloy to reserve areas near Mareeba. The associated reserves include Blue Lagoon Camping and Water Reserve (R24); Mount Molloy Recreational Reserve and Camping and Water Reserve on Rifle Creek (R76 & R77); Little Mitchell Pasturage Reserve at Yalkula (R25); Big Mitchell Camping and Water Reserve partially submerged with

sections of the stock route at Lake Mitchell (Lot 10 on DA 214); Mareeba Woodlands and Pasturage Reserves (R74, Lots 136 on DA384 and Lot 141 on CP 903068) and Native Police Reserve (Lot 10 on CP851428).

1.3 Contemporary Management of Stock Route and Reserves

Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Mareeba Shire Council jointly administer the stock route and reserves. Mareeba Shire Council carries out administration and management of the stock route on a daily basis. Various activities on the reserves have been established through lease and trustee arrangements. There is a grazing lease over a large section of the Blue Lagoon Camping and Water Reserve (R24). A pistol club has established a shooting range on Mount Molloy Recreational Reserve (R76). A permit to occupy for grazing exists over Mareeba Pasturage Reserve (Lot 141 on CP903068 and Lot 136 on DA 384) and an Ecotourism facility has been established on Mareeba Woodlands Pasturage Reserve (R74).

1.4 Method of Study including sources of information

The author, Geoffrey Kuhn, has been engaged in historical research of the area for over twenty years. Information on the history of this stock route has been a major focus of the author who has had landholdings adjacent to the stock route system. The author has previously presented the history of the stock route and reserves as part of an interpretation of the landscape when conducting Ecotourism ventures (horseriding) on the stock route system.

Informants have provided most of the information to the author on the history of the area over the years. For this study these have included:

- Evelyn Troughton of Mareeba
- Glenville Pike of Emerald Creek
- Rod Pashen of Julatten
- Toby English of Julatten

I would like to thank the above for all their valuable information and help in this study. I would particularly like to acknowledge Evelyn Troughton's research and Glenville Pike's attached references. Glenville's detailed research and collection of photographs remains an invaluable history of this area.

2. History of Julatten-Mount Molloy-Mareeba Stockroute & Associated Reserves

In order to understand the historical significance of the Julatten-Mount Molloy-Mareeba Stock Route and associated Reserves, it is necessary to understand the history of the 1870s and 1880s in this area of North Queensland.

2.1 Background History

The development of North Queensland was a direct response to the discovery of gold in the area. In 1872 William Hann had reported that a river he named the Palmer showed good colour during the government sponsored expedition that he led to Princess Charlotte Bay. James Venture Mulligan followed up Hann's report when he led a party of prospectors including Christy Palmerston to the Palmer River. In June 1873 the Queensland government had a thousand pound reward for the discovery of new goldfields.

By October 1873, the steamer "Leichardt" had arrived in Cooktown with miners, government officials and police to administer the new Palmer River Goldfield. Little did they know that the Palmer would yield over 1 million ounces of gold in twenty years and that it would earn the name of "River of Gold". At its height, there were 10,000 European and 25,000 Chinese miners working the field. By the end of the 1870s there was more shipping that entered the Endeavour River at Cooktown than Moreton Bay at Brisbane. So Cooktown itself was booming.

In late 1875, James Venture Mulligan led a small party from the Palmer to explore the region around the Mitchell, McLeod and Hodgkinson Rivers. In March 1876, J.V. Mulligan reported payable gold on the Hodgkinson to the Mining warden Coward at Byerstown on the Palmer. The word got out and created great excitement on the Palmer field and in the business community in Cooktown. The "Brisbane Courier" reported the discovery of the Hodgkinson field on Monday 27th March 1876.

This news motivated southern diggers to come north to share in the new El Dorado that was the talk of Australia. Over 2000 men rushed the Hodgkinson field. A lot of these miners left good claims on the Palmer field in anticipation of

even richer pickings on the Hodgkinson. Once there, the miners realised that it was not another Palmer as the alluvial gold was patchy. There was talk of lynching J.V. Mulligan! But news came of rich surface reefs being found on the Hodgkinson and the new field was established.

One of the major problems faced by the emerging towns on the gold field was the distance to the Hodgkinson from Cooktown: 135 miles that traversed a lot of very rugged country and numerous rivers, creeks and gullies. Due to the distance, freight to the Hodgkinson from Cooktown was very expensive at one hundred pounds per ton. So everyone on the field wanted a new and shorter route to the coast. Glenville Pike in "Pioneer Country" refers to these times:

A meeting was held at Thornborough on Saturday afternoon, 8 July 1876 outside J.V. Mulligan's store. The warden and Police Magistrate Howard St George (a popular official) presided. The object was to form an expedition to find a wagon road to a convenient point on the coast. Five hundred miners rolled up. Bill Smith, a packer and miner, and a former beche-de-mer fisherman who knew the coast, described the advantages of Trinity Bay as a likely seaport for the Hodgkinson. Quickly two hundred pounds was subscribed as a reward to be offered for the discovery of a road.

John Doyle, an expert bushman and horseman who had been in the Palmer Rush, accompanied Smith and a man named Cardnow to try to penetrate the ranges to the coast. When Doyle came upon the majestic spectacle of the Barron Falls tumbling into a jungle-filled gorge amid clouds of spray, he was amazed. The Aboriginals' name for the falls was Dinden.

Doyle was the first white man to gaze on the scenic grandeur they then presented. In Thornborough later, Doyle's report was scarcely believed. One influential person is supposed to have said that if such a river as the Barron existed it must run uphill.

Bill Smith then returned to Cooktown and attacked the range from the seaward side with two mates, Stewart and Lipton. They arrived in Thornborough on September 17th 1876, having covered seventy miles on foot.

On September 20th 1876, Mr Jenkin, the Thornborough correspondent for the "Townsville Herald", took up his quill and in neat copperplate wrote a despatch containing these words: ' Bill Smith and his mates have been the "lions" of the place for a while, and the consumption of "James Hennessy" has notably increased in the two cities of Thornborough and Kingsborough, and along with the Caledonia.'

These initial expeditions led to the development of the Douglas Track. The Queensland government spent ten thousand pounds trying to improve the track but it proved to be too steep for a wagon road. However it was used by packers who carried freight to the Hodgkinson from Smithfield and later from the new town of Cairns situated on Trinity Bay. The first gold escort that was sent from the Hodgkinson to Trinity Bay on the new road was held up by unidentified bushrangers.

In 1874 John Fraser and a companion, Arthur Temple Clark, left Farnham in the Lower Herbert River, in search of good grazing land. They scouted around the rainforest to the east and ended up on the headwaters of the Mitchell River near where the town of Mount Molloy was later established. They took up several hundred square miles of well watered and grassed country to return in 1875 with 400 head of lower Burdekin cattle to stock the new run at Mitchellvale.

In late 1876 some of Cooktown's leading businessmen, on the recommendation of J.V. Mulligan, engaged the services of Christy Palmerston (who was staying at John Fraser's Mitchellvale), to find a new wagon road from the coast as the Douglas Track had proved to be unsuitable. Cooktown was finding it both too expensive and difficult to meet the huge demand of the new towns on the Hodgkinson field.

In April 1877, Christy Palmerston, with Billy Little, headed south-east up the headwaters of the Mitchell River and easterly along Rifle Creek in mainly open sclerophyll forest country until he encountered the divide over the headwaters of the Mowbray River at Mowbray Gorge. Christy Palmerston and Billy Little followed a spur on the southern side of the Mowbray Gorge through dense coastal rainforest down to the valley floor. They blazed a tree at this point with "CP/BL". This track then became a new wagon road known as "the Bump".

The new wagon road was reported on 16th June 1877 in the Hodgkinson Mining News. Palmerston and Little received the two hundred pound reward for their efforts. Settlement was quickly established on the coast on the banks of the Mowbray River and was called New Jerusalem. However it was quickly abandoned for a better site on Dickson Inlet at Island Point originally called Salisbury and then Port Douglas.

The new town of Port Douglas grew quickly with merchants racing to be the first to set up shop and take advantage of the new road to the Hodgkinson. In October 1877 Bill Clark took a six ton boiler for the Monarch Mine over the new road. On 12th December 1877 Johnny Hogfish took the first mail by pack horse from Port Douglas to Thornborough. Record freight weight of 9 tons and 18 hundredweight was recorded when a Jackson and Plant boiler was transferred via the Bump and new wagon road to their plant at Kingsborough. Ted Troughton, a prominent teamster, used two teams of bullocks yoked four abreast and it took two weeks to do the journey.

2.2 Establishment of Transport System including Stage Coach, Camping Reserves and Hotels

In its heyday, Port Douglas had twelve hotels and numerous businesses. There were 42 resident horse teamsters, 44 bullock teamsters and 29 packers who operated on the Bump.

With all of this traffic on the new wagon road, there was a need for well watered areas with good grass for the working stock. Also camping areas for the teamsters, packers and travellers. This led to the establishment of common grounds for all to use known as Camping and Water Reserve areas along the new road.

Traveller numbers increased with the establishment of the Cobb & Co. stage coach started along the new road to the Hodgkinson. In 1880 with the discovery of tin on the Wild River, the Herberton district engaged the services of Christie Palmerston. He blazed a new road to connect the tin fields via Granite Creek (later Mareeba), to the well used road to the Hodgkinson from Port Douglas. With this new connection, the Cobb & Co. stage coach extended its service from Port Douglas all the way to Croydon and Georgetown. Port Douglas thus became the major port servicing the rapid development of the hinterland.

With the traffic on the road from Port Douglas to the Hodgkinson and beyond, hotels and stopovers were established. With the movement of stock for grazing activity and food supplies in the hinterland the road also became the stock route linking Port Douglas to the hinterland.

2.3 Detail of the Julatten-Mount Molloy-Mareeba Stock Route and Associated Reserves A

At this point, more detail of the stock route and reserves are described in two sections:

- I. From the top of the Bump to Mount Molloy Reserves**
- II. From Mount Molloy to the Reserves near Mareeba**

I. From the top of the Bump to Mount Molloy Reserves

Due to the steep ascent of the Bump, Cobb & Co. had to change stage coach teams at the top of the range where Allen's Hotel and Blacksmith Shop was situated. The only thing that identifies the site today is an old mango tree.

Following on west from Allen's Hotel is the site where Reynold's Hotel was situated on the banks of the Rocky Mowbray. There is nothing to identify the site today.

After the Rocky Mowbray crossing, the road ascends Bell's Hill. The old cuttings that were excavated by hand with horse and scoop, are still visible. The top of Bell's Hill is the Great Divide as all the water falling on the eastern side of the hill flows via the Mowbray River to the Coral Sea and all the water falling on the western side flows to Rifle Creek, the headwaters of Mitchell River and flows for over 1000 kilometres to the Gulf of Carpentaria. It is only a 10 metre separation on the top Bell's Hill that divides the catchments!

After the descent from Bell's Hill, the stock route traverses Molloy Swamp: a unique flood plain where Patrick Molloy, an early teamster on the road set up camp at Molloy Lagoon to spell his bullocks and horses. It was reported by an informant that once when Patrick Molloy was away on a tip to the Hodgkinson, five draught horses held in a yard were speared by Aborigines. His wife was forced to defend the family. Upon Patrick's return, there was what was described as "swift retribution" by a party of men. Towards Black Mountain there is an area called "the Graves": evidence of the retribution of this time. Patrick Molloy later discovered copper at what became Mount Molloy.

The wagon road after passing near Molloy Lagoon continues across forested country to Mick Macks crossing at Rifle Creek. This is within the area of Blue Lagoon Camping and water Reserve (R24). The crossing is named after Mick McNamara who was an early teamster and cedar getter in the Molloy district.

On the western side of this crossing at Rifle Creek is the site of Mullavey's Hotel and the Cobb & Co. weigh station. There is very little recorded history of this site. Yuccas and mango trees are evidence of its previous use. The Blue Lagoon Camping and Water Reserve (R24) would have provided good camping and watering for exhausted teamsters, packers and stock.

When the road went into decline, Mick McNamara bought Mullavey's Hotel. It was around 1900 when he moved it with his horse team from the banks of Rifle Creek to Frazer Road in Mount Molloy where it is still standing today.

Following the stockroute through the cane fields of today and along grazing paddocks near Rifle Creek, Wetherby homestead is visible. This property was known previously as "Weatherboards" and run by the Groves family. The homestead area was where Cobb and Co. changed their horses and guests could gain refreshment in the restaurant. The Groves family had moved there from Groves Creek on the Douglas Track when local Aboriginal attacks had become fierce.

In the 1920s, the property became known as Wetherby Station when Maurice de Tournouer bought it from the Groves. He and his family established one of the first Zebu (the forerunners of Brahman cattle) cattle studs in North Queensland at Wetherby Station.

In the early days, the stock route road passed present day Mount Molloy and travelled to the southeast over Spear Creek. Mount Molloy Reserve area (R76 now a Recreational Reserve & R77 Pasturage Reserve) was used for camping and watering by teamsters. Travellers today are probably unaware that they are in a camping area on Molloy Reserve that has been used continuously for over 115 years. Old glass jars and bottles are sometimes found on these reserves and are evidence of the early camping. Nearby Chinese market gardeners used to grow grain and other foodstuffs for teamsters alongside Spear Creek.

II. From Mount Molloy to the Reserves near Mareeba

After Mount Molloy the stock route crossed Spear Creek and headed southwest to Yalkula where the Little Mitchell Reserve (R 25). Here the Cobb & Co. stage coach had another team change and hot meals and drinks were provided for travellers. This was a reserve to spell stock and camp.

The stock route continued in a south west direction to Big Mitchell Creek. A large part of this section is now submerged beneath Mitchell Lake. The camping and water reserve here is known as Big Mitchell Camping and Water Reserve (Lot 10 on DA214). Originally located on the banks of the Big Mitchell Creek, it is also partly submerged by Mitchell Lake. There is little recorded history for this reserve except for the story of a family by the name of Sorensen who built and ran a wayside hotel at the Big Mitchell crossing. Gabriel and Doretta catered for travellers and had a vegetable garden and ran goats. In 1891 they abandoned the declining trade on the stock route to go to the mud springs at the foot of the Granite Range.

The stock route then traversed country that is again submerged by the reaches of Lake Mitchell to three Pasturage Reserves now known as Lot 141 on CP 903068 (514 ha), Lot 136 (210 ha) on DA 384 and Lot 142 or R74e (1930 ha). The latter, previously Mareeba Woodlands Pasturage Reserve is now known as Mareeba Wetlands being used for Ecotourism facilities and the other two for grazing. Previously this whole area of reserves was used for holding stock that had been droved from areas of Cape York on the stock route and before travelling onto the meat works established at Biiboohra in 1876 and later to the bacon factory that was located in Mareeba.

A fourth Reserve (Lot 10 on CP851428) in the south-east corner became an area for the benefit of Aboriginal people. Originally the Ban Bero Native Police Reserve, it had been set up by Sub-Inspector Douglas and his Native Mounted Police in 1877. Douglas had been previously moved from Thornborough to assist in the blazing of the Douglas Track (after whom it was named) and to assist with the frequent skirmishes between travellers and local Aboriginal groups. Douglas and his Native Police were also involved in similar police activities on the Port Douglas to Thornborough road and between Mareeba and the Wild River. There is little recorded history of this reserve. No doubt there would be detailed information in Police Archives in Brisbane. From discussions with informants, it was obviously not a place that the government encouraged people to visit. It was also explained to me by one informant that the term "dispersed" in the literature and police dispatches when made in reference to

dealing with Aboriginal people was, in fact, code for killing Aboriginal people in the early days.

2.4 Decline of Stock Route and Reserves

Once the rail road was established from Cairns and Smithfield up the Kuranda range and onwards to Mareeba and beyond in 1893 , the Julatten-Mount Molloy-Mareeba stock route declined dramatically. The volume of traffic diminished and Port Douglas became a sleepy town against the new thriving port at Cairns on Trinity Inlet.

Even though the Port Douglas to Cairns road was established in 1933 (and upgraded during World War II), all PMG telegraph and telephone lines remained along the wagon road/stock route system to Port Douglas from Mareeba. The maintenance of the PMG line continued even after the opening of the Rex Range Road in 1949 until the mid-sixties. There is still evidence of the lines and porcelain insulators scattered along the stock route today.

Until the construction of the Rex Range Road, the Bump remained the only road from the Douglas Shire to the hinterland. It was used as a stock route for cattle to be moved from the Daintree area to Mareeba. After the opening of the Rex Range, the stock route was still used for the droving of stock from the coast but even this activity diminished by the late sixties.

In 1977 the Bicentennial National Trail (from Cooktown to Healesville in Victoria) put sections of the Julatten-Mount Molloy-Mareeba stock route and reserves on a national map. Riders came through in 1977 to celebrate the Bicentenary. Otherwise the activity on the stock route and reserves was minimal.

With the opening of the Cairns International Airport in 1984, there was rapid tourism development in the Port Douglas area and a changing use of the stock route and reserves. Many areas have been accessed regularly by horse riders, mountain bike riders, bushwalkers, motor bike enduro participants and others in the pursuit of more passive recreational activities such as camping, fishing and bird watching.

However the significance of this stock route and reserve system that was crucial to the development of North Queensland, is not highlighted. Most people who ride or walk through this section are not able to appreciate the turbulent and colourful history over the last 115 years.

3. Recommendations for Management of Historical Values

Given the lack of readily available information on the Julatten-Mount Molloy-Mareeba Stock Route and Reserves and given the financial and time constraints of this study, it appears essential that further research is required. In providing this snapshot, I therefore make the following recommendations:

1. More in-depth research from archival sources (Cairns Historical Society, Oxley Library, Police, Mining and Aboriginal Archives in Brisbane) needs to be made on the history of the stock route and reserves to highlight the non-indigenous and indigenous history with a particular focus upon the interaction.
2. A booklet that outlines clearly with illustrations, maps and photos the history and historical sites along the stock route and in the associated reserves needs to be published and distributed throughout the region, and
3. Appropriate signage needs to be erected by the managers of the stock route and reserves to indicate the historical significance of the area, including any evidence of historical sites.

Map of Stock Route and Reserves

Photographs of Stock Route and Reserves

**(Reproduced with the kind permission of Glenville Pike
of Pinevale Publications, Mareeba, Qld. 4880)**

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