The Wet Tropics - World Heritage Area

The Wet Tropics World Heritage Area lies between Tullyville and Cooktown on the north-east coast of Queensland and covers an area of 694,407 hectares. The Wet Tropics is renowned for scenic panoramas of rainforest canopy from mountain lookouts, rivers that carve through rugged gorges and cascade into freshwater swimming holes, giant trees and ferns from ancient era and colloquies from the animal kingdom. It has Australia’s greatest diversity of animals and plants within an area of just 0.26% of the continent. Many plant and animal species in the Wet Tropics are found nowhere else in the world. The diverse range of vegetation communities are habitat to numerous rare and threatened species.

The Wet Tropics has the oldest continuously surviving tropical rainforests on earth. They are a living museum of how life plants have evolved since the breakup of Gondwana 400 million years ago, from ancient ferns, conifers and cycads to the more highly evolved flowering plants. The Wet Tropics is also a living record of the evolutionary history of animals — being home to some species that have changed little since ancient times such as the musky rat-kangaroo and the echidnas.

Lake Morris / Copperloade Falls Dam

A Water Reserve within a Wet Tropics World Heritage Area

Lake Morris
(No Water Activities Permitted on Lake)

Intake Tower

Aeration House

Compressed air from the Aeration House mixes the water to maintain water quality

Copperloade Falls Dam Spillway
(Site of Copperloade Falls)

Copperloade Falls Dam Wall

Intake Tower feeds water into the Cone Valve

Cone Valve releases Environmental Flow into creek

Water Discharge Outlet
Outlet capacity: 1230ML/day (24 hrs)

Water Discharge to Crystal Cascades & Tunnel Hill Treatment plant

Downstream intake valves to underground pipes that carry water to the treatment plant

Water Reservoir

Copperloade Falls Dam Statistics

The dam comprises a 1 km high dam and a 183m high earthen embankment that is 1224m in length. This embankment has a crest level of 403.84m AHD and a height of 6.4m and took 5 years to construct.

A brief history

Freshwater Creek was the original source of Cairns’ water supply. Population growth led to the need for another water source. In 1936, former Cairns City engineer, Mr. P.R. Morris, discovered what he regarded as a suitable site for a dam to store water. Subsequent surveys confirmed his estimate. Eventually government approval for the construction of an earth and rock fill dam of Copperloade Falls near the headwaters of Freshwater Creek was given. The original construction cost was estimated at $1,000,000 but by completion on March 25, 1970, the actual cost had risen to approximately $4,400,000. The total area cleared was 235 hectares. The rock and earth fill dam impounds 37,000 megalitres of water and has a raw water storage area of 445ha.

The dam was officially named Lake Morris in honour of the man who located the site and had the foresight to see its water storage potential for Cairns. Additional water supply to now provided from Behana Creek with investigations into another water supply for Cairns’ increasing population in progress.