

## A Short History of Mt. Spec

Have you ever wondered how a place came to be? On your field trip to Paluma, you might think about the long chain of events that led to the way Paluma and the Mt.Spec region being as they are today. There are many questions you can ask yourself about the area's history - such as, where did the name "Mt.Spec" come from?

We can trace the history of the Mt.Spec area back to 1875. From roughly 1895 to the turn of the century, came a period of intensive mining activity in three areas - Kangaroo Hills, Mt.Spec and the Star River. The peak of the boom was in 1905, but from then on the decline was rapid.

After alluvial tin (meaning tin which is found in creek beds) was discovered on Running River in 1875, prospecting and then large-scale mining moved into the Paluma Range area, of which Mt.Spec is the major feature. The name "Paluma" came from HMS Paluma, an early Government survey ship, and the Paluma Range is actually an off-shoot of Hervey's Range. Rollingstone Gap is where this change occurs.

Surprisingly, there is no definite authority as to the naming of Mt.Spec. Queensland place name expert, Mr. Sidney May of Ipswich, says there are two theories. One, and the more likely, is that the name is derived from small "specs" of tin found there. The second theory is that the name comes from the name of a horse. Right through to the early part of the century, provisions were taken to the top of the mountain by pack horse teams. One of the horses in a particular team, probably the team leader is said to have had a white star or speck on its head, and was called "Old Spec". The theory is that the horse could be seen in the distance because of its "speck" and that gradually the miners and packers applied the name to the mountain itself. However, no-one knows for sure which theory is correct.

Activities of miners and packers in the area resulted in the opening of a network of inter- connecting pack horse tracks. Within only the past 35 years, those tracks have been added to by timber cutters and loggers. The main roads up the mountain came in from the west.

The steep tangle of range spurs from the coast was only crossed by a few hardy men. These men left their names on the tracks they opened up and in map land marks. The Benham Brothers, Card Brothers, Jack Johnstone, Phil Foxlee and "Bullocky Tom" Andrews are all remembered in this way. Arthur Benham originally made the clearing at what became known as "Cloudy Clearing" and what is now the Paluma township. He also opened the track to nearby Cloudy Creek.

The old tracks across Mt.Spec are the only reminders we have today to mark the passing of the prospectors, miners, packers and teamsters. Hundreds of men walked up into the Range with stores and tools on their backs. Each clearing or old settlement has its graves, some marked, some unmarked.

Aboriginal tribes in the early days were numerous in the coastal area at the foot of the Range as well as over the Range itself. There are no records of native attacks in the area.

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Forestry activity has only been much more recent in the Mt.Spec area. An area of about 26 000 hectares of Mt.Spec was proclaimed a timber reserve in 1921. Following this, in 1937, the Forestry Department started action for a National Park reservation at Mt.Spec of about 9077. These were the reasons given for the request: "The area possesses outstanding scenic attraction. Magnificent panoramic views were obtainable. The many boulder-strewn watercourses dropping quickly to the coast through virgin Northern jungle and forest country made the area an ideal one to preserve in its natural condition."

The present coast road up to Paluma was opened in 1935. It was made to provide employment in the depression of the 1930s. Since its opening, the road has carried over 68 000 000 "super feet" of milling timber from the Mt.Spec area. Now, much of Mt. Spec is a National Park, after the first 751 ha were made so in 1952. The National Park is presently 7724 ha.

An interesting feature of the journey up the Mt.Spec road, is the much-admired stone bridge at Little Crystal Creek, a popular swimming area. Nowadays the quiet village of Paluma sits among the clouds at 1000m above sea level, and is best known as a cool green place to visit to escape from the tropical heat of the towns below.



## Exploring Paluma's History

How well did you remember the history of Mt. Spec?

To explore Paluma's history, you will have to read over the short history, this time answering the following questions. Try and give the best answers you can! (REAL explorers will try and answer questions without looking at the short history!!)

Q.1 How far back can we trace the history of Paluma? \_\_\_\_\_

Q.2 Where did the name "Paluma" come from? \_\_\_\_\_

Q.3 What do you think is the right theory about how Mt.Spec was named? Why do you think this?

Q.4 After whom do you think Benham's Creek was named? \_\_\_\_\_

Q.5 What was Paluma called when it first began? \_\_\_\_\_

Q.6 Why do you think there are unmarked graves in some of the settlements and clearings in the Paluma Range?

Q.7 In 1937, the Forestry Department started action for a National Park. Looking at the reasons for this request, suggest what you think a National Park is?

Q.8 When was the present coast road to Paluma opened up? \_\_\_\_\_

Q.9 What is Paluma best known for today? \_\_\_\_\_

Q.10 Now it's your turn to ask some questions. Write down 3 questions about the history of Paluma. You can look back to the Short History for help, although you may try to think of some originals!

a.) \_\_\_\_\_

b.) \_\_\_\_\_

c.) \_\_\_\_\_