

# The Aboriginal prospectors and miners of North Queensland's Gold and Mineral fields, from pre-contact times to ca. 1950.

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Kitty Pluto 1932, aged 55 (CHS)

# Tradition to present

- Aborigines were miners using sophisticated underground and pit mining methods
- They used post-extraction treatment processes
- They had explanatory story for mineral occurrence
- They adapted traditional knowledge of minerals, mining and treatment processes to post contact mining (technology transfer)
- They also adapted other traditional technology to mining eg. 'yandying'
- They were integral to the north Queensland mining industry as prospectors and miners

Open pit mining at Lake Moondarra  
for greenstone axe material

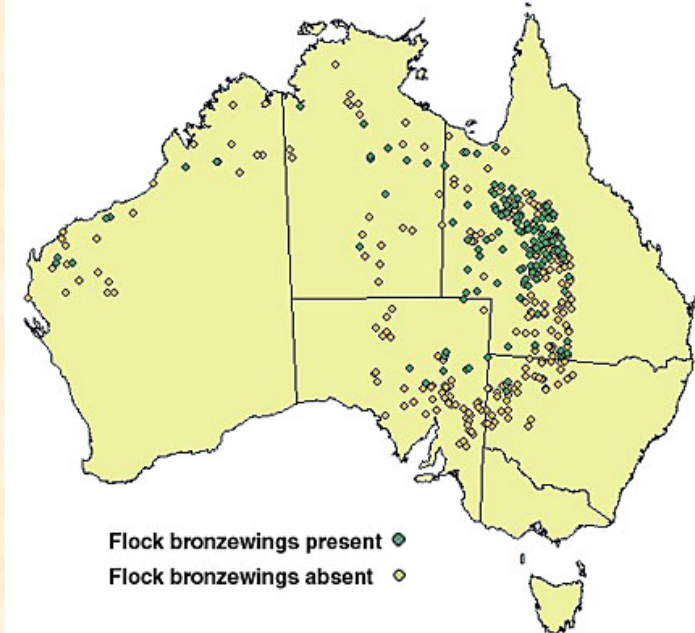




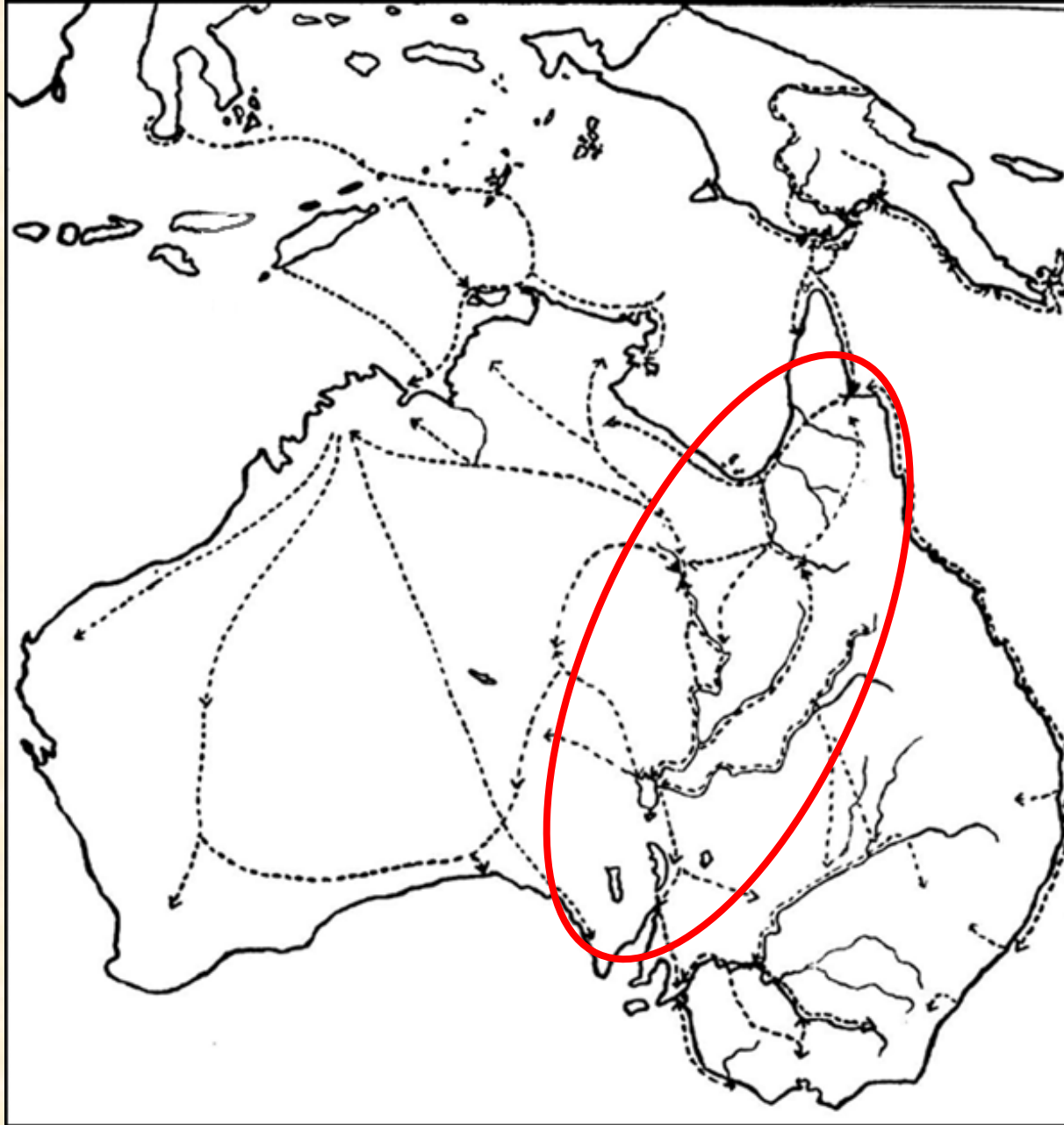
# Marnbi's journey

(Bronzewing Pigeon, *Phaps chalcopter*)

- Mining story
- Creation of minerals
- **Gold** eg Broken Hill, Tibbooburra
- **Copper** eg Cloncurry, Mt Isa
- **Grinding stones** (sandstone) – eg. Mt Isa, Parachilna
- **Opals** eg. Quilpie, White Cliffs, Cooper Pedy
- Traded around Australia
- Most of these – economic minerals for Europeans too



# Principal trade routes of pre-colonial Aboriginal Australia





# Zillmanton Mine and Marnbi

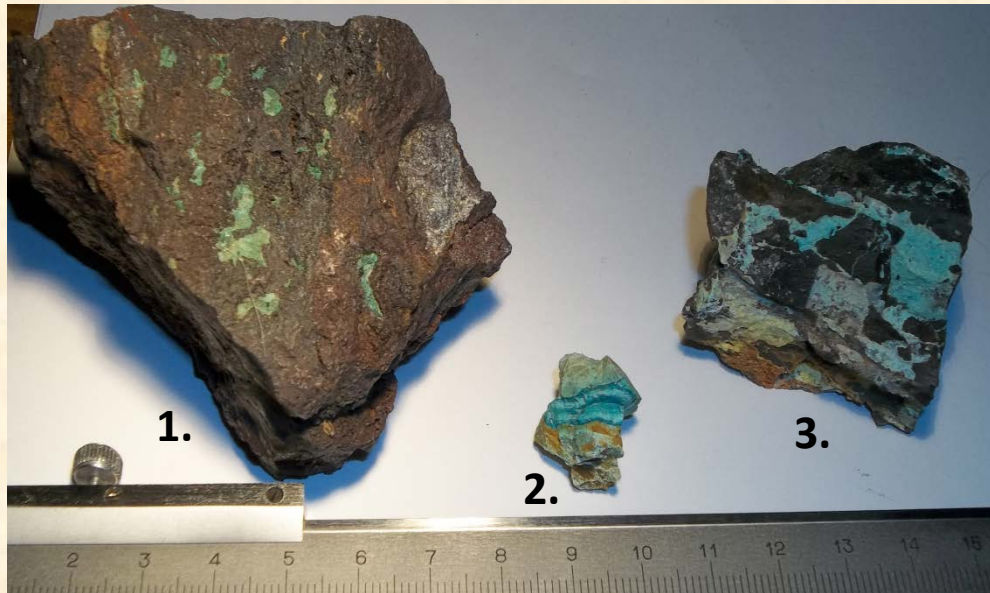


Copper staining on a limestone boulder



Outcrop of the western ore body, Zillmanton

(Ray and Ellwood, 2014)



Three copper specimens from the surface outcropping of the ore body (Ellwood, 2015)

- This is where the Marnbi story ends
- He finally enters the ground in Chillagoe creek to the east of this copper deposit
- This copper orebody was first prospected by an Aboriginal prospector In 1888 – George Henesy

# Economic minerals which are important both pre-contact and post-contact economies of the Chillagoe District.

	Pre contact use	Post contact use
<b>Iron stone, Ochre and Kaolin</b>	Rock art and body painting	Flux in the smelters
<b>Billy-chert</b>	Stone tools	Flux in the smelters
<b>Tin ore</b>	Stone tools?	Tin
<b>Copper ore</b>	pigments for Rock art	Copper
<b>Lead ore</b>	pigments for Rock art	Lead
<b>Obsidian</b>	Stone tools and possible trade	Perlite
<b>Alum</b>	Medicine	Medicine, toothpaste, purifier
<b>Silver</b>	rock art pigments	precious metals
<b>Gold</b>	rock art pigments	precious metals
<b>Mineral Salts</b>	Medicines, food additives, flocculants....etc	



# Copper ore as crayons for art



painted cave

Ab

boy

(





Using copper ores, charcoal and kaolin  
as paint, Mungana art site





# Good quality Red Ochre from a mine near Maytown



Fern Cave, Mungana, NQ



Markhams Tower, Mungana, NQ





# Nychum obsidian mine



(all images Ellwood, 2012)



# Extraction of Alum and other salts



**Alum ( potassium aluminium sulfate) deposits,  
Boonmoo Pinnacle near Stannery Hills**



**Potassium chloride and bicarbonate deposit ,  
near Pillar Rock 12 km east of Chillagoe**



# The transition from traditional to post-contact mining in Chillagoe

## King Cooper

A group of Broken Hill mining speculators, while inspecting the Chillagoe prospects, visited an Aboriginal camp near Calcifer, they noted an interesting skill adaptation.

“King Cooper,” who has been invested with a shield presented by Mr. Moffatt, has a reputation as a geologist. He has learned the class of stone the white man values, and his intimate knowledge of the district adds to his value in reporting upon mines and directing prospectors.”

(“Half way round the continent’, Barrier Miner, 17 November, 1899:2)



# Technology transfer: heat treatment

Heat treated billy-chert to make it more workable, from the heat treatment pits and reduction site near Atherton Mine, Cathedral Tower, Chillagoe



Heat treated fine grained Silcrete from heat treatment pits near Cathedral Tower, Chillagoe.



- Excavation of pre-contact heat treatment pits at Chillagoe include post contact treatment of copper ore
- Used to sinter copper ore to prepare it for sale to the European smelter at Calcifer
- Hot enough to melt tin  $\sim 1,100^{\circ}\text{C}$



Smelted tin found in the basal layers of a billy chert heat treatment pit





# Technology transfer:- Dry blowing

**Adapted to dry-blowing  
alluvial gold and tin**



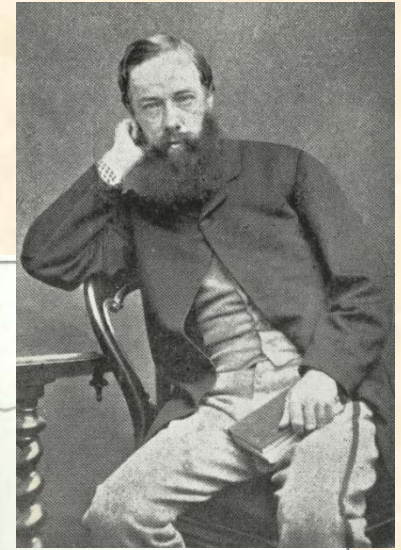
Yandying for tin, Western Australia

**Appears to have been passed  
to European prospectors at  
Cloncurry who developed  
some of the early dry-blowers**



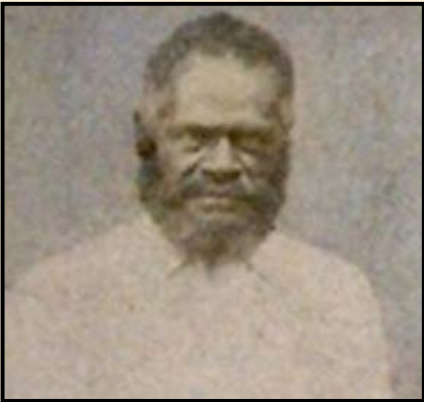
Aboriginal and White miners dry-blowing, Oaks Rush

# Using Aboriginal trade routes for historical exploration and prospecting of Cape York Peninsula between 1865 to c. 1875



**Richard Daintree**

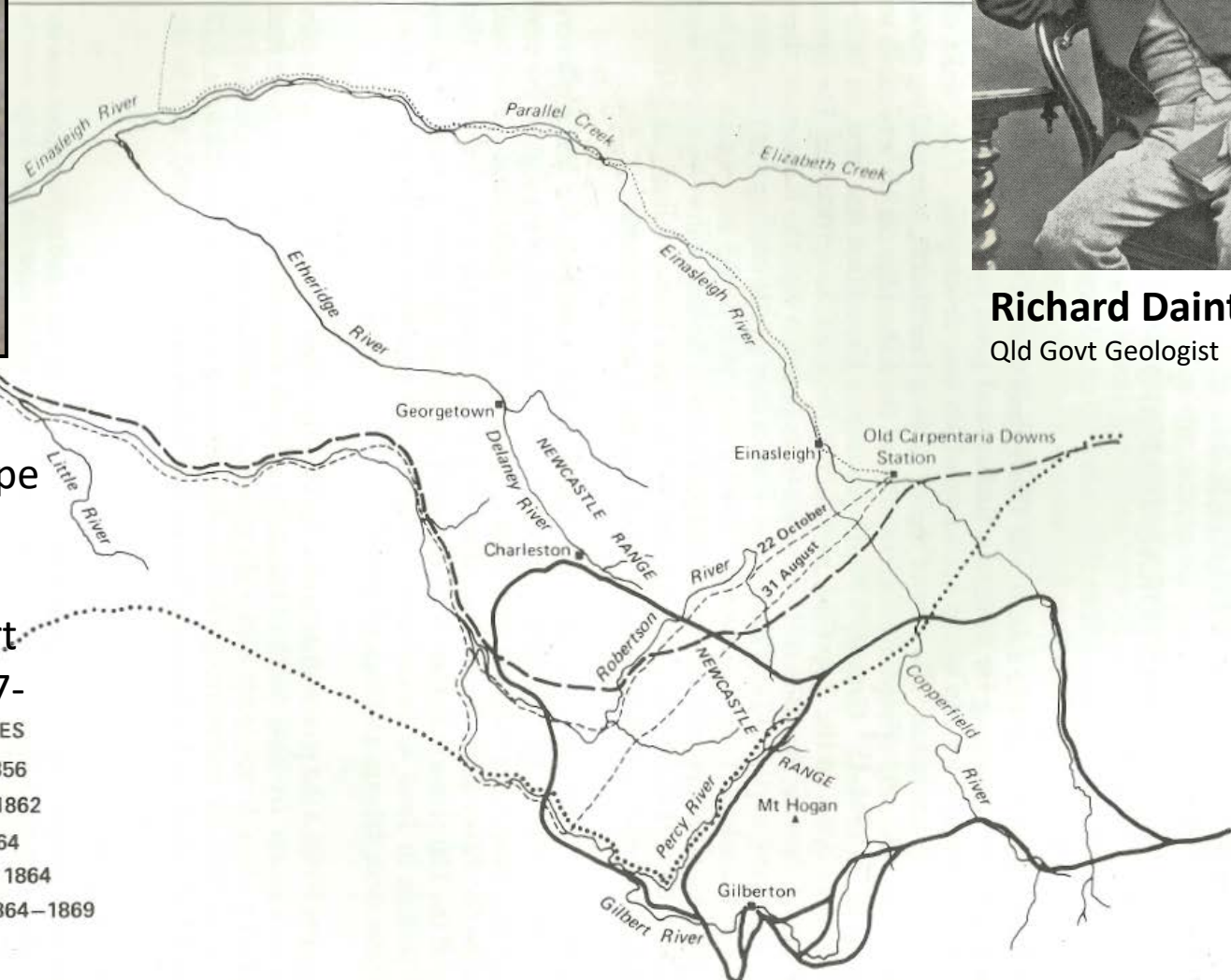
Qld Govt Geologist



**Jerry** of the Girramay people – finder of Cape River goldfield 1864, with Daintree when they found the Gilbert and Etheridge in 1867-1868

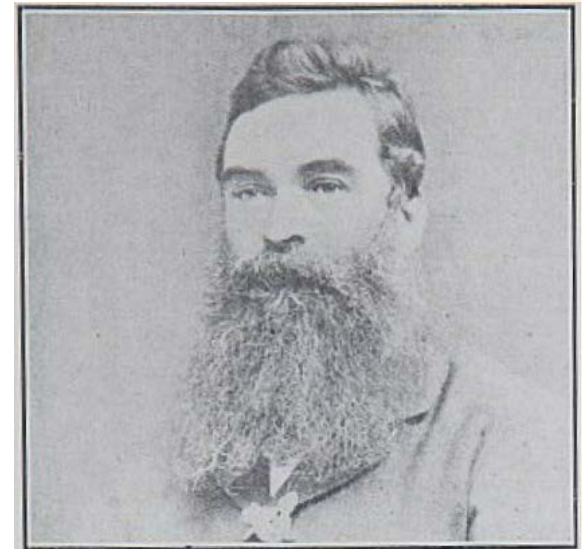
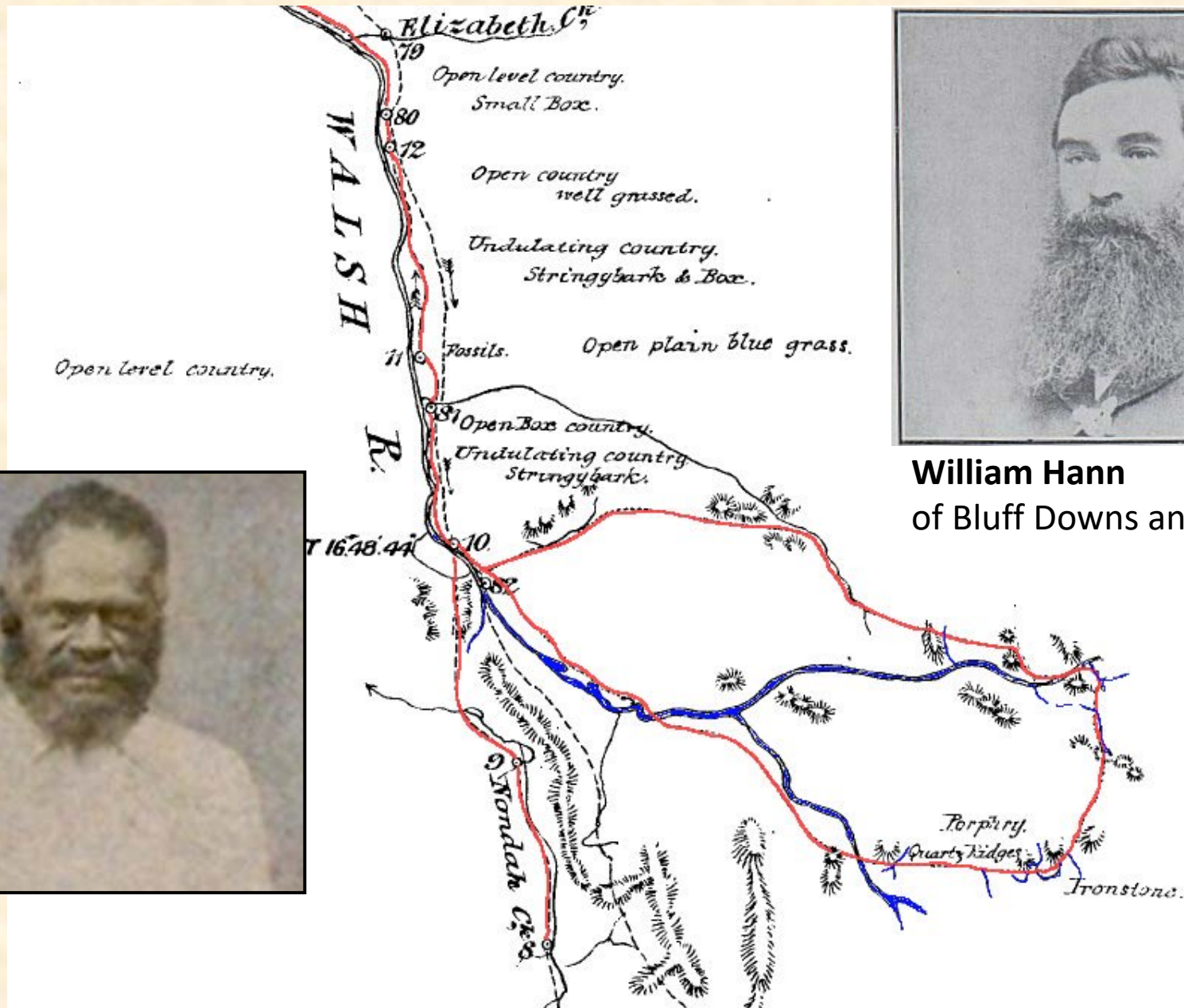
## EXPLORERS' ROUTES

- Gregory 1856
- ..... McKinlay 1862
- ..... Jardine 1864
- Macdonald 1864
- Daintree 1864-1869

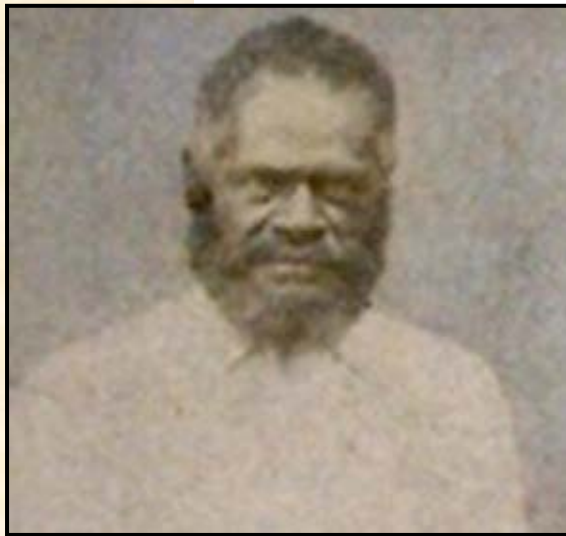




# William Hann's Northern Expedition, 1872 Chillagoe and Palmer

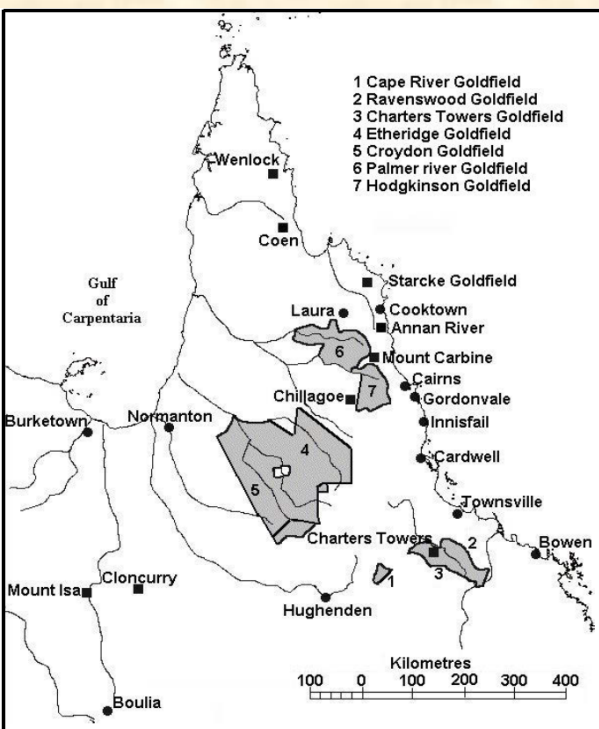


**William Hann**  
of Bluff Downs and Maryvale



Jerry

# Aboriginal miners and prospectors identified for north Queensland



Source: Adapted and redrawn from G. C. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away: A History of North Queensland to 1920*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1970, p. 42.

34 named individuals,  
17 named families and  
as yet many unknown  
and unnamed

Year	Field	Prospector/Miner	Mineral	Associated Town/Field
1852	Lord Johns Swamp GF	unknown Aboriginal Stockman (discoverer)	Au	Thanes Creek
1861	Clermont GF	unknown Aboriginal Stockman (Dick?) (discoverer)	Au	Clermont
1867	Cloncurry/ Mt Isa	<b>Tubbie Terrior</b> (discoverer) shows Ernest Henry where 'big fella copper lay down'; followed by others discovering copper and lead deposits	Cu	<i>Yamamillah</i> changed to <b>Argylla</b>
1865-1872	Cape River GF Palmer River GF	<b>Jerry (stockman)</b> (discoverer ) Prospector Gilbert Goldfield, Einasleigh copper with Daintree & Hann 1866-7 With William Hann's 1872 expedition	Au	Cape River Gilbert GF Einasleigh Copper Palmerville
1871 - 1940	Charters Towers GF Stockyard Creek Kangaroo Hills Tin	<b>Jupiter Mosman</b> (discoverer) (Horse boy, stockman, miner) – later part owner of tin mine, prospector in Kangaroo Hills and other fields	Au Sn	Charters Towers
1870s	Hodgkinson GF	unknown Aboriginal woman (miner/pro prospector)	Au	Thornborough
1886 - 1892	Annan River TF and the Batavia Diggings	Wm. Baird and <b>Romeo</b> (discoverer) prospector, miner	Sn Au	Mt Romeo Bairdsville (Retreat Creek)
1882	Cloncurry MF	<b>Toby</b> (discoverer, miner) with Ernest Henry	Cu	Mt Oxide
1887-1892?	Herberton/Chillagoe MF	<b>George Hennessey</b> (discoverer of major mines) Prospector, miner Also ran what is probably the first cave tour venture in the Chillagoe Karst area	Cu/Sn/Ag/Pb	Chillagoe, Koorboora, Muldiva, Zillmantion, Mungana
<1888	Darky Green's Reef, Mt Trial (Hodgkinson GF)	<b>John 'Darky' Green</b> (miner and millowner)	Au	Mt Trial Thornborough
1889	Jordan's Creek GF	unidentified Aboriginal diggers (discoverers of major mine)	Au	Geraldton (Innisfail)
Ca. 1899	Chillagoe- Mungana	<b>King Cooper</b> , invested with a King plate by Mr. Moffatt, for his reputation as a geologist, and his clan (miners)	Cu/Ag/Pb	Calcifer





BORING FOR TIN ON THE ROMEO COMPANY AND CARSON DREDGING CLAIMS.

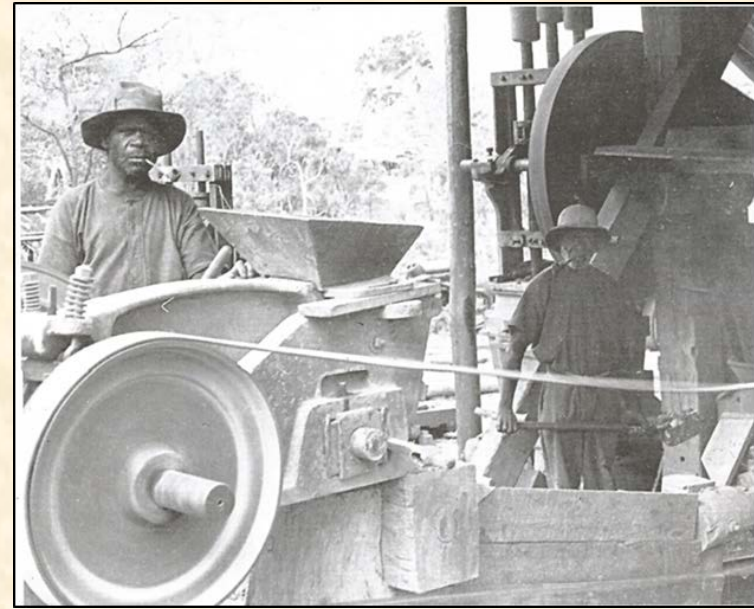


CARTING WATER FOR PROSPECTORS.

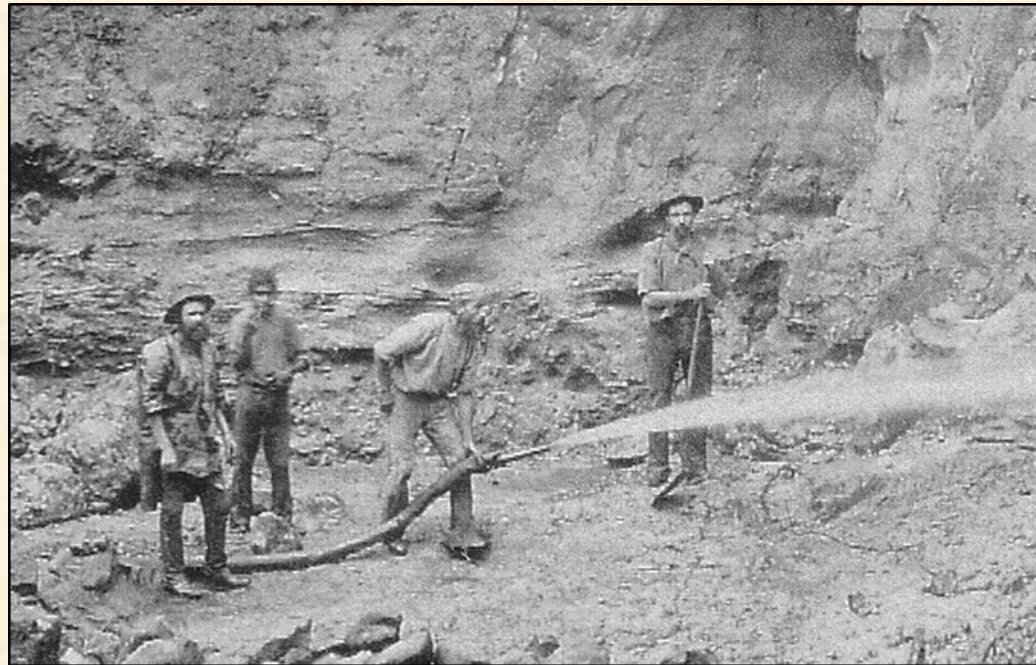
Illustrating how, in drought time, water is conveyed, often long distances, for the use of miners in the Cloncurry District.

c. 1900	Chillagoe MF	<b>Bob, Gilbert and Palmer</b> (stockmen) discovered OK Mine	Cu	OK
1905	Mt Emu GF	<b>King</b> (stockman) (discoverer)	Au	Mt Emu
1896 - 1942	Coen Ebagoolah Batavia Chock a block Blue Mountains	<b>Fredrick 'Friday' Wilson</b> (prospector, miner)	Au	Coen Ebagoolah Plutoville, Wenlock
ca. 1906	True Blue, Mt Carbine MF	<b>Keating Brothers</b> (discoverers, miners)	CaWo <sub>4</sub> /Wo	Mt. Carbine
1905-1910-1915	Chock-a-block Batavia Diggings	<b>Pluto</b> (prospector, miner) Appears Pluto also packed during the off season. He paid white prospectors to find more deposits in the region	Au (Pluto Lead #1-1910), Au (Pluto Lead #2-1911), Au (the Tunnel-1912), Au (Pluto's Gully-1913)	Plutoville
1915-1922	Batavia Diggings (Lower Camp)	<b>Kitty Pluto</b> (prospector/miner)	Au	Lower Camp
1922	Nightflower, Herberton /Chillagoe MF	<b>Archer and Stewart</b> (prospectors, miners)	Ag/Pb/Au	Chillagoe/Mungana
1932?	Blue Mountains GF	'uncivilised Black' befriended by Mr Armbrust (discoverer)	Au	near Blue Mountain
1934	Goondiwindi GF	<b>Weribone Jack</b> (stockman) (discoverer)	Au	Tawool Station
late 1930s? (1875)	Cracow GF	<b>Jacky Nipps</b> (stockman) (discoverer)	Au	Cracow
1943	Little River Coal	<b>Jerry Croydon</b> (packer, drover, miner) (discoverer)	Coal	Laura
? - 1960s	Coen Geike Creek (tin, gold) Batavia/Wenlock	<b>William 'Billy' Fox</b> (miner)	Au, Sn	Coen Lower Camp, Wenlock

# Many others



- **Cape York:** Norman Baird, Friday Wilson, Billy Fox, Keating Bros., Carbine miners (gold, tin, wolfram)
- **Herberton:** Con Goo, Gosam, Haines, Smyth families (tin and wolfram)
- **Palmer:** Burton, Pellen, Mitchell, Lyell families (gold, tin)
- Ngadjon-jii, Mamu, Yidinji on the Mulgrave, Russell, Jordan goldfields



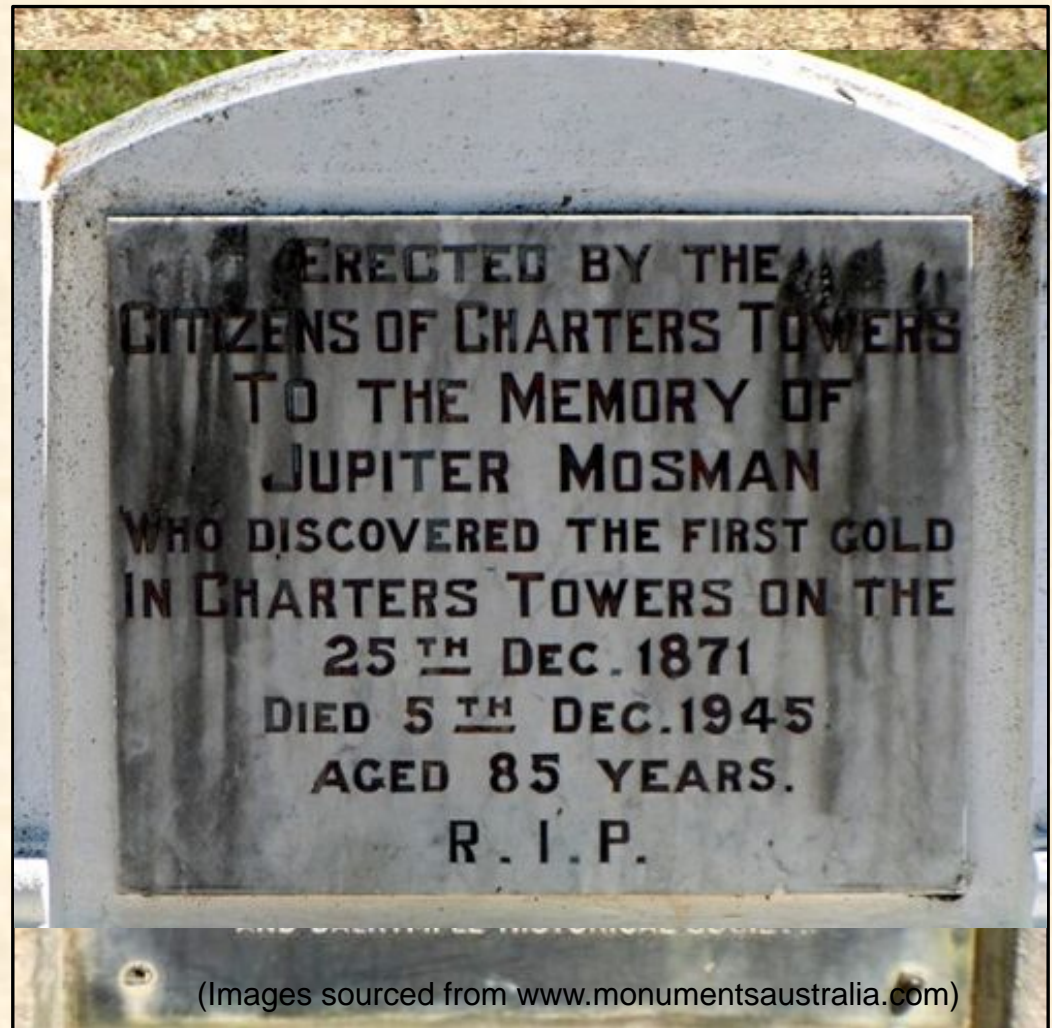


# Jupiter Mosman- Charters Towers

Jupiter Mossman was a 10 year old boy when he found the first gold near Charters Towers in December 1871.



Jupiter in old age standing where he found the first gold on Charters Towers. The second image is the memorial to the discovery of the gold, showing Jupiter on the right. However, the scene implies that the gold was alluvial; this is inaccurate.



(Images sourced from [www.monumentsaustralia.com](http://www.monumentsaustralia.com))



## Romeo

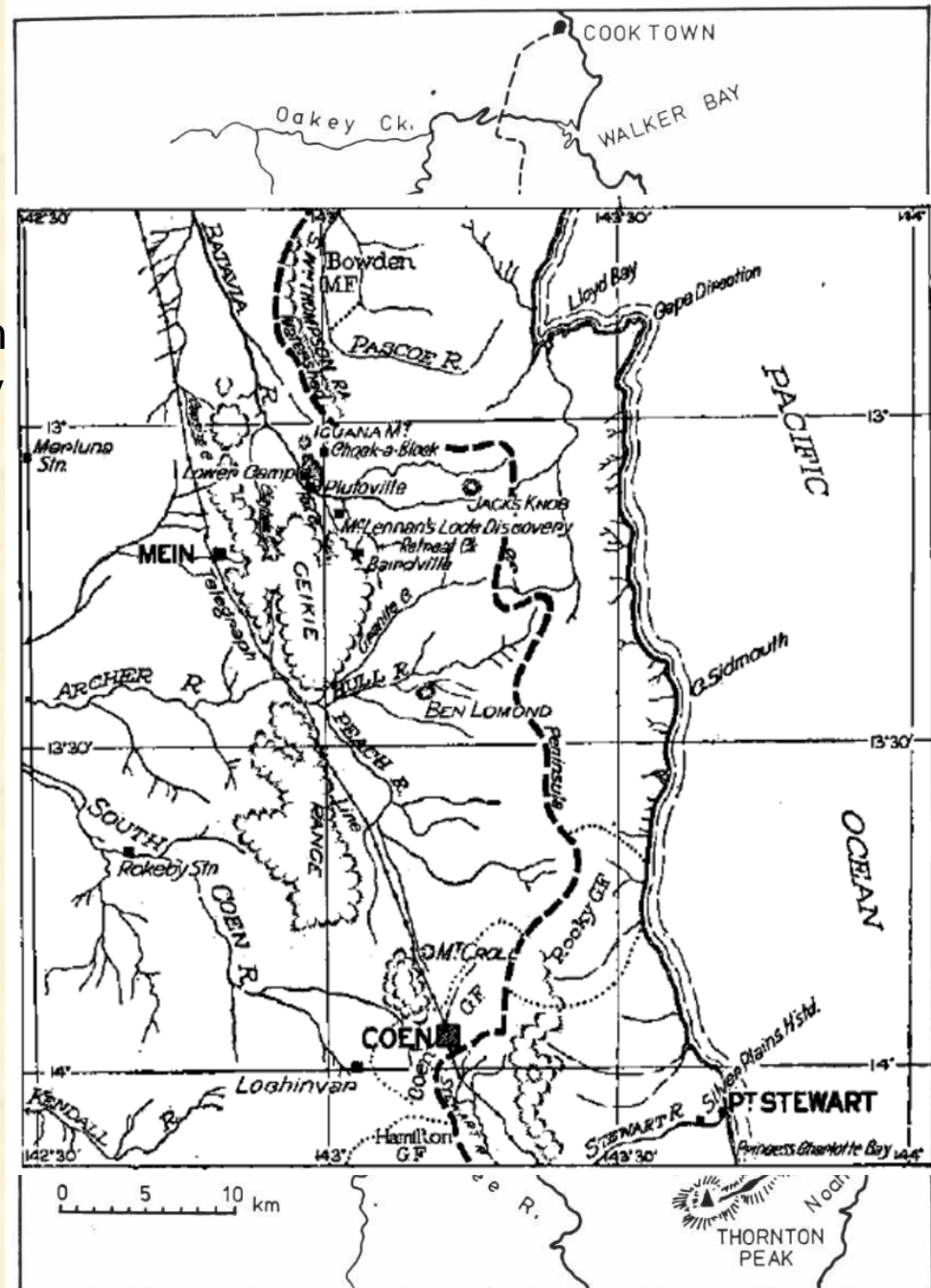
**1886** Romeo discovered the tin field of Mount Romeo south of Cooktown on the Annan River.

The small town of Romeo grew up, with a store, hotel and a post office that only closed in 1930

Romeo, with his partners William Baird and Jack Duval, discovered the Batavia goldfield in October **1892** on Retreat Creek.

About 150 men rushed to a camp called Bairdsville. Most soon left but Baird and Romeo remained there until, in 1894, Baird was killed by local Aborigines.

Romeo joined the Native Police - died in Cooktown Hospital 1915.



G. Hennessy





# George (James) Hennessy aka Hensey

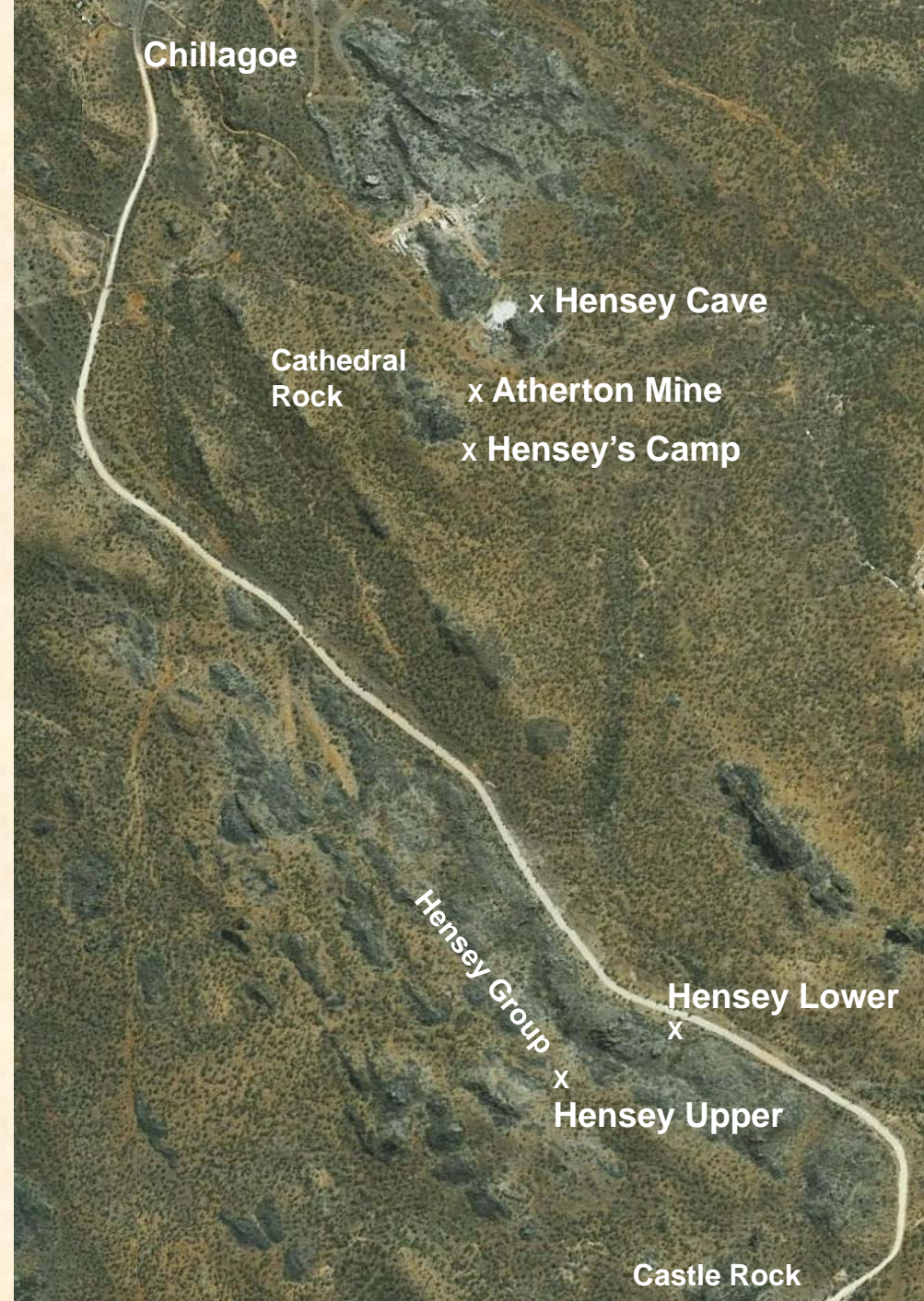
b. unknown, Ipswich, Qld

Garbutt and Stevenson  
1887 Chillagoe (Cu, Pb, Ag)

with Garbutt  
1888 Muldiva (Cu, Pb and Ag)

with Tony Linedale  
1888 Zilmanton (Cu, Ag)  
1888 Girofla/Mungana (Cu and Pb)  
1888 Koorboora (Sn)

d. ca. 1892- 1894, thrown from horse  
near Chillagoe



# Pluto of Plutoville, Batavia (Wenlock) Diggings

b. 1869:- Charters Towers

1895:- Travelled from Laura to Cape York with the party of Basalt Earl

1895:- Departed from party to try his luck on the Coen goldfield

1905:- Chock-a-Block

1910:- Pluto's Lead #1

1911:- Plutoville named for Pluto

1911:- Pluto's Lead #2

1912:- The Tunnel

1913:- Pluto's Gully

d. 1916:- Coen Hospital





# Kitty Pluto (*Altengen*)

b. ca.1877 pos. Batavia River District

1916:- found gold at **Lower Camp** on the Batavia River

1922:- Kitty Gully

1931:- Records say removed 1921 but Cilento's survey notes her on the field, age 55, finder of Plutoville

1932:- Removed during the 24<sup>th</sup> December round up of Aborigines by Const. Thies (witnessed by Anthro., Donald Thompson) but soon sent back

1939:- granted a full mining pension by the Qld Govt. for being the only Aboriginal woman to find a Goldfield

d. 1946:- Lockhardt Mission, aged 69 years



Kitty Pluto (Qld) aged 55, standing near where she found gold at Lower Camp, 1932 (CHS)

# So:

- Aborigines knew mining
- Aborigines knew minerals later valued by Europeans and had Story for them
- This is why so many mineral fields were discovered by Aborigines post-contact
- This is why so many Aborigines went mining
- Tradition continued on into post-contact society



***Mining in north Queensland is a 38,000 year old mining story, not just a 160 year mining history.***



Mt Leyshon, Charters Towers. This is the only 19th century photograph of the 'shared history' of mining: an Aboriginal miner and his White mate at work. (Gallagher Collection)

**THE END**



