

HISTORY OF WETHERBY STATION, MOUNT MOLLOY FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA

Wetherby Station

“Wetherby Station – this was the site of William Groves’ “Weatherboards” originally erected on Groves Creek and then taken down and re-erected here and used as a staging post on the Bump Road. In 1930’s Wetherby was taken over by Maurice de Tourneur” (Cairns Historical Society 2009 pp 2)

“The Groves’ farm at Mt. Molloy which they called “The Weatherboards” as they had called their earlier roadside hotel at Groves Creek, became Wetherby Station in recent times. The de Tournouers bred prize Zebu cattle on the property, and expanding, owned Southedge for some years. (Pike, Pioneer’s Country p34)

“Groves “Weatherboards” was a little further on. The old building is still standing as part of Wetherby homestead now owned by Mr M de Tourneur. From there on to Rifle Creek and beyond was fairly flat going with creek crossings and boggy stretches in wet weather the only real hazards.” (The Historical Society –Cairns 1968)

“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 & 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 1920’s 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 (for 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”. (Kuhn 2001)

“Northern History deserves to be preserved intact. The misinformation continues. The latest is in a gaudy advertisement in the *Register* recently for Wetherby Station, Mt Molloy, in which it is proudly stated the property (now largely a tourist resort) was first settled in 1868.

This is quite wrong, as anyone who knows their Northern history will testify. There was no settlement north of Cardwell until after 1873. Christie Palmerston opened the Bump Road on which Wetherby stands in 1877, when Port Douglas was founded. It is a pity such errors as appeared in the advertisement are published as fact.

Another thing, Sundowner travelled the old Bump Road on horseback a few years ago; it is indeed a road of history which Cobb & Co coaches used as the only road of access to the Tableland and beyond. The latest information has it that much of this historic road has been bulldozed destroying signs of its past. It should not happen to a Heritage Trail. Cobb & Co had been established in Victoria for about 20 years when, in 1882, it decided to come to the north of Queensland. A depot was formed at Port Douglas, with Bill Millett in charge. Rod McCrae was the chief driver and “road Manager”, Bill Crowe, who had been in the Native Mounted Police, was put in charge of a depot at Saltwater Creek and broke in the horses. They were soon out on the road as Cobb & Co’s drivers liked them rough.

So the lovely Thoroughbred coaches of Cobb & Co. tackled The Bump with a seven-horse team, to change at the top of the range to five horses for the easier run to Granite Creek (later Mareeba). By 1886, Cobb & Co was running right through to Georgetown, and finally to Croydon and Normanton.” (North Queensland Register 14.9.2006 pp 6)

Cattle Tick – 1896-7

“Ted Henry said that back in 1897 he visited Port Douglas and Mossman. A sailing ship had just arrived from Scotland with the machinery for the Mossman sugar mill under construction.

Ted travelled down the Bump Road and passing through the Mt. Molloy area, he saw cattle by the hundreds dead or dying; it was the time of the terrible tick plague” (North Queensland Register 2009)

“Stewart bought cattle and was doing well until the famous “bank smash” of 1893. He and thousands of others lost every penny they had. The tick plague of 1896, when ninety per cent of all cattle died within a month, was another terrible blow to the pioneers”. (Pike 1986)

Cobb and Co. Coaches

“Cobb & Co. started in 1882 having bought our McDonald & Murphy. When Cobb & Co. brought down gold, they had a police escort. I can still picture the coach tearing down Macrossan Street (Port Douglas) at almost a half gallop, the coachmen cracking their long whips and the Police escort cantering alongside.

In conclusion, let us remember that those early pioneers were many and varied, comprising people of all nationalities – European and Asian – and even humble aboriginals. Let us hope that present and future generations will, of their own volition, in their own best interests, be fully appreciative of what they have inherited and not lose it through lack of vigilance – for that could happen – for in this respect there is much to do to expand the link of progress, so that peace and happiness may accrue to all man kind.

And now as a general finale, let us picture in our minds the long rugged road over “The Bump” to the hinterland, its joys, its sorrows, its hardships. The teamsters, the coachmen and their noble animals loads. What a glorious sight it was – what a hive of activity – but now a relic of the past, never to be seen again, to which we can all be worthily proud”. (Cobb & Co Re-enactment Record 1963).

“It was, as the Eighteen-eighties got under way, a road fit for the bouncing wheels of Cobb & Co. who headed Australia’s greatest transportation organisation of the day. At their peak, they were said to be harnessing six thousand horses a day to keep their hundreds of American-type stage coaches moving on strict schedules over passenger and mail roués, some of them hundreds of miles in length, throughout the Eastern Colonies. The late Tom Crowe whose mother conducted the stage at the Little Mitchell and whose father was connected with Cobb & Co., provided this information many years ago” (Pike 1986)

“Thus the leather brace coaches of Cobb & Co. – the same type of vehicles that conquered the prairies and sierras in the American West – rolled out of Port Douglas and tackled The Bump with a seven-horse team. They changed to five horses at Allen’s stage at the top of the range for the easier run to Granite Creek. The two hundred mile journey to Georgetown cost five sovereigns and took five days. The passengers would have arrived bruised and dust-grimed for there were no luxuries such as hot baths at the overnight stops of the way. When he was a boy Tom Crowe thought a Cobb & Co. coach the fastest and most exciting thing on earth.” (Pike 1986)

“Cobb & Co. had bought out the original coach line that started to run a coach from Port Douglas to Herberton, that of Murphy & Macdonald, but they were to be without opposition for only a few years, and it was their own doing. They appointed Tom Gallagher as road manager, and for some reason Rod McRae was to be reduced from driver-manager to driver only. His salary would be reduced from 22 pounds (\$44.00) per month to 16 pounds (\$32.00). McRae and his Irish mate, Bill Millet, decided then and there to resign and start a coach line of their own in opposition to Cobb & Co. They had to find horses and arrange stages, and Cobb’s men were their bitter enemies. But the people along the road admired their courage. They had a ramshackle buckboard with a canvas hood, but they got the passengers. Tom Crowe said Cobb’s lovely “comfortable” coaches were half empty whereas passengers would be clinging on like flies on McRae’s coach. The horses were shaggy, unkempt, and not very well fed, and had to be changed more often. McRae changed at the foot of The Bump at Gregory’s Hotel, again at Reynolds’ at the Rocky Mowbray, at Groves’ at the Weatherboards, at the Little Mitchell, and again at Granite Creek.” (Pike 1986)

Bump Track

“Johnny Hogsfleisch, once the Cooktown-Maytown mailman, took the first mail by packhorse from Port Douglas to Thornborough on 12 December 1878. Apparently he made only a few trips, for soon Louis Borghero was the mailman; six of his horses were speared in an Aboriginal ambush at Rifle Creek. That was a name significant of the times, and so is nearby Spear Creek, where the wife of a settler was speared when Mount Molloy township comprised only Hughes’ shanty.

By then, there was a continuous stream of horse and bullock teams up and down The Bump Road, as it was called.

Early in September 1877, the first teams from the Hodgkinson – thirty, in a great convoy – came down the road and camped at a spot some homesick Scot called Craiglie, four miles out.

On 6 September, a settler from Leadingham Creek named Mackie, drove his six-horse dray up the range loaded with stores for John Fraser’s Mitchell Vale Station near Mount Molloy.

Then later that month, a convoy of thirteen loaded wagons left Port Douglas (still called Salisbury) for the Hodgkinson. They carried over a hundred tons of stores, probably much of that which Jenkins saw piled on the foreshore at Port Douglas.

A few days later, the “Hodgkinson Mining News:” reported that another nineteen teams were on their way up the range with another two hundred tons of stores, building materials, and mining machinery for the booming Hodgkinson Goldfield.

A bridge of axe-hewn logs had just been built over Rifle Creek, but “The Bump” section was so steep I look 36 horses to pull a wagon loaded with four tons up the incline. The bullock teams “double-banked”. (Pike 1986)

“We now have to climb Bell’s Hill, a hard steep pull several chains long, the reach the crest of the range. We are now about eleven miles from Port Douglas. On a clear day one can get a glimpse of the sea.

The descent from Bell’s Hill was also fairly steep and rough, but from here the road led along hard easy ridges to the more open country of Rifle Creek.

The Government certainly got value for its money in those days when men with picks and shovels were willing to give their best. The cuttings and the wheel ruts can still be plainly seen on Bell’s Hill.

The road wound on past O’Donnell’s farm, Mullavey’s Hotel, Groves’ “Weatherboards”, Spear Creek with Chinese gardens, and Hughes’ Carrier’s Arms” near the later site of Mt. Molloy township.

In 1879, a newspaper reported that “the Port Douglas Road is in a deplorable state since the rains. The gold escort was unable to proceed further than Rifle Creek and had to be unloaded and the bullion sent on packhorses. Some packers have had to camp at the foot of the range for three or four days...

This same year, William Loudon, a boy of nine, accompanied his father as a “spare boy” with his team, from Thornborough to Port Douglas for the first time. It was a dangerous road in those days.

In his old age he recalled that at a hut belonging to Pat Molloy, a teamster who had settled near Black Mountain, they saw five fine draught horses lying dead riddled with spears. They had been killed by an Aboriginal raid on the pioneers' hut, and Mrs. Molloy, alone in the hut with two children, had beaten off the attack with rifle fire" (Pike 1986)

"Bill Stewart remembered Charlie Logue the saddler as being a real old timer with a flowing beard when Bill was a lad. He came from Cooktown with the first settlers and later ran a packhorse mail to Mount Molloy up The Bump and to Mowbray. His son was burnt to death in a grass fire on the hill at Port Douglas" (Pike 1986)

"The notorious Bump Road here begins its horrific climb up to Wetherby on top of the eastern escarpment of the Great Divide. The road was still in occasional use in 1943 as the Rex Road, starting up from Cassowary, was not completed until some years later, and apart from a walking track called "the short cut" up from Shannon Vale to Devil-Devil Creek and Julatten, the only other route, apart from The Bump, was the then new road up the range from Cairns to Kuranda. In the 'Forties, Jim Reynolds still kept his team of three or four horses available to hitch on to vehicles to assist them up The Bump. I recall the Mill Tram picking up loaded trucks of sleepers at Ballyhooley; they had been cut and brought down The Bump Road by the Alston boys using a big ex-Army "blitz" truck. I think the Alstons may have been the last to use The Bump Road for commercial purposes. Latter day "explorers" on horseback and motorbikes use it just for the heck of it, not from necessity." (Pike 1986)

"Of all the wagon roads that opened up the frontiers of Queensland in the pioneering days, few were as important or as colourful as the old Port Douglas – Thornborough Road which was the lifeline for a vast territory where mines, farms, stations and townships were being hewn out of the bush.

Better known as "The Bump" road it was first blazed in April 1877 by Christie Palmerston, a prominent bush man and pathfinder of the times. Within months this track was the main access from the Hodgkinson Goldfields to the port facilities of Port Douglas and with the construction of a branch road in 1880 provided the access to the Herberton tinfield."

"The Bump road was infamous for its steepness of grade. Passengers on the horse drawn coach service had to get out and walk both going up and coming down Slaty Pinch. Later, motorists had to be helped up by horse teams and coming down they attached a log to the rear of their cars. This greatly steadied the vehicle and acted as a break. Abandoned logs at the foot of "The Bump" regularly became a nuisance and had to be burnt.

The completion of the Cairns to Mareeba railway in 1893 and the Cook Highway between Cairns and Mossman in 1933 reduced the usage and importance of "The Bump" road. However, during World War II "The Bump" was mined by the Army and in event of Japanese invasion the local Home Guard were under orders to blow up the road."

(National Four Wheeler 1992)

Pioneers Graves

“Another for whom help came too late was a Mrs Mathieson, travelling on a dray en route from Port Douglas to Kingsborough on the Hodgkinson Goldfield.

It was no sort of a journey for a woman in an advanced state of pregnancy, and when near the Little Mitchell she went into labour and complications developed.

This time the horseman who thundered over the miles of rutted track is not nameless; he was Billy Lee. He led a second horse to fetch back the midwife – what towers of strength such women were to their pioneering sisters in this land where doctors were rare.

The midwife rode back over the long miles from Port Douglas with Billy Lee, but she was too late. After days of agony, alone on the ground under the dray, Mrs. Mathieson had died.

In 1961, the Mareeba Rotary Club erected a plaque on her lonely grave “In Memory of the early Pioneers”. It should also be in memory of all those brave souls who travelled the Port Douglas Road and died on the way” (Pike G. 1986 pp 14)

Her headstone reads:

*“Georgina Mathieson, nee McPherson died in childbirth under a bullock wagon here at Yellow Clay Gully on route from Port Douglas to Thornborough.
Born 1853 Died 14.1.1896”.*

“There are many other graves in this old cemetery (Port Douglas) where so many of the pioneers sleep. To mention a few more, there is the grave of John O’Donnell, the packer and settler at Rifle Creek who died on June 11, 1909; Walter Groves of The Weatherboards (Wetherby Station later), who died on July 16, 1903. One can imagine the funeral cortèges coming slowly and carefully down The Bump Road to this last resting place.” (Pike 1986)

Groves Family

“William Groves and Elizabeth Milligan married April 14 1868

	Issue:
William John Groves	Born July 20 th 1869
Mary Groves	Born February 23 rd 1871
Charles Groves	Born December 14 th 1873
James and Hugh Groves	Born July 12 th 1878
Thomas Groves	Born October 4 th 1880
Walter Groves	Born March 8 th 1882
Ann Elizabeth Groves	Born January 13 th 1885
Selina Groves	Born July 4 th 1887
Gertrude Maud Groves (Family Records)	Born February 19 th 1890”

William Groves

“About three miles beyond O’Donnell’s selection, the Groves family lived at The Weatherboards – now Wetherby Station. The Groves were typical station people. Mrs. Groves had a reputation for baking wonderful scones using buttermilk that were a joy to tired and hungry travellers over The Bump Road.

In 1876-77, these folks had conducted a roadside inn on the then just opened pack track from Thornborough to Cairns. Grove Creek on the Kennedy Highway between Mareeba and Kuranda was named after them.

When Jack McBride landed in Port Douglas in 1885 he, like many others bought mining tools and shouldering a swag, set off up The Bump Road to seek his fortune on the gold and tin fields.

Just across the range, he met a big black-bearded wild-looking individual with two Colt revolvers in his belt and a snider rifle in his hand. He was not a bushranger, but introduced himself as Bill Groves, the selector on Rifle Creek. He was well armed because the Aborigines were very dangerous in the vicinity and he had had several narrow escapes when they had thrown spears at him. He was now out looking for some of his horses which he supposed had been driven off and speared. It would appear he did not intend to let the culprits escape.” (Pike 1986)

Newspaper clipping August 10th 1929:

“Obituary

Mrs Elizabeth Groves

There passed away at her residence “Weatherboard” on Friday, July 26, Mrs Elizabeth Groves at the age of 83 years. The deceased lady was well known and highly respected and was the oldest pioneer in the district, having landed in Sydney from New Zealand in 1873 and settled in this district about 50 years ago. Her husband predeceased her many years ago. She leaves three sons, Mr Charles Groves (Brisbane), Mr James Groves (Port Douglas), and Mr Thos. Groves (Mt. Molloy); and three daughters, Misses Annie and Gertie Groves (Mt. Molloy); and Mrs J.P. O’Donohue (Tully), to mourn their loss. The funeral was largely attended and last sad rites were conducted at the graveside by the Rev. Bird.

The floral tributes were from the following: Matron Daughney, Mr. and Mrs J. White, Mr and Mrs Fullerton, Mr and Mrs Peersen, Mr and Mrs Edwards, Mr and Mrs Mildren (two), Mr and Mrs Gadd, Mr and Mrs Nissen, Mr and Mrs Armstrong, Mr Nott, Mr and Mrs Mullavey, Mr and Mrs Ball, Mr and Mrs Carr, May and Clara, Mr and Mrs McNamara, Mrs and Miss Thomas, Mr and Mrs A Rolls, Jack and Newell Ltd., Shelley and Paddy.”

Newspaper Clipping

“Sudden Passing

Mr Tom Groves a well-known grazier.

Mt.Molloy, March 24.

Just before nine o’clock on Saturday morning a messenger arrived at Mt. Molloy from Weatherboards with the sad news that Mr Tom Groves had passed away.

It appears that Mr Groves had that morning milked the cows as usual and had come in for breakfast when he complained of a slight pain in the chest and took some medicine.

His sister, Miss Annie Groves, was with him; the other sister, Miss Gertie Groves, who resides at Weatherboards, being at a neighbouring house, staying with the daughter of Mr and Mrs Jack White, who were away at Mareeba, visiting their mother, who is very ill.

Collapsed.

Shortly afterwards, Mr Tom Groves was found sitting on the verandah step and appeared to be worse. His sister took him indoors and put him on the couch, where he suddenly collapsed and passed peacefully away.

The deceased had visited a doctor in Cairns a few weeks ago, but it was not known in the neighbourhood that he was ailing, as he returned and carried on with his work as usual.

Mr Jim Groves was telephoned for at Killaloe, and arrived before one o'clock.

Mrs Carr (acting hospital matron) and Mr G Crowley went out to assist the family.

Constable Bourke also got in touch with Dr. Dent and Rev. Bird at Mareeba. They arrived at Mt Molloy about three o'clock and went on to Weatherboards.

Heart Failure.

Dr. Dent made a post mortem examination and found that heart failure was the cause of death.

The remains were interred in the grounds of Weatherboards, late the same afternoon. Members of the family present were the Misses Annie and Gertie Groves and Mr J Groves.

A large number of Molloy residents drove out to attend the last rites of their old friend, whose span of life was but forty-nine years. Rev. Bird conducted the service.

Highly Esteemed.

A quiet, unassuming and hardworking, but very popular man, his whole life devoted to the upkeep of Weatherboards, his passing will leave a gap hard to fill. Many an old-timer will remember Weatherboards better as a resting place after the arduous climb from Port Douglas in the days before the railway when the Port Range was the route used to get to the goldfields.

The whole district will grieve with the family in their loss, following so quickly the decease of their mother, Mrs Groves, who died in the latter half of last year, and was also buried at Weatherboards."

Maurice de Tournouer

"Wetherby was purchased in 1935 by J.M. & H.E. de Tournouer and is one of the three oldest Brahman studs in Australia.

Within a very short time, Mr. de Tournouer realized that only with Zebus could the ticks be controlled, and as and when possible he began buying cross bred bulls.

In 1940, he purchased the first pure bred Zebu or Brahman bull Abdul, son of imported Abel (imp.) and Louise 222 from Mr. Wright of Waverley, St. Lawrence. With Abdul, Mr. de Tournouer bought several $\frac{3}{4}$ bred heifers and bulls, the highest grades available and started a stud."

"Wetherby has sold stock far afield as well as all over Queensland. In 1952, two bulls and two heifers all pure Brahmans, went by ship to Kimberley downs, Western Australia

and in 1957, three bulls and five heifers again pure bred, were sold to the Netherlands Government and flown to Dutch New Guinea.

Only rarely Wetherby sells heifers, and top price was 1,500 guineas for one sold to a stud breeding in southern Queensland. Wetherby bulls can be found in North, Central, Western and Southern Queensland.” (Australian Brahman Breeders Society)

“Formation of Australian Zebu Society and Australian Brahman Breeders Association.

Two North Queensland cattlemen decided they would start a registered Zebu Stud Association, K.J. Atkinson, Warne, Kuranda, and J.M. de Tournouer, Wetherby, Mt. Molloy, held a meeting on the night of 7th October 1946, at the Strand Hotel in Cairns.

Only their wives and themselves were present. It was decided to form The Australian Zebu Society, with Ken Atkinson president and J.M. de Tournouer secretary-treasurer. They were the only members for several years. Mr. Colin Wright of Waverley, St. Lawrence, was patron.

Some of the 1933 importations and their descendants were the first to be entered in the register.

A meeting of the Australian Zebu Breeders Society was held in Mr. W.H. Simms’ office at Mareeba on 9th April 1952. Those present were Mr. K.M. Atkinson (chair, Mr. J.M. de Tournouer and Mr. W.H. Simms.”

(The Australian Brahman Breeders Association 1983 pp 27)

“Weatherboards” was bought in 1929 by Maurice de Tournouer, who was one of the founders of Australian Zebu Association in 1946 – the forerunner of the Australian Brahman Breeders Association.

Mr de Tournouer and associates started their studs with Zebu bulls when they realised that traditional British breeds were unable to withstand the ravages of northern Australia’s cattle ticks, tick fever and drought.

“He changed the name to Wetherby because Weatherboards was not a very flash name for a stud and it became Wetherby Brahman Stud No 2,” John notes.

By breeding Brahmans, Maurice de Tournouer also became a contributor to the gene pool which spawned the Droughtmaster breed.

In the 1940’s, a purebred Brahman from Wetherby Station was put with Robert Rea’s Kirknie herd at Home Hill. Rea was developing a herd suitable for the Queensland environment, in tandem with the pioneering Droughtmaster breeding program with Atkinson at his Mt Garnet Property. Rea started with a red half-bred bull from St. Lawrence followed by the purebred Brahman from the then Wetherby Stud.” (Personal communication).

“From Devi’s the cattle went to Wetherby, then owned by the de Tournouer family who helped pioneer the introduction of *Bos Indicus* or Zebu (Brahman) blood to the northern beef herds. The next day saw the drovers down the winding old Bump Road to Jack Hyde’s property south of Mossman. What followed was tricky and took a bit of skill combined with daring. The mob had to be taken quietly through the central part of Mossman township. To do this the drovers got an extremely early start, walking their

cattle stealthily along the main street and, as quickly as possible, headed for Daintree. Mossman residents were sometimes amazed at finding fresh cowpats on the bitumen surface of Front Street as they came to work.” (Wallace pp 41)

On the back of Zebu –

“Other studs that have received wide acclaim and whose young animals are much in demand by Northern graziers as more and more introduce Zebu strain bulls, are Mr. de Tournouer’s on Wetherby Station, Mt. Molloy, and J.L. Atkinsons’ at Mungalla, Frank Fraser, “Burnside”, and others in these districts” (North Australian Monthly 1955)

“When the first importation of Brahman cattle arrived in 1933, the development of a stud industry was not on the agenda. In 1946 two North Queensland cattlemen with vision, laid the foundations for the Australian Brahman Breeders’ Association. Those two foundation Brahman breeders were Messrs. K.J. (Ken) Atkinson whose Wairuna stud became Stud No. 1 and J.M. (Maurice) de Tournouer’s Wetherby stud was listed as Stud No.2 in the membership register.” (*The Australian Brahman* (2001))

Maurice de Tourneour originally came from France. Gontram was his brother and was a titled person - ? Count), both brothers came to Queensland. Maurice was described as “A gentleman”, wiry and tough as old boots. He is said to be a property manager near Longreach before buying Wetherby. He married Helen Elizabeth Shepherd (Betty) who was one of seven children. She came from “Milray Station” Pentland where she met Maurice. They had three children:

- Maurice who married Margaret and they lived at Southedge Station, Mount Molloy.
- Elizabeth who became a Hindmarsh (Ref: Personal communication Elizabeth Stone)
- John, who died in 1960 at Southedge after a fall from his horse (Ref John Pringle)

Chinese Market Garden.

“The Chinese market gardener on Spear Creek was named Kay Sow – he was there 1936-45 at least and sold fruit and vegetables in Mount Molloy. He picked up fruit from the weekly train on Wednesdays and grew the vegetables. His house (hut) was located near the Bamboo clumps on Frazer Road. He had a horse and dray to carry his vegetables into town”. (Personal communication with Elizabeth Stone April 2007)

“O’Donnells were early settlers on top of the range, then came Mullavey’s Hotel with Groves’ place next, and Hughes’ shanty near where Mt. Molloy later sprang up. There were big Chinese gardens along Spear Creek – so named because a white woman was speared there in the early days of the Hodgkinson” (Pike Pioneer’s Country)

Mount Molloy

“Historic mining and timber town.

Mount Molloy is one of those towns where it is obvious that its moment of glory and importance has long gone. A huge pub, a rusting steam engine and a few shops which have been closed for decades are all that really exists of this once important mining and timber town. There's still a bakery, a general store and a petrol station but these do not hint at the thriving centre that sprang up here in the 1890s when the copper mine was at its height.

Compared to the lushness of Kuranda and the popular tourist haunts near the coast, Mount Molloy is a world away. 100 km from Cairns it is located in a dry area where cattle grazing is now the dominant industry

Cemetery. To the south of the town is a small cemetery in which James (Venture) Mulligan is buried. The new inscription on his tombstone (which also appears on a monument in the town's main street) beautifully captures not only the man but the times in which he lived.

'James (Venture) Mulligan 1837-1907. Born Rothfriland, County Down. Migrated in 1860, found Palmer River gold in 1873, Hodgkinson River gold in 1875 which led to the establishment of Cairns and Port Douglas. He mined copper at Mount Molloy in the 1890s, married in 1903, bought the Mount Molloy Hotel in 1905, and died on 24.8.1907 from injuries received when he tried to break up a fight in his hotel. He had no children.'" (www.theage.com.au/news/Queensland/Mount-Molloy/2005)

"In 1885 a teamster, Pat Molloy, while searching for lost bullocks near Rifle Creek, rode onto a hill where he saw a large outcrop of green coloured stone. It proved to be a rich copper deposit. Molloy worked the copper lodes for four years as a one-man operation while prices were high until taken over in 1891 by Mulligan and James Forsyth.

The Mt Molloy mining camp took its name from its discoverer when it sprang into existence after a Melbourne company bought out Mulligan and Forsyth for 6,000 pounds. This company soon collapsed due to poor management and low grade ore. Forsyth reclaimed the mine and in 1901 sold it to John Moffat's Irvinebank Company. With copper prices rising in 1904, Mt Molloy became a hive of activity. Five shafts were developed, smelters capable of treating sixty tons per day were erected on Rifle Creek and were connected to the mine by a narrow gauge railway. During 1905, 14,500 tons of ore were treated yielding copper valued at 101,500 pounds. Buoyant conditions continued through 1906 and 1907 when 90 men were employed at the mine and 100 at the smelters. The difficulties, delays and general unreliability in the transportation of ore fluxes, metals and goods persuaded the company to construct a 36km tramway to Bibbohra. Construction commenced in 1907 but by late 1907 copper prices collapsed and although the railway was opened in August 1908, the smelter closed down in December of that year.

When mining ended, the town survived by establishing a timber industry which lasted until 1914. The Mt Molloy Company went into liquidation and to recover a portion of its capital, sold the Bibbohra-Mt Molloy railway to the Queensland Government. This line was closed in April, 1964. The two cairns in the main street commemorate Pat Molloy, the founder of the town and JV Mulligan, explorer. One also lists a Roll of Honour for the Great War. Prominent on the side of a hill next to the main road are the ruins of the Johnston and Polentz sawmill which was destroyed by fire many years ago. Only the boiler house remains." (Cairns Historical Society 2009).

Walking the roads of the Past – by Francis W Little.

Can we walk back into the past along these roads? No, not at all! And we certainly do not want to, as those days held too many hardships when these roads were in everyday use. With the pace of today's traffic, who would want to go back to the slowly-moving horse drawn sulkies, and, instead of semitrailers, to return to the horse and bullock drawn wagons creeping inch-by-inch along these roads with their heavy loads. Roads that were very rough and dusty in the dry times, and impassable quagmires during most of the wet. No! My friend Peer and I would just like to take you along these roads of the past so we can share our knowledge with you as we have already shared.

We started at Mount Molloy and followed the original Julatten Road as well as we could, and I pointed out old bridges, creek crossings, farms and landmarks that were relevant to those earlier times.

We walked down the old Main Street, past the old Baker Shop and the Café, Dance Hall, and Buff's Hall sites to the old Spear Creek Bridge, built by Steve Payne and Willie Lee, so the teamsters could cross here, after crossing Rifle Creek at Mitchellvale Crossing. The remains of this old bridge are just downstream from today's traffic bridge.

Spear Creek was so named after Katie Gadd (Tivoli Kate) rode ahead of the party she was with and narrowly missed being speared by wild Aborigines. For many years, the spear marks were plainly seen on a huge gum tree, just downstream from the old bridge. This tree was eventually felled for some useful purpose, we presume.

This old bridge could tell many tales about the traffic which passed over it before motor cars; horse and bullock drawn wagons, carrying heavy loads of logs to the sawmill, and the rattling and bumping of them returning on their journey home. The clippity-clop of horse shoes on prancing horses hooves, ridden by men and women decked out in the classiest riding attire of those days, not forgetting the grinding noises of sulky and buggy wheels on gravel and stones. These vehicles were on their way up town to do their shopping, as Mount Molloy was the main shopping town. The trip was quite an event for these hard working new settlers who kept the shop keepers and their assistants very busy. The bridge could even tell tales about the many pushbikes that passed over it, and the clicking shoes of pedestrians who could not afford a horse and sulky. There was one old man who used to stick his chewing gum on one of the bridge posts on his way to town, and retrieve it on his way home.

The bridge could also tell of the raging torrents of water that passed 12 and 15 feet over it after the monsoonal downpours.

On past the bridge, a walking track that follows the original road has been cleared, and we came to a little billabong, where the road was corduroyed. On the left-hand side was a bridle track leading across to Mitchellvale Homestead which was owned by Fullertons, and a bridle track leading right, going to the old race course (Tickle Belly Flat), and over to Lily Ponds where the White family lived, just past the property owned by the Crawfords.

Next stop, Mitchellvale Crossing; a favourite picnic area today. But picnickers rarely think about its history, or why it was so called; not just a cool place to have picnics and a lovely place for children to have fun in the clear shallow water.

A road to the right, heading East, led to Crawford's property, previously owned by Joe Bell. Later owners were MacDonalds, Charlie Vains, Eric Anderson, Mr Towns; the present owners are Peter Pal and Sue Holcombe, with their Cape Oasis Plant Nursery.

A bend in the road, close to the creek, was chosen as the suicide spot for some poor chap who could no longer face his life's hardships. All stories have their sad parts. At this bend on the right-hand side of the road and heading North, was the original road to Wetherby Station, owner by the de Tournouer family in the 1930s. The original owners came over from the Clohesy River area to run cattle and had a shanty to cater to the teamsters travelling to and from Port Douglas along the Old Bump Road. Their name was Groves, and were well known for their sign of "Hot Tea and Scones". Three of the Groves family are buried in a plot near some mango trees, and their faithful Aboriginal Servant, Rosie, is buried nearby. The graves have been fenced and are taken care of by station manager Jenny Perich and Peter Clarke. Groves called the place Weatherboards and Mr Maurice de Tournouer changed the name to Wetherby.

Back to a place that used to be called "The Swings". We do not know how this place got its name, but the edge of the road drops suddenly down to the water, so perhaps some of the younger folks of those days swung down here for a dip and freshen up. This is the cleared space they now call "Rifle Creek Rest Area" which has been used for that purpose by generations of travellers. It is still quite an attraction for weary travellers to take a break, with water on tap, toilets, and barbecue areas. Some fisher folk have been lucky enough to catch fish in the creek.

The track took a right-angled turn onto the cement bridge over Rifle Creek, facing West. Imagine the work that went into building this bridge. The concrete was mixed on a flat board by two men with shovels. The bridge hand rails were a good guide for flood heights; it was a 'small flood' when the water covered the curbing, and a 'big flood' when the water reached the second rail. Originally, there were three rails, but this was cut down to one in recent times. Just upstream are the remains of a low-level wooden bridge.

Straight ahead, over the red hill past Fullerton's Lagoon and past Fullerton's gateway on the left, and Joe Bell's dwelling on the right, twined the Old Mt Carbine Road, and it was a very slippery climb during wet periods with its red-stocky soil, it was known as Bell's Hill (Not to be confused with the Bell's Hill over on the Bump Road).

We swing away from the Old Carbine Road, passing Arthur Ray's old dwelling site on the left, with his neighbours Arthur Pendergast further uphill to the West, and Mrs Broadhead (Curtis) on the North side. Passing Arthur Ray's Lagoon on our right, there used to be a short cut between the lagoon and Rifle Creek Bridge. This area was known as The Pensioners' Reserve, and it was known that an Aboriginal's grave is hidden here.

Arthur Ray's home passed on to Gorm Nissen, and then to "Possum" Daniels. The building was either pulled down or fell down. This is where Ned Keddie built what is now known as Rifle Creek Cottage".

Arthur Pendergast's abode became the home for a Josh Hardy, then Dave Allan. Mrs Broadhead's house site remained vacant until Charlie Knight took up the land and built there, just above the Old Julatten Road. Charlie sold to Merryll Matthews, and it now belongs to Cliff and Ayesha Mahommed.

A little further, and on our left, we came to where the Moreton family lived for a long while, and came to Moreton's Lagoon on the creek side of the road. This lagoon was

noted as a good fishing hole, and Aboriginal families used to come out from Mount Molloy to fish there.

Back in the late 30's the Moreton family were flooded out of their house and had to take refuge with the Lee family, living further upstream, on higher ground to the North. Drought seemed to creep in in early 40's. This cycle lasted until the late 40's when heavy rains came again.

On now, to where the old road nearly catches up with the bitumen road. The Lee family lived above this road for many years and further up the hill to the West lived Matt Gad; Tome Nevins; Peter English; Jack Diehl, and then the little family who still reside there, in their new house, built about 1956.

We hit Bradley Road which swings right, away from the bitumen, we hit Lee's corduroy where Tom Nevins used to camp after crossing Rifle Creek at Nevins's Crossing, also where Andy MacDonagh was drowned on his way to Mount Molloy during a heavy flood. We trekked on in the shade of some beautiful trees, to Cowie's Culvert. Here, the birds' singing in chorus of some of Nature's enchanted melodies. Rufous Shrike Thrushes, Rufous Whistlers, Robins, and Honey eaters of all kinds join the chorus, showing their appreciation for the nectar and insects that are so prevalent here. Even the butterflies show their brilliance as they flutter through the brilliant shafts of sunlight that break through the holes in the forest canopy. We were reluctant to leave his enchanted place to push on to Payne's Culvert, lingering for a while and reminiscing about the past. Bradley Road is part of the Old Julatten Road for about a kilometre, and then we come to the built up area where the railway line used to be, just before getting onto the Old Dairy Farm Road turnoff near the entrance to Bradley's property.

The Dairy Farm Road was the only direct road to Julatten at one time, and came out near the Julatten School.

We nearly face West after a sharp bend in the road which takes us over Bethel's corduroy, and pass Bethel's Lagoons a few hundred years on our left. This is the area where the Bethel Brothers used to camp while they were carting cedar logs to Mount Molloy Sawmill from the Rumula-Julatten area. Bethel's is now owned by my father, Frank Calder Little". (Little 1997)

Mount Molloy Copper Mine

The 1905 edition of the "Queensland Government Mining Journal" tells us that Patrick Molloy was undoubtedly the original discoverer although other reports also credit his employee Tom Cuddihy with first seeing it. This may have been when he was tracking some of Molloy's strayed bullocks.

Pat Molloy pegged the claim and worked the outcrop profitably for some time, sending the ore from Port Douglas to Germany for treatment.

Copper prices slumped during the 1891 depression and Molloy lost the mine as he did not work it.

After the depression, J.V. Mulligan and James Forsayth recognised the value of the mine, taking 3000 pounds' worth of ore out of it in a short time. They sold the mine to a Melbourne company for 6000 pounds.

A so-called expert reported to the shareholders they had been swindled and the mine was again abandoned.

How wrong “experts” can be. Forsyth took up the lease again, and with only two men working it with picks and shovels, obtained about a thousand pounds’ worth of copper out of it.

In 1904 he sold it to a John Moffat for 1500 pounds. In May, 1905 the mine was floated into a company with a capital of 100,000 pounds.

The smelters were erected at Mt. Molloy and part of the township of Mt. Molloy called Smelter Town came into being. This caused the building of the branch railway from Bibbohra.

Though the copper mine had a short life, the railway opened up the area’s timber and dairying potential, creating the township of today”. (The Northern Sun October 2008 pp 2)

North Queensland Herald, April 15 1905, article reproduced in the May, 1905 Queensland Mining Journal and re-written by Peer Justice at Mt Molloy on Friday, August 21, 1987-

“Mt Molloy Copper Mines 1885-1910

Mr James Forsythe claimed that in 1885 a Mr Cuddihy reported to his teamster employer, Mr Patrick Molloy, that he had found an outcrop of green rock, on top of a hill, not far from Rifle Creek. This area later was known as Mount Molloy.

(Note: In Mrs Dorothy Jones’s book *Trinity Phoenix*, she mentioned Mr D Cuddihy as one of the teamsters who helped transport mining machinery from Revolver Point on the Palmer River, to Goldsborough)).

Patrick claimed the mine and sank an 80ft deep shaft, during the following four or five years. He shipped hand picked Copper ore to England, until low prices forced him to abandon the mine.

About 1891, copper prices did improve, and Patrick re-applied for his lease, but was beaten to it by James Venture Mulligan and James Forsythe. It was quite legal to take up an abandoned lease, but it was thought that this caused some friction between the two parties.

The two James’s sank an 80ft shaft about 40 years east of the original shaft, and cleared 3,000 pounds worth of copper. (The article does not say how long this took, but they probably made fairly good money, as wages were probably less than one pound per week at that time).

Sold – They sold the lease for 6000 pounds, to a Melbourne firm who claimed the mine to be worthless. Forsythe resumed the lease, and he and one man got 600 pounds worth of copper from it. He then sold it to Mr Reid (of Tenterfield Northern NSW) for 1,500 pounds (500 pounds deposit and the balance was to come from profits)

Mr Reid sold to Mr John Moffat who formed a syndicate, 100,000 pounds in shares, and 60% to be retained by Mr Reid.

The new owners raised 200 tons of rich oxidized ore from Molloy’s original shaft. At 200 ft., the 25 ft. wide lode assayed at 14-30% copper. Ore in sight was estimated to be 35 to 40,000 tons of 11% copper.

The company acquired 7/12 and Mr Petersen of Bibbohra owned 5/12, which he sold to the company for 500 pounds cash and 1,500 pounds worth of fully paid up shares.

Copper ore was shipped to England. ((Micael McNamara described heavily sulphided ore being stacked on the bank of Mine Creek, and covered with firewood and burnt to reduce the impurities). The bare patch has not fully overgrown since)).

Smelters. In an effort to reduce transport costs, the company built a smelter which began operating on November 25, 1904. (The two foot gauge tramline from the mine to the smelters, was built later. It is that locomotive pictured on the cover of this Bulletin).

The company invested 36,000 pounds to build the 20 miles branch line from Biboohra to Mt Molloy, completed in August, 1908. Low priced copper forced the closure of the smelters on Christmas of that year, but the mine was maintained by a reduced labour force, in hopes of re-starting the smelter.

September 15, 1909, Mr H.S. Muir from Mt Lyell was appointed manager of the Mt. Molloy Mines. He reported large supplies of logs being cut and exported to their Mareeba Sawmill (Pugh's Almanac, 1914 listed Mt Molloy Company as operating sawmillers of Mareeba for that year)." (Justice 1988)

John Moffat of Irvinebank:

"On the eastern extremity of the Hodgkinson Goldfields, Moffat became interested in an antimony-gold venture at New Northcote and a copper show at Mount Molloy on Rifle Creek, where he had noticed the curious green rocks a decade earlier. Mount Molloy offered the greatest prospect of promotion, being a copper show, yet Moffat knew that Patrick Molloy already had it sewn up. Moffat hoped that the other copper lodes which his friend, William Prentice, had seen in the district in earlier years, with grazier, Fraser, were worth promoting. If they were valuable Moffat guaranteed to erect a furnace. Molloy had taken up a Reward Lease, No. 463, in 1889 and worked it intermittently through the nineties. After a rich beginning of 37 per cent copper ore, the mine's fortunes fluctuated from owner to owner. Molloy joined seasoned Northern campaigners, James Mulligan and James Forsyth of Burns Philp and Company in 1894, sending 20 tons of ore to Aldershot for assay results of 15 to 42 per cent copper. Excluding Moffat, they looked to Melbourne for directors – Victorian Chief Secretary Sir Andrew Peacock, and William Brooks – to form a new company at the time Moffat was floating Chillagoe. So it was not until the next copper boom that Moffat could take over the Mount Molloy Mine" (Kerr 2000 pp136)

"Similarly Moffat sought to sell the Mount Molloy tramway to the government to satisfy part of the debts of the Mount Molloy Copper Mining Company (in Liquidation). Negotiations opened in 1914, at the same time as the Mount Garnet railway-purchase proposal, and were completed in 1916. The line had been built at a cost of 46,773 pounds, ran at a loss and was poorly maintained. Moffat's asking price was 40,000 pounds with the possibility of investing half of that in re-opening the Mount Molloy mines and smelters. That opening gambit was far too ambitious and Moffat agreed on 23 March 1916 to 17,500 pounds in 4.5 per cent State debentures. To formalise the agreement the *Mount Molloy Railway Act 1916* was passed, much to the chagrin of conservatives such as James Forsyth, who knew there was only low-grade ore left but who had avidly supported the sale of the Mount Garnet railway in similar circumstances two years earlier. William Murphy, Member for Burke, summarised the situation succinctly – Moffat, he remarked, had been a good speculator in North Queensland and

the government was spending public money to buy assets of companies floated by Moffat, but which had gone into liquidation because Moffat was a good speculator. The Mount Molloy railway purchase was meant to stimulate mining at Mount Carbine, previously closed down.” (Kerr 2000 pp 261)

“During this time Moffat concentrated on his Irvinebank enterprise and fostered other copper deposits, O.K. and Mount Molloy. As Mount Garnet closed down and Chillagoe floundered, Moffat and John Reid were finalising a copper-furnace site on Rifle Creek, organising exploration, dam and tramway construction at Mount Molloy, and shifting one of the Mount Garnet furnaces to O.K., 50 miles north of Mungana. Moffat had eyed Patrick Molloy’s find since the copper boom of the eighties. Patrick Molloy had been travelling through that area since the late 1870s and had selected a 160 acre block on Rifle Creek in July 1878, probably as a spelling paddock for his bullocks on the Port Douglas-Hodgkinson goldfield road. He paid no more rent after March 1879, the selection was forfeited in 1881 and reserved for camping. Moffat knew that Molloy had obtained 37.5 half per cent copper assays with gold from four tons from his 55-foot shaft on that reward lease. Moffat, Linedale and Reid eventually bought it in 1901 from James Forsyth who had acquired it in 1894. It had been worked in a desultory way through the 1890s by the Mount Molloy Copper Syndicate, which had obtained control from Molloy around 1894 and sold out to Melbourne speculators who failed and Forsyth repossessed it. To Port Douglas residents, James Forsyth and James Venture Mulligan bought the mine in 1894 and sent 20 tons of ore to Aldershot for testing. The mount Molloy syndicate comprised Forsyth, Mulligan, Mary Theresa Courtney and Callaghan Walsh, controlling the Mount Molloy Lease No. 783 of 125 acres. The Melbourne directors of the Mount Molloy Copper Mining Company No Liability were Melbourne speculators in legions of mines – William Brooks, Isaac Wheeldon, J Randall, Gorge C. Kelly, Joseph English, C. Norman Armitage and Sir Andrew J Peacock, Chief Secretary of Victoria. Company capital was 24,000 pounds in 960 shares of which 480 were issued to the public.

Another new tent and hotel town sprang up in the wake of Moffat’s investment. Four hotels including Forsayth’s, Tom Burke’s and Emanuel’s, 50 tents, two stores, Grogan’s butchery and boarding house were located near Molloy’s Camping Reserve and the smelted site; others straggled along the Biboohra Road.” ((Kerr 2000 pp 183-184)

“Timber concessions to the north, obtained in dubious circumstances, were the only salvation. Negotiations between Linedale and the Minister for Lands, which clinched the concessions, raised the ire of the Labor Party and the local member, Mick Woods MLA. Because the concessions avoided competition and was obviously given as a reward for development works. Mount Molloy Limited was permitted to remove 30,000 superfeet of timber each month over five years. In four and a half years, royalty was paid on only five and a half million superfeet of logs removed”. (Kerr 2000 pp186)

Railway- Mareeba to Mount Molloy

“Mount Molloy had a railway from 1908 until 1964. The rails were pulled up and sold to the Mossman and Mulgrave sugar mills.” (Peter Justice Newsletter Issue 1 pp 1)

“The Commissioner for Railways reported Bibbohra Station was handling 1177 tons of goods worth 1,209 pounds, with freight to the station, 5,330 tons valued at 2,139 pounds with 2,912 passengers travelling to and fro.

The Mt Molloy Smelters awaited the completion of the Railway, to get copper ore from the New Anniversary Mine.

The Cairns Post, May 2, 1910, reported that the smelter will restart towards the end of July, when the Herberton line will be completed. (The Herberton Railway was opened on October 20, 1910, however the smelters never restarted, possibly due to low copper prices”. (Justice 1988)

“In 1936 the present railway trucking yards were built. Highly successful cattle sales began in special yards nearby from May 1948, the prime mover being W.H. (Bert) Simms, a well known Mareeba stock and station agent for many years and now living in retirement in Bundaberg. Cattlemen like Ken Atkinson and his sons, the late Walter Lawrence, Paul Hawkins, and Maurice de Tournouer were association with this enterprise, North Queensland Saleyards Ltd. In the years of high prices, cattle sales brought a million dollars a year to Mareeba. Some successful horse sales have been held there recently”. ((Pike 1986 pp 218)

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