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Chapter 8

Roads: Connection to the outside world.

As Cooktown was founded primarily as a supply point for the Palmer River gold field, it could be argued that transportation was integral to, if not the reason for, its very existence. From the town's inception, transportation and the associated infrastructure has been identified by locals as the single most important factor in Cooktown's survival. Various Governments have been accused of failing to provide a viable economic transportation system within the district, and between Cooktown and the outside world.

A viable road system was critical to the progress of any pioneer settlement such as Cooktown. Although sea transport provided for the import of goods and produce to the port, roads were necessary to supply the hinterland, and to allow the economic exploitation of inland resources. Gold had a high value to mass ratio, and needed a minimal transport system to deliver it to the port for export.⁶⁷² However, timber, agricultural produce, and minerals like tin and copper, required a viable road system to allow fast economic transport to the port, or to markets in adjacent population areas. The viable exploitation of these products also often required heavy machinery, and this could be delivered on site only by road or rail. As well, road transport was not dependent on the whims of a few carriers in the way shipping was. Once the town

⁶⁷² For instance gold escorts often carried the gold on horses in saddle packs, and could travel on tracks. In contrast, roads were essential to carry tin economically, as it had a low volume to value ratio, and needed heavier transport vehicles such as drays.

began to decline, an efficient road system became even more important to provide fast transport to markets.

The absence of trafficable roads within the surrounding area, and between Cooktown and its southern neighbours, contributed to the decline of the district. A recurring theme in Cooktown's history is the attempt to secure road, rail, and after the development of the aviation industry, air transport facilities, to complement the sea links with other areas. These efforts were successful only to a limited degree until relatively recent times. The views of those advocating the benefits of improved access to Cooktown have been vindicated. The improvement in transport facilities to Cooktown and the surrounding district, especially in respect to road transport, has been accompanied by an increase in population.⁶⁷³ This has led to significantly increased commercial activity, and there is little doubt that the improvement is a direct result of better access.

Ormston asserted that Cooktown's failure to progress was influenced to a great extent by the negative attitude of the town's civic leaders. Ormston saw the leaders of commerce in Cooktown as being concerned primarily with servicing through-traffic, rather than with promoting growth. He insisted that they rarely attempted to establish any industries in the area.⁶⁷⁴ This claim is in contrast to the perceptions of the participants of the period, who identify Government inaction and neglect as being responsible for the decline of the area. It is also

⁶⁷³ The 1961 census showed the population of Cooktown as 425 people. C. Crowley, 1972. *The Remote Aborigines*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, pp. 79-80. Between 1960 and the present time there has been a continuous upgrading of the Mulligan Highway to Cooktown. The present population is about 2,000.

⁶⁷⁴ Ormston, *The Rise And Fall*, p. 313, p. 333.

inconsistent with the many efforts by local commercial interests to promote new enterprises.⁶⁷⁵

While periods of apathy and inactivity on the part of local residents are apparent, the evidence suggests that the people of Cooktown and their local authority representatives consistently strove to improve the position of their area. Three major factors were consistently identified by successive Councils as hindering the further development of their town and district following the decline of the gold fields: lack of access, either by road or rail; deficiencies in the sea transport system; and the lack of a permanent water supply sufficient for the needs of the town. When air transport and electric power supplies began in North Queensland, these too were added to the list. The efforts of the local people to convince Government to provide funds for these improvements demonstrate an understanding of the political process, and a willingness to persist. While all these factors have been addressed to a certain extent by the authorities, the people of Cooktown are still trying to improve the road and the electricity supply, which are still both subject to wet weather disruption.

Most of the Government infrastructure in the Cooktown area in its formative years was provided to facilitate the generation of fees and duties associated with the Palmer River gold field. While the district continued to yield high gold returns, the Government provided funding for roads to allow miners and merchants access to the field, and to

⁶⁷⁵ There are a number of examples, for instance, Cooktown residents petitioned against the exclusion of the port from the Gulf Mail Contract. Petition, 25 January, 1900 Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown. The Cook Shire Council also attempted unsuccessfully to initiate its own coastal launch service to the area. Letter from Treasurer to H.H. Collins M.L.A., 19 September, 1947. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown. The search for minerals on the Rossville field was backed by Cooktown merchants. Christopher Anderson, 1983. "Aborigines and Tin Mining in North Queensland: a case study in the anthropology of contact history", *Mankind*, Vol. 13, No. 6, April, p. 479.

facilitate the safe conveyance of gold to the markets. The Government obviously considered that its contribution to roads was sufficient, but local sentiment did not concur. The people of the district viewed the funding of Government infrastructure as niggardly compared with the revenue the district contributed.

There is little doubt that if the momentum of road construction to access gold deposits had been extended to the exploitation of agriculture, timber and other minerals, the decline of Cooktown and the surrounding district would not have been so severe. An examination of the history of road construction in the district reveals that the Government was not consistent in its support for local infrastructure, and that a better road system would have made these alternative industries more commercially viable. This failure contributed to Cooktown's decline.

The growth phase: 1873-1885.

In 1873 McMillan's party blazed the first track between the Endeavour River and the Palmer River field. It took the shortest possible route, and was suitable only for foot and horse traffic. However, it provided miners and their necessary provisions access to the field, and allowed the Police to escort the gold to Cooktown for export. It also enabled the carriage of mails between Cooktown and the gold fields, which assisted the Government and commercial sectors to operate efficiently.⁶⁷⁶ Initially mail was transported by available carriers on an unofficial

⁶⁷⁶ For instance, commercial interests could communicate with suppliers, and Government agents like the police and Mining Warden could communicate with their Departments.

basis, but the Government soon awarded a fortnightly mail contract, at a price of £1,170.⁶⁷⁷

In the period from the opening of the field in 1873 until mid 1875, the Colonial Government allocated a total of £8,280 for the construction of roads and bridges for Cooktown and the Palmer River gold fields. A contract was issued in 1874 to construct a road, which would be trafficable by wheeled vehicles, to Palmerville on the Palmer River. This "New Main Line of Road" was completed in 1875 at a cost of £5,019/12/0.⁶⁷⁸ By the end of 1876, total expenditure on roads and bridges in the area servicing the gold fields had reached £27,302.⁶⁷⁹ Ferries were also provided to transport passengers and goods across flooded rivers.⁶⁸⁰ However, access to the field was still difficult, and the Government set aside £5,019 in 1876 to open a new road between Cooktown and Palmerville. Funds were also provided at this time to make the main street of Cooktown more trafficable.⁶⁸¹ Total allocation for roads in the Cook district for the year 1875-76 was £11,000.⁶⁸²

Not all attempts to improve transport were successful. For instance, in 1878 the local Member of Parliament, Mr Murphy, moved that £15,000 be put towards a new road following Robinson's Track, cutting the distance by forty to fifty miles. He said the new road would help lower the excessive freight charges to the Palmer. Although he claimed that

⁶⁷⁷ The distance to be travelled each year was 2,820 miles. *Q.V.P.*, 1875, Vol. 2, p. 538.

⁶⁷⁸ *Q.V.P.*, 1876, Vol. 2, p. 233.

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁶⁸⁰ One such ferry, the Maybelle, is on view at the James Cook Museum in Cooktown.

⁶⁸¹ *Q.V.P.* 1876, Vol. 2, p. 233. Charlotte Street, the main street of Cooktown, was initially very uneven. It followed the contour of the land, with a considerable camber from the "top" side of the street to the "bottom" side. It required extensive cutting and filling.

⁶⁸² *Q.V.P.* 1876, Vol. 1, p. 833.

the Government had received an excess of £25,000 in revenue over expenditure from this area in the previous year, the move was rejected on economic grounds.⁶⁸³ However, in 1880 the Government relented and provided £3,000 for road works between Cooktown and the gold fields, and £1,000 for roads in Cooktown. It also made an attempt to formalise its Works programme, and appointed C.H. McDonald as District Road Inspector to coordinate road construction and maintenance.⁶⁸⁴

One of McDonald's first tasks was to report on the destruction of the Endeavour River bridge by flood in 1880, and the contract let to build a new bridge. This was a sign that the Government now viewed Cooktown as a permanent town, as the specifications of the bridge were impressive. It was to be 364 feet long, and would be fitted with floats and levels to allow the hand rails to fall automatically in the event of floods. Cast iron cylinder piles and anchor stays would be screwed into the river bed. The contract was let in two sections, with materials to cost £1,980, and erection costing £2,899. McDonald also announced that a similar style of bridge was to be built across the Annan River to the south of Cooktown. However, this bridge was much bigger, with twenty-two spans covering 1,101 feet. The total cost was expected to be £18,414.⁶⁸⁵ Cooktown is fortunate that a gold-happy Government invested its money in these two bridges. Although the Palmer gold field declined soon after they were built, both bridges played an important part in Cooktown's economic life. The mining and agricultural districts that contributed to the town's economy could be accessed only by

⁶⁸³ *Q.P.D.*, 1878, pp. 568-579.

⁶⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 631-632. A blueprint of sections of the Annan River bridge is held in the Cook Shire Council archives storage facility in Cooktown. Some of the iron hand rail supports are still to be found near the bridge.

these bridges, and they have been in constant use since built. They were critical to Cooktown's survival.

The decision to construct the Annan River Bridge was the culmination of a three year effort to secure a crossing.⁶⁸⁶ The two local authorities in the area wanted the bridge for different reasons. The Daintree Divisional Board, which was composed principally of farmers and agriculturalists, wanted it to serve the farming community. They said the bridge was necessary to give access to dairy farms on the southern side of the river, and claimed that it would also open up extensive sugar cane land in the area.⁶⁸⁷

The members of the Municipal Council, however, were mainly entrepreneurs and business operators. To them, a bridge over the Annan River would provide a more direct route to the Palmer field, thereby cutting cartage costs. The existing road to the Palmer field took a circuitous route that made freight costs prohibitive. However, by the time the Annan River Bridge was built, the Palmer field was in decline, and the Municipal Council now saw it as a priority to access the tin and timber reserves in the upper reaches of the Annan River.

Construction was delayed for several reasons. The majority of the steel sections were imported from England, and took nine months to arrive. The screw piles were found unsuitable and this caused a delay, as divers had to sink the piles by hand while working under water. The completion of the bridge was celebrated by an official opening attended by fifty people. The Police Magistrate, who performed the ceremony,

⁶⁸⁶ The Mayor of Cooktown requested that a bridge be built in 1877. Cooktown Courier, 21 November 1877.

⁶⁸⁷ Daintree Divisional Board Minutes, 1 December 1883. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

stressed the importance of the bridge to the area. He said that almost 1,200 tons of tin had been exported through Cooktown, and most of it had been carted across the Annan River under difficult circumstances. Carriers previously had to wait for low tide to cross the river.⁶⁸⁸

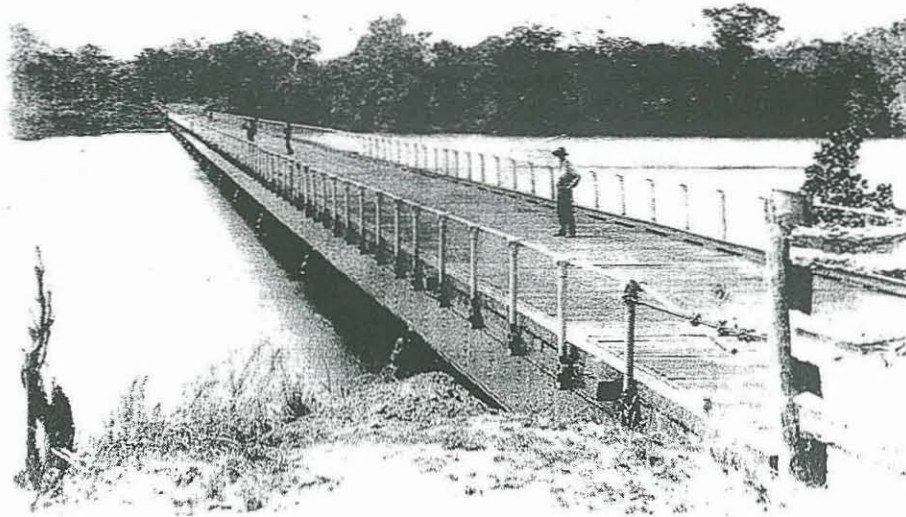
Although the Annan Bridge was supposed to lower freight rates to the Palmer, it carried little of that trade. The bridge was more important to the tin and timber industries. In recent years it has also been critical to the tourist industry, with the majority of land-based tourists using the bridge to access the town.

After the gold: Government neglect.

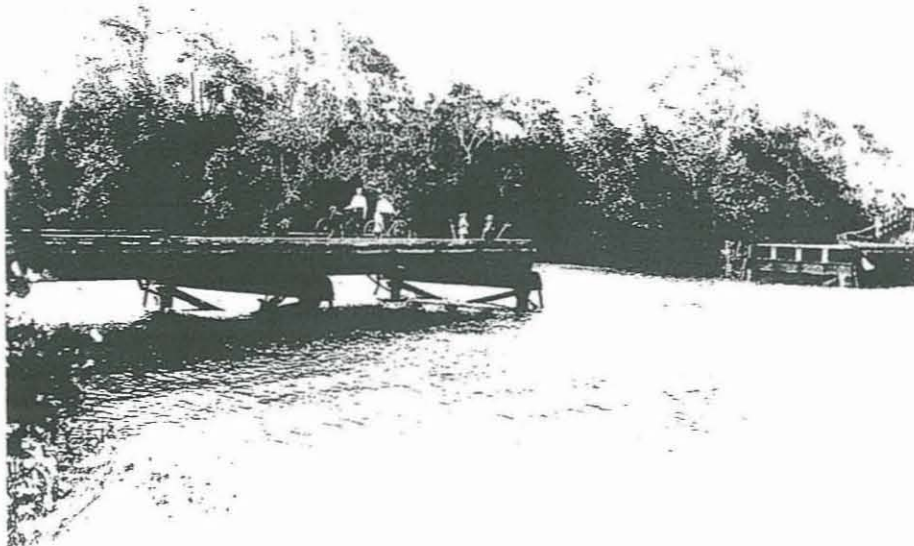
The Colonial Government continued to invest funds for the improvement of roads in the Cooktown area well into the 1880s. The 1882 budget included Special Appropriations of £13,000 for roads and bridges in the Cook district.⁶⁸⁹ However, as the gold fields declined, the level of Government funding fell, leaving local Councils to provide for roads. Three separate local authorities controlled the Cooktown region until the amalgamation of the Shires of Hann and Daintree in 1919. Most road infrastructure was in the area of the Cooktown Municipal Council (later Cooktown Town Council) and the Daintree Divisional Board (later the Daintree Shire Council). Both these local authorities recognised the importance of roads to the area's progress, but friction between them often proved harmful. It is clear that while a cooperative approach to road and bridge maintenance in the area would have been productive, the antagonism between the two Councils caused unnecessary problems, especially in securing Government cooperation.

⁶⁸⁸ Cooktown Courier, 15 February, 1889.

⁶⁸⁹ Q.V.P., 1882, Vol. 1, p. 784.



Annan River bridge showing collapsible guide rails, c. 1890. (Cairns



Endeavour River bridge showing span washed away in flood, 1884.
(Cairns Historical Society).

The particular configuration of the local authority boundaries in the area caused confusion for road funding and maintenance. An example of non-cooperation between these entities is shown in efforts to have them share maintenance costs of the Annan River Bridge. The bridge was in the area of the Daintree Divisional Board, but it was close to the boundary of the Municipal Council, and critical to Cooktown's access to its hinterland.⁶⁹⁰ In 1915, the Daintree Shire Council (former Divisional Board) asked the Town Council to share the costs of repairs to the bridge. It claimed, with justification, that the bridge was as important to the economic future of Cooktown as it was to the people in the Shire.⁶⁹¹ The Town Council said the bridge was not in its area, and rejected the request. It argued that it was illegal to spend Council funds outside its boundaries.⁶⁹² The Daintree Shire Council brought the matter to a head when it presented the Town Council with an agreement for the maintenance of the bridge.⁶⁹³ The matter was referred to the Home Secretary, who ordered the Town Council to contribute one third of bridge maintenance costs.⁶⁹⁴

The bridge continued to be an economic burden on the local Councils for many years. In 1923, the Cook Shire Council sought expert advice on the bridge, and an estimate of necessary repairs.⁶⁹⁵ The Council

⁶⁹⁰ The Annan River Bridge was situated in the Daintree Divisional Board area when it was constructed. In 1910 the Divisional Board was changed to a Shire. After the amalgamation of the Daintree Shire Council and the Hann Shire Council in 1919 to form the Shire of Cook, the bridge was in that Council's area. The new Local Authorities Act of 1902 established two basic forms of local authority, towns and shires, and all of the Divisional Boards became Shires.

⁶⁹¹ Daintree Shire Council to Cooktown Town Council, 8 June, 1915. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁶⁹² Cooktown Town Council to Daintree Shire Council, 23 June, 1915. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁶⁹³ *Ibid.*, 9 August, 1915. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁶⁹⁴ Daintree Shire Council to Cooktown Town Council, 8 May, 1916. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁶⁹⁵ Cook Shire Council to Under Secretary, Department of Public Works, 27 November, 1923. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

asked for a grant to repair the bridge, claiming that the people couldn't afford to pay a Special Rate to fund it.⁶⁹⁶ The depressed state of the local economy, and the associated fall in rates revenue, left the Council in no position to pay for maintenance of necessary infrastructure such as the Annan River bridge.

Whereas the Government provided roads to encourage gold miners, its neglect of the roads in the tin mining areas hindered development. Following the decline of gold revenue, roads servicing the tin mining areas deteriorated until many became impassable. In 1888, Cooktown residents asked for funds to repair existing roads, and to construct new roads in the Cooktown mineral field.⁶⁹⁷ Despite the productive capacity of the field, the Government ignored the area, and after two decades tin mining was still hindered by roads so poor that miners had problems *transporting machinery to the field. For instance, when the mining firm Wales and Flower wanted to relocate mining machinery from Byerstown on the Palmer River to Mount Poverty in 1912, they found the road impassable. The Cooktown Chamber of Commerce asked the Mines Department to provide £200 for repairs. The Chamber said the improvements would "enable them to take a dray up to Mount Poverty, which at the present time is altogether out of the question, owing to the bad state of the roads".*⁶⁹⁸ A similar concerted campaign in 1916 by the miners and residents of the Annan tin field secured funding of £150 to

⁶⁹⁶ The Mayor, Cooktown Town Council and The Chairman, Cook Shire Council to H.J. Ryan, M.L.A., 16 February, 1924. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁶⁹⁷ It was claimed that bad roads had caused heavy losses in tin fields area. *Cooktown Courier*, 17 July, 1888.

⁶⁹⁸ Cooktown Chamber of Commerce to Daintree Shire Council, Cooktown, 29 October 1912. Letter from Cooktown Chamber of Commerce to Under Secretary of Mines, Brisbane, 29 October 1912. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown. (When one takes into account the rudimentary roads that were used by drays to carry freight, the road complained of must have been in a deplorable state).

improve the road between Rossville, the main centre on the tin field, and Romeo, on the western extremity of the field.⁶⁹⁹

In 1932 the local authorities in the area amalgamated into a larger Cook Shire Council, which was responsible for all roads in the area. The new Council continued to press for Government funding to extend and improve local roads. For example, it enlisted the help of the local State Member of Parliament to secure a grant of £500 for improvements to the Shipton's Flats road, on the Annan River tin fields. The road between Shipton's Flat and Cooktown was critical to the timber industry, which used it far more than other users. The Council said that two million super feet of timber was taken from the area each year, with trucks travelling approximately 44,800 miles on Shire roads. Its ability to provide road funding was limited, as annual rates from the area amounted to only £490 per year, of which only about 75% were recoverable. The Council believed that the Forestry Department should allocate some of the royalty paid on the timber towards road maintenance.⁷⁰⁰ Despite being responsible for the road, the Council received little income from the industry, and the Forestry Department refused to contribute any funds. The Council also asked the local Member to approach the Mines Department for help, as the Shipton's Flat road also serviced the Rossville, Tableland, Mount Amos, Romeo and Poverty tin mining areas.⁷⁰¹ This approach too proved unsuccessful. The price of poor roads was increased transport costs which affected the viability of these industries.

⁶⁹⁹ H.J. Ryan, M.L.A., Brisbane to Daintree Shire Council, 5 February 1916. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁷⁰⁰ It was claimed that bad roads caused heavy losses in the tin field areas. Cooktown Courier, 17 July 1888.

The fight for road access to Cairns.

In the late 1920s, the people of Cooktown made a concerted effort to have their town connected by road with other centres. They proposed two options, one to follow the coast to Mossman, and the other to take an inland route. The coastal route offered access to agricultural land and timber resources, and was much shorter than an inland route. However, it had two major disadvantages. Construction and maintenance costs would be higher, as the route crossed mountainous terrain with high annual rainfall. Second, the road between Mossman and Cairns was unfinished, and this would severely limit travel between Cairns and Cooktown. While an inland route through Mount Molloy or Mungana would be longer than the coast road, construction costs would be much lower, because it would traverse relatively level country with low annual rainfall. However, the country had little potential for development. While each route had its supporters at different periods, the general consensus in Cooktown was that any road was better than none.

Rural areas were offered a better deal in 1925 when the Queensland Main Roads Board was transformed into the Queensland Main Roads Commission. The new body rationalised the system of building and maintaining those roads designated as "main roads". These were primarily the connecting roads between towns, and important roads within local authority areas. The Commission relieved local authorities, and especially the poorer Shire Councils, of much the burden of providing many of the roads in their district.⁷⁰²

⁷⁰¹ Cook Shire Council to H.H. Collins, M.L.A., Brisbane, 12 February, 1936. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁷⁰² Q.P.P., 1926, VII, p. 1253.

By 1926 the whole community was pushing for a road connection with Cairns. Local public organisations combined to lobby politicians,⁷⁰³ and the Mayor met the Premier in Brisbane to urge him to fund a road to Cairns through Mount Molloy.⁷⁰⁴ Both the Cooktown Progress Association and the local branch of the Australian Labor Party supported the construction of a road, but thought it should go through either Mount Molloy or Mungana.⁷⁰⁵ They said the route through Mount Molloy would allow access to the pastoral lands on the upper reaches of the Normanby and Laura Rivers, including the fertile Butchers Hill area. A road to Cairns through Mungana would be much longer, but it would give access to the Mitchell River lands between Laura and Chillagoe. Supporters for both routes were convinced that their preferred road would precipitate an increase in mineral exploration.

The various local public bodies realised that they would have greater strength in unity, and combined to agitate for the road.⁷⁰⁶ They asked H.J. Ryan M.L.A. to support an application for a grant of £2,000 "to put in trafficable order for motor-traffic the road now existing between COOKTOWN AND MOUNT MOLLOY".⁷⁰⁷ This statement showed that Cooktown residents in the 1920s, like their predecessors in the 1880s, were not above a bit of poetic license if it would help their cause. The "road" referred to was a track used by drovers and graziers to access properties and to move cattle. No motor vehicle had travelled over the section from Mount Molloy to Butchers Hill, and the "road" was not

⁷⁰³ Telegram from Public Bodies Committee Secretary to H.J. Ryan M.L.A., Brisbane, 11 September, 1926. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁷⁰⁴ Cooktown Town Council Minutes, 29 July, 1926.

⁷⁰⁵ Cooktown Town Council Minutes, 15 July, 1926. Meeting of Public Bodies Sub-Committees, Cooktown, 18 September, 1926. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁷⁰⁶ Meeting of Public Bodies Sub-Committees, Cooktown, 18 September, 1926. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁷⁰⁷ Secretary For Sub-Committees to H.J. Ryan, M.L.A., Parliament House, Brisbane, 22 September, 1926. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

"christened" until 1929. An attempt was made to reach Cooktown through Mount Molloy in 1928, but the vehicle never reached Cooktown, and there is no record of how far it got. The adventurer was motivated by a rumour that the Shire Council had offered a reward of £50 to the first car to travel the route.⁷⁰⁸

Two New Zealanders claimed to have travelled this route in 1929, driving a *Baby Austin*. The condition of the "road" can be appreciated from their description of that journey. In addition to having to carry the vehicle over many creeks, they were forced to use chocks and ropes in the descent of the Byerstown Range near Butcher's Hill station.⁷⁰⁹

When R.D. Gallop and Horrie Moon blazed the route of the present Mulligan Highway in 1947, they had great difficulty in making the trip, even with the aid of an ex-army four-wheel-drive vehicle. They found a formed road between Mareeba and Biboorah, with tracks to Mount Carbine and Curraghmore Station through Mount Molloy. While searching for a route, they encountered the remains of old mining tracks between Curraghmore and Butcher's Hill Station, now Lakeland Downs. From Butcher's Hill, a track existed to Cooktown.⁷¹⁰ Gallop established a rudimentary road, using a large quantity of land mines and other army ordnance to blast a path through the hills.⁷¹¹ He then convinced the Government to allocate £4,000 to buy machinery and form a road. A track suitable for four-wheel drive vehicles was

⁷⁰⁸ H. Minge Juni (Mechanic), to Shire Clerk, Cooktown, 26 June, 1928. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁷⁰⁹ These travellers also made inquiries about the rumoured £50 reward for the first vehicle to complete the overland trip to Cooktown. The Council again claimed it had made no such offer. Mac Quarrie, 1929. *We And The Baby*, Angus & Robertson Limited, Sydney, pp. 144-151.

⁷¹⁰ Gallop, *The Bush Engineer*, p. 55.

⁷¹¹ It was claimed that Gallop used 48 tons of explosives on the Byerstown Range. *Cooktown Weekly*, 18 October 1985, p. 4.

completed in three months.⁷¹² In 1950 this route was proclaimed a State Highway, and eventually formed part of the Mulligan Highway, Cooktown's major road link with Cairns.

The push for the coast road.

Acting on a suggestion by the local politicians, in 1934 the Shire Council presented the State Government with a report supporting the construction of another road, from Cooktown to Daintree through Rossville and Bloomfield. This road would eventually become the second road linking Cooktown to Cairns. The report used information from an aerial survey commissioned by the Main Roads Commission, supplemented by reports from various people who had travelled the route. It said the section from Cooktown to Rossville was trafficable only in dry weather, and that only small sections of track existed between Rossville and Bloomfield. In addition to upgrading the existing road, a ten-mile section through heavy rainforest scrub would need clearing and forming.⁷¹³

At the Bloomfield end, a six-mile section to the former Vilele sugar mill was still serviceable. It would also be necessary to clear and form another section, four miles in length, between Bloomfield and China Camp. All but two miles of the twenty-two mile section between China Camp and Daintree would have to be cleared and formed. Of the total eighty-three miles of the proposed route, almost half would be new formation.⁷¹⁴

⁷¹² Gallop, *The Bush Engineer*, p. 58.

⁷¹³ Report on the extension of the Cook Highway and the possibilities of the future development of the resources contained in the Cook Shire, 15 October, 1934. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown

⁷¹⁴ *Ibid.*

According to its supporters, the proposed road had many advantages, such as tapping further timber resources.⁷¹⁵ It would also boost employment in the mining industry by reducing transport and processing costs. They also predicted a boost for tourism, as the road would allow access to "scenic mountain views and tropical forests".⁷¹⁶ The report also extolled the virtues of the agricultural land along the proposed route. It said that an area of arable land seventy miles long by up to thirty miles wide would be made available, although no indication was given as to where this land was. Much of the farming land would be serviced by the construction of dams on the Normanby River. The report estimated that one hundred new settlers could be accommodated in the first year, with at least 1,000 farmers eventually settled in the valleys of the Normanby, Endeavour and Annan Rivers. Cotton, peanuts and citrus fruits were among the crops promoted. Even before further development began, it predicted that building the road alone would provide 400 jobs for at least one year for the district's unemployed workers.⁷¹⁷

Cooktown people again proved they had two enduring characteristics consistency and persistence. If they met resistance in their dealings with various levels of Government, they invariably used defence, or the lack of it, as leverage. Consequently, when the Government showed little interest in the coastal route, the locals stressed the defence

⁷¹⁵ This view reflected the claims made by the District Forester in a letter to the Provisional Forestry Board in 1930 that better roads would open up timber and agricultural land. Royal Commission On Development Of North Queensland. Submission From Cook. 541. N.D. Allom to The Secretary, Provisional Forestry Board, 10 February 1930, A/6420, Q.S.A

⁷¹⁶ Report on the extension of the Cook Highway and the possibilities of the future development of the resources contained in the Cook Shire, 15 October, 1934. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown. (It is interesting to note that this road is now a significant tourist destination for people interested in the World Heritage tropical rainforest).

⁷¹⁷ Ibid.

aspects of a road link with Cairns. They said the expected increase in population from better road access would in itself be a defence asset. The area would be more suitable for an air defence base, as a good road would allow the transportation of materials from Cairns in an emergency. The report concluded that :

the rehabilitation of the Cook district with all that it will mean to the State and the Commonwealth is a job of out-standing importance not alone for the relief of unemployment but in the settlement permanently of the most northerly part of Queensland.⁷¹⁸

Unfortunately, the State Government was not swayed by these rosy visions, and took no action.

The perceived advantages of a road link with Cairns were also recognised by people outside the Cook Shire. Themselves looking for new trade, residents of Mossman, Port Douglas and Daintree petitioned the Premier in December 1936 to extend the Cook State Highway (Cairns to Daintree) from Daintree to Cooktown. The petition claimed that this would open up for exploitation one of the "finest mineral fields in Australia", as well as agricultural and grazing lands, and large timber reserves.⁷¹⁹ Defence was again dragged in, by reference to the "important position which the question of migration and defence are occupying in the deliberations of statesmen of the day".⁷²⁰ During this campaign, the Cook Shire Council maintained pressure on the local member of parliament, H.H. Collins M.L.A., to support the project.⁷²¹ Although he claimed to support the road, Collins was described in the local press as a hypocrite. He was a Member of the

⁷¹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷¹⁹ Presumably the mineral fields alluded to were the small Rossville and China Camp fields between Mossman and Cairns.

⁷²⁰ Petition to The Honourable the Premier and Members of the Queensland Government authorised by the Douglas Shire Council, 3 December, 1936. A total of 426 persons from the Cooktown area signed the petition. The Chairman, Cook Shire Council to Chairman, Douglas Shire Council, Port Douglas, 30 September, 1936. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁷²¹ Cook Shire Council Minutes, 30 September, 1937.

State Labor Government, and had promised to have the road constructed within three years of his election. However, he now said the "Tory" Government in Canberra should build the road.⁷²²

In an effort to commit the Government to the Daintree road, the Cook Shire Council urged the Main Roads Commission to declare the road from the Annan Road to Shipton's Flat a Main Road. This would make Government funds available for construction and maintenance of the first section at least. Alternatively, the Shire Council wanted the road declared a portion of the Cook State Highway.⁷²³ The Minister for Public Works thought that the Commonwealth Government should help the States construct roads with such obvious defence potential, but conceded this was not likely. He promised the Main Roads Commission would consider the matter, and make its decision based on its own information and financial commitments.⁷²⁴ The plan was rejected, but the Government allocated more money to the Shire's internal road system. Repairs were undertaken on the Annan River bridge, and portions of the main road near Cooktown were upgraded. The Government rejected suggestions by the Council that a thirty-mile section from Cooktown towards Daintree be resurveyed and reconstructed, pointing out that further work was not practical until the information from an aerial survey and other investigations was analysed.⁷²⁵

Talk of Commonwealth funding led a hopeful Council to lobby the Federal Government, seizing an opportunity for a deputation to meet

⁷²² *Cooktown Independent & Northern Sun*, 5 September 1938.

⁷²³ Cook Shire Council to The Secretary, Main Roads Commission, Brisbane, 11 January, 1937. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁷²⁴ Minister for Public Works, Brisbane, to Cook Shire Council, 29 June, 1938. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁷²⁵ Minister for Public Works, Brisbane, to Cook Shire Council, 8 August, 1938. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

the Minister for External Affairs at Cooktown on his return from a visit to New Guinea. The Minister was reminded of the strategic position Cooktown occupied, and urged to commit the Federal Government to a defence base in the area, and to support the construction of a road.⁷²⁶ Despite his record as a strong advocate of Australia's defence preparedness, the Minister did not offer support for either project. The Federal Government's failure to recognise the defence implications of the lack of roads in the area is in contrast to its early support for defence aerodromes elsewhere in North Queensland.

The combined efforts of Cook and Douglas Shire Councils to have the Shipton's Flat road gazetted were finally vindicated. The local member of State Parliament was informed in 1938 that the road had been gazetted a Main Road.⁷²⁷ This was seen by the Chairman of the Douglas Shire Council as "the final step to Douglas Shire". Representatives of the two Shire Councils proudly escorted Mr Anderson of the Main Roads Commission in a survey of the proposed coastal route.⁷²⁸

Once the first section of the road towards Daintree was gazetted, efforts were redoubled for the remainder of the route to be included. The people of Cooktown demonstrated an understanding of the intricacies of political reality by forming a beneficial alliance with the Governor of Queensland, Sir Leslie Wilson. The Governor appeared to

⁷²⁶ Deputation To The Right Honourable W.M. Hughes, Minister For External Affairs, by Cr. A Standfield Sampson, Chairman, Cook Shire Council. Mr. P. Kenny, President, Cooktown Sub-branch R.S.S.I.L.A., 11 June 1938. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁷²⁷ Minister for Public Works, Brisbane, to H.H. Collins, M.L.A., 9 December, 1938. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁷²⁸ Daintree Shire Council to Cook Shire Council, 26 December, 1938. Cook Shire Council to Douglas Shire Council, 31 December, 1938. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

have a special affinity for Cooktown and its people, and they were prepared to use this relationship to the advantage of the district. The Governor proved willing to represent the interests of the area where possible, and in 1938 the Shire Council had no hesitation in asking him to support the construction of the Cooktown-Daintree road, starting from both ends at the same time.⁷²⁹

World War Two: another chance for a road.

The two Shire Councils thought the deterioration in the world political situation offered a further lever, and asked the Commonwealth Department of Defence for a grant towards the cost of construction of the road.⁷³⁰ However, this application, and another request by the Cook Shire Council for £200 to help construct a civilian evacuation road between Cooktown and Butcher's Hill, was rejected. Although the Department agreed that an escape route for the population of Cooktown in the event of attack was desirable, it said that such roads were the responsibility of the State Government, and not the concern of the Commonwealth.⁷³¹

Despite the Federal Government's apparent reluctance to supply funds for defence road construction, armed forces personnel were interested in possible road access to the area. In 1940 Army surveyors asked the Shire Council for information on local roads, and found that most of the roads and tracks marked on early maps should be discounted. The old

⁷²⁹ Cook Shire Council to W.F.J. Riordan, M.P., 21 January, 1939. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown

⁷³⁰ Cook Shire Council to W.F.J. Riordan, M.P., 21 January 1939. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁷³¹ The Secretary, Department of Defence, Melbourne to Cook Shire Council, 25 September, 1939. The Minister for Defence to W.J.F. Riordan, Canberra, 28 September, 1939. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

main road to the Palmer was impassable, as was the track to Laura. However, the Council was hopeful about rumours that the Government was considering a defence road from Mount Mulgrave near Chillagoe, through Palmerville to Fairview near Laura.⁷³² Eventually this connection was made, but was of little use to Cooktown residents. It was subject to floods, was too rough, and was over twice the distance of the road that later went through Mount Molloy.

By 1940 the Shire Council decided to change tactics in its pursuit of a road connection to Daintree. Whereas it had previously asked for the completion of the road between Cooktown and Daintree, it now concentrated only on the Cooktown to Bloomfield section of the road to assist the timber industry.⁷³³ Council told the Main Roads Commissioner that J.M. Johnston, sawmillers, were installing a modern mill at Bloomfield, and would need road access to export the timber. Johnston hoped to encourage settlers to occupy vacant agricultural land at Bloomfield, giving the sawmill an assured labour force. Road access to Cooktown would make these projects more viable, and would have the added advantage of allowing access to the Cooktown hospital in case of emergency. Needless to say, the road would also assist in the development of Cooktown and the surrounding area.⁷³⁴ The Shire Council asked many of the local authorities in North Queensland to support its proposal, and at least six Councils complied.⁷³⁵

⁷³² Cook Shire Council to Capt. S.B. Ward, D.A.D. Survey, A.M.F., Northern Command, 21 November, 1940..

⁷³³ Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown. Cook Shire Council to H.H. Collins M.L.A., 22 May 1940. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown

⁷³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁵ Letters from: Douglas Shire Council, Cairns Shire Council, Cardwell Shire Council, Townsville City Council, Thuringowa Shire Council, Ayr Shire Council to Cook Shire Council, October, 1940. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

With the entry of Japan into the war, there was a real threat to the safety of Cooktown's population, and the matter of road access became urgent. The Shire Council was concerned at the lack of a significant defence strategy for the town, and especially the absence of a decent road to evacuate civilians. The Shire Chairman, exasperated at the lack of progress on the Cook Highway, recommended that all residents be evacuated in case of attack.⁷³⁶ His concern over the lack of road access was justified. An American armed forces unit stationed in Cooktown during the war was faced with transporting a heavy load of materials to the town. As the load was too heavy and bulky for the available shipping service, they chose to deliver it overland. The only route from Cairns was through Mareeba, Dimbulah, Chillagoe and Palmerville to Laura. From there, the trucks were transported to Cooktown by rail. The total distance traversed was 550 miles.⁷³⁷ In comparison, the distance to Cairns by the proposed route through Daintree was only about 156 miles.

In 1944 the Shire Chairman, Standfield Sampson, again asked the Governor to support the Council's campaign for the coast road, pointing out that the Shire had been trying for thirty years to have a road built. He explained that if it was constructed, the road would allow the development of an area of 48,999 square miles. Detractors alleged the mountainous route made road construction uneconomic, but Sampson said the armed forces could push the road through with modern machinery in weeks.⁷³⁸ The Governor was sympathetic, but his reply was not encouraging. After discussions with J.R. Kemp, the Deputy

⁷³⁶ Telegram from Chairman, Cook Shire Council to Hon. J.S. Collings, Federal Members Room, Brisbane, 24 January, 1942. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁷³⁷ Sinclair, *Cooktown At War*, pp. 30-32.

⁷³⁸ The Chairman, Cook Shire Council, to The Governor of Queensland, Government House, Brisbane, 8 June, 1944. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

Director General of Allied Works, and with the Main Roads Commissioner, he was convinced that the road was a major project and would be very costly to construct. He told Sampson that the area should be prepared to rely on air transport and shipping for some considerable time.⁷³⁹ It is understandable that the authorities would be reluctant to proceed with a road through the heavily wooded and rugged terrain between Cooktown and Daintree. However, given the real threat of invasion, it is inconceivable that funds were not allocated to construct a road to Cooktown through Mount Molloy. The cost of providing a suitable access track capable of carrying heavy army vehicles would have been minimal, as the route was lightly forested with only two small ranges to cross.

Despite the negative view taken by the Main Roads Commission, the Survey Section of the army undertook a survey of the proposed route between Cooktown and Daintree. The party consisted of Warrant Officer Herps from the Survey Corps, two civilians, and one "black-boy" from Cooktown.⁷⁴⁰ In his summary, Herps said that the road would open up the Rossville scrub for timber, the Wyalla Plain (formerly the site of the Vilele plantation) for grazing and agriculture, the Bloomfield River for timber, grazing and agriculture, and various other areas for agriculture and mining. He estimated that it would cost £110,000 to build the all-weather road with a gravelled surface fifteen feet wide.⁷⁴¹ The Shire Council immediately sent the Governor the results of the survey. However, the Chairman thought that Herpes' estimate of

⁷³⁹ The Governor of Queensland to the Chairman, Cook Shire Council, 28 June, 1944. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁷⁴⁰ It is obvious from the reference to the "black-boy" that Aboriginals were not regarded as "civilians", and did not warrant being named in the report. This attitude was a reflection of their official standing as wards of the State at that time.

⁷⁴¹ Report on road from Cooktown to Daintree, O.C. 2 Survey Section. 2 Aust. Fd. Svy. Coy., 21 August, 1944. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

£110,000 was too low, even if modern machinery was used. He thought a more realistic figure would be £160,000.

In addition to this discouraging news, the Councils concerned were unable to refrain from their usual bickering. Although the Cook and Douglas Shire Councils had cooperated in urging the Government to build the road, they were not united on the actual route it should take. The Cook Shire Council now supported a route a few kilometres inland from the actual coast, as it was more practical from an economic and engineering standpoint. The Douglas Shire Council had originally supported this route, but it was now in favour of going along the coast, or the Gold Hill Stock Route. The Cook Shire Council thought the coastal route was impractical because it required the construction of bridges across the Daintree and Bloomfield Rivers. It also discounted the alternative inland route along the Gold Hill Stock Route because it was a longer route to Cooktown.⁷⁴²

The war ends, but the struggle continues.

As soon as the war finished, the Cook Shire Council renewed its efforts. It told the Main Roads Commission that most of the reasons previously given against building the road were no longer relevant. The end of the war meant that surveyors would be released from essential defence work, and these would now be available for civilian jobs. Thanks to the war, aerial survey maps and ground surveys of the section were available to allow a decision on the appropriate route. In addition, road-making machinery was working at Cooktown aerodrome

⁷⁴² Cook Shire Council to Cairns Chamber of Commerce, 19 March, 1945. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown. The coastal road has since been constructed, but neither the Daintree River nor the Bloomfield have bridges. The Daintree is serviced by ferry, and the Bloomfield has a ford, which is subject to high tides at times.

and would be available for road construction when the route was surveyed.⁷⁴³

The argument was futile, as the Government had no intention of building a road. The Council was given a rehash of the same excuses, even though the war was over. Surveyors were still being employed on essential work only, and would not be available for general surveying for some time. The machinery at Cooktown aerodrome was not available for road construction, as it was the property of the Allied Works Council, and was to be used on army works in "forward areas".⁷⁴⁴ As the conflict had ended, one must question what "army works" would be necessary, and where the "forward areas" were. The recent war had revealed how vulnerable coastal areas such as Cooktown were, and it would be reasonable to assume that the defence of the area required a good road network. It appears that the lesson had not been heeded.

The dissension between the two Shires with most at stake did not help Cooktown's cause. Disagreement between the Cook and Douglas Shire Councils on the proposed route became more acrimonious. In a letter to the Cairns Chamber of Commerce, the Chairman of the Cook Shire Council stated that "certain quarters" were spreading misinformation about the intentions of the members of his Council. He reiterated that the only interest of the Cook Shire Council was to have the Cook Highway extended to Cooktown by the shortest practical

⁷⁴³ Cook Shire Council to Main Roads Commission, Brisbane, 21 March, 1945. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁷⁴⁴ Commissioner of Main Roads to H.H. Collins M.L.A., 5 April, 1945. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

route, "wherever it may lie".⁷⁴⁵

The inland route.

A new player entered the road debate in 1947, when the Woothakata Shire Council, based in Mareeba, supported the inland route. Mareeba was the cattle saleyard centre for Cape York Peninsula, and Woothakata Council saw a road connection to Cooktown as crucial to the growth of the cattle industry of the region.⁷⁴⁶ The Acting District Engineer, R.D. Gallop, who was stationed at Cairns, agreed that an inland route had better potential. In addition to giving access to the mineral reserves and grazing areas of the Peninsula, this route would open up timber reserves in the Windsor Tableland area near Mount Carbine. He promised a more detailed investigation of the inland route would be undertaken.⁷⁴⁷

While the Cook Shire Council was anxious to secure a road connection to the outside world, it had reservations about the proposed inland road. It feared that the exploitation of the Windsor Tableland timber reserves would divert timber resources towards Mount Molloy and Mareeba at the expense of Cooktown. If this happened, it would take trade from the Port of Cooktown and the district sawmill.⁷⁴⁸ The argument was rejected by the Woothakata Shire Council, which pointed out that the benefits to be gained from the expansion of the cattle and

⁷⁴⁵ The Chairman, Cook Shire Council, to S.E. McKewen, Chamber of Commerce, Cairns, 16 July, 1945. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁷⁴⁶ Woothakata Shire Council to District Engineer, Main Roads Commission, Cairns, 24 June, 1947. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁷⁴⁷ R.D. Gallop, Acting District Engineer, Main Roads Commission, Cairns, to Woothakata Shire Council, Mareeba, N.D. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁷⁴⁸ Cook Shire Council to Woothakata Shire Council, 26 August, 1947. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.



Palmer River crossing showing "Gallop Bridge" designed by Rollo Gallop, c. 1960s. (Jack Fearnley).

mining industries would far outweigh any potential loss in other areas.⁷⁴⁹

After many years of lobbying by the relevant Shire Councils, various public organisations, and the North Queensland Local Authorities Association, the people of the district were finally rewarded. The Government decided to construct the road by the inland route, through Mount Molloy. The section of the inland route from Mount Carbine to Cooktown was proclaimed a State Highway in 1950. In addition, a thirty-eight mile section of the Cooktown to Laura road was proclaimed a Main Road. These connections would complete the road system from Portland Roads to Cooktown and Cairns.⁷⁵⁰ The Cook Shire Council was cautious about the pronouncement, as it had been "led up the garden path" many times before. It called for an early start on construction, as "gazettal will mean nothing at all if no action is taken to see that ample funds are provided to carry out necessary improvements to the road".⁷⁵¹ They had vivid memories of "gazetted roads" in the area that were no more than marks on maps. Once work commenced on the road, improvements were dramatic. For instance, the Inspector of Mines reported that whereas it had taken him two days to travel from Herberton to Cooktown the previous year, the same trip took only one day in 1952.⁷⁵²

In 1952 a Government Land Inquiry Committee supported the construction of the road because it would provide a connection with

⁷⁴⁹ Woothakata Shire Council to Cook Shire Council, 15 September, 1947. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁷⁵⁰ The Under Secretary to the Treasury to H.H. Collins, Minister for Agriculture and Stock, Brisbane, 4 May, 1950. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁷⁵¹ Cook Shire Council to C.F. Wordsworth M.L.A., 22 June, 1950. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

⁷⁵² Inspector of Mines, Herberton, to the State Mining Engineer, Mines Department, Brisbane, 4 September 1952, A/63005, Q.S.A.

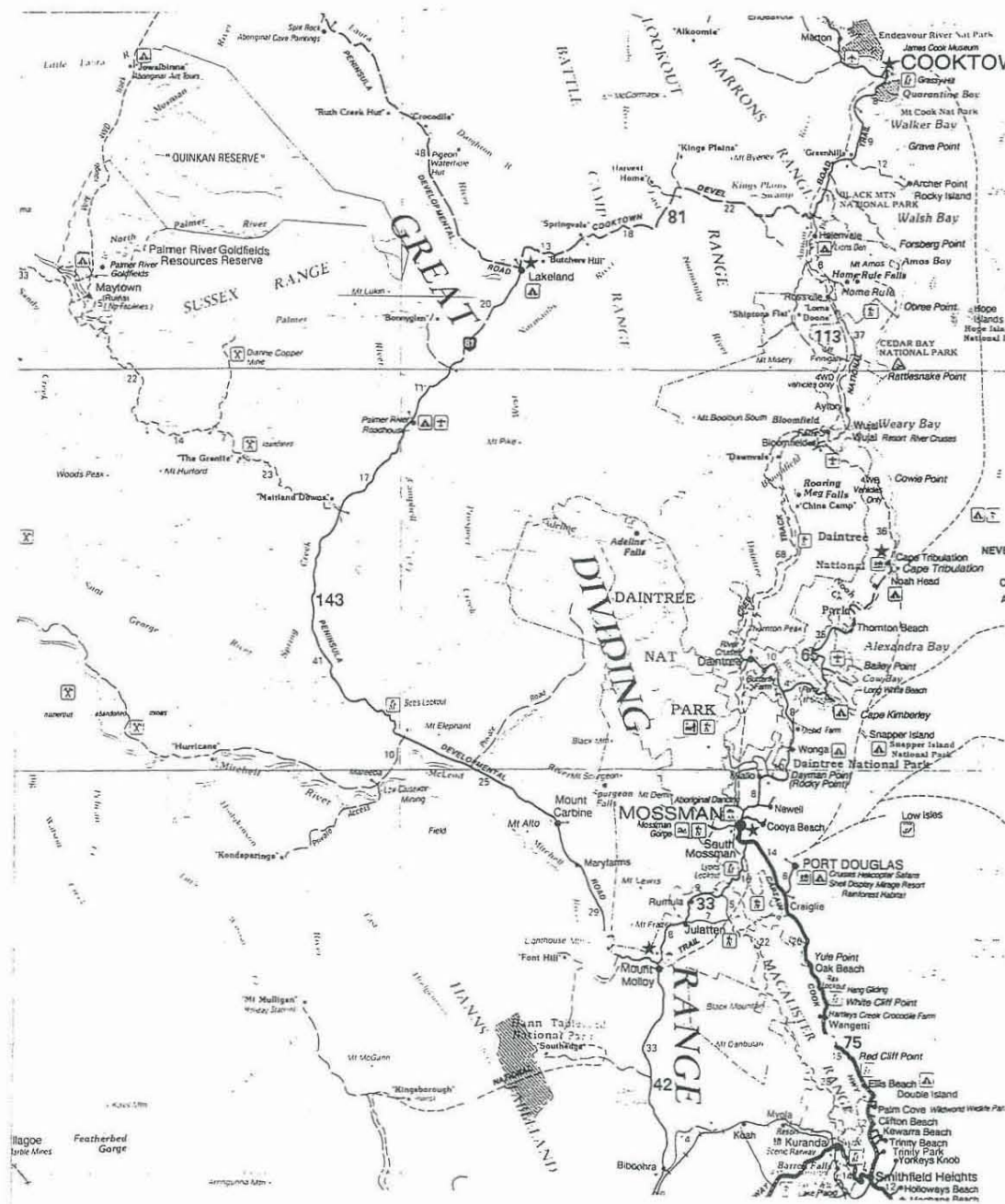
prospective markets. It believed that good roads were essential to the successful development of the area, which was capable of producing a variety of crops, including cotton.⁷⁵³ However, despite the many predictions of a great increase in agriculture and timber production, the only real increase in agricultural production occurred at Lakeland, where the road has enabled a significant area to be exploited. The road had even less effect on the timber industry, which has virtually disappeared.

Since the construction of the Mulligan Highway, the road has been constantly upgraded. At present only seventy kilometres remain unsealed. Whereas the trip from Cairns to Cooktown by this route took about twelve hours in 1960, and was best done in a 4 wheel drive, a sedan car can now complete the journey comfortably in less than four hours. Improvements continue. The Main Roads Department's plans include the complete sealing of the road by 2005, with new bridges over many rivers, including the Annan. The Department presently has \$70 million committed to the project, and now consults frequently with local residents to keep them informed of developments, and to obtain local input.⁷⁵⁴ Tourist traffic over the road has increased commensurate with the improvement of the road.

A coastal road was pushed through in the period 1983-1984 under controversial circumstances. The project was not planned or engineered, and it first came to public attention when the Daintree Shire Council pushed a track through the virgin forest. The Chairman, Tony Mijo, offered to bypass the Bloomfield Aboriginal Mission, whose

⁷⁵³ North Queensland Land Inquiry Committee. Report To Honourable The Minister For Land And Irrigation, December 1952, pp. 20-21, TR 168/1 1960/7386-1960/7530, Q.S.A.

⁷⁵⁴ Cooktown Local News, 5 August 1999.



Map showing roads servicing Cooktown.

inhabitants feared the road would bring unwanted travellers.⁷⁵⁵

Ironically, Government Ministers justified its construction on various grounds, including providing access between Mossman and Bloomfield so that the Aboriginal people in each area could visit relatives. This was a particularly cynical statement from a State Government opposed to Aboriginal advancement. Opponents of the road charged the Government with pandering to a local land developer with significant property interests in the area. The development of large tracts of land in the area north of the Daintree River since the road was built appears to substantiate this view.

The coast road is still suitable only for four-wheel-drive vehicles. As predicted, the road boosted the tourist industry, being especially attractive to those interested in environmental tourism. It could also be claimed that the defence capabilities of the area have been enhanced. While the coastal road is not as accessible as the inland highway, it nevertheless does provide a alternative route for defence access to the district, and has been used in jungle training exercises.

Conclusion.

The saga of access roads for Cooktown illustrates several theories of regional decline, including Myrdal's theory of cumulative causation. Once Cooktown started to decline, the Government saw the lack of economic progress as an excuse not to commit more funds to roads in the area. Unfortunately, the lack of road access compounded the problem of economic decline by hindering the development of the mining, agricultural, tourist and timber industries. The Government's inaction was undoubtedly influenced by the lack of economic benefit to

⁷⁵⁵ Cairns Post, 1 September 1984.

either Cooktown or the Government from the considerable expenditure on the railway.

Cooktown's decline was not reversed until the provision of a road connection with larger towns in the area, particularly Cairns. As the condition of the road improved, the cartage of goods between Cairns and Cooktown became more economical. A greater range of consumer goods has also become available, with chilled and frozen foods delivered regularly. Locals can also access services in Cairns with relative ease. Ironically, progress in Cooktown has come not from the industries that were always regarded as being its greatest hope of renewal, but from tourism. It is obvious that Myrdal's claim, that intervention is needed to reverse a decline, applies here. In Cooktown's case, the provision of a road connection with Cairns constituted part of that intervention.

Staple theory is also relevant. While the Government continued to reap an economic benefit from gold, the staple product responsible for Cooktown's existence, it was willing to invest in infrastructure, including roads. However, with the decline of the Palmer River as a gold producer, the Government's commitment to the area declined accordingly. Secondary staples like tin, pearl-shell, beche-de-mer and timber were of less value, and consequently gave the Government less return in duties and fees. The wealth generated by these industries helped Cooktown to survive but did not provide enough to allow Local Government to take on the burden. With inadequate infrastructure, these staple industries were further disadvantaged. The Cooktown to Laura railway, which according to McCarthy constituted a forward linkage and should have stimulated progress, had the opposite effect. Its failure as a generator of economic progress deterred further Government investment in the area.

There is no doubt that the failure of various Governments to provide a road connection between Cooktown and Cairns was partially responsible for Cooktown's decline. However, given the failure of the railway to generate progress, or to provide a reasonable return on outlay, the reluctance of the Government to invest further in the area is understandable. In the period prior to the Second World War, the low incidence of private vehicle ownership would have perhaps made the provision and maintenance of a long road through difficult terrain unjustifiable. Conversely, it could be claimed that vehicle ownership would have increased if better roads were available. However, the demonstrated vulnerability of the area during the Second World War, and the difficulties encountered in servicing the armed forces and construction units in the area, should have precipitated a decision to provide road access as a defence priority while the armed forces were in the area. Other towns had benefited in this way; Cairns gained an improved road up the range to its hinterland, as well as other works and drainage. After the war, in Cooktown, as elsewhere in Australia, the freedom of mobility offered by private vehicles led to increased public pressure for more and better roads. Eventually, the increase in private vehicle ownership following the war made the provision of a road to Cooktown imperative.

Shipping did provide a transport service until the Mulligan Highway became an all-weather road, but the boat service had limitations that restricted growth. Goods carried by boat were limited in size and weight to the capabilities of the vessel. To make matters worse, customers were compelled to arrange delivery to the wharf in Cairns, and from the wharf in Cooktown, adding further costs to the freight. As the road was improved, carriers began to use semi-trailers to deliver much bigger loads from point to point, without the necessity of "double handling".

The advantage was apparent with cargo like bagged cement. Before the road was built, the amount of cement delivered by boat was restricted, with the bags being handled individually up to seven times between the factory and the job. In contrast, trucks could land up to twenty-five ton loads from the factory in Townsville direct to the job.

The growth of the tourist industry in Cooktown since the Mulligan Highway was constructed is testament to the faith of the local residents and the various members of the local authority who fought to secure road access. Their contention that progress would come with the provision of a road connection with the outside world has been vindicated. That the progress came from tourism, and not from primary production or mining, in no way detracts from the victory.