

# World War II Trail



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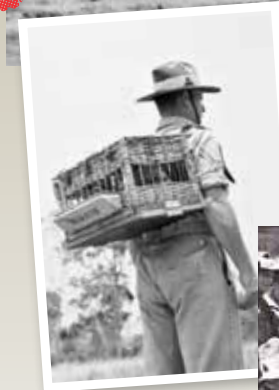
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Find out more at the network of information centres and museums across our region.



Above: Training young pigeons to return by rattling a tin of peas. 9 January 1945. Photo: AWM 085497

Left: The carrying method showing a four-bird collapsible basket. 9 January 1945. Photo: AWM 085464



Right: Captain HT Cornish lecturing Army personnel on care, handling, liberation and tactical use of birds. 9 January 1945. Photo: AWM 085488



## Pigeon Loft

Thousands of pigeons risked their lives in World War II. They helped win the war by delivering important messages from battlefields, ships and aircraft, often flying through bombardment and over long distances.

The headquarters for the 1st Pigeon Company were located at Barrine, and other companies at Wondecla. Pigeon recruits were kept for several weeks to get accustomed to their home.

Pigeons were often 'parachuted' into battle areas in small tin boxes where the message was exchanged and the birds then released to return to their lofts. Throughout World War II, several pigeons were awarded 'The Dickin Medal' — the equivalent to the Victoria Cross for animals. One pigeon carried a message from a sinking ship through a severe tropical storm — 64km in just 50min. The pigeon's efforts resulted in the salvage of valuable ammunition and equipment and the rescue of many men.



**Queensland Government**

The Regional Arts Development Fund is a partnership between the Queensland Government and Tablelands Regional Council to support local arts and culture in regional Queensland.



Corporal P Sansom of the 2/9th Australian Armoured Regiment beside a tank. Photo: AWM 056783

Lest we forget

## World War II Australia Under Threat

In 1942 Australia was preparing for the imminent threat of the advancing Japanese Imperial Army and Field Marshall Sir Thomas Blamey (2nd Australian Imperial Force) selected the Atherton Tablelands as a staging and training post. The area was ideal for recuperation and jungle warfare training and was close to resupply lines and battlefronts.

By December 1942 the Australian Army headquarters had transferred from Townsville to Atherton and Tolga. By January 1943 work had begun on the 13th Advanced Ordnance Depot in Tolga — the largest in North Queensland's history. The entire Tablelands region would soon have new infrastructure, amenities and hundreds of buildings.

Returning units from the 6th and 7th Divisions arrived after their Papuan campaign and established encampments around Ravenshoe, Wondecla and Wongabel. The 9th Division returned from North Africa and set up camps in the Kairi, Danbulla and Tinaroo areas. By the end of September 1944, 689 units were spread across the Tablelands.

The Atherton Tableland's population boomed with the additional 100,000 military personnel, and the nearby Rocky Creek area became the site for the largest field hospital in the Southern Hemisphere.

## Rocky Creek Hospital Precinct

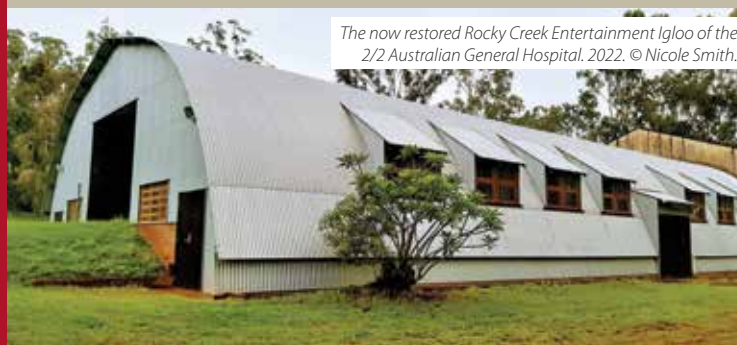
During World War II Rocky Creek was the site of two hospitals, a convalescent depot, a malaria research laboratory, ambulance services, kitchens, laundries, workshops and its own railway station.

The Atherton Tablelands were the focus for troops in training, transit and for medical support at the height of World War II in the Pacific (1943–45). This region was ideal because it:

- was close to the action in both South-East Asia and the South-West Pacific
- provided a safe tropical environment for jungle warfare training
- was free of malaria.

The Rocky Creek War Memorial Park was established in 1995 and, on VP Day that year, it commemorated the service of military personnel who served in the Pacific during World War II, trained on the Tablelands and were part of the militia (National Servicemen). VP Day is commemorated here each year on the closest Sunday to 15 August.

Following the end of the war, military buildings were sold at auction and relocated. The igloo at Rocky Creek was purchased by the Frazer family and became a private residence. In 1996 the Frazers donated the igloo to Atherton Shire Council and, in 2015, the Atherton Rotary Club took on the arduous task of restoration. It is now a heritage-listed community hall available for functions.



The now restored Rocky Creek Entertainment Igloo of the 2/2 Australian General Hospital, 2022. © Nicole Smith.

## Quick Facts

- 43 trains and railmotors were recorded in one day at Tolga Railway Station.
- The daily bed average at Rocky Creek peaked at 1760 in September 1944.
- More than 13,000 7th Division personnel attended sports days.
- The Army produced their own newspaper 'Table Tops' with two print runs a day, seven days a week.



The Tivoli concert party ballet in the dressing room of the Rocky Creek Entertainment Igloo, 13 October 1943. Photo: AWM 0048887

## Rocky Creek Igloo

The igloo was constructed in 1943 and used for church services, dances, movies and travelling shows until 1945. Private Phyllis Hill from the 2/2nd Australian General Hospital recalls assisting with the dance preparations. Greenery was gathered and the concrete floor prepared to a glass-like surface.

## 13th Advance Ordnance Depot

One of the largest Australian Army depots was established on the hillslope west of Tolga. The complex consisted of over 150 buildings, 18 igloo storage sheds, salvage and repair yards and a jeep vehicle park with over 4000 vehicles. Staff numbered over 1000, including 200 members of the Australian Women's Army Service. The depot had its own butcher shop, mess huts, open-air picture theatre and two tennis courts. Visit the Tolga Museum to see the site plans and photographs.

Heavy carriage gun at the 13th Advance Ordnance Depot in Tolga, 4 November 1944. Photo: AWM 065728



## Tolga Ammunition Depot Accident

After the war, personnel began the slow and dangerous task of clearing ammunition depots. On 29 November 1946 a spark ignited a load of cordite, causing a massive explosion and killing three personnel. Private Robert Alastair Breingan, Private Graham William Brown and Lieutenant Frank Stuart-Boyle were the last to be buried at the Atherton War Cemetery.

## Atherton War Cemetery

Atherton has the third largest of the 14 war cemeteries in Queensland and the cemetery has a Cross of Sacrifice, which represents Commonwealth War Cemeteries that have more than 40 burials. The first burial was on 4 January 1943 and the last on 1 December 1946. The cemetery has 151 Australian Army graves, 12 Royal Australian Air Force graves and one Young Men's Christian Association grave.

Chaplain DL Redding at the funeral of Corporal CW Luke, 7 Division Signals, 12 December 1944. Photo: AWM 084382



Members of the maintenance staff of the 7th Division at the Ordnance Vehicle Park in Tolga, 24 February 1944. Photo: AWM 064528

Blankets at the 5 Returned stores depot in Tolga, 7 March 1945. Photo: AWM 087307



# World War II Trail Map

## Museums & World War II Historical Sites of the Tablelands

### Atherton

- Australian Army Canteen** — Merriland Hall at Atherton Showground
- Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery** — 222 Rockley Road
- Golden Grove Rations Store** — 11 Grant Street
- Officers' Quarters** — Barron Valley Hotel
- Signals Division HQ Plaque** — brick building on the corner of Main and Robert Streets

### Barrine

- 2/1st Convalescent Depot** — Lake Barrine (Crater Lakes National Park), Gillies Highway

### Herberton

- Herberton Historic Village** — Kennedy Highway
- Herberton Mining Museum** — Jacks Street

### Kairi

- 5th Australian Farm Company** — State Farm Road
- 67 Wireless Section** — Shead Road
- Division sportsground** — paddock on Sorrensen Road
- North Trig Base** — corner of Sorrensen and Pasetti Roads
- Rations store from Atherton** — building to the left of Kairi Hotel, Irvine Street

### Malanda

- Eacham Historical Society Research Centre** — James Street
- Entertainment Igloo from Tinaroo township** — Patrick English Pavilion, Malanda Showground
- Malanda RSL** — Catherine Street

### Millaa Millaa

- 2/2nd Australian General Hospital operating theatre from Rocky Creek** — RSL Hall, Oak Street
- Eacham Historical Society Museum** — Main Street

### Millstream & Ravenshoe

- Fireplace monument** — Millstream Parade (600m from highway)
- Millstream Memorial Plaque** — lookout, Millstream Falls Road
- Millstream WWII Heritage Walk** — Millstream Falls National Park
- Officers' Quarters and Mess** — Ravenshoe Hotel, Grigg Street
- School of Arts** — Corner of Grigg Street and Wakooka Road
- World War II display** — Ravenshoe Visitor Centre, Moore Street

### Rocky Creek

- Entertainment Igloo (Original site of 2/2nd Australian General Hospital)** — Frazer Road
- Rocky Creek War Memorial Park** — Kennedy Highway

### Tinaroo

- Division campsites and headquarters** — Anders Park, Black Gully Road
- Fireplace remains** — 600m before Lamb Street intersection on Tinaroo Falls Dam Road
- World War II monument** — corner of Tinaroo Falls Road and Lamb Street

### Tolga

- Tolga Historical Society and Museum** — Kennedy Highway

### Tumoulin

- Railway station** — Tumoulin-Ravenshoe Road

### Wondecla

- 6th Division memorial plaque** — near grandstand at Wondecla Sportsground, Kennedy Highway



Lest we forget



## Australian Women's Land Army (AWLA)

The shortage of men meant women were enlisted to help on farms and the AWLA provided training in previously male-dominated roles, and found them positions on rural properties. This was a major help to farmers on the Atherton Tablelands who were growing food for the large numbers of troops. The AWLA received very modest wages, especially compared to the men. Many worked up to 48 hours a week for as little as 30 shillings.

Above: Matron Dean giving a physical training drill to a squad of Australian Women's Land Army personnel in Atherton. 24 October 1943. Photo: AWM 05889

Below: Rear view of the officers' quarters at the Barron Valley Hotel in Atherton. 2 July 1943. Photo: AWM 053954



Above: 1943 recruitment poster. Photo: AWM ARTV08836

## Barron Valley Hotel

In 1943 the Barron Valley Hotel was requisitioned by the Australian Army as the officers' quarters and mess. Field Marshall Sir Thomas Blamey, Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Military Forces, resided there before moving to Port Moresby, and the Australian Women's Army served as waitresses, cooks and bar staff.



## Artists at War

For centuries military art has recorded valuable insight into past conflicts, military life and the impacts of war. World War II war artists were posted to the Atherton Tablelands to document military life, while other personnel used their spare time to paint and sketch. The diversity of their works has jointly left a rich, visual history of the region. Visit Rocky Creek War Memorial Park for information of some of these important artists and examples of their work.

Below: 'Bathers' painted by William Dargie of Lake Barrine Convalescent Camp. 1943. Photo: AWM ART22156



Above: Painting of Corporal Dickinson operating radio, Atherton Tablelands by Lieutenant EA Douglas Watson. 1944. Photo: AWM ART21030

William Dargie painting at the Acropolis. 1945. Photo: AWM 130313



## Sir William Dargie

Sir William Dargie was a distinguished war artist who documented Australian troops on the Atherton Tablelands. To thank the local family who hosted him, he created a painting on a wooden wardrobe door of a soldier sitting on a toilet reading the local paper — in the likeness of General Douglas MacArthur! The painting was later donated to a local church and auctioned in 1973. With Tablelands locals unable to raise the funds, an American military art collector paid £7000 for the artwork, a sum equivalent to over £90,000 (\$170,000) today.