

A Brief History of Chillagoe Caving

The First Australians

The first Australians, or Aborigines, arrived in Australia some 50,000 years (or more) ago, gradually spreading across the continent. Not sufficient work has been done at Chillagoe to place an accurate time for when they arrived in the Chillagoe area, but it would appear to be in excess of 20,000 years ago.

There is evidence of Aboriginal use of cave entrances and rock overhangs in the area and this is shown by

quite large ash and bone deposits from their cooking fires. There are also cave paintings in various locations. Occasional burials in niches in the limestone have been located.

We have found no evidence that Aborigines travelled far into dark zones of caves and do not expect them to have done so, as they had no reliable light sources. However, it is possible some intrepid fellows penetrated into the dark parts of the caves but little evidence would have been left if they found their way out again. Perhaps some time in the future we may locate Aboriginal remains in dark zones of any that did not find their way out.

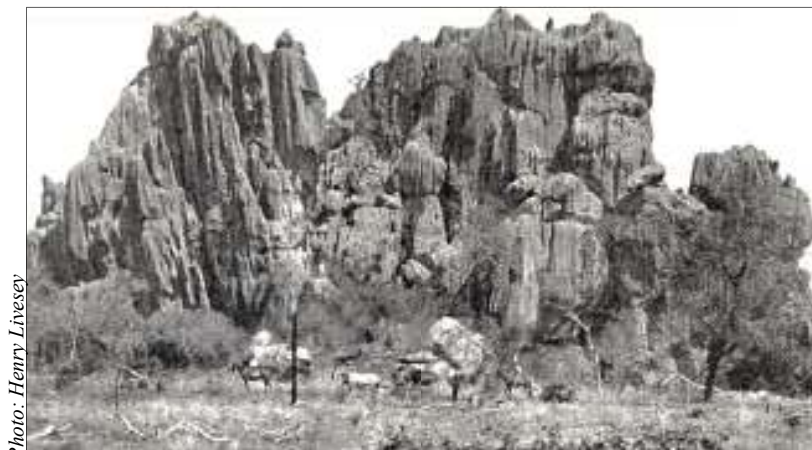


Photo: Henry Livesey

Limestone Bluff near Balancing Rock, 1891.

European and later settlers

Following the establishment of Chillagoe Station in 1888 the “marvelous caves” at Chillagoe began to be reported by cattlemen and mining prospectors.

The earliest printed report I have located of cave discovery in the Chillagoe area occurred when sinking a mineshaft at Muldiva, reported in the Wild River Times of 23/1/1891 as follows:

“We have received a wire from Mont Albion which states that at the bottom of the Eclipse shaft, Muldiva, a cave has been discovered 25 feet long, 20 feet high and 20 ft wide, in the walls, roof and bottom of which, splendid ore is to be seen. The wire also states that as the development of the mines progresses the prospects of the Muldiva increase in brilliance.”

The Queensland Mines Minister, the Hon. W. O. Hodgkinson, having heard of the Chillagoe caves, dispatched the Government Mineralogist, Mr. W. M. Thompson, to Chillagoe to investigate the matter, and to provide a report for the Government. Mr. Thompson arrived at Herberton on May 15th 1891, and then travelled to Chillagoe with the Herberton Mineral Lands Commissioner, Mr. Zillman, who was visiting the Chillagoe district as part of his duties. One of Zillman’s jobs in the area was to set out the Township of Muldiva. Accompanying Mr. Thompson was Mr. Henry Livesey, a Herberton photographer and owner of Livesey and Lonergan. Their work was completed by the middle of August, 1891, and included some sixty splendid photographs, the greater number of which were taken underground. Caves mentioned by name include the Royal Arch, the Ellen, Herculaneum and Pompei.

As a result of advice received from Mr. Thompson, the Minister issued instructions in July, 1891, for the permanent preservation of the caves by excluding them from mining leases, as far as possible. In Wild River



Royal Arch Cave main entrance

Times of 11th September, 1891, there was a brief report that Mr. Thompson had returned from Chillagoe and that the photos of the caves revealed their beauty.

In the 2nd January, 1892, issue of the Wild River Times at Herberton reported a photographic display by Mr. Livesey's of the photos taken some months previously at Chillagoe. These included "Lizard's Head", "The Cathedral", "Entrance to Royal Arch Cave" and "A Wonder of Nature".

The Cairns Morning Post published an article on Chillagoe Caves on 3rd October, 1891, which said that "*the Jenolan Caves have a great reputation and justly so, but the Chillagoe wonders dwarf these into insignificance*".

In 1892 Mrs. Ellis Rowan visited Chillagoe to see the Caves. She had come by coach to Muldiva and had a letter to Mr. Atherton of Chillagoe Station. She was driven to Chillagoe "*in a small one horse trap, the material of which needed to be of the strongest, for the road was an exceedingly rough one, for the most part over broad beds of rock and pebbly ground. The whole country is a vast undulating plain dotted with rugged masses of curiously outlined limestone ridges, rising to many hundreds of feet, straight out of the ground, giving the landscape a stern and oppressive grandeur, the deep fissures of these towering walls are filled with gnarled and hoary trunks of trees striking and grasping the massive fragments with their rootlets and creeping and twisting in and out of crevices. Below the huge blocks of stone are overgrown with an intricate wilderness of shrubs and creeping plants, while high above, these dark and towering walls are destitute of any living thing, and their shattered-looking peaks, networks of sharp pinnacles with needle-like points, stand gray and arid-looking against the intense blue of the sky.*"

She reached Chillagoe Station at 6 o'clock and next day Mr. Atherton took her to the caves in a party sharing two buggies. The trip included visiting several caves, which she describes in words which would put journalist Nomad, who gave descriptions below, to shame for her command of descriptive language. The following day was spent in her well-known pastime of painting local flowers.

In July, 1893, the Cairns Argus had a further article on Chillagoe Caves following a visit by Cairns photographer, Mr. C. Handley, who produced some three dozen photographs. It was recommended that readers visit Messrs Handley and Atkinson's studio to view the photographs. Two of these Handley photographs were published in the Queenslander newspaper in the 2nd September, 1893, issue (p457). The two photographs were printed as lithographs and included the Lizard's Head and the Balancing Rock. The Cairns Historical Society has some 20 glass plate negatives from Mr. Handley's visit.

The next report on Chillagoe Caves is on 2nd October, 1897, in



The Great Collapse in Queenslander Tower, Mungana



Lizard Head or Tank Rock

Lithograph from Photo. Handley & Atkinson



Handley Photo of Picnic Chamber in
Royal Arch Cave

the Cairns Morning Post when Nomad, a journalist, reported on his visit to the Caves. This article is tiresome to read and is sadly lacking in information. However, it makes up for its lack of information with its poetic prose. Even the newspaper editor found it hard going as he added a footnote which said "*Finis – thank God*". The same journalist returned to the paper two weeks later with a continuing article in the same style in which he described his visit to the Royal Arch Cave.

The Land Commissioner, Mr. W. T. White, visited Chillagoe in 1898 to inquire into reports of damage to the famous Chillagoe Caves. While he saw ample evidence of broken stalactites, he was unable to get sufficient evidence to prosecute the offenders. Notices warning the public not to interfere with the caves was posted in conspicuous places in the neighbourhood and it was intended to place further notices inside the caves.

A land sale was advertised in the Wild River Times in October 1900 for the township of Chillagoe. Upset prices of blocks were to be in the range of £6 to £50. At that time the railway and smelters

were in the course of construction. The auction was to be conducted on 5th November by John Cairns of Cairns and Hollway.

A similar auction was held by the Land Agent at Mungana in 1901 but no bids were received. The reason for lack of interest was apparently "*that the town site was too far from the mines and purchasers at Chillagoe, who paid large prices for blocks, had realised that they could have built across the creek on Crown Land and saved themselves a lot of money. Quite a township was forming on the western side of Slate Creek by new arrivals, as it is much nearer the mines and the land being Crown Land, costs nothing*".

In 1904 the Chillagoe Caves were included in a reserve for public purposes and placed under control of trustees Messrs. William Atherton, Francis Lane and Christie Millar who were given power to make bylaws and provide penalties not exceeding £5.

The responsibility for the caves was vested in the Chillagoe Shire Council. In 1912 there was a report that "*the interest in Chillagoe Caves, since a small subsidy has been granted to the Shire Council (Chillagoe Shire from 1908) towards their improvement, appears to be increasing. From the 1st January to the end of July last 690 persons visited the caves; and the Shire Clerk, in writing of the work done, stated that the improvements effected had been in the direction of affording facilities for viewing the caves. Pathways had been made, ladders erected, and many of the awkward passages enlarged. Visitors could then look at the caves with a minimum of risk.*"

This control by Chillagoe Shire was confirmed by the National Parks Ranger from Tully who in his letter of 22nd August, 1939, advised that the Caves then came under the control of the Chillagoe Shire Council until that Shire was disbanded and the area absorbed into Woothakata (Mareeba) Shire in 1932. Thereafter the caves were under the control of the Woothakata (Mareeba) Shire.

The Queensland Government in 1912 arranged for Mr. H. Baldwin, one of the Guides of Jenolan Caves, to report to them on the Chillagoe Caves. A copy of his report was supplied to Mr. P. Doyle, the caretaker, and he sent it to the Cairns Post who published it as follows:

"The Chillagoe Caves are situated in a limestone belt about three miles from the town of Chillagoe, in a southwesterly direction. The belt of stone runs north and south. The cliffs are about 150 feet high, and are very rough and water-worn. The caves are what are known as surface caves. I regret to report that a great deal of vandalism has taken place, names and marking being every few yards, and the formations have been damaged by both markings and breakage. At the outset I would suggest that regulations be at

MONDAY, 5th NOVEMBER.
IMPORTANT SALE OF CROWN LANDS.
TO BE HELD AT CHILLAGOE.
ON THE GROUND,
GOVERNMENT TOWNSHIP
OF
CHILLAGOE.
CHILLAGOE.
CHILLAGOE.
THE TOWNSHIP OF CHILLAGOE
Consists of
202 TOWN ALLOTMENTS,
In the
THRIVING AND IMPORTANT DISTRICT
OF CHILLAGOE,
Varying in Area from 1 Road to 1 Road 24
Perches Each.
UPSET PRICES FROM £6 TO £50 PER
ALLOTMENT.

This township is the centre of the large Copper Mining District of Chillagoe, rapidly becoming one of the most important and prosperous mineral fields in Queensland, owing to the large area of rich copper and silver bearing country which surrounds it. Chillagoe is situated within about 140 miles of Cairns by railway, and within 924 miles of Melbourne. The Mareeba-Chillagoe Railway is now completed as far as Wattle's Hotel, being more than half the distance to be covered, leaving
ONLY ABOUT 40 MILES
Of the railway to be completed, which is now in the course of construction, and will shortly be open.
Smelting Works are now being erected, and likely to commence work within a very short space of time. The value of the town allotments should improve considerably, owing to the probable influx of a numerous and most likely a permanent population.

The mining towns of Queensland are now becoming the most important of the old-fashioned ones, taking as instances MOUNT MOHGAN, GYMPE, CHARTERS TOWNS, all carrying large populations, and becoming important manufacturing and producing centres.

In the Chillagoe district alone about 15,000 acres of land is held under mineral leases. A very large number of miners are employed in working the leases, in addition to these there will be a large influx of settlers to the locality in a very short space of time.

MR. JOHN CAIRNS of Messrs Cairns & Hollway will, on behalf of the Queensland Government, sell by public Auction, on the Ground, at Chillagoe, on Monday, 5th November,
The above-described 202 Town Allotments, three of which, and copies of the Proclamation, may be obtained from the Land Agents at Cairns, Herberton, Townsville, Charters Towers, Rockhampton and Brisbane; also, from the Department of Public Lands, Brisbane; Messrs Cameron Bros., Brisbane; Messrs Buchanan & Warrack, Sydney; Messrs C. E. & T. Hann, Melbourne; and Messrs F. J. Tatling & Co., Adelaide.

once framed and that prosecutions follow in cases where persons are caught in the act of defacing or otherwise injuring the formations. With reference to the lighting of the caves, I would suggest that a supply of candles and candlesticks be sent to the guide in charge as well as a magnesium lamp for effective lighting purposes. The system of showing the caves at present is very unsatisfactory. The guide has a carbide lamp, and apart from the inconvenience of carrying such a heavy lamp, it gives off a very unpleasant odour especially when there is a crowd and happens to be in a stuffy place. In my opinion, it would not be wise to install an electric light plant. In the first place, the caves are exposed to so much daylight that the effect of electric light would be spoiled. The expense and upkeep of the plant would be very costly, while fuel etc. would have to be drawn about three miles. In various parts of the caves I made markings where excavations and improvements could be made, and the guide, who is appointed from year to year by the Chillagoe Shire Council, undertook to make the improvements as suggested. With reference to outside improvements, I would suggest that small quarters be erected for the guide in charge, as well as a refreshment room, and several summerhouses; further, that a well be sunk for water. At the present time there is no shelter whatever for visitors, and no means of obtaining refreshments. They are thereby greatly inconvenienced, as the drivers of vehicles hurry them back in order that they may get back for luncheon. I further suggest that a charge be made, say 1/- for each group, as per list attached. I would also suggest that the entrances to the caves be securely fastened. Under the present conditions people may go in or out as they please, and in my opinion this is the cause of so much damage being done to the formations. I visited the caves daily, and with the assistance of the guide and a Mr. Fluerty we did a fair amount of exploratory work, but I regret that we met with no success. We followed up passages leading off the main cave but in each case the passages ended abruptly. We also followed the limestone belt north and south. Working in a southerly direction we came across a very large cavern, about two miles from the main caves. It is another semi-daylight cave. We took a rope with us, and Guide Doyle and A. Fluerty lowered me down about forty feet. I travelled both in a northern and southern direction along a passage absolutely void of formation. I then returned to the men, and we each worked a different passage, but without discovering anything. It has the appearance of a big cave having fallen in or sunk. Next day we worked north of the guide's camp about half a mile, and came across a very pretty but small cave. We named it the Fairy Cave. This is also exposed to daylight, but has beautiful colourings in it also, and fine clusters of formation. The entrance to this cave should be immediately blocked, for so far no damage has been done. I also visited Mungana and inspected what are known as Markham's Caves. They are surface caves, but more majestic than those at Chillagoe, and they are nearer the town. Very fine clusters of formation are to be seen, and little damage has been done in comparison with that at Chillagoe Caves. I would suggest that the entrance to these caves be fitted up with, say, eight feet galvanized iron, and barbed wire to prevent youths doing further damage. Both systems of caves could be managed by one guide, certain days being allotted for inspections of each cave. If a cheap excursion train was run from Cairns to Mungana, I believe it would help to develop the caves greatly. I had a conversation with the Traffic Manager of the Chillagoe Company, and he informed me that some time ago the experiment of cheap fares was given a trial, but it was a failure; but on the first occasion it was advertised only on one day. On the second occasion the train left to schedule

time, though the boat was one and a half-hours late. If an excursion could be run, with the fare at, say, £1/5/- or £1/10/- return from Cairns I think it would be a success. The excursion, however, should be advertised at all ports of call by steamers. Then a charge of 2/- or 2/6 return could be made for coach fares to the caves. Visitors could stay and see the Chillagoe Caves, and then proceed to Mungana at night and inspect the caves there, and then return to Kuranda or Cairns next morning. In conclusion, I may add that the caves are very fine, lofty chambers, and honestly are worth a visit,



Bob Shephard's Model T Ford bus

Photo: Nell Trainor

Photo: Joyce Raymer

but the entrances but the entrances should be at once securely fastened to stop further vandalism. I have pleasure in acknowledging the great assistance rendered me by P. McDermott, Esq., Chief Traffic Manager, Chillagoe (who kindly lent a rope for exploratory work) and by P. Doyle (guide) and A. Fluerty. (Then follows a detailed description of Royal Arch Cave and a brief one of Fairy Cave.)

In 1913 there was a report by Mr. F. E. Fluerty of Chillagoe where he gave an account of a recent visit with a group of friends to the Royal Arch Cave. As part of his report he described the cave and in particular mentioned Picnic Chamber, which had been used frequently for entertaining vice-regal parties. The most recent vice-regal party in the cave was Sir William and Lady McGregor and party when nearly half the residents of Chillagoe and the Band were present at a grand function.

In 1914 Eric Mjöberg, a scientific observer from Sweden, visited Chillagoe and reported on his visit to the caves:

Immediately outside the caves, an old caretaker lived in his simple little camping tent. He was an old widower, who led the life of a hermit, in the company of his dog and a few chickens. Occasionally, he made a trip to the nearest hotel to overcome his feelings of loneliness, returning late at night with his dog, a lot steadier in its legs than its master.

In 1916 the caretaker was R. (Bob) Shephard and he remained in that situation for many years. Apparently when Woothakata Shire became responsible for the Caves they dispensed with the caretaker's job and sold the caretaker's quarters almost immediately. It must be recalled that this was in the depression era and money was not available for other than essential works. The Shire would have had little choice but to close them down. Bob Shepherd stayed in Chillagoe and initially had operated a cab but later had a motorized taxi.

In 1939, when the Tully Ranger approached Woothakata Shire Clerk regarding their attitude to the Chillagoe and Mungana Caves he was informed that the Council had no policy on them.



Bob Shephard

In 1939, Bob Shephard, then the town's only taxi driver, was still the person for visitors to contact to be shown the Caves. Shepherd also had a bus. He had purchased a Model T chassis and fitted it out as a bus to carry visitors out to view the caves. Shepherd met the trains and took visitors out to the caves where he became the cave guide. He operated into the 1940s and retired to Mareeba in the early 1950s.

Paddy Byrne is also reported as a Chillagoe resident who guided visitors to the caves. The Royal Arch Cave was electrically lit (temporarily) in 1920. This occurred during the Chillagoe Carnival, which commenced on 27th October. Races were held at the caves where the caverns were lit for *"the first time in their history by the electric light, which was generously installed by Mr. H. E. Handy of the "King Carnival" Company. People were taken by traction engine and lorries to the scene of Nature's creation. The delightful scenery exposed by the brilliant light was a picture never forgotten by the visitors. The Chillagoe Band played in the large hall cave (probably Cathedral Chamber), rendering sweet music, under the baton of Bandmaster Menadue."*

Following a visit to North Queensland Canon Garland of Brisbane, in 4/6/1924, it was reported as having said: *"I visited the caves at Chillagoe and Mungana, which, if developed, would be second only to the Jenolan Caves. Something should be done to preserve them for the future, and, in the meantime to encourage tourists to visit them. The limestone formation is wonderful. Some ten or eleven years ago the Denham Government expended money for the development and preservation of the caves, but unfortunately since then much damage has been done by sheer vandalism to the stalactites that have taken hundreds of thousands of years to form. These caves are a national asset."*

Caves Trust

In October 1927 the Cairns Post reported the discovery by Mungana Stationmaster, Mr. James Killoran, of new caves at Mungana. Killoran said *"A fair amount of my spare time on week ends, together with several others, has been spent in exploring lime bluffs for new caves, or caves unknown to local people. In this we have been indeed very successful. Within a mile or so of Mungana, we recently came across a huge cave, which on exploring we found to contain names and dates of 35 years ago. The first glimpse on entering the main chamber reminds one of a cathedral in Gothic design. The stalactites reaching downward from the roof are thirty or forty feet long, and are most wonderful. Two more caves (previously unentered) we discovered half to three-quarters of a mile on the Chillagoe side of Griffiths Siding, about a quarter of a*

mile apart. These caves are both about the same distance from the rail. They are different in foundation and both are easily entered. The first cave mentioned is not so easily entered, one having to walk over a lime bluff and through another one before coming to the cave entrance. We have made rough tracks to all and numerous parties have consisted of a number of women and children (including babies) so the roughness is not so great."

The new caves at Mungana were reported with excitement in the Sydney "Sun" and "Evening News." James Killoran and T. Godwin wrote an article published in the Cummins & Campbell (Ltd.) Monthly Magazine in December that year where they told where the caves were located and described the chambers and formations.

These reports attracted much attention and the Railway proposed a rail motor excursion from Cairns at a cost of 27/6. The motor would leave Cairns at noon on Saturday and arrive at Mungana at 7:20pm and return leaving Mungana at 3:00pm getting back to Cairns at 10:00pm. This apparently did not include any costs at Mungana as the accommodation and car fare was quoted as reasonable. There was space for 50 people on the rail motor and by 27th October all seats had been sold. A further excursion was arranged for the first Saturday in November and all 50 seats were sold, so the railway arranged for another 25 seats, which were to be allocated in order of application. The second excursion trip was reported in the Cairns Post with details of visits to Geck, Spring and Cathedral Caves. A dance was held in Mungana's hall that appears to have been very enjoyable and the cave visits were made on Sunday morning. The return journey home left them physically tired. The Cairns Post gave a further report on "North Queensland Beauty, Mungana Caves" on 19th November, 1927, that repeated the earlier information supplied.

By March, 1928, the Trustees for these three caves had arranged for Gazettal of the Reserves for these three caves and established bylaws for their preservation. The bylaws were approved by the Governor in Council on 15th March 1928 and are as follows:

Bylaws

Interpretation

1. *In the interpretation of these bylaws the following terms shall, unless the context otherwise requires, have the meanings set against them respectively, that is to say*

"Caves and Reserves" – The land at Mungana, in the Parish of Chillagoe, permanently reserved and set apart for Recreation and Scenic Purposes, and placed under control of Trustees by order in Council dated 31st January, 1928, and published in the Government Gazette dated 4th February, 1928, and the caves therein known as Geck, Spring and Cathedral Caves.

Ingress and Egress

2. *Ingress and egress to and from caves and reserves shall be had by and through proper gates, roadways, or entrances provided for this purpose.*

Damage to Property

3. *No person shall in any way whatsoever negligently, willfully or maliciously destroy, damage, deface, or disfigure, by writing or otherwise, any fence, sign, bridge, path, fountain, sanitary convenience, tree-guards, building work, erection, wall, cave, grotto, stalactite, stalagmite, column, natural or artificial curio or property whatsoever within the caves and reserves.*

Damage to Trees etc.

4. *No person shall damage in any way whatsoever the bark or branches or the flowers of any tree, shrub, or any other plant within the reserves.*

Waste Litter of Picnics to be Removed

5. *When any person or numbers of persons inspect, play any game, or picnic in or upon the caves or reserves they shall, immediately prior to removing the grounds, collect and remove, or cause to be collected and removed, all waste material, broken glass bottles, scraps, litter, or rubbish of any kind brought or made in or upon the caves or reserves by them.*

Firearms, catapults, or other weapons not to be used

6. *No person shall discharge any firearm, or throw or cast any stone, either by hand, catapult, or other method within the caves or reserves.*

Intoxicated or disorderly persons

7. *Any person intoxicated or not decently dressed, or using profane, obscene, abusive or insulting language, or misbehaving, or creating any disorder or disturbance, or committing any act of indecency whatsoever, shall be liable to be summarily removed from the caves and reserves by the caretaker, or guides or any person duly authorised in that behalf by the trustees.*

Caretakers and Guides

8. *The trustees may appoint caretakers and guides to act in that capacity to protect the caves and reserves from injury in any way, and to conduct person or persons through the said caves and reserves at a remuneration to be fixed by the trustees, all necessary artificial lights and drinking water to be provided by the trustees.*

Admission

9. *No person or persons shall enter any of the caves and reserves unless accompanied by an authorised guide.*

Charges for Admission

10. *Admission to any of the caves shall be by ticket only; tickets to be obtained from the trustees.*

11. The trustees may make charges for admission by ticket to the caves for inspection. Such charges shall not exceed those hereinafter specified:-

For admission for any ordinary day or night inspection of the Geck, Spring or Cathedral Caves, one shilling for each cave for each person.

For admission for inspection of any or all of the three caves before mentioned on any Sunday or Sunday night, five shillings for each person.

For admission for a special inspection by a party of not less than six persons, a special charge of one pound in addition to the aforesaid charges.

No person shall enter any of these caves until a proper ticket of admission has been presented to and collected by the guide.

Visitor's Book

12. A visitor's book shall be kept at each cave by the trustees, and therein persons inspecting the caves may enter their names and addresses and shall read the displayed Regulations or Bylaws relating to the management of the caves and reserves.

Expenditure of Moneys

13. All moneys collected by the trustees shall be expended by them upon the care, protection and improvement of the caves and reserves.

Penalty

14. Every person guilty of an offence against any of the provisions of these bylaws shall for every such offence, where no specific penalty is provided therefore, be liable to a penalty not exceeding five pounds.

Public Places

15. The caves and reserves shall be public places within the meaning and for the purpose of any Act conferring on members of the police force powers or duties with respect to public places or providing for the punishment of offenses committed in public places.

Certificate

The foregoing bylaws were made by the trustees for the Reserves for Recreation and Scenic Purposes, Geck, Spring and Cathedral Caves, Mungana on the twenty-ninth day of February 1928.

Thos. Goodwin James Killoram

Hon. D. Atherton, Minister

Then on 16th April, 1928, an official opening of the Mungana Caves took place. This ceremony took place at the Cathedral Cave, with Alderman Collins, Mayor of Cairns, officiating. Cr. Albert Shaw, the Chairman of the Chillagoe Shire Council, welcomed the visitors to the caves, specially mentioning Aldermen W. A. Collins and J. C. Birch and the District Superintendent of Railways, Mr. W. A. Hooper. Mr. Shaw spoke of the work done by the trustees at the caves, the cost being in the vicinity of £150, for which reason the charge had been imposed on visitors. Mr. T Goodwin also spoke and stated that, although they had approached the Government for the small sum of £25, they had not been able to get it.

The Mayor said "*there is no doubt you have a wonderful asset in these caves*". He went on to say that the caves, apart from being an attraction to the lover of nature would also draw those who were studiously inclined. He thought it a pleasure to address an audience in such surroundings. It was a matter of wonder that these caves had not been discovered before. That merely emphasised that little really had been done towards the development of North Queensland.

Alderman Collins then spoke of the work of the Chillagoe Company, and of the value the smelters had been. In making reference to the matter of harnessing the Barron Falls, for a hydroelectric scheme, Alderman Collins stated that such a scheme could not fail to resuscitate mining in the district.

In most cases, he said, things of beauty were also utilities, and he instanced the Range Road (Gillies) the Barrine and Eacham Lakes, and the Barron Falls. *The Mungana Caves by their beauty would probably attract large numbers of people to the town, just to see them. When you can get here after a most pleasant journey and are able to come and return in good time, the trip must commend itself to all. The Mungana Caves must and should be included in the itinerary of any tourist party to North Queensland. I hope that the opening of these caves will open up a new era of prosperity for the people of this district. I can assure you that anything that requires the support of the people of Cairns, you will get that support,* he



Organ Chamber in Cathedral Cave

concluded amid applause. Alderman Birch and Mr. Hooper gave further speeches. After Cr. Shaw had expressed thanks to the speakers, Mrs. Shaw cut the ribbon across the entrance to the cave and they were declared officially open. Mrs. Shaw was presented with a xylonite box and a pair of silver scissors in thanks for cutting of the ribbon. Persons who attended from outside Chillagoe came from Cairns, Redlynch, Edmonton, Gordonvale and even one from Innisfail.

Film Production

Mungana Caves were also involved in the production of a film in August, 1928, when the Seven Seas Screen Production Company chose Chillagoe for filming an outback film. The film was under direction of Mr. Alexander McDonald, F.R.G.S., with the company composed of Australian and Scottish actors shooting scenes in the caves. The cameraman was Mr. Lacey Percival, with assistant Mr. Walter Sully. The leading lady was Miss Wendy Osborne who was to be captured and carried off into the caves. The local Aborigines were enthusiastic and in the film they *"carried her across rocks and over chasms without her receiving a single scratch"*. Nell Trainor (nee Shephard) recalled her father being involved in the film making and even acting in some scenes.



Vince Kinnear

Skeleton found in Cave

On 7th November 1930 an aboriginal, named Algy, found the remains of a miner, Frederick Stanley, in a small cave about a mile from Mungana. Enquiries showed that he had left Mungana on 20th December, 1924, to walk to Chillagoe. He failed to reach there and was reported missing. The remains were buried a short distance from the cave in which he was found.

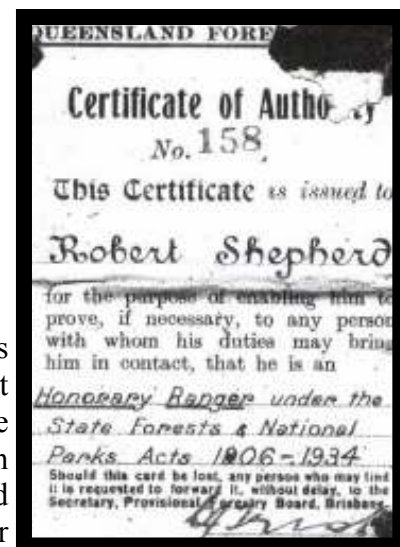
National Parks Gazetted

Chillagoe and Mungana Caves were gazetted on 2nd March 1940 and were to be controlled by the Lands Department. Previously they were held as public reserves.

The caves included in National Parks were:

- Royal Archway Cave, Mungana
- Markham Cave, Mungana
- Ryan Imperial Cave, Mungana
- Eclipse Cave, Mungana
- Geck and Spring Cave, Mungana
- Cathedral Caves, Mungana
- Donna and Tower of London Cave, Chillagoe
- Jubilee and Piano Caves, Mungana

Following the gazettal of the National Parks prospective Honorary Rangers were sought for Chillagoe and Mungana and on 10th October 1940 Mr. Robert Shephard was asked if he would accept such a position. He was selected as he was actively involved in showing the caves to visitors. A similar approach must have been made to Albert Shaw at Mungana as both were appointed Honorary Rangers in the Government Gazette of 28th November 1940 for Chillagoe and Mungana respectively. Robert Shephard was sent an authority card in a letter dated 2nd January 1941 from the Forestry Department, who by then were responsible for National Parks. This made him the first Ranger for Chillagoe. No doubt Albert Shaw was sent one too but I have not located it. He would have been the first Ranger at Mungana.



In recent times there have been reviews of the National Parks and additions made include The Ramparts, Tea Tree Cave and the Metal Hills. It is understood that further gazettals are pending.

Cave Visitation in Decline after Smelters closed during World War 2

When the Smelters closed in 1943 Chillagoe lost much of its population as the workers at the Smelters with their families left the district for work, or to join the armed services. This resulted in a drop in the rail services to the town and with the threat of invasion many people left the north. As a result visitors to Chillagoe seeking to see the caves dropped away and didn't return until the 1960s when a few caving enthusiasts began to come to the area. These included, Alan Cummins and John Kersey of Cairns and Father Jones of Innisfail. I came in the 1970s bringing Venturer Scouts. Most people came by road, which was in very poor condition with rough washouts, corrugated surfaces and hazardous creek crossings. Some people took all day to travel from Cairns to Chillagoe and most suffered damage to their car exhaust and muffler

system on the rough road and some damaged panel work, while crossing the steep creek bottoms.

The road gradually improved and by the 1970s the trip was down to four to five hours from Cairns in fine weather, but numerous creek crossings could cause long holdups due to flash flooding. The Chillagoe road is now bitumen most of the way and the journey from Cairns is less than 3 hours with holdups by flooding rare.

Vince Kinnear.

In 1963, as both the Honorary Rangers had left the area, the Forestry Department, who were still responsible for National Parks, appointed Vince Kinnear as an Honorary Ranger. In 1966 he became a full time paid employee of National Parks who had taken over the caves. With this appointment, progress on the caves, as now shown by National Parks, commenced. Then employee housing was constructed and John McKeegan joined Vince in working on the caves from 1966. Paul Wilson visited Chillagoe in the early 1970s and, as there was a Ranger job, stayed.

Vince planned the layout of footpaths and necessary stairways and ladders and then construction began. Concrete was mixed outside the cave and carried in by Vince and his offsidiers using buckets.

Much cleaning of the caves was needed and piles of rubbish, which had accumulated over the years, were removed. Inscriptions were scrubbed from the walls and from formations. The Tully Ranger reporting in 1939 had commented *“Very little damage appears to have been done to limestone formations, but the visitors left behind many broken bottles and papers. In the Picnic Cave, into which light is admitted through a large opening in the dome, it is the practice of parties to boil billies to have lunch, firewood being carried in from outside, Many broken bottles, and much rubbish is littered about this cave”*.

The caves were gated and fences built to close off other obvious accesses.

Vince and his offsidiers showed visitors through the Donna and Royal Arch Caves, both morning and afternoon, and the development work proceeded when they were not on cave tours. At that time National Park showed visitors the caves at no charge.

Vince also commenced similar work at Mungana where gating and access paths and stairways were built in Ryan Imperial cave. The Archways cave was opened as a self-guiding cave at Mungana and work commenced on improving access to Markham Cave. A large section of the overhanging entrance of Markham cave collapsed after a violent thunderstorm and because of this collapse the Department decided to abandon the cave for public use. The Ryan Imperial and Archway caves were used for guided tours from 1965. QPWS have subsequently concentrated cave tours in the caves closer to Chillagoe.

Sydney Speleological Society

The SSS made five trips, each of several weeks, to Chillagoe in the second half of the 1960s and established the first known speleological record of the caves at Chillagoe. This included the mapping of a number of the caves, but more valuable still were their maps of the outcrops with the various cave entrances marked. SSS also had one trip in the early 1970s to the Mitchell Palmer limestone accessing it from Mt Mulgrave Station.

This was a remarkable and sustained effort by the club in what was to them a very remote area.

Chillagoe Caving Club

The Chillagoe Caving Club was formed in April, 1973, and has grown in membership over time to some 70-80 members. The Club acquired the old school buildings following replacement by a new school across the road in 1977 and have slowly developed facilities suitable for visiting school groups interested in caving, thus ensuring future members from among the interested students. The Club, while mainly Chillagoe based, visits other caving areas throughout North Queensland and on occasions has visited caves elsewhere in Australia and overseas.

Cave Management Plan

In late 1976 the National Parks used Paul Wilson and a temporary employee, Ralph Page of CCC, to develop a management plan for the Chillagoe and Mungana Caves. This involved locating and visiting a large proportion of the known caves, mapping the location of their entrances and establishing a philosophy of cave classification for a management plan to be developed. Paul Wilson's report was published in 1977 and forms the basis of the Club's Cave Classification System.

Electric Lighting in Caves

In 1977 the Donna Cave was lit by electricity. This was installed by Rangers Paul Wilson and John Barton (Electrician). This was a landmark in development of the caves. An excellent job was done which highlighted the formations so that they are now seen as never before possible. At the same time the car park

was moved from below the Donna Cave entrance to the Chillagoe end of the Tower and a concrete path constructed to the Cave entrance.

Then the adjacent Trezkin Cave was developed, with Ranger John Barton and his team of workers constructing a steel walkway that allowed visitors to enter and traverse the cave without walking on the delicate floors and formations. This was a major project as there were a lot of long steel beams and support structures to be manhandled into the cave without damaging the cave in the process. Then the cave was lit with electricity to show off its formations. It was planned to provide visitors with recorded information, which they could activate at various points in the cave to allow self guiding. This recorded information system is yet to be provided.

Fees for Cave Tours

In 1989 the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service commenced charging visitors to certain National Parks to attempt to recover some of the costs associated with operating them. Chillagoe was one of the nominated Parks and cave tour charges and booking arrangements were instituted. To achieve this the QPWS established an office opposite Vince Kinnear's old Post Office Building underneath one of their residences. They also took over from Vince Kinnear, then retired from National Parks, his Post Office activity for Chillagoe to help justify the provision of a clerk to take cave tour bookings.

The Hub

In 2002 an environmental and interpretative centre was built diagonally across from the old Post Office from grants made under the National Trails Heritage Network, which has been named the Hub. This building now houses the Chillagoe Post Office, Booking Office for Cave Tours and various displays.

Contracts were let by QPWS for construction in 2003 of walkways from Donna Cave to Trezkin and a covered platform at the Trezkin entrance as well as improvements to the nearby car park.

It was planned by QPWS to enter into contracts with private enterprise to take over the cave tours, but years have passed and this appears to have been abandoned.

Access Restrictions

During the late 1990s signs regarding access to caves, other than the QPWS show caves, were erected and access is allowable only under permit. This restriction prevents access other than by organisations with public risk insurance and a permit from the Department for visiting wild NPWS caves in the area.

Conclusions

Over the last 120 years there appears to be only minimal damage to cave formation in NPWS caves, despite the slow increase in visitation. Access to shown caves has been significantly improved and wild QPWS caves are more tightly controlled by QPWS - however this is a small price to pay for their preservation.

Only a small number of caves in the Chillagoe area are controlled by QPWS, with the balance on private property. Unfortunately property owners have suffered considerable damage to stock and to property caused by a range of visitors entering their land, so access to private property for caving is steadily becoming more difficult and in some cases impossible. This is a heavy price to pay but less visitation to caves reduces even the minimal damage done in good caving.