

# **A Brief History of Chillagoe**

**Author: Les Pearson**

**Presenter: Alan Cummins**

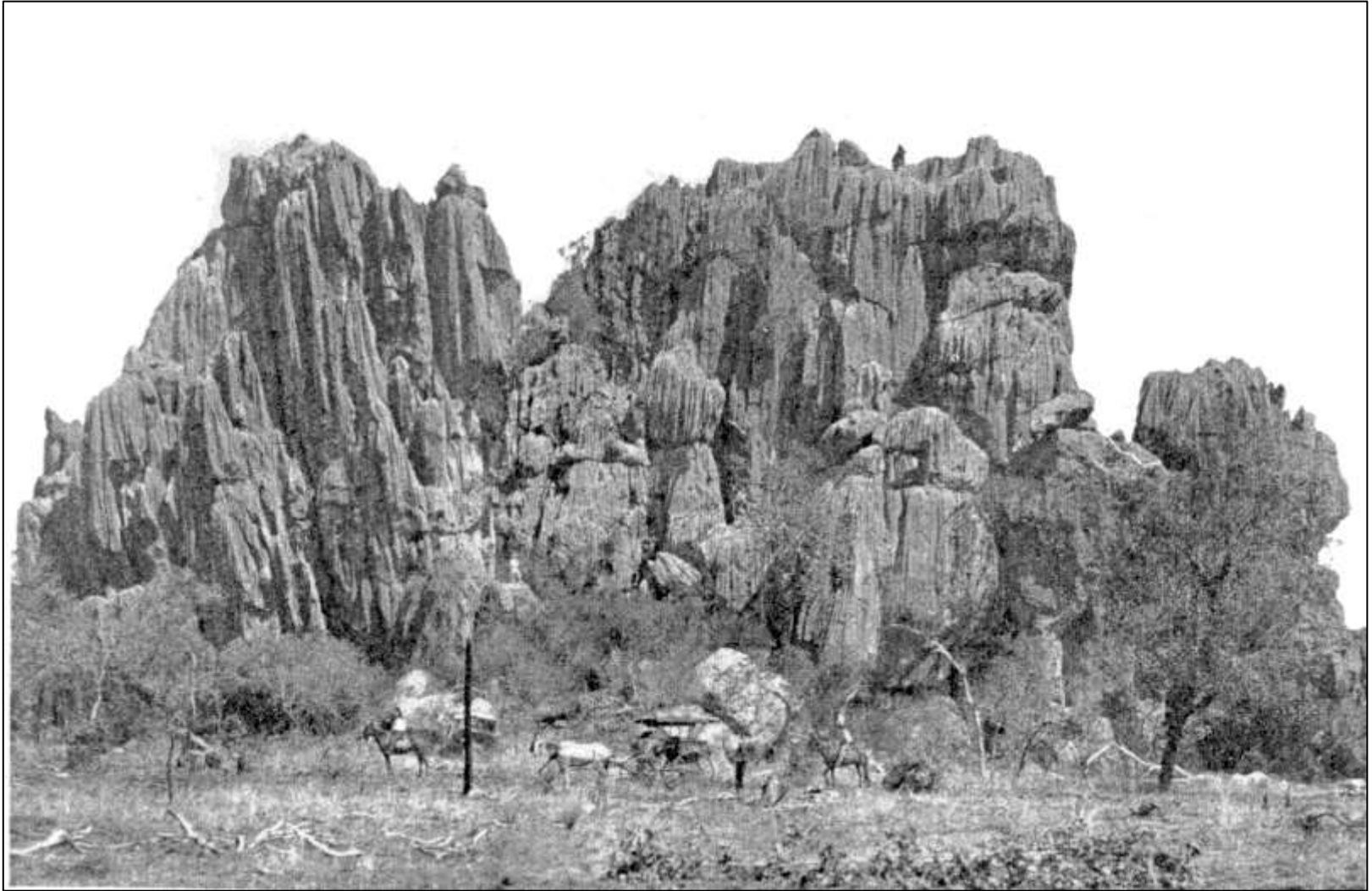
# The First Australians

- Arrived about 50,000 years ago.
- Used cave entrances as shelters, cooking fires and painting galleries
- No evidence of them entering beyond daylight
- Perhaps someday we will find remains of one who ventured beyond daylight.

# The Invaders Settle

- Chillagoe station settled by William Atherton
- Wild River Times 23/1/1891 first newspaper report of cave in - Muldiva Mine (the Eclipse) indicated a cave with the roof walls and floor covered by "*splendid ore*"
- Qld Govt sent Mineralogist W. M. Thompson to investigate reports of caves and also Herberton Mineral Lands Commissioner Mr Zillmanton with Herberton Photographer Henry Livesey

# Henry Livesey photo



# Cairns Post 3/10/1891

- The Cairns Post said “ *the Jenolan Caves have a great reputation, and justly so, but the Chillagoe wonders dwarf these into insignificance*”.

# Mrs. Ellis Rowan 1892

- Came by coach to Muldiva and was driven to Chillagoe over “*broad beds of rock and pebbly ground*”.
- She describes the landscape as “.. *A stern and oppressive grandeur ..... While high above these dark and towering walls ..... Networks of sharp pinnacles with needle like points stand gray and arid looking against the intense blue of the sky.*”

# Cairns Argus of July 1893

- Reported visit of Cairns Photographer Mt C. Handley who took some 3 dozen glass plates.
- Cairns Historical Society has some 20 of these.
- Lizard Rock and Balancing Rock photos published in Queenslander of 2/9/1893 (p457) as lithographs

# Tank and Balancing Rock

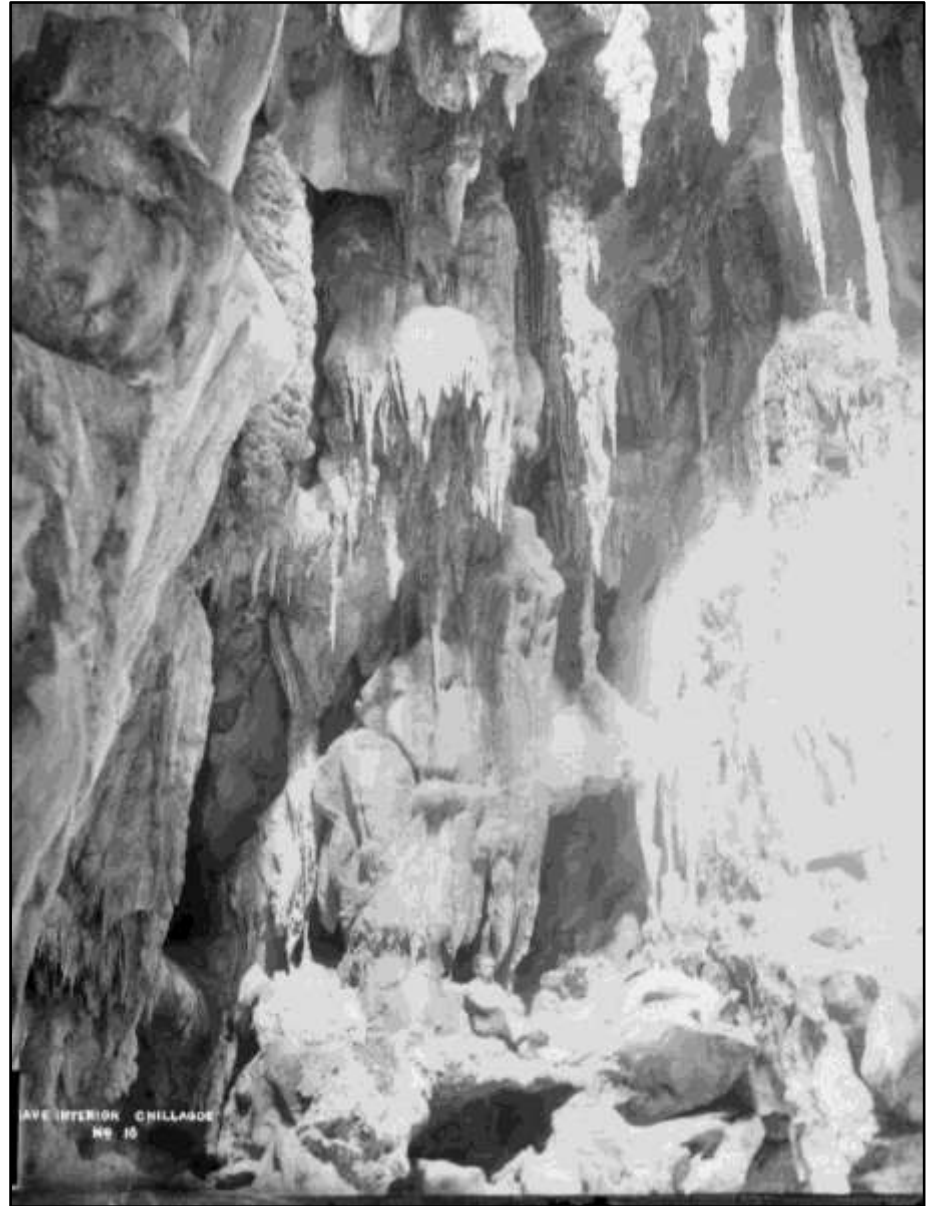
(lithographs from Handley photos)





# Handley Photo - from Cairns Historical Society glass plates

Very little damage can  
be detected when  
compared with recent  
photos – It appears  
the damaged  
formations are not  
just from recent times.



# Visit by Journalist “Nomad”

- Report by Nomad in Cairns Post 2/10/1897 poetic prose, but just drivel. Editor commented “*Finis - Thank God*”
- Nomad continued with a second report two weeks later, which was just as unreadable.

# Land Commissioner T. White sent after reports of cave damage 1898

- Found evidence in a lot of broken stalactites on floor, but no evidence to prosecute anyone.

# Land sale for Town of Chillagoe

- Auction held 5<sup>th</sup> November 1900 with good sales and prices.
- Railway and smelter then in construction

# Caves at Chillagoe included in Reserve

- Reserve established over Chillagoe Caves with William Atherton (Station owner), Francis Lane (?) and Christie Millar (Publican) as trustees having power to make bylaws and provide penalties not exceeding 5 pounds
- In 1908 Chillagoe Shire established. Shire took over caves reserve.
- In 1912 subsidy granted for cave improvement. Pathways made, ladders erected and cave narrow passages widened.

# Report by Jenolan Guide Mr. H Baldwin

- In 1912 Baldwin (Chief Guide, Jenolan) reported on the Chillagoe Caves to Qld Government and his report was printed in Cairns Post on 7/10/1912.
- He did not approve of carbide lamps as they smelt. Suggested using candles!
- He also visited the Markham Cave at Mungana
- Proposed fencing entrances of caves and rail trips from Cairns

# Vice Regal visit to Caves

- In 1913 Vice Regal visits to Caves reported most recent of which was Sir William and Lady McGregor when half the citizens of Chillagoe and the band were present in Picnic Chamber of Royal Arch Cave

# Eric Mjöberg

- Mjöberg was a visiting Swedish scientist particularly studying the Aborigines but he reported on the “*Old caretaker living life of hermit with his dog and a few chickens, who occasionally visited the nearest hotel with his dog who came home a lot steadier on its legs than its master*”.



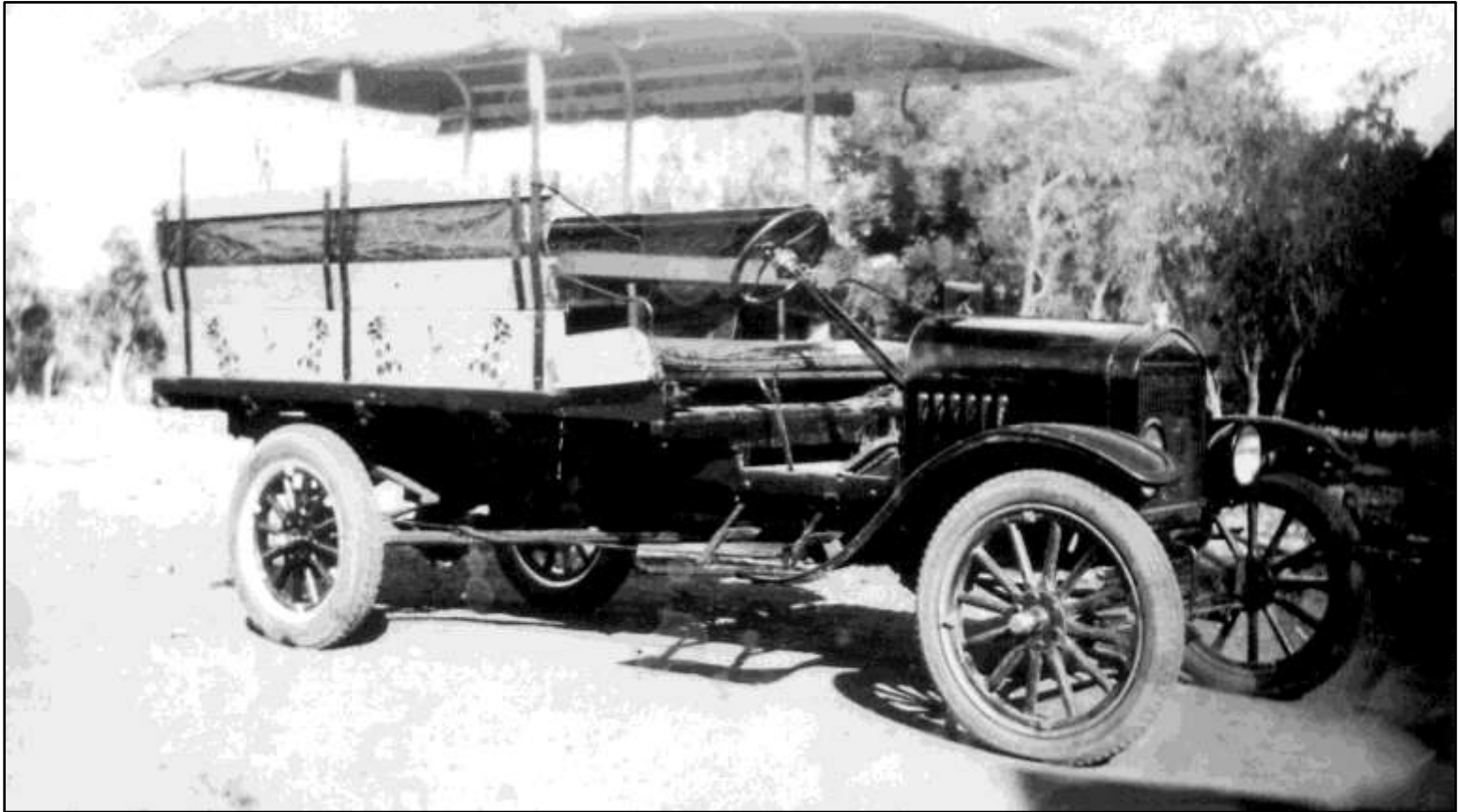
# Bob Shephard

- Bob Shephard became caretaker of caves in 1916
- By 1939 when a Tully Ranger investigated the caves Bob had been dispensed with and was then the only taxi driver in Chillagoe, but still “the contact” to visit the caves.
- Bob built a bus on a Model T Ford which he used to take people from the train to see the caves.

# Bob Shepherd



# Bob Shepherd's bus



# First electric lighting in Chillagoe Caves

- In 1920 during the Chillagoe Carnival the Chillagoe Caves were electrically lit for the first time.
- Mr. H. E. Handy of the “King Carnival” installed lighting and people were taken by traction engine and lorries to the caves and the Chillagoe Band played in one of the large chambers.

# Canon Garland of Brisbane

- In 1924 Canon Garland of Brisbane visited caves at both Chillagoe and Mungana and was most impressed.
- He compared them favourably to Jenolan Caves.

# Caves Trust

- Mungana Stationmaster, James Killoran, spent a lot of weekends exploring for new caves at Mungana.
- One of these caves was Cathedral Cave which is part of the Queenslander system. He reported his finds in the Cairns Post in October 1927
- By March 1928 trustees were appointed for the group of Mungana Caves (Cathedral, Piano, Spring and Geck Caves were their show caves.)
- Bylaws printed in Qld Govt Gazette

# **Railmotor weekend trips**

In October 1927 there were several railmotor trips from Cairns to Mungana on weekends to see the caves. They were very popular and filled the rail-motors but did not seem to continue for long.

# Official Opening at Mungana Caves

- On 16<sup>th</sup> April 1928 Alderman Collins, Mayor of Cairns, with Cr Albert Shaw of Chillagoe Shire welcomed visitors to the Mungana Caves which he saw as “*a wonderful asset*”.
- Attendance was from Cairns, Redlynch, Edmonton, Gordonvale and even one from Innisfail



Organ  
Chamber in  
Cathedral  
Cave at  
Mungana



# Film Production

- In August 1928 the Seven Seas Screen Production Company chose Chillagoe for an outback film. The leading lady Wendy Osborne was to be captured and carried off into the caves. The local Aborigines carried her across rocks and over chasms - without a scratch.
- Bob Shephard also took a part in this film.
- No trace of the film now exists.

# Caves under Woothakata Shire

- Chillagoe Shire absorbed into new Woothakata (Mareeba) Shire in 1932.
- It was the middle of depression era and Shire had no money for Caves. Sacked Caretaker, sold his cottage and generally forgot about the caves.

# Skeleton found in cave

- On 7/11/1940 an Aboriginal named Algy found remains of a miner in a small cave about a mile from Mungana.
- Enquiries showed Frederick Stanley had left Mungana on 20/12/1924 to walk to Chillagoe and was not seen again.
- His remains were buried close by.

# National Parks Gazetted

- On 2/3/1940 Chillagoe and Mungana Caves were gazetted to be controlled by Lands Dept.
- Caves declared in National Parks were:-
- Royal Arch, Donna and Tower of London Caves at **Chillagoe**
- Cathedral Cave, Royal Archway, Markham, Ryan Imperial, Spring, Geck, and Eclipse at **Mungana**.
- Many reserves cover **only the cave entrance**.

# Appointment Honorary Rangers

Department of Public Lands,  
Brisbane, 28th November, 1940.

**H**IS Excellency the Governor, with the advice of the Executive Council, has, in pursuance of the provisions of "*The State Forests and National Parks Acts, 1906 to 1934*," been pleased to appoint the undermentioned persons to be Honorary Rangers:—

ALBERT SHAW, Mungana

ROBERT SHEPHERD, Chillagoe,

Fstry. File 20.

E. J. WALSH,  
Secretary for Public Lands

# Chillagoe Decline

- During the Second World War the Chillagoe Smelters closed and with enlistment of men in the area the town declined - only just surviving.
- Cave visitation also declined sharply; not recovering until the 1960s

# Vince Kinnear





# Vince Kinnear

- As both the Honorary Rangers had left the area by 1963 Vince was asked to be the Honorary Ranger. In 1966 Vince became a paid employee for National Parks and Wildlife Department and was joined by his wife's son, John McKeegan.
- Paul Wilson was on a travelling holiday when he visited Chillagoe. There was a ranger job so he stayed and joined Vince.

# Cave Development

- Vince, John and Paul cleaned rubbish out of the caves, scrubbed graffiti off formations and made concrete paths stairs etc to facilitate cave tours.
- Cave development at that stage was in Donna, Royal Arch and Pompey at Chillagoe and Ryan Imperial, Markham and Archway Cave at Mungana.
- Work ceased on Markham when the entrance collapsed after a thunder storm.

# Sydney Speleological Society

- SSS had a series of trips, each of several weeks duration, to Chillagoe and one to Mitchell Palmer in the latter half of the 1960s and early 1970s.
- They did a phenomenal amount of survey and mapping, both in the caves and for locality maps to show cave entrance locations.
- Their early recording work made it much easier for CCC when it was formed in the 1970s

# Early Nth Qld Cavers

- Alan Cummins, Father Jones, John Kersey were active for some years in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Alan and Fr. Jones brought numbers of people, some of whom continued their interest in caving.
- Les Pearson was a latecomer, who was involved with Venturer Scouts and brought them to Chillagoe. He and some Venturer Scouts were hooked on Caving when they came in 1972.

# Chillagoe Caving Club

- A meeting of interested people met in April 1973 and the Club was formed.
- Numbers increased fairly quickly and have held between 70 and 100 ever since.
- While most caving has been done at Chillagoe the Club has done work at Mt Consider, Kings Plains, Mitchell Palmer , Christmas Creek and Broken River. Also lava tube caves at Undara, granite and sea caves etc.
- Some members have since caved interstate and overseas.

# Cave Management Plan

- In 1976 Paul Wilson and Ralph Page (both CCC members) visited most of the known caves at Chillagoe for NPWS to locate their entrances and enable a development plan to be formulated.
- Paul's report established a classification system for QWPS to manage the caves.
- This system forms the basis of the Club's Cave Management System. This was reviewed recently and a "dangerous" category was added.

# Electric Lighting of Caves

- In 1977, The Donna Cave was lit by electricity, installed by Rangers Paul Wilson and John Barton (electrician).
- Subsequently the adjacent Trezkinn Cave was developed with stairs and walkways and then electrically lit. This was done by John Barton and his offsidars.
- No lighting was installed at Royal Arch Cave as it was considered that visitors would like to experience both lit and unlit caves. Also Royal Arch is a rambling cave which does not lend itself to electric lighting.

# Cave Tour Fees

- In 1989 NPWS introduced fees for guided tours of the caves.
- To provide a place for booking cave tours an office was established under the NPWS house opposite the Post Office. Since a clerk was employed for bookings the Chillagoe Private Post Office was taken over to justify the additional employee for bookings.



# The Hub

- In 2002 an environmental and interpretive centre, The Hub, was established with grants from National Trails Heritage Network.
- This building houses QPWS cave bookings, Post Office and various displays

# Access Restrictions to NPWS Caves

- Signs have been placed on access ways to NPWS caves requiring a permit to enter.
- Permits require qualified trip leaders and Public Risk Insurance.
- At the time of introduction, this bureaucracy was not well liked, but the overall effect has been to improve skills of trip leaders and more or less stopped unsupervised and unskilled people from caving. Such individuals now need to join a Club.

# Conclusions

- Over the last 120 years it appears that only minimal damage to caves has occurred, despite increased visitation
- The NPWS activities have improved access to the caves they show and wild QPWS caves are now more closely controlled by QPWS
- Only a small number of caves are QPWS caves, with the balance on private land. Property owners have suffered damage to stock and property from casual visitors of all types and access has become more difficult for cavers to access in some areas. The Club tries to maintain access and cooperates with landowners in every way possible.

# The End

