

A short history of walking tracks in Queensland's National Parks

Compiled by Peter Savage

Although Queensland did not have the honour of seeing Australia's first National Park, it was probably the first state to have a system of walking tracks built to an engineering standard. (The first park was the Royal National Park in Sydney which was established in 1879.)

On 7 Nov 1906, the Hon JT Bell as Minister for Lands introduced an act to "provide for the reservation, management and protection of State Forests and National Parks. It became law on 14 Dec 1906. Just over 12 months later, Queensland's first National Park was set aside at Witches Falls, now part of the Mt Tamborine National Park.

Romeo Lahey worked hard throughout the early 1900's to convince the 1914/15 government to proclaim Lamington National Park. Following this success, he concentrated on his civil engineering practice. In the late 1920's he began to feel that there was again a need to put pressure on the government of the day. This led to the formation of the National Parks Association of Queensland in April 1930.

Many of the family names associated with this first meeting are still well known today. In late 1932 Romey Lahey and five others including three of the Groom family formed Queensland Holiday Resorts Ltd and built the guest house at Mt Roberts. The guest house continues to operate today as the Binna Burra Resort.

After constructing the road to the foot of the mountain and a slab sided kitchen to complement the guest tents, Romeo Lahey began constructing the first graded walking tracks. He started on Binna Burra land and later in 1936, with the permission of the Forestry Department and a subsidy from them, extended the tracks into the National Park.

This gave their visitors the opportunity to take in the scenery without having to worry about stumbling over rocks and roots and disappearing into the mud. The first track was developed along the route of the old-time horse trail from Beechmont to Mt Hobwee.

There is no doubt that Lahey put his engineering mind to work on these tracks and developed a very substantial basis for a track system that is still in use today.

From 1937/38 the Forestry Department took over the construction of walking tracks.

It is likely that the original engineering standards were further developed by the park staff of the day. A very useful specification was presented to the Secretary of the Forestry Department in 1950 by National Park Ranger J A Gresty. This specification forms the basis of what we teach today.

Many of Queensland's walking tracks have had many years of use. Here are some that I have been able to put a date to. By June 1956, the following Queensland National Parks had graded walking tracks (there were many other tracks that I have not been able to establish a date for):

Lamington - White Caves extension and West Canungra Creek Loop of the Main Border Track.

Main Range - Palm Grove Track, Palm Valley and West Gap Creek

Bunya Mountains - West Cliff, Cherry Plain and Westcott - Barkers Creek Track

Manorina - Main track completed 1948, Boombana.

Maiala - Greene's Falls extension.

Warrie (Springbrook) - Turramurra and Warrie entrance tracks, Canyon Lookout and Blackfellow Falls Circuit.

Gwongorella (Springbrook) - Purlingbrook Falls, Rankins Falls Circuit.

Palm Grove (Mt Tamborine) - Picnic Creek and Central Avenue Circuit

Joalah (Mt Tamborine) Most tracks are prior to 1939. 1956 - Creek walk and roadside entrance circuit.

Numinbah (Springbrook - Natural Arch) All tracks completed by 1956.

Noosa - Main track completed in 194?, 1956 - Pine Circuit, Palm Circuit and Ocean View Circuit.

Queen Mary Falls - All tracks complete by 1956.

Burleigh Heads - Most tracks constructed prior to 1949.

MacDonald Park (Mt Tamborine) - All tracks are prior to 1941.

Witches Falls (Mt Tamborine) - All tracks prior to 1941.

Kondallila - Construction of Falls Circuit Track.