

The Cri in Rocky.

Back in 1968, 38 Sqn sent one (or was it two) Caribous up to Shoalwater Bay near Rockhampton where 7RAR and 9RAR were field training prior to being sent across to Vietnam.

The Caribous were meant to keep both 'teams' supplied with food, fuel and other requirements and to transport personnel in and out of Rocky as and when required. All good training prior to a posting to Vietnam.

Accompanying the Caribous were a number of Iroquois choppers from 5 Sqn and a Winjeel from Pt Cook that was to act as an FAC. The Army had a couple of their mighty little Porters too.

I can remember flying into Rocky airport, refuelling then flying out to Shoalwater bay, which I think was called "Pink-lily Swamp" and being shown our 'tent-line' where we were expected to sleep, live and maintain a couple of aircraft. Our boss had a look at the conditions, said "thank you - but no thanks" to Army and we all climbed back on our aircraft and returned to Rocky Airport where we set up our maintenance facilities. I can't remember what happened to the 5 Sqn mob or the Winjeelers, or the Porter people, but that was their problem, we were just happy we didn't have to play Army out in the bush. With maintenance facilities sorted, it was time to look for some accommodation.

After a bit of haggling, we settled on the majestic old Criterion Hotel which is on Quay St, overlooking the Fitzroy River.

Being 24 year old young blokes, we didn't realise or care much about the history or the significance of the Criterion, to us it was a million times better than a tent in the bush, it was an adventure, we had a comfy bed, 'proper' showers, good food, access to a cold beer at the end of the day and being only a short walk from the centre of Rocky, there was a fair chance there would be a bunch of girls who we 'knew' were just waiting to meet us.





It's only now, after all those years when we revisit Rocky and look back on those exciting few weeks that we realise what a great old Pub the "Cri" is.

In 1855, prior to the separation of Queensland in 1859, the New South Wales Government had requested that William Henry Wiseman the Commissioner for Leichardt, locate a suitable place on the Fitzroy River for a settlement. Rockhampton's name and place had been decided on in 1856 although the settlement was not officially proclaimed a town until 25 October 1858. In 1857 a Mr Palmer erected a store in Rockhampton and soon after a Richard Parker, who had been living in Gayndah which at that time was the town of most importance north of Maryborough and Ipswich, moved east to Rocky and erected an iron-bark slab and shingle roof pub which he called The Bush Inn.

In 1858 the discovery of the Canoona goldfield rapidly changed the fortune of the Bush Inn which enjoyed overwhelming patronage and clientele over the four months that the rush lasted. In 1859-60, it was enlarged and rebuilt, the entrance to the public bar was from the corner of Fitzroy Street and Quay Lane, and the business premises extended back along Quay Lane. The layout of the Bush Inn now included a coffee room approached through a garden, and a billiard room at the Fitzroy Street end of the building.



Parker died in 1860 and his widow Maria, kept the Inn going until remarrying a John Watt in 1861. The Bush Inn was sold in 1862 to a John Ward who changed the name from the Bush Inn to the Criterion Hotel which it has remained ever since.

In 1889, with wealth from the mine at nearly Mt Morgan contributing to the development of the town, the hotel was rebuilt and on completion was the finest hotel in central Queensland. At the time it was considered way ahead of its time containing such 'modern' conveniences as gas-lighting and toilets with ample ventilation.

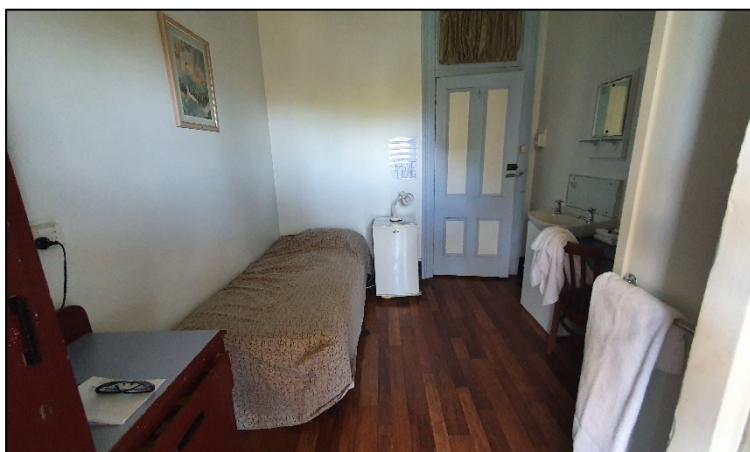
The Hotel became well known for the black tie balls and dinner parties that were held within its walls from the turn of the century until the 1950s. It has also hosted many distinguished visitors during its existence including Prince Henry, Duke of Gloucester (when Governor-General), his wife Princess Alice, the former Prime Minister of Australia Sir Robert Menzies, Dame Nellie Melba, Sir Donald Bradman, and Charles Kingsford Smith. Sporting teams such as the touring English cricket sides have also been accommodated at the Hotel and during the second world war it was commandeered for the use of American service personnel. It also served for a period of time as the headquarters of General Robert L. Eichelberger who was on the staff of General Douglas MacArthur. Eichelberger commanded over 70 000 American troops stationed within the Rockhampton region.



We were in Rocky early in October 2021 and of course had to have a look at the old girl once again. We approached Ryan Turnbull, the current owner, and asked if we could have a look around and he was gracious enough to give us a key to our old room. Back in 1968 we 'lived' in the room below (arrowed) which we thought was royal like and that all our birthdays had come at once.



Not a lot had changed in the room since we'd left it over 50 years ago, we noticed the addition of a small fridge which obviously doubled as a bed side cabinet and a small shower cubicle on the right foreground in the pic. Previously communal showers and toilet facilities were "down the hall" but as that was what we 'enjoyed' in our accommodation block back at Richmond, we just accepted that as the norm.



The view out on the balcony was just as pleasant as we remembered it, though it has been upgraded considerably. Years back there was a grass verge on the other side of the road which contained a small shelter shed type construction directly opposite our window.



The current view from the top floor balcony. Years prior, the area beyond that little white car was all lawn and a shelter shed stood about where that person is walking.



The dining room layout has also changed. Once it was a very formal affair, with starched white linen table clothes, silver cutlery and a [dinner chime](#) announcing meal time.



The corner bar hasn't changed a lot, still old school, comfortable with plenty of wood panelling.

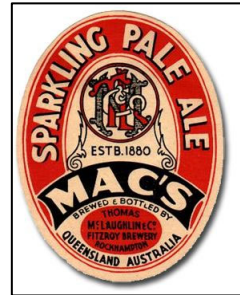


But the rest of the hotel has been very tastefully redeveloped.



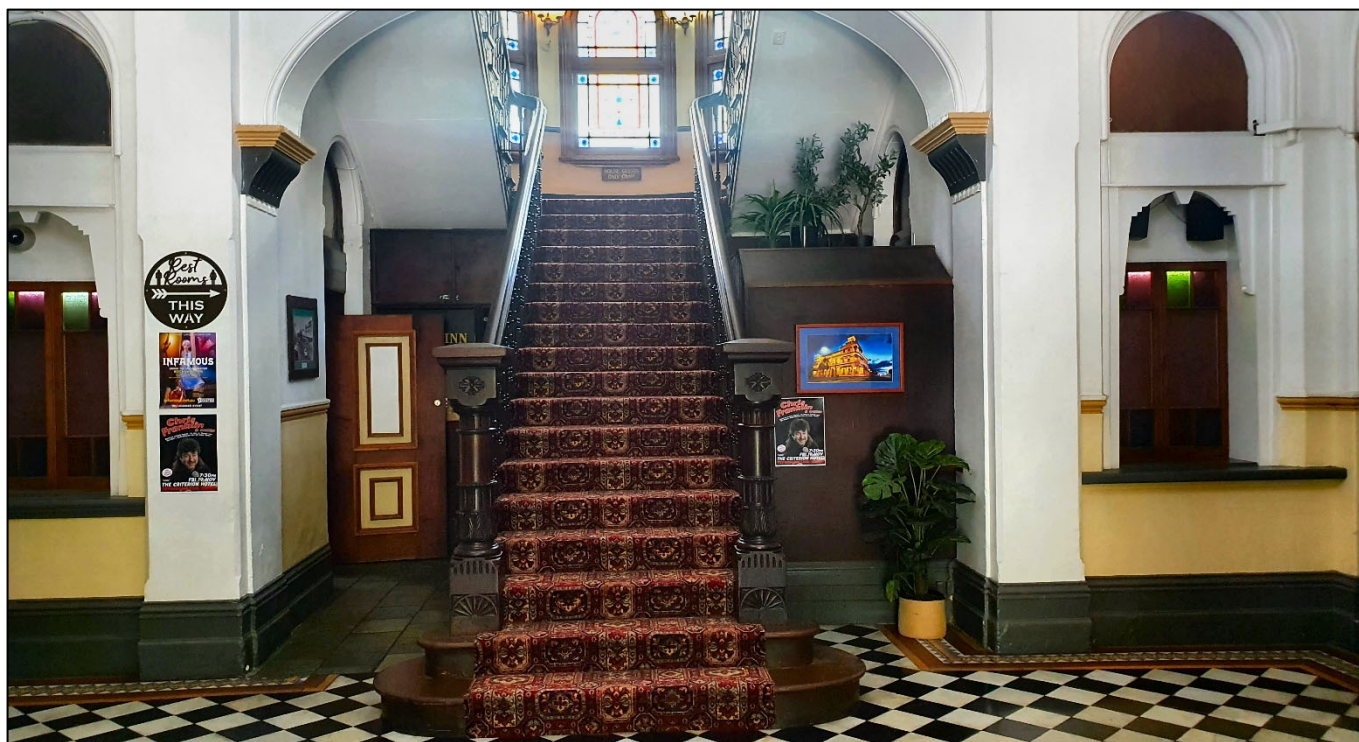
The Bush Inn Bar and Grill used to be a small bar area that sold Mac's beer in tiny 4oz (120ml) glasses. As the standard drinking glass size in NSW back then was the 10 oz (300ml) middie we couldn't believe anyone would want to drink a beer from such a small glass.

In 1961, like most small independent breweries back then, Mac's was gobbled up by CUB which continued to produce and sell the brew until 1976 when it was closed down.



The little bar was completely remodelled and is now this attractive bar and grill lounge area (below).





The grand entrance to the hotel has been retained.

If ever you get the chance to visit Rocky, make sure you put the Criterion on your “must see” list. Pop in and say hello to Ryan Turnbull and spend a few hours enjoying a fine meal and a couple of cold ones in a fabulous location.

Rocky itself is a must see town, with a population of nearly 81,000 people, it contains some wonderful old buildings, built back in time when gold was found in the area.



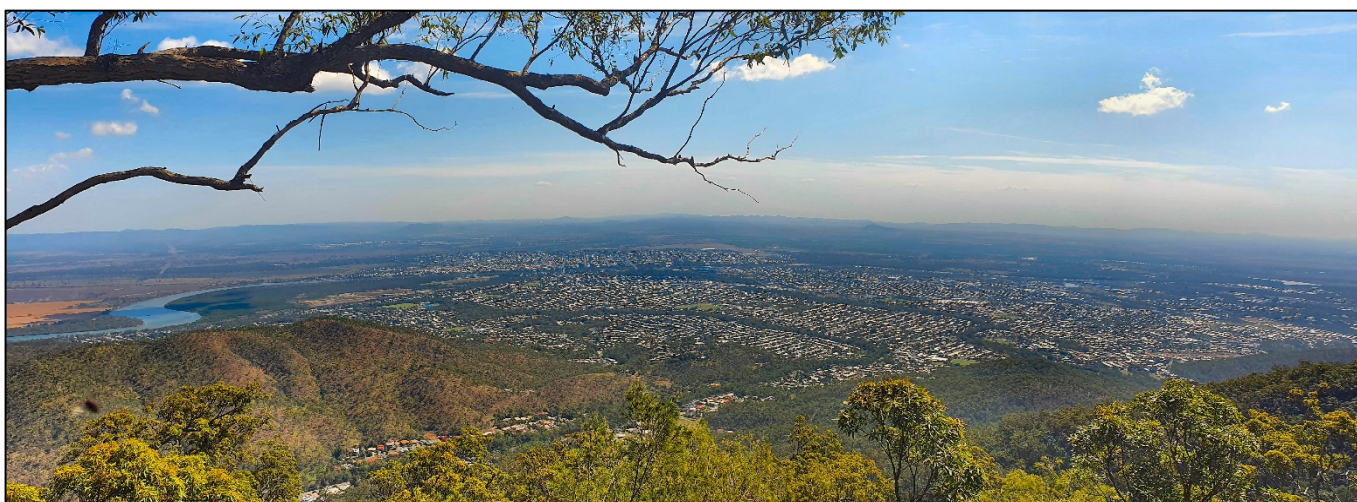
The catholic Cathedral.



The Rocky Post Office.



The Boathouse licenced restaurant on the Fitzroy River. Great for breakfast, lunch, dinner or just a drink or two.



And a trip to Rocky would not be complete without a trip to the top of Mount Archer lookout.

There are a few ways of getting there, it's about 640km north of Brisbane so you can drive it in one day although at the moment there are lots of road works along the way which will slow you down. You can fly, Qantas, Virgin, Sunstate, Air New Zealand, Singapore and Etihad all offer a service to Rocky but our method of choice is to take the Tilt Train. This wonderful service leaves Brisbane at 11.00am and gets into Rocky at 6.50pm daily. If you're a TPI or EDA, it's free. If you're a pensioner a business class seat is only \$92.50 and a full adult fare is \$157.25 each way. Economy is pensioner \$67.50 and full fare \$101.25.



It gets along, reaching speeds just over 160kph and the food on board is excellent and keenly priced. Our suggestion, go business class. Seats are superb.

