

# THE PALUMA ROAD — 50 YEARS ON

Published by the Paluma Progress Association  
Editor: Neal Sellars  
Business Manager: Ingrid Harrod

JULY, 1987  
Price \$1.50

## The Paluma Road — 50 Years On

Fifty years ago on Sunday, July 18, 1937, the road to Paluma on top of the Mt Spec range was officially opened. The purpose of this commemorative publication by the Paluma Progress Association is to mark this notable and historic achievement, this golden anniversary.

The narrow ribbon of road which clings to the mountainside linked mountain and coast. It provided access to the mining and grazing activities around Hidden Valley and Ewan, along the Star and Running River, and to the timber on the ranges. It provided the sweltering coastal dwellers of Townsville and Ingham a cool retreat in summer, and an excuse to light a fire and share its warmth and companionship in winter.

That this road was built at all was remarkable. It was a remarkable feat of engineering in the age of hand tools, with relief labour instead of the customary experienced construction crews. It was politically remarkable that it was built to serve an area which had no major settlements, no major industry to justify the cost. It is also remarkable that it was built with such aesthetic awareness, with so little apparent damage to the mountain and rainforest. It was built with much loving care by men and women of vision and persistence, of courage and tenacity, who shared the hardship and triumphs of those harsh, depression years. Many are still living, still active, and justly proud and happy to talk about those rough but rewarding times.

Townsville historian Dorothy Gibson-Wilde provides a back-

ground to the building of the road. She traces the history from the 1860's when the squatters settled the Upper Burdekin valley, the Kennedy district, to the 1930's, when the motor car took people to the foot of the range.



An early view of the Paluma Road.

Early residents of Townsville had virtually no knowledge of the mountain ranges to the north. The first attempt to establish a coastal settlement between Townsville and the northern ranges was on Hinchinbrook Station in 1867. Frederick Hamilton, the settler involved, had been the innkeeper at Hamilton's Crossing on the Burdekin River in 1864 and later opened Hamilton's Hotel in Townsville in 1866; he was accustomed to the difficulties of pioneering. Nevertheless, Hamilton soon abandoned Hinchinbrook because crocodiles swarmed in the creeks and the aboriginals were numerous and troublesome; his cattle were speared and on one

occasion, the station was attacked when the men were away.

For many years travellers between Townsville and Ingham preferred the comparative comforts of the coastal steamers, and the not always agreeable landing at Dungeness near the mouth of the Herbert River to the hazards of the coastal road.

The earliest knowledge of the range appears to have come from prospectors on the Star River Mineral Field. In the early 1880's silver mining in this region boomed with the opening of the Great Kennedy mine and the Colorado mine. The township of Argentine on Cattle Creek, a tributary of Keelbottom Creek, was founded about 1881. Fossickers roamed far and wide. However, it was not until the opening of the tin mines at Kangaroo Hills, Ewan, Waverley and Hidden Valley that the track from Ingham was established, and Mt Spec became more accessible.

The name of the mountain has been the subject of much debate; some state that it was named after a miner discovered a spec of gold there, others that 'Spec' was the name of a favourite lead mule. These explanations ignore the existence of a vessel named *Spec* which operated out of

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Townsville. It is highly probable that it may have been operating as the tender for the survey vessel *Paluma* at the time the mountain was named. No proof apparently exists of this, but it adds one more interesting theory to the lists of explanations for the name 'Spec'.

The road from Ingham was Jacobson's Track; the present road to Hidden Valley from Ingham via Mt Fox follows roughly the line of this track. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Hidden Valley was accessible only by mule trains. All lading was carried by these sturdy little animals which at times almost disappeared under their loads.

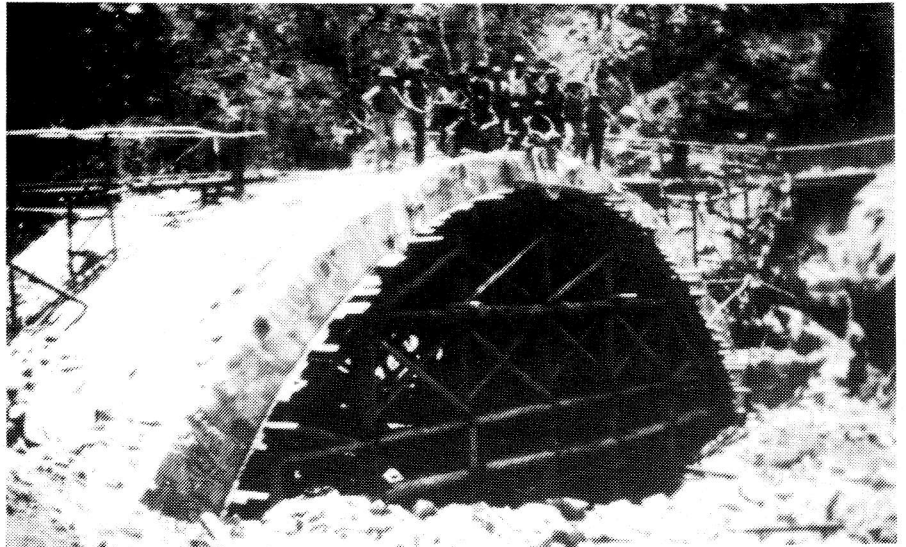
**Mt Spec was probably named after a small boat, the "Spec", owned by Robert Towns, founding father of Townsville, but it may have been named after a mule. Bob Shepherd, present editor of the Herbert River Express, writing in Bob Burla's "Following the Blazed Paths", describes the progress of a mule team.**

It must have been a fine sight to stand at a point of vantage on the mountain side and watch one of these pack teams ascending the hills. In a long serpentine procession, the animals won their way up, at times almost on their knees. In many cases the loads were so bulky that only the heads of the mules could be seen, the bodies being covered with the most unique collection of goods, including bags, cases, kegs, and even kitchen encased the little animals giving them a most grotesque appearance. Occasionally, the loads would shift from their lashings, giving packers a joyful time adjusting the consequent stampede.

**Dorothy Gibson-Wilde continues her account.**

Adventurous Townsvillites desiring to explore the mountains then travelled to Ingham where they joined Frank Fraser as guide for the climb. By 1910 suggestions were being made that a better road should be formed up the Paluma Range in order to provide Townsville with a mountain resort. Advocates declared it offered more beautiful scenery than Katoomba in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales. Unfortunately, no finance appears to have been available and the First World War intervened before interest in the Paluma Range increased in the late 1920's. Nevertheless, a few Townsvillites continued to visit Mt Spec.

Among them was Dr Gordon Ross, a well known Townsville medical practitioner, who organised an expedition to climb Mt Spec about 1924. With him were his wife, the former Florence Scott, second daughter of Walter Scott of Taramo



**Workers constructing the Crystal Creek Bridge.**

Station; Phoebe Lewis, the first woman linotypist in Australia, employed by the *Townsville Daily Bulletin*; and Jessie Macqueen whose reminiscences of Townsville and Magnetic Island are now invaluable to historians of Townsville.

These women claimed to have been the first women to ascend the mountain.

Jessie recorded her impressions many years later in *Memories of Townsville*. Ross engaged a guide named Hunt. The forest had to be cleared in places in order to make a track. Half way up they encountered a gold miner named Andersen; at the summit they met the only other settler, an Englishman named Johnson, whose name is recorded on today's maps in 'Johnson's Mine' north of the Paluma Dam. Ross found Johnson a most interesting character whom Jessie described as a 'mysterious recluse whose home was packed with the latest and best reading matter, books, periodicals etc.' Among the publications were political pamphlets issued regularly from the House of Lords, while the doctor discovered that Johnson knew 'all of the great Londoners of his day, and that his life had been lived among them'. What had brought Johnson to Mt Spec, and his true background, was never revealed. He was still living in 1930 when the first plans to build the road were becoming a reality. Visitors then referred to him as the 'mayor of Mt Spec, a retired miner'.

Jessie recorded the fate of both these early settlers: Andersen was found sitting beneath a tree 'dead from heart failure', while Johnson died in hospital some years later after the shock of returning after a week's absence to his camp and discovering his house and all his possessions burned to the ground.

After the opening of the railway from Townsville to Ingham in 1924, visitors to Mt Spec were able to travel from Townsville to Bambaroo by train. By 1930 Fred West or his offsider Joe Holland met parties with packhorses which conveyed their baggage. The trip commenced with the arrival of the train in the afternoon. The first halt was at Gard's Lookout where the view enchanted many who braved the track. Camp was pitched at a disused mining camp further up the range. From there a number of day trips were made. One of these visited Saltwater Gorge and Falls calling at Johnson's Mine (or Johnson's Clearing as it was sometimes called); Johnson himself occasionally joined the party as guide. Another trip was to Gold Creek Falls, Foxlee's Lookout and

Gard Brothers' tin mine, where a water-wheel stamper was in operation. Some visitors were surprised to find the Shay family running a rough boarding house at Waterfall Creek. Other visitors were to Diorite Falls, Trout Falls and the many other beautiful falls and gorges. Invariably the reactions of visitors were expressed in superlatives: 'The scenery in this locality cannot be surpassed anywhere in Australia'; 'There is a profusion of ferns, palms and creepers'; 'The waterfalls abound in freshwater crayfish'; 'We were truly astonished that such scenery could be found within easy reach of Townsville'.

**If your car broke down, could you call the R.A.C.Q.?**

About 1929 the Townsville members of the Royal Automobile Club of Queensland began pressing for improvements to scenic roads in the Townsville region, in particular to Pallarenda, the summit of Castle Hill, and to Mt Spec. In December 1929, despite an unusual and very severe dust storm, about forty cars set out from Townsville for Mutarnee where surveyors had formed a camp while assessing possible routes for a road up the Paluma Range. A number of Townsville Boy Scouts also took part in this expedition. The road to Mutarnee still followed the old coach route, snaking to avoid trees and fording streams. It was very rough; in fact to make Bluewater in under an hour was regarded as a feat in a six cylinder Chevrolet. Refreshment at the Rollingstone Hotel was very welcome. Once arrived at Mutarnee tents were pitched. Only one woman, Mrs R.E.A. McKimmin, had ventured on the journey with her husband. The men proposed that she should remain with one of the settlers' wives at the foot of the Range but Mrs McKimmin, not to be deterred, insisted on taking part in the ascent.

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From Mutarnee they motored eight kilometres to Saltwater Creek, parking the cars at a site called Mango Trees where the ascent began. Mrs McKimmin found the going difficult: 'the first 1000 feet I'll never forget, I puffed and my legs refused to behave. I saw a look of I told you so on the face of one of the men'. Determined to prove the men wrong, after a rest she continued to the top of the climb where a man named Bell was then camped. A cup of billy tea there was most welcome. Mrs McKimmin had visited many mountain resorts but never, even at Mt Tambourine, felt 'the air so keen and crisp as on the top of Mt Spec, where one shivers with cold at the end of November.'

**When you finally got to the top of the range, it all seemed worth the struggle .**

By February 1930 the route via Moongabulla up the westerly saddle of the range had been selected. Since the depression of the 1930's had forced many men out of work, the construction of the road was started by relief workers. At the same time the road from Ingham via Mt Fox, Hidden Valley and Prospect Creek was opened to motor traffic. In August 1930 another party of Townsville motorists explored this route; R.E.A. McKimmin was again one of the party but no mention is made of his wife. One of the settlers, Mr Shay of Shay's Boarding House mentioned above, had built a bridge over Prospect Creek, a major obstacle to access to the summit of the Range on this route. Only a short gap would separate the termini of the two routes when the road from Moongabulla was completed. It was confidently predicted that this gap would soon be closed.

By 1933 well-known journalist C.A. Jenkinson, who wrote under the *nom de plume* 'Tramp' was exclaiming: 'Up in the clouds in three hours in the middle of Townsville's summer. No, not by aeroplane. Dream? No, a reality just around the corner' — a reality that Townsville residents now accept as one of the city's major recreational facilities with little thought of our far-sighted ancestors who pioneered the roads. It is fitting that we should recall their efforts on the Golden Jubilee of the opening of the road to Paluma.

**Journalists have a liking for the catchy phrase, the colourful word. In 1933 "Tramp" proclaimed that the reality, a road 3000 ft up the rugged range, was "just around the corner". Linda Venn, Paluma resident and local historian, gives some of the background .**

The opening of the Mount Spec Tourist Road in July 1937 linked Cloudy Clearing (now Paluma) with the coastal highway and railway at Moongabulla (Ollera Creek) and provided access to Townsville and Ingham.

The Honourable C.G. ('Nugget') Jesson, local member for Kennedy, when opening the road, publicly acknowledged the Main Roads Commission's two objectives in building the range road, besides the obvious benefit of providing employment. The Commission had recognized the need for the 'back-country's' mining, timber, pastoral and proposed small crops industries for more direct access to Townsville and southern markets. Given greater priority however, was the provision of a quick and scenic access to the new township of Paluma, gazetted primarily "to provide citizens of Townsville with a mountain resort ... a short distance away with all the advantages of health hitherto

available only at the cost of much travel and money". The Mount Spec catchment was also being inspected for provision of Townsville with a guaranteed water supply.

From the days of the pioneering miners and packers, the scenic beauty and climate of the ranges was remarked upon. The earning potential of the area as both a tourist and a health resort was being promoted in the 1920's, with an offer to mark out a range road being put to Premier Theodore in 1925.

After the First World War, the Mount Spec area, criss-crossed with tracks since the 1890's, became a popular weekend destination for visitors from both Townsville and Ingham. Easiest access to Mount Spec, some seven kilometres away from the eventual site of Paluma, was gained via the Bambaroo track. Guesthouse accommodation was provided for visitors by the Shay family. Guided tours, on foot or on horseback, were taken of the many creeks and waterfalls.

At the end of the 1920's, the State Government was considering a number of proposals for 'health resorts'. Many of these sites were within the coastal ranges, where the temperate climate was thought to be of therapeutic value. Local Councils and private lobby groups began campaigning for their favourite proposals.

The Hinchinbrook Shire Council favoured a health resort at Mount Fox, and wanted the Lucinda Point road funded as a Tourist Road before the Mount Spec Road. The Townsville City Council was also investigating Hervey's Range, but strong representation from the Townsville and District Development Association, a group of influential Townsville businessmen, secured the road's inclusion in the new Tourist Roads category. The Great Depression paradoxically boosted expenditure on such developmental roads through the application of Unemployment Relief Scheme funds.

The Main Roads Commission appears to have been charged with the responsibility of investigating each proposal. Presumably access roads, as in the case of Paluma, would have formed the major expense in setting up such resorts.

The construction of this road, begun late 1930, was an ambitious and costly project, undertaken by the Thuringowa and Hinchinbrook Shire Councils with Unemployment Relief funds. The magnitude of the scheme made it suitable for relief work. The Main Roads Commission was responsible for its survey, design and supervision of construction. Apart from some men under contract, for example, truck owner-drivers, the Main Roads Commission staff were the only permanent employees. Labour was found among unemployed men, who were only engaged for six weeks (if single, up to ten weeks if married). They could be re-employed if they chose to re-register with the Department of Labour and Industry, work one day a week until a sufficient number of days worked made them eligible for full-time relief, and wait.

Despite the poor economic climate of the early 1930's, this rotational system, combined with the hard working conditions, rough and isolated living conditions, and an abnormally wet summer, led to a shortage of workers in 1934. As the road gained altitude, thick scrub had to be manually cleared. Two tractors, small by today's standards, and a few trucks provided the only mechanical aids. Cuttings in the fine granite were blasted, then the overburden removed by horse-drawn scoops, wheelbarrows, or trolleys on small

pieces of portable track. Most work was done by men with picks and shovels. As an Unemployment Relief project, it was the most labour-intensive in the State, with up to 180 men employed at a time.

Deliberate attention was paid to the aesthetic appeal of the road. No better example of this attitude exists than the pleasing design of the masonry arch bridge, unique in Queensland, across Little Saltwater Gorge (now Little Crystal Creek). This bridge was designed and completed in the two years from June 1931 to June 1933. Several smaller arches can also be found, and the stone retaining walls and kerbing are both functional and attractive.

**Most of the stone for the bridge was quarried from Barrett's Bluff, not far past Crystal Creek. This bluff was drilled and blasted away to make the road and at the same time provide stone for the bridge over Crystal Creek. Hand drills were used. Usually one man held the drill and the other hit it with an eight-pound hammer. In awkward places one man laboriously drilled into the rock with a drill and a two-pound hammer. Progress must have been maddeningly slow. Some long, vertical drill cuts can be seen on the rock face on the lower side of the bridge at Crystal Creek, opposite the mango trees. Fortunately many men had mining skills.**

**There was a dentist who worked on the road, but oddly enough, he ran messages and boiled the billy, and his drilling skills were overlooked.**

The scenic attraction of the new road, noted in the Commission's Annual Reports, led to the establishment of a series of guesthouses and camping grounds along its length while construction continued.

**The most notable of these guesthouses was built by Fred and Georgina Barrett during the construction of the road. I recently spent a fascinating morning with John Plant, now retired and living at Mt Elliot, step-son of Fred Barrett.**

John well and fondly remembers his boyhood life at Barrett's Guesthouse and Paluma, and the building of the road. We started at the bottom of the road at the Mt Spec turnoff, and as we drove up to Paluma stopped at places of interest and John related his recollections of the road and the guesthouse.

Fred Barrett was one of the foremen on the road. As construction teams moved slowly up the mountain building the road, they established tent camps. One team would work up the mountain from their

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camp while the other would work down to meet them from a higher camp. They would then abandon the camps and move on, on and up.

Fred and Georgina Barrett built their delightful guesthouse before the road reached that spot, 3 or 4 kilometres past the Crystal Creek bridge. They built it from bush timber and corrugated iron, which they had to pack up through the bush. Their guesthouse had a short but colourful life from around 1934 or 35 to the early war years, the early 1940's.

The view from Barrett's Guesthouse was nothing short of magnificent. It looked out over the Pacific Ocean with the Palm Islands seemingly floating in the sea. You could see the lights of Ingham by night. John Plant's sister, Marjorie, was married there, and the Queensland Governor, Sir Leslie Wilson, stayed there. They held dances in the dining room and an old photo shows a waitress immaculately dressed, with a starched apron and bonnet. There were also some bark honey-moon cottages nestled among the tall trees.

When the telephone line to Paluma linked the guesthouse to Townsville, the bus driver would let Mrs Barrett know how many guests would be arriving for lunch or dinner. John recalls that one day there were 42 guests for lunch. His mother was an excellent cook. She would send young John off to shoot a couple of scrub turkeys, which were there in droves, to help feed the travellers. Sadly, other hunters later shot the turkeys in large numbers, although they are fortunately still numerous in these ranges. John and his sister, who now lives in Ravenshoe, recall the huge pythons which ate their chickens, and the enormous Atlas moths. They also vividly recall the bird calls, the crisp, mountain air, the creek beside the house with its clear, cold water, and the mountain views.

**When Paluma village was established, travellers, understandably, wanted to reach the top of the range rather than stop half way up at Barrett's. The Barrett's eventually moved on to live at Paluma, but they left a unique and romantic chapter of life on the Paluma road behind them.**

**Eventually, inexorably, the road reached Cloudy Clearing, or Paluma, as the new village was called. Linda Venn gives some of the village's history.**

The history of the township of Paluma, whose first residential allotments were not offered for sale by auction until December 1934, is linked to its twin uses as a place for recreation or rest and rehabilitation. Paluma's fortune has alternately wavered or been strengthened by its popularity as a health or tourist retreat. The village has never supported a large resident population, but holiday visitors numbered many hundreds even in the 1930's.

The Tourist Road was still two miles away from Paluma when the first land was auctioned. The entire road was trafficable twelve months later, although it was not officially opened for another year. Work on the Townsville-Ingham section of the coastal highway, particularly bridgeworks, brought 'Mount Spec' closer to Townsville. A major deviation from the planned coastal highway was approved between Moongobulla and Mutarnee, solely to be a more direct route to the Mount Spec tourist Road. For some new owners of allotments



**Trolley gang removing dirt and stone.**

at Paluma, these works did not happen quickly enough.

Plans for a National Park nearby were mooted in the 1920's, but not until 1937 did the Forestry Department recommend an area of 22430 acres be set aside as a National Park. In the post-war period, 18560 acres were finally gazetted. Surprisingly, Mount Spec itself is not protected within the boundaries of the National Park. The Main Roads Commission managed tourist facilities at Paluma for some twenty years, being innovative in its establishment of a "motor camp", possibly the first motel in Australia. In conjunction with the Railways Department, whose Townsville manager had long supported the road project, the Commission enthusiastically promoted the district. By the late 1930's, tourists could travel by car or rail, privately or as part of an organized group, for a day trip to the mountains. Those staying longer were accommodated at either the Main Roads cabins or 'Cavilcade', a private guesthouse run by a former Main Roads employee.

Given the furore about the construction of another road through rainforest some fifty years later, it is interesting to reflect upon the survival of the Mount Spec Road. Admittedly, much clearing was done as the road pushed upwards, and much of the "forest" now seen by the roadside is, in effect, only weeds. There have also been many landslips. The general stability of the road however, is a credit to the design, engineering and construction standards of the 1930's, and the maintenance given the road since then. Unfortunately, the attention to aesthetic detail, which resulted in the Little Crystal Creek bridge, seems to have been lost to progress.

**In 1937 the time came for the official opening of the road. This is the time for politicians and other dignitaries to bless this secular event. The Townsville Daily Bulletin of July 20, 1937, reported the official opening under the heading "Mt Spec Road - Official Opening". The following are some extracts from the report.**

The new road to Mt Spec was officially opened on Sunday by the Member for the district (Mr C.G. "Nugget" Jesson) before a representative gathering.

In his address to those present, Mr Jesson said:

"Owing to the Hon. Mr Dash not being able to officially open the road at the request of the Townsville Development Association, I was asked to act in his stead, to which I readily consented, as the road is in my electorate, and I have been keenly interested in its progress and the progress of the district. I have, first of all, to apologise for the absence of the Hon. Mr Dash, Mr Hynes, and Mr Bruce, who have been compelled to return to Brisbane for an important meeting of the Cabinet on Tuesday. They have asked me to

express their regret that they have been unable to attend. At this stage, I would like to congratulate Mr Young, the Main Roads Engineer, his staff and the workmen engaged in this important construction work. The job reflects great credit on all concerned, and proves that we have in North Queensland the necessary ability to construct roads of this description more favourably than in any other part of the State, and I pay a tribute to the men who have given of their best in this important job.

The Range Road starts at Moongobulla, 39 miles from Townsville and reaches the crest of the range in a distance of 12<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> miles: The first two miles is over the coastal flat, but from the two mile point the road starts to climb the range and rises, on rough rugged granite country through forest and jungle, from 50 feet above sea level to 2800 feet above sea level, where it reaches the range crest. Running along the range top, the road passes Cloudy Clearing pioneered over 40 years ago on foot and later with pack horse, by the Benhams, represented here today by Mr Arthur Benham, and then continues through the new town site of Paluma to the end of the completed road at the 16<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> mile point, over 2900 feet above sea level. From this point construction is in progress, still along the range top: At the 17<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> mile point the road reaches a height of 3200 feet, and then drops off the range on the inland side, heading towards Hidden Valley on the Running River; and towards the second of the two objectives for which the scheme was designed. From the start to the 15<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> mile point the road is in Thuringowa Shire, and the balance is in Hinchinbrook Shire.

I have now very great pleasure, as the Member for Kennedy, in declaring this road, which will be an important link with Townsville, officially open, and trust that it will be utilised frequently by the residents of the district as I consider that there is no finer climate in Queensland, and the scenery is quite equal to any part of the world.

**While the opening of the road was a terrestrial ceremony, it was marked by a cosmic event. John Plant's sister, Marjorie, tells how the family journeyed to Paluma for the opening ceremony. Like others, they camped in their tent on the mountain the night before the big event and that night around 3 a.m. they were all woken by a brilliant light in the night sky. Her recollections as a young girl are that it lit the night sky like day for about twenty minutes. Perhaps the heavens were shining a celestial spotlight on Paluma.**

**Now, at long last, there was a road to Paluma, and people were building houses there, mostly holiday houses. Some long-time Paluma visitors remember their early trips to the mountain village nestled in the rainforest. Townsvillian Loris Klumpp (nee Brown) relates her childhood memories of Paluma.**

My first drive to Paluma was when I was about 9 years old. My father and mother, Eric and Ruby Brown, were visiting their friends T.C. Melrose and family. The Melrose cottage is now Ivy Cottage. We had a 1936 Chev. My sister Averil and I were jammed in the back with the picnic gear between us.

As the cars of the '30's tended to boil, we were always stopping to cool the motor

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and fill up with water at places like Crystal Creek and Twin Falls. I was always glad of the stops to let my stomach return to normal, always car sick. Barrett's Guesthouse was half way up the range where the adults had tea and scones and children cordial.

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.

As children we had wonderful Christmas holidays (6 weeks) when there seemed to be plenty of young folk. We would all go off exploring old tin mines, walk to swimming pools and waterfalls, learning of life in the rainforest. We played endless games of Monopoly, which was a new game then. Dad had a table tennis table in a shed behind our cottage and the young folk used to gather most evenings — 10 p.m. curfew. We also had an antbed badminton court beside the house. Quite often the adults would arrange a day's picnic in Running River or some beaut swimming spot. A convoy of cars would head off for a wonderful day's fun.

These were the days of carbide lights, kerosene lanterns, chip bath heaters (frequently lost eyebrows using too much kerosene to get them going) wood stores and damp wood. Not much fun for the mums, no refrigeration, mildew always there, as now. Before our water tank was put up, Dad used to carry kerosene tins of water, Chinese style on a pole, from the creek behind the house. Two homes on the mountain had live-in caretakers, whose job was to cut firewood for the stoves and generally keep things in order. My father made Mum happy by getting a piano up so she, a good violinist and Norman Melrose, a good pianist could practice together.

Bishop Oliver John Feetham had a cottage "Aeropagus" opposite Melroses. The Bishop used to bring a number of student church boys and young bush brothers with him. The Evensong service was always well attended due to all the young folk. One evening a member of the congregation fell asleep and fell onto some planks stacked against the wall which set off a domino action. Timber was coming down onto everyone. The Bishop kept on preaching.

After Christmas the rains would flood Hen Camp and Ollera Creeks making it impossible for the cars to ford the creeks. Once we spent a wet, uncomfortable night on the floor of a small farm house, later catching the train at "Moongobulla" with the cars following later. From Rollingstone to Moongobulla we drove on a bush road through trees.

After the war our family found the air force had left about six army huts behind the house and their picture theatre beside the house. The picture theatre later became Jimmy Linton's store, now Parry's garage (the house opposite the former one-teacher school, now the Environmental Education Centre).

In very early days, the young girls used to shower under the waterfall across the road from Coleman's on Smith Drive, between 3 and 4 p.m. and the young boys after 4 p.m. It was fun soaping up in the cold water; we were squeaky clean afterwards.

My father started something in the 1930's. Our son and daughter love our mountain home and four grandsons count Paluma among their best holidays. This connection now spans four generations.

The Klumpp family are on the mountain every weekend possible.

**You might get the mistaken idea that life on the mountain, as Loris Klumpp describes it, was idyllic. It was in some ways, but in others it was a war! A war against mildew! The ancients had some advice for the householder.**

#### LEVITICUS 14

The Lord gave Moses and Aaron the following regulations about houses affected by spreading mildew. Anyone who finds mildew in his house must go and tell the priest about it. The priest shall order everything to be moved out of the house before he goes to examine the mildew; otherwise everything in the house will be declared unclean. Then he shall go to the house and examine the mildew. If there are greenish or reddish spots that appear to be eating into the wall, he shall leave the house and lock it up for seven days. On the seventh day he shall return and examine it again. If the mildew has spread, he shall order the stones on which the mildew is found to be removed and thrown into some unclean place outside the city. After that he must have all the interior walls scraped and the plaster dumped in an unclean place outside the city. Then other stones are to be used to replace the stones that were removed, and new plaster will be used to cover the walls.

If the mildew breaks out again in the house after the stones have been removed and the house has been scraped and plastered, the priest shall go and look. If it has spread, the house is unclean. It must be torn down, and its stones, its wood, and all its plaster must be carried out of the city to an unclean place. Anyone who enters the house while it is locked up will be unclean until evening. Anyone who lies down or eats in the house must wash his clothes.

If, when the priest comes to look, the mildew has not reappeared after the house has been replastered, he shall pronounce the house ritually clean, because the mildew has been completely removed. To purify the house, he shall take two birds, some cedar-wood, a red cord, and a sprig of hyssop. He shall kill one of the birds over a clay bowl containing fresh spring water. Then he shall take the cedar-wood, the hyssop, the red cord, and the live bird and shall dip them in the blood of the bird that was killed and in the fresh water. And he shall sprinkle the house seven times. In this way he shall purify the house with the bird's blood, the fresh water, the live bird, the cedar-wood, the hyssop, and the red cord. Then he shall let the live bird fly away outside the city over the open fields. In this way he shall perform the ritual of purification for the house, and it will be ritually clean.

**Try this sometime. If it works, please let me know. You see, we have this house at Paluma.....**

**Loris Klumpp's friend, Joan Bourke (nee Butler) remembers it this way.**

A journey to Paluma, more often called Mt Spec in those days really was a journey, especially in the wet season. 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. How far up my legs, as a small girl, the water came

indicated whether our Dodge sedan could be driven through water without stalling.

Once the bottom of the range was reached the road up was much the same as it is today except it was not bitumen, just a gravel surface and narrow in lots of places. It was necessary to drive with extreme care as the large timber trucks bringing the logs from the forest further out past the village could be met anywhere. They carried 3 to 5 logs, depending on the size, but all were about 30 ft long. The journey from town took 3-4 hours.

At Christmas time it was possible to pick passion fruit by the bucketful. My mother made a syrup or cordial with the fruit. It was a very pleasant summer drink. At night the forest would be absolutely alive with fireflies. As all young children love fire, we had great fun burning out the large stumps left round the property when it was cleared for the house to be built. Mr and Mrs Cavill owned the guesthouse (now owned by the Catholic Church) and it was the social centre of the village.

There was a Townsville family of four who came up several Christmas holidays with all their camping equipment etc, in a baby Austin car (something smaller than a Mini Minor). They camped in Cloudy Clearing for a couple of weeks. That was a real feat given the car and the equipment they brought.

In 1942 the R.A.A.F. took over most houses in the village for a convalescent camp. There was also an R.A.A.F. radar station on Lennox Crescent and the American forces also had a group nearby. The Americans built a log cabin on land almost opposite the Police Station.

**But there were more ways of getting to Paluma than one. Phil Brazier, an incredibly fit 89 year old, and former Townsville City Engineer, recalls a journey he made on foot many years ago. He also acknowledges the role played by J.R. Kemp, the then Main Roads Commissioner, in the Paluma road saga, a role that history seems to have overlooked.**

Prior to the advent of the road a Mr and Mrs Shay had a small guest house a few miles beyond the present Paluma Dam, at the spot which was then known as Mt Spec, and I remember walking up there from Bambaroo.

One of the factors which influenced the building of the road to the tip of the range was the prospect of exploiting isolated timber resources. As far as I can ascertain these resources did not turn out to be particularly valuable.

The man most responsible for the construction of the road was, in my opinion, Mr J.R. Kemp, who at that time was Main Roads Commissioner. He was a man of vision and unbounded energy and as Sir John Kemp and Co-ordinator General of Works, he exerted a wonderful influence of the development of Queensland.

During the period when the road was being built a friend of mine Mr Harry Baskerville, who was then City Accountant, made an exploratory trip with me to discover the famous Cloudy Clearing, which I had heard was somewhere up on the top of the range. Harry Baskerville and I started from Thornton's Gap, carrying in our packs all our camping gear and a week's provisions. We walked from Thornton's Gap along the western edge of the range at a leisurely pace and after two or three days we reached a fairly large creek which I estimated to be the Star River or

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**Barrett's Guesthouse with some of its many guests.**

one of its tributaries. This was about 5.00 p.m. and we decided to camp there.

While Harry built a fire and got the camp ready I went for a walk and came upon a well worn track leading straight up the mountain. I have never spoken to anyone who used this track but I knew that quite a lot of fossicking was done in the Star Valley, where there were rich alluvial tin deposits and occasional valuable outcrops of copper ores and wolfram.

I guessed that the track I had stumbled across was a horse or mule track across the range and we decided next day to follow it up.

This we did and finally found ourselves, not unexpectedly, in a tiny clearing on the

top of the range in the middle of the heavy rain forest. From descriptions I had of Cloudy Clearing, I had no difficulty in recognizing where we were.

At this time the road up the mountain had been built beyond Crystal Creek, and after scouting around a little we discovered the surveyed line which the road was ultimately to follow. Next day we set off down the survey track and after several hours reached Mrs Barrett's Ranch. By the time we arrived there my legs were beginning to swell from the effects of spear grass seeds which had become embedded and we decided to have two or three days holiday on the mountain.

# The People: The Paluma Identities

Paluma had its share of characters. One could not do justice to their memory without time to trace their rich and fascinating lives and space to tell their life story. I, sadly, have the benefit of neither. However, here are some snippets of information about some of these mountain pioneers. Apologies are offered for any inaccuracies; the intentions of the writer are honourable, even if the research is limited.

A name mentioned more than most is that of Arthur Benham, born 1868, died 1956. At age 15, with his brother and sister, he sailed from England in 1883 and some 10 weeks later arrived in Townsville. He promptly left to work in the bush, and after various jobs around North Queensland became interested in mining at Kangaroo Hills. In 1892 with some partners he found payable tin at the head of the Star River and named the spot Cloudy Creek. He then blazed a track through to Mt. Spec. Not long after this they found tin on a branch of Saltwater (now Crystal) Creek and established a camp known as Cloudy Clearing, where he later built a rough hut. Benham's Track, Benham's Lookout, Mt Benham and Benham's Falls all bear his name. The Benham family history ("Our Benham Children", by Lee Digweed and Marilyn Hammond, published in 1986) gives the facts and figures to document a remarkable life. What they don't mention is some of the folklore that has grown up around Arthur Benham.

He was a bachelor, a strong man and very popular. A celebrated yarn spinner, he doubtless sent many a tenderfoot in search of mythical El Dorado, a secret lode. The story also goes that, although a gentle man, he would occasionally over indulge on a visit to Ingham or Townsville, and the police sometimes had occasion to "arrest" him and let him sleep it off overnight before releasing him. They say it took a veritable army of police to accomplish the arrest. He would simply walk off dragging a few policemen behind him. His life in the mountains must have contrasted greatly with his childhood in Winchester in England. That young men such as Benham chose to make their life in the area was indeed a bonus for the fledgling country which they so readily embraced as their own.

**Pioneering women seldom get the recognition that falls to the men. One pioneer, still living in Cairns at age 82 years, is Mrs Linda McClelland. Her husband, Mr W.H. McClelland, was the Main Roads Officer in charge of the construction of the Paluma road.**

The McClellands arrived on transfer from Brisbane in July 1931. The construction of the road had started that year, probably after the wet season. McClelland was in charge of the first Queensland relief work road construction project, the Mt. Nebo road near Brisbane. It seems that part of the reason for his transfer was that

there was some trouble with the Paluma road project, including the threat of a strike. At that time the young Mrs McClelland had a boy of 5 years and a 20 month old girl. Her next three children were born on the road project and her next and last child (three boys, three girls) back in civilization, in Cairns. For most of the nine years her husband worked on the road project from Ollera Creek over Paluma down to Ewan she lived with him in a tent on the slopes of the Paluma range.

Their most "permanent" tent home was at the Saddle, just past Crystal Creek bridge. At that time she had three children on correspondence schooling and was also helping a couple of other worker's children through their correspondence. There were two more children under school age. A little later she went to live in Townsville with her young family and spent week-ends on the mountain, or points beyond, with her husband. The Governor of Queensland, Sir Leslie Wilson, stayed overnight in their tent, probably around 1935.

When one considers the insects, leeches, ticks which affected humans and animals, and snakes, not to mention the endless challenge of drying clothes in that damp climate, one marvels at the ability and resilience of women such as Mrs McClelland. She intends to return to Paluma for the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the road in July this year, and will doubtless do so with feelings of accomplishment, richly deserved.

The anecdotes which surround the characters and events of Paluma and the building of the road are memorable. Some are based on fact, like the payroll hold up around 1931 or 1932 at the "bottom" camp. These latter day bushrangers got away, although a suspect was later brought to trial but not convicted. That story remains unfinished. Another anecdote concerns the young James Linton, son of the foad foreman James Linton. The Lintons, after the road to Paluma was finished, built and lived in Paluma's only store, which was also the Post Office. A simple stone monument to James Linton now stands in front of the humble Community Hall at Paluma.

Young Jim Linton grew up at Linton's camp on the Paluma road and at Paluma. At that time, and for many years afterwards, a frequent visitor to the village was the Anglican Bishop of North Queensland, Bishop Feetham. He was an English bachelor, a very tall man, built like a bean pole, with pince-nez glasses and bushy eyebrows. At Paluma he wore a straw hat, khaki shirt and trousers, and lace-up World War I leggings. In Townsville he slept, not in the palatial Bishop's Lodge, but out of doors in a tent because of some respiratory allergy. In Paluma he likewise slept out of doors in a hammock, under a tent fly.

Not surprisingly, young Jim regarded the Bishop as a figure of awe. One day Jim saw the Bishop walking slowly down the road, which caused him to hurry inside and hide under the bed. There followed a knock on the door, which Mrs Linton answered, and a sepulchral voice said, "I understand you have a young boy, Mrs Linton". Jim said that he is sure you could hear the bed rattling at Moongabulla.

## Paluma's Weather:

No account of Paluma and its road would be complete without some reference to the weather. You can't have a rainforest without rain; on average it rains one day in three at Paluma. Every night either a fog

(Continued next page)

(From previous page)



Waitress at Barrett's Guesthouse

rolls in or a heavy dew falls, which fills the gutters on houses and drips off the trees leaving wet patches on the road. Yet five miles further on towards Hidden Valley there are eucalypt forests, and ten miles further on is the dry valley of the Burdekin and its tributary, Running River.

Paluma features in the Bureau of meteorology publication "Tropical Cyclones of Queensland" in the "Extreme Values of Rainfall" category. In January 1972, a fortnight after cyclone "Althea" struck Townsville on Christmas Eve, Paluma recorded 1864.8mm (about 75 inches) of rain in a five day period, January 8-12. This included successive daily totals of 629 and 634.8mm. Townsville's average annual rainfall is approximately 1100mm.

In February 1940 there were two cyclones some weeks apart. Massive landslides closed the road for a similar period before a truck got through to Paluma. The torrential rain washed away the heaps of tin ore accumulated by the miners waiting for the rains, which would enable them to wash out the tailings. The locals were reduced to living off the land; the menu even featured parrot stew, which ranks



A typical road gang.

just above boot leather on the culinary scale. The local hero was a miner, Mr Heilbronn. He visited many people to check on their condition, and then rode his bike to Moongabulla and caught the train to Townsville to get help. The community pooled their food, and at one stage had enough left for one breakfast. A story reported in the Townsville Daily Bulletin concerned the Huston family. Mr Heilbronn went to check on their safety. They

Thuringowa, knows Mt Spec, Paluma and the road well. He spent time in the ranges as a miner, and also worked to clear landslides from the road. He recalls that on many occasions, when carting materials to the Paluma area, that the fog was so heavy it was impossible to see the front of the vehicle. On summer days, in the late afternoon the mist comes over the mountain in sheets from the moist coastal air

below, an eerie sight to the uninitiated and a distinct advantage to the bowler in the Saturday afternoon "village green" cricket matches.

The other notable aspect of Paluma is the cool mountain air. In his address at the opening of the road in 1937 "Nuggett" Jesson compared Paluma's summer temperature with Townsville's as follows:

The climatic difference between the coast and this resort can be understood instantly from the following comparisons of shade temperatures - official figures at Townsville and at the job office near Cloudy Clearing for the last December-February period. The figures given are the lowest 3.00 p.m. figures for each week mentioned:

Week ending	Townsville	Paluma
December 5	80	68
December 12	81	66
December 19	80	64
December 26	83	64
January 9	76	69
January 9	82	66
January 16	83	71
January 23	85	77
January 30	82	67
February 6	83	70
February 13	79	71
February 20	81	76
February 27	80	68

(Continued next page)



Linton's Pioneer Jungle Store

lived in a tent, which had another tent fly out front as a galley. As he approached their camp a huge tree fell across the gap between the tent and the fly. Mrs Huston was under the fly and Mr Huston and their little girl were in the tent. The tree was reported as 150 ft high and 2 ft in diameter. Miraculously the Hustons were uninjured.

As the road consolidated, landslides became fewer. They still occur, and the road occasionally gets blocked, but its capacity to withstand the rainfall is remarkable.

Another feature of Paluma's weather is fog and mist. Mayor Dan Gleeson of

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The Member for Kennedy, Mr. C.G. ("Nuggett") Jesson, cutting the ribbon and declaring the new Mount Spec tourist road open at Paluma.

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### Epilogue:

Fifty years later, the road to Paluma is being commemorated. Officially opened in 1937, it links mountain and sea, the Burdekin Valley with the coast, as its visionary planners intended. One can confidently predict that in another fifty years, some other scribe will write a tribute to the road and the pioneers who gave it life and purpose. I won't forget 1937 either, since I was born then. So 1987 is my fiftieth "anniversary", so to speak. Would that I had worn as well as the road to Paluma!

Neal Sellars

**Editors Note:** Thanks go to the many people who contributed information and anecdotes to this publication. It is unfortunate that space does not enable more of the interesting material submitted to be included. A special thanks to Liz and Tom Mumbray and Alan Webb, for the excellent Paluma Range Game, and to Alan Page, Jim Linton, the Townsville City Library and the Townsville Bulletin for the photographs.

## A Traveller's Guide to the Paluma Road

The following are the historical "mileposts" (in kilometres) on the Paluma Road, as recalled by John Plant and Jim Linton.

- 0 km The start of the road at the junction with the Bruce Highway.
- .7 km Gravel pit on left. Blacksmith shop and Camp No. 1 (for 200 men) on flats below on right (now pineapple farms).
- 1.4 km Road leads off to left to Ollera Creek wolfram mine (at Hairpin Bend).
- 2.0 km Fairy Falls (formerly called Curtain Falls).
- 3.1 km Formerly the "double trackway", so named because there were two lanes with a post at each end where the lanes merged, with stones between the posts to separate the lanes.
- 4.2 km Camp No. 3 on left.
- 5.1 km Linton's camp, marked by two mango trees (on right). On the bend below the camp is a big rock in the shape of a boat which was called the Canberra, now called Noah's Ark.
- 5.4 km Gravel pit.
- 7 km Crystal Creek bridge. Camp was on left of road, on plateau opposite mango trees just downhill from bridge.
- 8.8 km Rock face near bend. Barrett's Bluff.
- 10.1 km McClelland's Bluff.
- 10.3 km The Saddle. Ridge on right joins the road at right angles. Site of Main Roads office and tool shed. Main Roads Supervisor, McClelland and family lived in tent behind the office. Old pack track from Mutarnee (perhaps called Lemon Tree Track) crossed road here and continued up the ridge.
- 10.8 km Barrett's Guesthouse.
- 11.3 km Landslide which blocked road for around 6 weeks in late 1940's.
- 11.6 km The Shute. Permanent running water. Tiny trickling stream. The story goes that if it did dry up it would rain within two weeks.
- 13.0 km Camp site.
- 14.2 km The Yellow Cutting.
- 15.3 km Twin Falls (formerly called Richardson Falls).
- 15.8 km Camp No. 8. Last construction camp before Paluma.
- 16.4 km Yellow Slip.
- 16.9 km Windy corner.
- 17.2 km Where the old pack track crossed the road and followed the spur up to Cloudy Clearing.
- 19 km The Crest, 2925 ft. Paluma village.

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