

A Brief Overview  
of the  
Cultural Heritage Values  
associated with the old  
Jullaten-Mt. Molloy-Mareeba  
Stock-Route  
and  
Associated Reserves

report to

**Mitchell River  
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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This report presents a brief overview of the Aboriginal cultural heritage values of the stock-route system and associated reserves identified between Julatten and Mareeba and travelling via Mt. Molloy (see Fig.1). This report was commissioned by the Mitchell River Watershed Management Group and researched and written by Damian Britnell (Archaeological Consultant) between Aug.15th-25th, 2000.

Apart from the stock-route's obvious detailed historical significance (especially the 'Bump' section), the system is also part of the complex Aboriginal cultural landscape of the region. Not only does the stock-route system represent a cultural landscape in part, but it also contains numerous sites and places of cultural heritage significance to various Aboriginal groups. It is also important to the Aboriginal stockmen (and their families) who use to work and travel along it.

This report is limited to known and recorded (or published) anthropological, archaeological and historical data and previous relevant research in the area. Previous research and known cultural resources of the study area are also combined with a brief environmental review to determine archaeological site potential of the remaining area.

It then offers recommendations into further cultural heritage research and traditional owner identification and involvement in future studies.

### **Project Outline**

The aim of the project was to provide a preliminary review and assessment of the Aboriginal cultural heritage issues relating to the old Mt. Molloy-Mareeba stock-route system. This process includes:

- a review of previous anthropological and archaeological work of relevance to the study area
- a desktop study of topographic and photographic material
- a preliminary assessment of the archaeological site potential of the study area
- identification of further cultural heritage research appropriate to the study area

### **Methodology**

Due to the difficulties in gaining formal access to the study area, the scope of this study has been limited to a desktop study and introductory community consultation with Mossman Gorge and Kuranda Community Rangers.

While there has been little detailed specific archaeological and anthropological work undertaken on the stock-route itself, sections of it and its surrounds have been included in previous cultural heritage studies. These main reports and studies are reviewed.

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## 2. CULTURAL HERITAGE LEGISLATION

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Studies such as this are basically assessments of the value of particular cultural heritage items, sites and places to part or whole of our society. Assessment of the significance of cultural heritage sites or places is a necessary preliminary step in the cultural heritage management planning process. The guiding principles for the assessment of significance in Australia are based on those laid down in the Australia ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance (**The Burra Charter**) 1977.

Under these guidelines the cultural heritage significance of a site or place refers to its “aesthetic, historic, scientific or social significance, or other special value, to the present community and to future generations” (Marquis-Kyle and Walker 1992:73). These principles are enshrined in all legislation which protects cultural heritage in Australia.

The *Cultural Records (Landscapes Queensland and Queensland Estate) Act 1987* protects cultural sites (Landscapes Queensland) and evidence of human occupation (Queensland Estate). While the Act does not specifically mention sites of significance to Aboriginal people, it has the effect of protecting archaeological sites (over thirty years old) and can be interpreted to include non-archaeological Aboriginal cultural sites. A permit is required under *Section 27* of the Act for archaeological survey, exploration and excavation.

The Act establishes a register of cultural sites, which includes primarily Aboriginal archaeological sites. It can also be used to declare special areas of significance Designated Landscapes, to provide special protection (eg. Quinkan Reserves-Laura). Any taking, destruction or interference with an item of Queensland Estate without authorisation is an offence. All parts of the Queensland Estate (all archaeological and other cultural sites except burials) are deemed to be property of the Crown.

The *Queensland Heritage Act 1992* protects non indigenous sites, and establishes a Heritage Register of significant historical places managed by the Cultural Heritage Branch of the Department of Environment and Heritage. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can, however, nominate buildings such as old houses or mission stations which may be of significance to them.

The cultural significance of a Queensland historical site is assessed by applying eight criteria as defined in the Act (s.23(1)). A site qualifies for entry in the Heritage Register if it meets one or more of these eight criteria.

Criteria:

*a)* the place is of cultural heritage significance if it is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of Queensland’s history

*b)* the place is of cultural heritage significance if it demonstrates rare, uncommon or endangered aspects of Queensland’s cultural heritage

*c)* the place is of cultural heritage significance if it has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Queensland’s history

*d)* the place is of cultural heritage significance if it is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class of cultural places

*e)* the place is of cultural heritage significance if it is important in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by the community or a particular cultural group

f) the place is of cultural heritage significance if it is important in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period

g) the place is of cultural heritage significance if it has a strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons

h) the place is of cultural heritage significance if it has special association with the life or work of a particular person, group or organisation of importance in Queensland's history

*The Australian Heritage Commission Act 1975* provides for the establishment of the Commission and for the identification and registration of places considered to be of national significance on the Register of the National Estate.

It is likely that the stock-route and reserve system contains numerous sites and places of historical, cultural, educational and social significance in addition to and similar to those previously recorded in R76.

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### 3. ENVIRONMENT

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The study area lies within the Wet Tropics Biogeographical Region and consists of predominantly metamorphic rock with extensive alluvial areas especially around Rifle Creek. The local environment consists of a rich mosaic of cleared and uncleared ridges, valleys, flood plains and undulating hills of *Melaleuca* sp., *Eucalyptus* sp. and *Casuarina* sp. dominated open woodland, with small patches of rainforest in between. Swamps, permanent waterholes in low lying areas and localised wetlands are dominated by *Melaluca* species while major creek systems support typical riparian and vine thicket tropical vegetation. A major feature of the area is the ecologically significant Rifle Creek which adds to the already significant biodiversity of the area.

Much of the area consists primarily of cleared road or track (which in most areas is heavily grassed and regularly maintained) and passes through a variety of terrain ranging from rainforest, rural/residential development to rolling hills of agricultural and pastoral properties (see photos). The stockroute nowadays is represented by a range of land use ranging from:

- sealed and unsealed road
- cleared and uncleared grazing properties
- agricultural land (mainly sugarcane)
- relatively intact open woodland

A large portion of the study area supports pastoral, agricultural development and residential infrastructure. Since much of the landscape has been altered since European settlement, it is likely that initial clearing of the natural vegetation would have disturbed many archaeological sites and cultural features. Housing developments, roads, essential services infrastructure and continued working of land means that the

likelihood of finding undisturbed sites in direct alignment with the sections now covered by road is greatly reduced.

The surrounding region is expected to be rich in cultural sites with areas around wetlands being used for a range of resources, with access to other areas and resources along walking tracks located along the ridges.

Water and Pasturage Reserves contain larger areas of lesser disturbed environment and therefore the likelihood of finding archaeological material within them is increased.

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#### **4. HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

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Prior to the development of the existing road network, movement between Port Douglas and the surrounding tableland (especially the old mining town of Thornborough) was via the historic Bump Track up the Mowbray Valley. This track was found in 1877 by Christie Palmerston and was an important part of the Port Douglas and goldfield history of the region (see also Pike 1993, Bottoms 1995). This old road, like many others developed throughout the region, was based on a traditional Aboriginal walking track.

The study area also follows another section of this track. This 'road' down the ridge was originally part of the old Aboriginal walking track system linking Djabugay and the neighbouring Kuku Yalanji country. It was just one section of a much more complex system which joined all sites and places of cultural significance (see McCracken 1989, Bottoms 1992 & Figures 2&3). Following its use as a walking track this section of the route became a pack track from Molloy to Port Douglas, an old forestry road in part and later a stock route.

Mt Molloy began its rise as a town following the discovery of copper in the area in 1885 by Pat Molloy. The Mount Molloy Mining Company built the old railway line which crosses near Bushy Creek. This old section of line represents part of the branch railway from Biboohra to Molloy which was completed in 1908. As with much of the regional tramway it turned out to be not economically viable although still being used and it was dismantled in 1961.

Historical records for the region (Pike 1976, Bottoms 1995) give numerous references to the local Aboriginal groups of the area between the 1870s to the 1890s and especially the frontier conflict between them and the miners and settlers. The resulting impact on the Aboriginal groups between the outlying mining settlements of the region was immense (see also Reynolds 1978 and Hughes 1978).

#### Outcome

Several historical archaeological sites have been identified in previous studies (see also..)  
It is important that the results of the historical report also being produced separately be studied from an archaeological perspective in order to identify and record possible sites and places of historical significance.

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## 5. ABORIGINAL CULTURAL HERITAGE

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Initial investigations reveals that the study areas fall within three main Aboriginal groups area of interest. These include the following groups:

- Kuku Yalanji
- Djabugay
- Muluridji

To these groups the study area represents a significant part of the cultural landscape with numerous sites and places known throught the area. The area is also important for its contemporary use of resources especially along Rifle Creek. There is a wealth of knowledge relating to the area although this spread amongst numerous members of various communities including those not mentioned above.

The main Aboriginal community contacts in relation to cultural heritage issues in the study area are:

- Karen Gibson or David Buchanan (Kuku Yalanji- Bamanga Bubu Ngadimunku Inc)
- Lyal Brim (Djabugay Rangers)
- Keith Mathieson (Muluridji)

The North Queensland Land Council Aboriginal Corporation in Cairns is currently undertaking a tribal boundary mapping exercise in conjunction with traditional owners of the region. As a result of this project boundaries will not be attempted here but previously published maps can be used as a rough guide (see Figures 2 & 3)

### **Previous Archaeological/Anthropological Investigation**

The Queensland Environmental Protection Agency, Cultural Heritage Branch, lists several Aboriginal cultural heritage sites in the region surrounding the study area. These consist of both archaeological and anthropological sites as well as a system of Aboriginal walking tracks and associated camps and features. The seemingly limited sites recorded to date though is not necessarily indicative of site potential or cultural significance, but rather reflects on the limited nature of previous research and documentation.

Research of most relevance to the study includes:

#### Aboriginal Walking Tracks

McCracken's (1989) paper on a network of walking tracks, associated camps and places of cultural significance (which includes part of the study area), identifies two main tracks through the Kuku Yalanji coastal area adjacent to the study area. One of these went along the coast and beach and the other close to the current main highway now. These major tracks were also connected by a far more intricate network of tracks in between and therefore their known presence increases the likelihood of finding archaeological evidence in their vicinity. Bottoms' 1992 book and 1995 paper also adds to the recorded knowledge of this walking track system located throughout the area.

Sections of these tracks are still visible in some places while other sections have since been taken up by roads and powerline easements (see Figures 4 &5).

It is most likely that the stock-route followed one of the old Aboriginal walking tracks (in whole or part),

however due to the various impacts over time the likelihood of finding in situ archaeological sites is more limited. In developing a working definition for bama walking tracks important features to take into account include:

- they are a defined route linking all places of cultural significance and are used for a variety of different purposes incl. hunting, access, ceremonial etc.
- they have high cultural significance due to detailed knowledge of cultural sites, stories, places, names, resources, archaeological sites, incidents etc. along them
- they link archaeological sites and as a result generally have a high density of sites and types over their length (nut cracking and grinding artefacts are common)
- they have other identifiable cultural features including: bent marker trees, steps, crossings stones, distinct path/pad etc.
- they occur throughout various environments, incl. open forest, mangrove and use distinctive topographical routes eg. ridges, spurs and also join places of high resource value

There is a wealth of culture and heritage knowledge and physical evidence known along the major tracks as identified by McCracken (1989) and Bottoms (1992), those identified represent some of what was a much larger, complex system, of which much has since been destroyed or developed in the past with little regard to their significance or the Traditional Owners rights and interests.

This high cultural significance and the fact that many have since been destroyed is one reason why bama desire to have more control and voice in the management and future development of such tracks, as current use and development has occurred with little Aboriginal involvement. Management issues in relation to Aboriginal walking tracks often include:

- identification of traditional owners for consultation
- cultural heritage assessment to identify current and future cultural heritage impact
- significance assessment and site clearance
- current data analysis pertaining to existing use
- management arrangements including permitting assessment arrangements
- monitoring
- protocols for collecting, keeping and use of cultural information

#### Recreation Reserve R76- Mount Molloy

Reserve 76 near Rifle Creek has been investigated archaeologically on two separate occasions (Britnell 1997 and David 1995). These studies have identified and recorded numerous archaeological sites and features including:

- at least 15 scarred trees (mainly Eucalyptus sp.)
- three open sites with nut cracking rocks present
- isolated finds (stone implements)
- historical grave sites
- at least 3 historical camp sites with remains (incl. old bottles etc.)
- identified cultural resource zones
- evidence of Aboriginal walking tracks

The results of this investigation indicate that numerous Aboriginal groups have a close association to Reserve 76 and 77, both through traditional and historical affiliation and contemporary use. The project initiated consultation amongst traditional owners and other members of the community with an interest in the reserve area and this is now an ongoing process.

Together there has been at least 25 archaeological sites of cultural, historical and scientific significance recorded on Reserve 76 Mt. Molloy (see photos). These results confirm that the area in and around

Reserve 76 and 77 is rich in cultural sites and as David (1995) states “these sites can not be taken in isolation as their significance lies in their environmental contexts and therefore there is a need to protect the cultural places in the area in their appropriate environmental contexts. This is a matter not only of scientific significance, but also of cultural and educational significance.”

#### ANZES Expeditions

Australia and New Zealand Scientific Exploration Society (A.N.Z.S.E.S.) undertook an archaeological survey in the Mt. Carbine Tableland and Bakers Blue Mountain Range regions of North Queensland in Dec. 1989. This survey sampled the flood plains of the Mitchell River and Rifle Creek (see Fig. 4).

Amongst other sites found in the region three low density artefact scatters were located on the southern bank of Rifle Creek, on the surface of eroding creek terraces and the flood plain. However, it became clear that if sites had indeed occurred in greater densities in the area, then the probability for their survival was minimal (David 1990).

While this survey was neither detailed nor systematic it gives another indication to the type of sites located throughout the area.

#### Environmental Impact Studies

Other research in the surrounding region of the stock-route include:

Anthropological and social studies undertaken by Ray Wood for the proposed Mt. Molloy to Port Douglas electricity line (Wood 1992). This study identified several story sites in the region including one in and around Devil Devil Creek. This site consists of a cassowary totemic site mythologically linked northwards to the Cassowary Range and south westwards to Mt. Molloy and the Carbine area. This site is known to include the waters and banks of upper Devil Devil Creek.

Archaeological surveys undertaken by Hatte and Kirwan (1992) for the same powerline project also mention some historical sites associated with the stock route. These include the Rifle Creek Crossing and the historical hotel site and associated remains located not far away and approximately 150m from Rifle Creek.

While neither of these studies identified Aboriginal sites or places of relevance to this study they do indicate and support the concept of the region being rich in Aboriginal cultural sites and places.

### **Archaeological Potential**

Archaeological potential is assessed on the basis of many factors including the degree of modern disturbance, climate, topography, geology, vegetation, information from Aboriginal elders and the results of previous archaeological and anthropological investigations in the region. Areas such as major watercourses, rock outcrops, ridges and areas with increased visibility increase the chances of finding archaeological material.

Areas considered to have relatively low archaeological potential include steep ridges, cleared farming or grazing land, disturbed or eroded terrain and low lying ground subject to seasonal flooding.

The results of the study to date indicate that the archaeological potential over the length of the study area

would be considered reasonable, as it traverses a range of environments with varying degrees of disturbance and other mitigating factors and there is a wealth of knowledge on the area.

This would include both historical and Aboriginal cultural sites with areas within the larger reserves being identified as having the greatest potential for archaeological remains.

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## **6. RESULTS & CONCLUSION**

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As a result of initial study to date the following conclusions have been formulated:

- the study area falls within three main Aboriginal groups area of interest
- the old stockroute was in part an Aboriginal walking track which increases the likelihood of finding cultural sites
- Mt. Molloy-Jullaten area is rich in cultural sites of scientific, historical, educational and social significance as determined by previous studies
- further co-ordinated anthropological and archaeological studies are required to gain more detailed understanding of the cultural heritage values of the stock-route

As a result it is recommended that:

- efforts to gain formal access to the stock route and reserves continues in order to carry out further important cultural heritage research
- funding be sought to conduct a detailed cultural heritage assessment of the stock-route system. This would include further Aboriginal community consultation with the aim of developing further detailed historical, anthropological and archaeological surveys. Such a study should also include recording the social and educational significance of the cultural environment and any sites located.

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