

THE CENTRAL COAST



LUDWIG LEICHHARDT on his expedition to **Port Essington** in 1844–45 provided, in his own words, ‘a peep behind the curtain’ into the Central Coast region of Queensland. Within the region he named the Dawson, Comet, Mackenzie and Isaac rivers, the **Peak Downs** and other geographical features. Early in 1847 his second expedition reached the Peak Downs but was forced to turn back because of incessant summer rains and consequent fevers. At this time the region had already been occupied for at least 30 000 years by Aborigines identified under group names including Darambal, Bayali, Kangulu and Goreng Goreng. Their estimated population was six or seven thousand.

The coast and offshore islands (later named the Capricorn and Bunker groups) had been known to Europeans since Capt James Cook’s northward voyage in 1770: he anchored overnight in Keppel Bay (see Rockhampton), naming the bay and the islands. In 1802 Matthew Flinders charted and named Port Curtis (see Gladstone), explored the Narrows separating Curtis Island from the mainland, and spent a week in Keppel Bay, though he failed to identify the large river which emptied into it. John Oxley named the Boyne River in 1823 while examining and dismissing Port Curtis as a suitable site for a northern penal establishment. The first European settlement in the region was British prime minister William Gladstone’s abortive Colony of North Australia founded by Col Barney at Port Curtis on 30 January 1847 and disbanded by Gladstone’s successor on 15 April 1847.

The northern thrust of pastoral exploration commenced in the early 1850s. Charles and William Archer, advised by Leichhardt of the probability of a large river flowing into Keppel Bay, reached and named the Fitzroy River (see Rockhampton) in May 1853. They took up pastoral runs in 1854 and established Gracemere station (see Rockhampton) in August 1855. By the early 1860s the great northern land rush had effectively secured leasehold titles to the region’s so-called ‘waste lands of the crown’. The Aborigines resisted fiercely and frontier warfare continued for about twenty years.

The squatters with their flocks only thinly populated the region, but in 1858 the Canoona gold rush brought thousands to **Rockhampton**. The town, named by W.H. Wiseman in 1856, developed rapidly as a river port. It soon overshadowed **Gladstone** on Port Curtis where Charles FitzRoy had installed Capt Maurice O’Connell as government resident in April 1854. Having arrived in the *Calliope*, FitzRoy named the Calliope River to commemorate the occasion. In 1862 the goldmining township of **Calliope** came into existence, ultimately becoming headquarters of the Calliope Shire, which includes the Boyne valley.

In the **Rockhampton** district goldmining townships sprang up during the 1860s at Crocodile Creek (later **Bouldercombe**), where anti-Chinese riots occurred in 1867, Cawarral and Ridgeland. Both gold and copper were discovered at **Clermont** on the **Peak Downs**. Gemstones were mined at **Anakie** in the 1890s and have been periodically mined ever since. By far the most significant event, however, was the Morgan brothers’ rediscovery in 1882 of rich gold in ironstone 41 km southwest of Rockhampton. They called their claim **Mount Morgan** and by the 1890s it was recognised as the richest single goldmine in the world. Mount Morgan millionaires included Walter Hall (benefactor of the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute in **Melbourne**) and William Knox D’Arcy. It was Mount Morgan gold that financed the Persian oil search which made D’Arcy a millionaire for the second time. Mount Morgan’s population peaked at 16 000 early this century; it is now about 3000.

Wool and gold, the two commodities on which Central Queensland was founded, were replaced by beef and coal. By the late 1860s beef cattle herds, initially Shorthorn but later Hereford, pushed the sheep flocks further west. Lakes Creek meatworks, established in **Rockhampton** in 1871, ultimately became the largest export works in the Southern Hemisphere. Since World War II a livestock 'revolution' has occurred with the introduction of Zebu blood to more than 80 per cent of the regional herd. Central coastal Queensland is now the most densely populated beef cattle region in Australia, with a total herd of over two million. Rockhampton, 'the beef capital of Australia', steadily grew to a population of 56 000 by the 1980s. Almost a century earlier it had narrowly missed becoming the capital of a separate state.

The Fitzroy Basin Brigalow Land Development Scheme that began in 1962 not only doubled cattle numbers on four million hectares but also led to increased broadacre cropping, chiefly of sunflower, sorghum, safflower and wheat. **Clermont**, **Capella**, **Emerald** and **Springsure** in the Central Highlands and Baralaba, **Moura** and **Biloela** in the Dawson valley service the grain as well as the coal industry. These subregions include the country discovered by Ludwig Leichhardt who truthfully said: 'if water were plentiful, the downs of the Peak Range would be inferior to no country in the world . . .'

At the junction of the Comet and Mackenzie rivers, Leichhardt also found 'good coal' on 10 January 1845, the first indication of the mighty Bowen Basin coal beds. By the 1980s coal from the region dominated Queensland's export trade. While it had been mined in small quantities at **Blair Athol**, Baralaba, **Blackwater** and Ogmoo in the first half of the twentieth century, it was in the 1960s that the great export trade to Japan commenced. Japanese, US and Queensland interests began open-cut mining at Kianga (see Moura) in 1961. US interests also developed huge coal deposits at **Blackwater** during that decade.

While **Blackwater** and **Moura** grew from existing townships, completely new mining towns were created in the late 1960s and 1970s on former cattle runs at Middlemount, **Moranbah**, Dysart and Tieri to service six open cuts and one underground mine. Unlike the early goldfield shantytowns, the new coal towns were planned with high-standard housing, reticulated water, sewerage, electricity, shopping centres and schools. Native trees were retained wherever possible. The new urban areas with their range of social and sporting facilities provide attractive living conditions for populations of up to 9000.

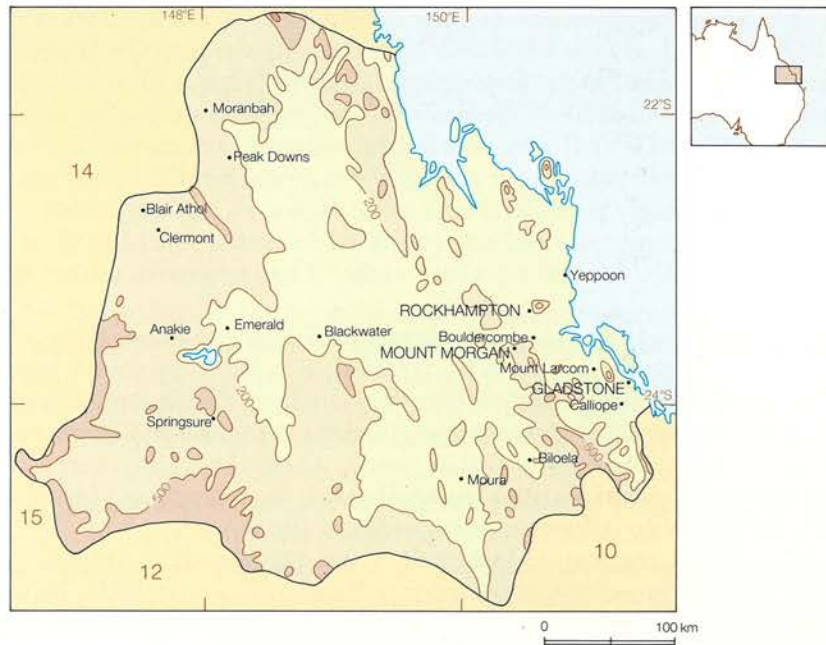
These postwar primary and industrial developments brought dramatic changes to **Gladstone**. Despite early recognition of its magnificent harbour, it remained a sleepy pastoral port for a century after its establishment. Its awakening came with shipments of coal to Japanese markets through the port. Then in 1964, Queensland Alumina Ltd began building on its shores the largest alumina refinery in the world. This was followed by more coal and grain loading facilities, a huge power station, the Comalco smelter on Boyne Island and other heavy industries. Within a few years its population increased from 7000 to 25 000. Rejected by Oxley in 1823, abandoned by Barney in 1847, ignored by early Queensland governments, Gladstone's potential was fulfilled when its export tonnage exceeded that of the port of **Brisbane**.

Central coastal Queensland with its rich primary and mineral resources, its peaceful offshore islands and coral reefs, now provides a balance between industrial and recreational enterprises with tourism complementing the older industries.

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SUGGESTED READING

- J. Kerr, *Mount Morgan: gold, copper and oil*, St Lucia 1982.
 K. Killin, *Drovers, diggers and draglines: a history of Blair Athol and Clermont*, Brisbane 1984.
 L. McDonald, *Rockhampton: a history of city and district*, St Lucia 1981.

**ANAKIE** [23°33'S 147°45'E]

Popn: 52 (1911), 96 (1954), 78 (1961). Name: Aborig = 'twin peaks'. Anakie Gemfield of 216 sq km, is probably world's largest known sapphire deposit. Kairi group of Aborigs used precious stones for barter. Sapphire field discov by Europeans in the mid-1870s. Major mining from 1890, area declared a mining field in 1902. Many diggers moved here from **Clermont** when latter washed out in 1906. Townships of Rubyvale (popn: 235 (1911), 59 (1961), 569 (1981)) and Sapphire grew. Qld govt marketed gems from World War I until 1926. Rubyvale and Sapphire Gem Miners' Assoc formed in the 1930s to market stones. Best deposits worked out by 1935, but renewed demand from the 1950s. Star of Queensland, best black star sapphire in world, found in 1934; cut as Presidents' Heads Sapphire, now in Smithsonian Institute, New York.

BILOELA [24°25'S 150°30'E]

Popn: 429 (1933), 2048 (1961), 4643 (1981). Name: Aborig = 'cockatoo'. Charles Archer explored lower Dawson R in 1850, town stands on original Prospect station taken up by him in 1852. Coal first discov on Callide station in the 1890s: lease granted in 1900, but mine not developed until open cut estab in 1944 by State Electricity Commission. Dam built in 1966 for irrigation and to supply power station. Upper Burnett and Callide Land Settlement Bill of 1923 led to closer settlement in district. Callide Cotton Research Station estab in 1923, became Biloela Research Farm in 1962: cotton remains an important district crop. Greycliffe homestead (RNE) at Rannes.

BLACKWATER [23°34'S 148°53'E]

Popn: 106 (1911), 63 (1947), 77 (1961), 1984 (1971), 5434 (1981). Descriptive name due to dark colour of

local waterholes. Ludwig Leichhardt discov coal in district in 1844–45. Town laid out in 1886. Earliest attempt at mining coal was in 1892–93, followed by intermittent activity including mine at Rangal that operated from 1922 to 1934. Exploratory drilling from 1958 and thick coking coal seam discov southwest of town in 1962 when town popn about twenty-five. Mine opened in 1968. By 1983–84, popn had grown to about 8000. Three companies mining in area by both open-cut and underground methods producing coking coal for export and steaming coal for **Gladstone** power station: total output in early 1980s was 7m tonnes per year. Aust's only anthracite mine at nearby Yarrabee.

BLAIR ATHOL [22°41'S 147°32'E]

Popn: 221 (1911), 532 (1954), 240 (1966). Named after village in Perthshire, Scotland. Coal discov in 1864. Open-cut coalmine, Aust's first, opened in 1937 on 33 m thick coal seam, thickest in Southern Hemisphere. Rlwy opened in 1910. Conzinc Riotinto of Aust took over the two existing companies in 1968, then greatly developed open cut in 1975, leading to shifting of town and people to **Clermont**. Further expansion in 1980s to supply steaming coal to Japan.

BOULDERCOMBE [23°33'S 150°29'E]

Popn: 149 (1876), 294 (1961), 196 (1966). Also formerly known as Crocodile Creek. Gold discov in 1865, rush of about 2000 miners by late 1866 when field proclaimed. Violent anti-Chinese riots over claim pegging in 1867. Usher Reef mine opened in 1897, had a township of about 1000 by 1901. Crocodile Creek Gold Dredging Co floated in 1934 and worked area until 1944. Hector Reef, between here and **Rockhampton**, had first crushing machine in Qld in 1867.

CALLIOPE [24°01'S 151°12'E]

Popn: 250 (1871), 202 (1891), 516 (1911), 299 (1961), 728 (1981). Diggings earlier known as Nuggety Gully, but name changed when river named by Gov Charles FitzRoy after HMS *Calliope* in 1854. Area surveyed and opened for settlement in 1853–54, a number of stations taken up by 1855. Alluvial gold discov on river in 1853: find on Carrara station in 1858. Calliope goldfield officially proclaimed in 1863, the first in Qld. Popn of about 800 in 1864, but gold and popn dwindling by 1870. First hotel, the Diggers Arms, built in the 1860s, still operating. Town site surveyed in 1871, school estab in 1872. Much land subdivision and agric development in the 1970s; also shale oil exploration. Affected by rapid growth of Gladstone.

CLERMONT [22°49'S 147°39'E]

Popn: 821 (1868), 1955 (1901), 1659 (1981). Named after town of Clermont-Ferrand, France, birthplace of early settler. Originally known as Hood's Lagoon. District explored by Ludwig Leichhardt in 1845, first European settlers in early 1850s. Gold discov in 1861, town surveyed following year. First gold escort left for Rockhampton in 1863: about 1000 diggers at peak, but field declined from 1870 following severe flooding and gold discoveries nearer to Rockhampton. Had also become centre for pastoral industry and local coalmining from the 1860s. Rlwy opened in 1884. Chinese removed from goldfield after racial troubles in 1888. Flood in 1916 claimed 62 lives: town then shifted to present, higher site. Now residential centre for Blair Athol coalfield. Former nearby town of Copperfield had popn of 1430 in 1878, having become a municipality in 1872, 12 yrs after copper was discovered.

EMERALD [23°31'S 148°10'E]

Popn: 406 (1891), 2029 (1961), 4628 (1981). Named after Emerald Downs station estab by P.F. McDonald in c1860. 'Dig' tree inscribed by Ludwig Leichhardt on 1844 Port Essington expedition nearby. Some gold and copper mining in district in the 1860s. Began as rlwy town in 1879: large timber rlwy station (RNE, Nat T) built in 1900. Flour mill estab in 1897. Fairbairn Dam built in 1972 for irrigation: sunflowers an important crop. Town boosted by opening of the Gregory open-cut coalmine in 1980.

GLADSTONE [23°51'S 151°16'E]

Popn: 224 (1856), 215 (1861), 5244 (1947), 7181 (1961), 12 426 (1966), 22 083 (1981). Named after the colonial secretary W.E. Gladstone who advocated settlement of Northern Aust as new colony with capital at Port Curtis. Bustard Head to south named by Capt James Cook in 1770; Port Curtis by Matthew Flinders in 1802. Coast explored by John Oxley in *Mermaid* in 1823, and entrance to Port Curtis surveyed by Owen Stanley in HMS *Rattlesnake* in 1848. Settlement estab at Port Curtis in 1847 with 200 convicts under Lieut-Col Barney, but abandoned later that year after change of mind by Colonial Office on Gladstone's replacement. Region proclaimed as new district in 1854 and opened to settlers: town of Gladstone grew on site of earlier settlement. Moves to make this the capital of Qld on separation failed. Enormous increase in port traffic, industrial activity and popn since mid-1960s. Qld Alumina Pty Ltd alumina refinery at Parson's Point came into production and first shipment took place in 1967. Plant extended a number of times to become the world's largest single-stream alumina plant: covers 80 ha, produces 2.5m tonnes of alumina each yr from



After extensions in 1973 the alumina refinery at Gladstone was the largest in the world. The refinery dominates Gladstone's townscape. Photograph by John Houldsworth, 1981.

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