

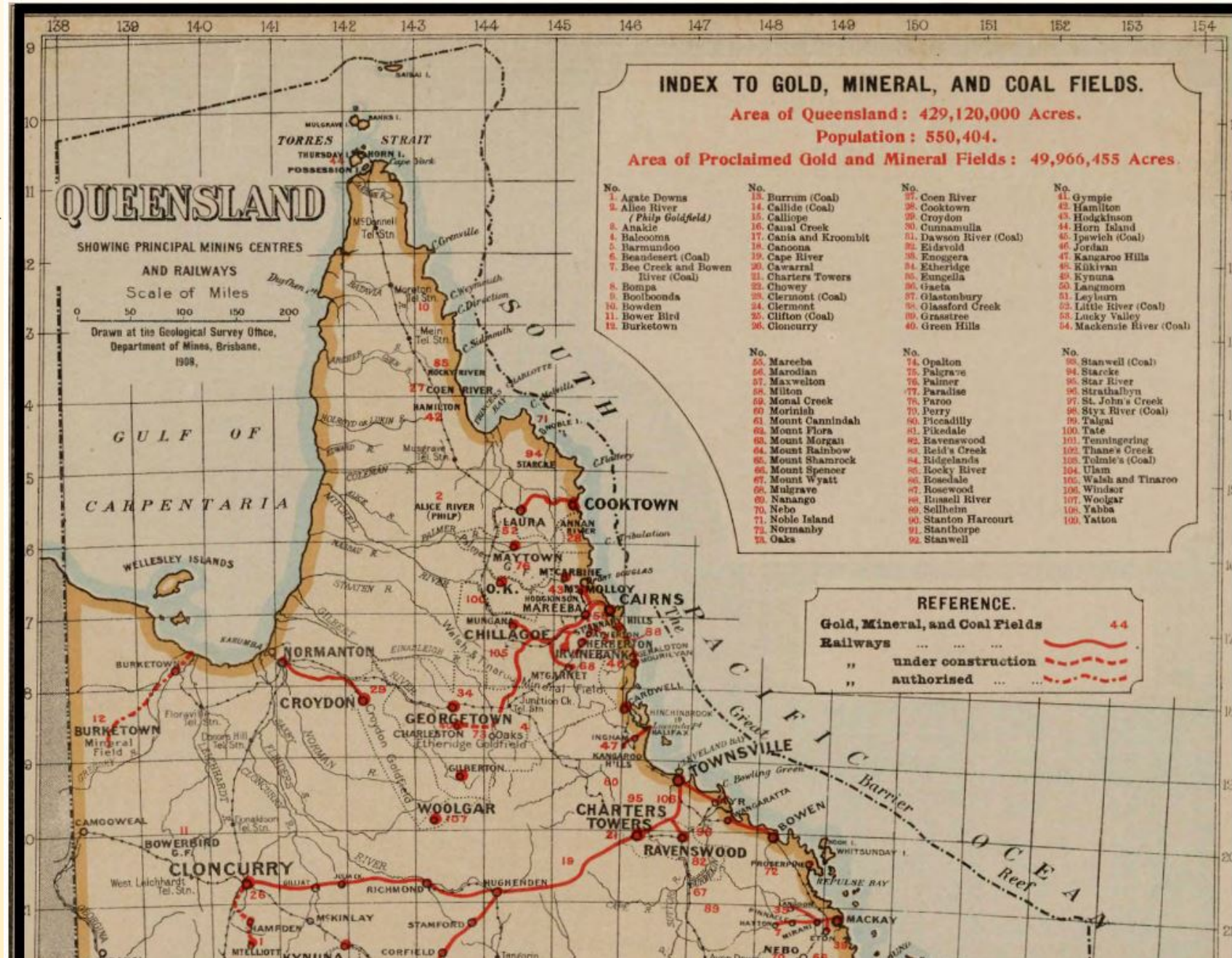
# **Mining in North Queensland: some historical background**

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MinErAL Meeting Cairns 2019

# North Queensland?

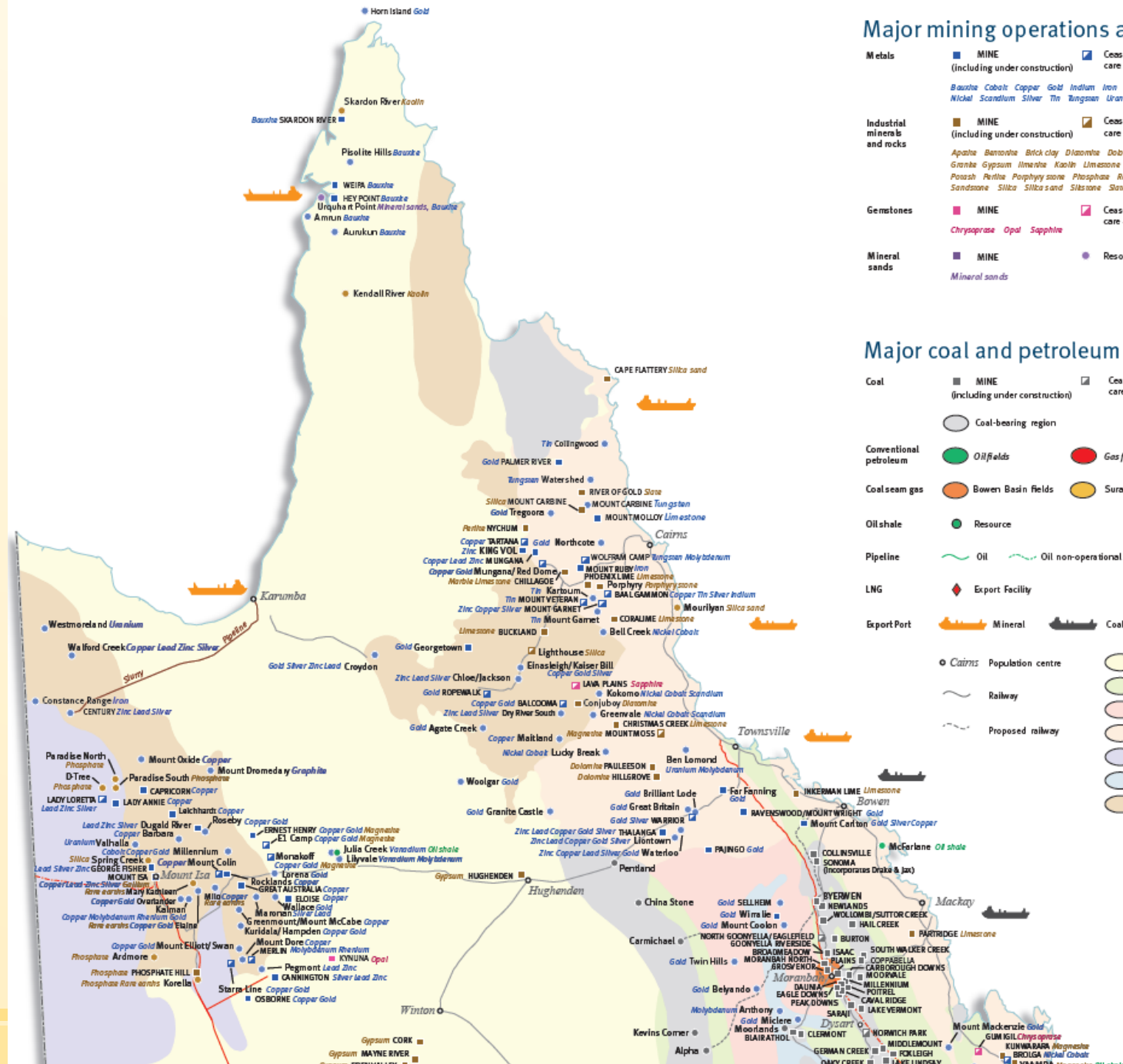
- Hinterlands of Cairns and Townsville
- Cape York
- Gulf Country
- One of the world's great mineral provinces
- 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: Gold, copper, tin, lead, silver, coal, wolfram, scheelite, bismuth, manganese, mica, zinc, graphite, limestone, molybdenum, sapphires, opal



- 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries

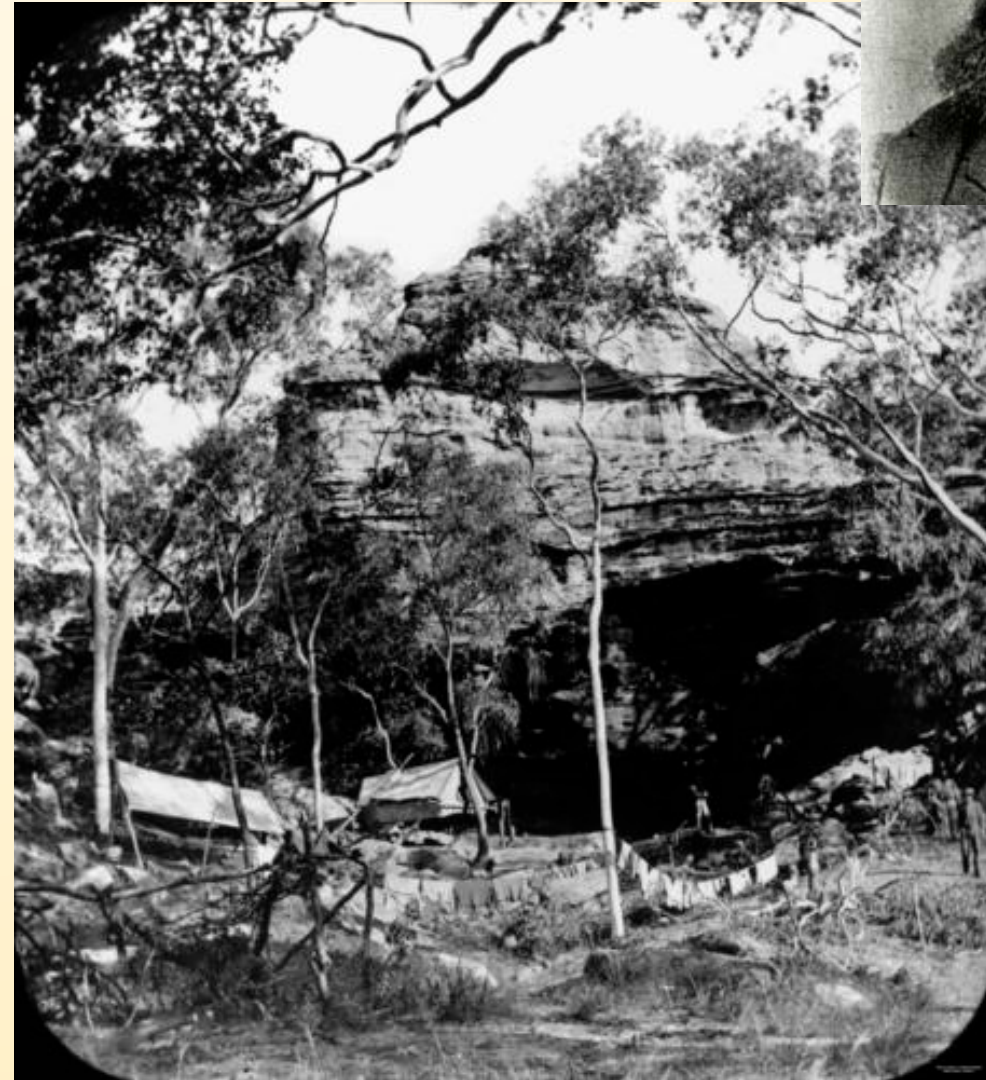
- Add:

- Uranium, nickel, perlite, bauxite, kaolin, silica sand, slate, marble



# European mining history

- European occupation of North Queensland begins with pastoralism, late 1850s
- Sheep first but soon found unsuited to the tropics
- Change to cattle – but had a limited market
- So graziers and business people in their ports created a market: goldfields
- Geologist Richard Daintree, partner William Hann, and Aboriginal prospector Jerry begin Cape River, Gilbert River and (indirectly) Palmer goldfields 1867-1873
- Miners spread out and discovered more goldfields 1880s – 1910s
- Tin, copper, silver mining established in the same period



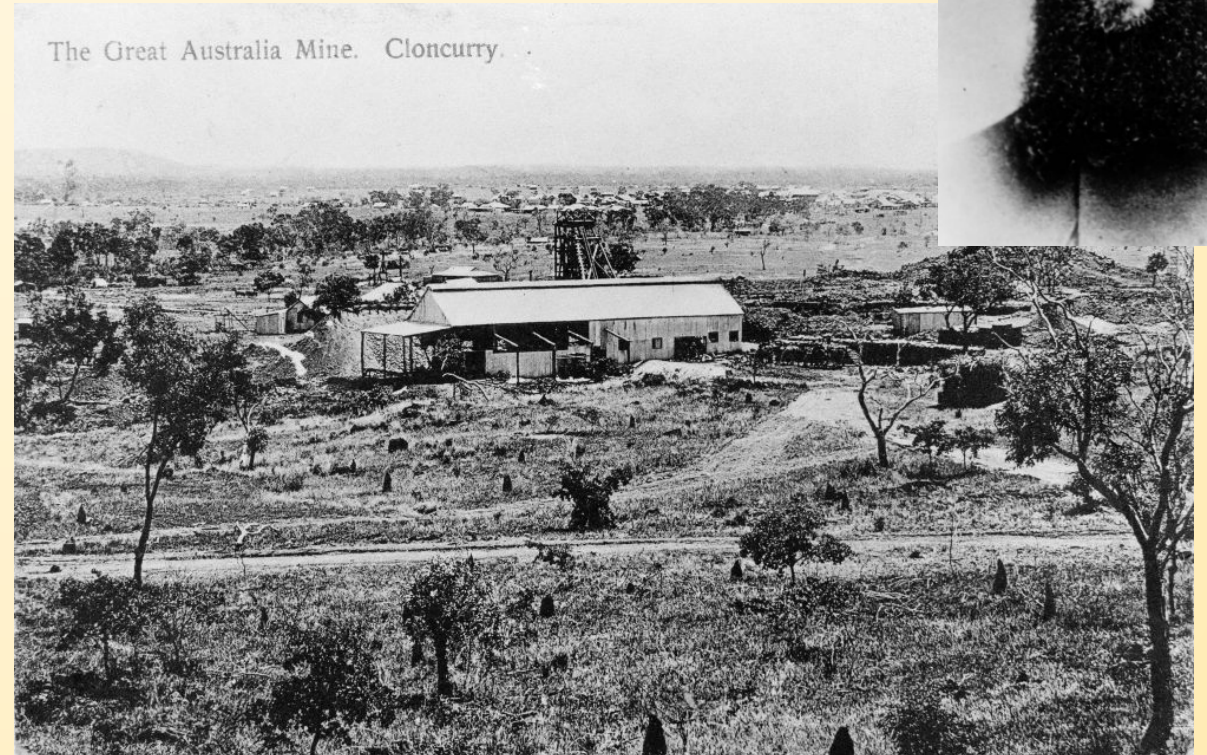
Daintree's prospecting party on the Gilbert

First copper mines in NQ: Daintree's Einasleigh Mine 1866, Ernest Henry's Great Australia 1867



NEW EINASLEIGH MINE.

SHOWING DAIN'TREE SHAFT, WITH CAPTAIN SIMPSON STANDING NEAR  
THE OLD DOOR.



The Great Australia Mine. Cloncurry.



Both images early 20<sup>th</sup> century

# Gold

- Part of the anti-clockwise movement of gold discoveries around Australia (with some back-tracking)
- Began Star River (Townsville) 1865
- Major discoveries: [Cape River 1867](#), [Gilbert River 1868](#), Ravenswood 1868, Etheridge 1870, Charters Towers 1872, [Palmer River 1873](#), Hodgkinson 1876, Coen 1876, Croydon 1886, Hamilton (Ebagoolah) 1900, [Oaks \(Kidston\) 1907](#)
- Queensland legislation favoured small scale mining to attract population
- However – mining companies formed locally, in other colonies/states of Australia, in Britain, especially after 1880
  - Hard rock mining, hydraulic sluicing, one dredge
- Declined after World War I – inflation and fixed price of gold



# Gold mining became the frontier in Cape York

- Pastoral expansion slowed after the change to cattle
- Mining frontier caught up on the Cape
- Either just behind or just before the graziers
- Meant having to establish supply routes (tracks and roads), mail services, ports AFTER the rushes – why starvation was common in the wet season
- Also had to establish first relations with local Aborigines, with mixed success



Ironically, this field (Hodgkinson GF) was the first area to develop the idea of paying rations to Aborigines to obtain peace

# Base metals

- Tin soon followed - similar technology for recovery, both alluvial and hard rock mining
- Major finds: Herberton/Irvinebank 1880, Annan River/Bloomfield 1886
- Copper expanded from Ernest Henry's find: Cloncurry copper field
- Mt Molloy 1880, Chillagoe 1887, Mt Garnet 1882
- Lead: Etheridge, Lawn Hill (Burketown) 1887, Chillagoe
  - Greatest mine: Mt Isa 1923, in Cloncurry field
- Wolfram and molybdenite in demand from 1860s, prices boomed from 1890s: Wolfram Camp, Mt Carbine



Early Mt Isa, one of the few north Queensland mines to be properly developed (with British and American capital and expertise)



# Post-World War II

- Mining in 1930s similar to 1890s
- After the war – large scale company mining favoured by Government policy
- Using open cuts
  - Coal (Bowen Basin)
  - Re-opening old discoveries eg. Ravenswood, Red Dome (Chillagoe)
- Zinc a nuisance in pre-war mining – now mined extensively eg. Century on Lawn Hill field, King Vol near Chillagoe, Mt Garnet
- New minerals being exploited:
  - Uranium: Mary Kathleen 1954 (on Cloncurry field)
  - Bauxite: Weipa 1957
  - Silica sand: Cape Flattery 1966
  - Nickel: Greenvale 1973

Ravenswood

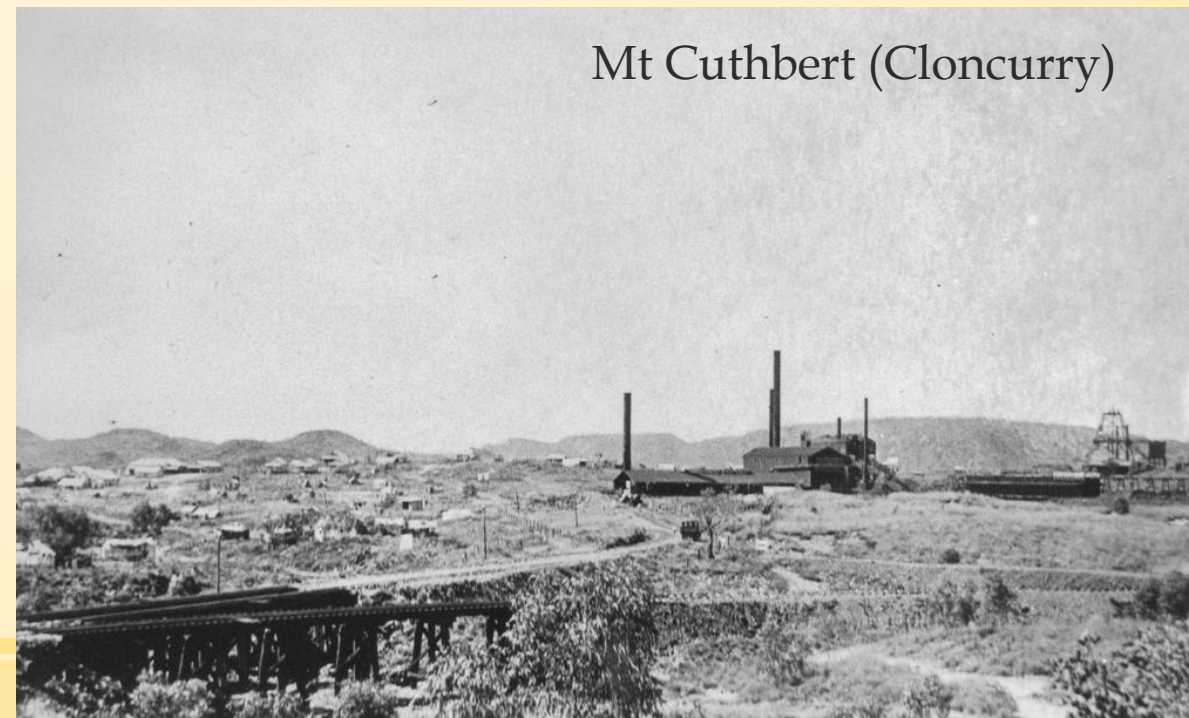


Cape Flattery



# Impacts: mining and non-Indigenous population

- Pastoralism – settlement sparse, few towns
- Mining (especially gold) introduced far larger European and Asian population
- Palmer rush alone: 26,000
- 1861 – all North Qld 86 Europeans
- 1876 – Far North Qld 13,548
- 1900 – Far North Qld 31,544
- And – mostly inland
- Charters Towers became Queensland's second biggest city
- Heavy local impact on Aboriginal people
- Began farming settlements away from the coast (maize for teamsters, food and milk for mining towns) eg Atherton



Mt Cuthbert (Cloncurry)



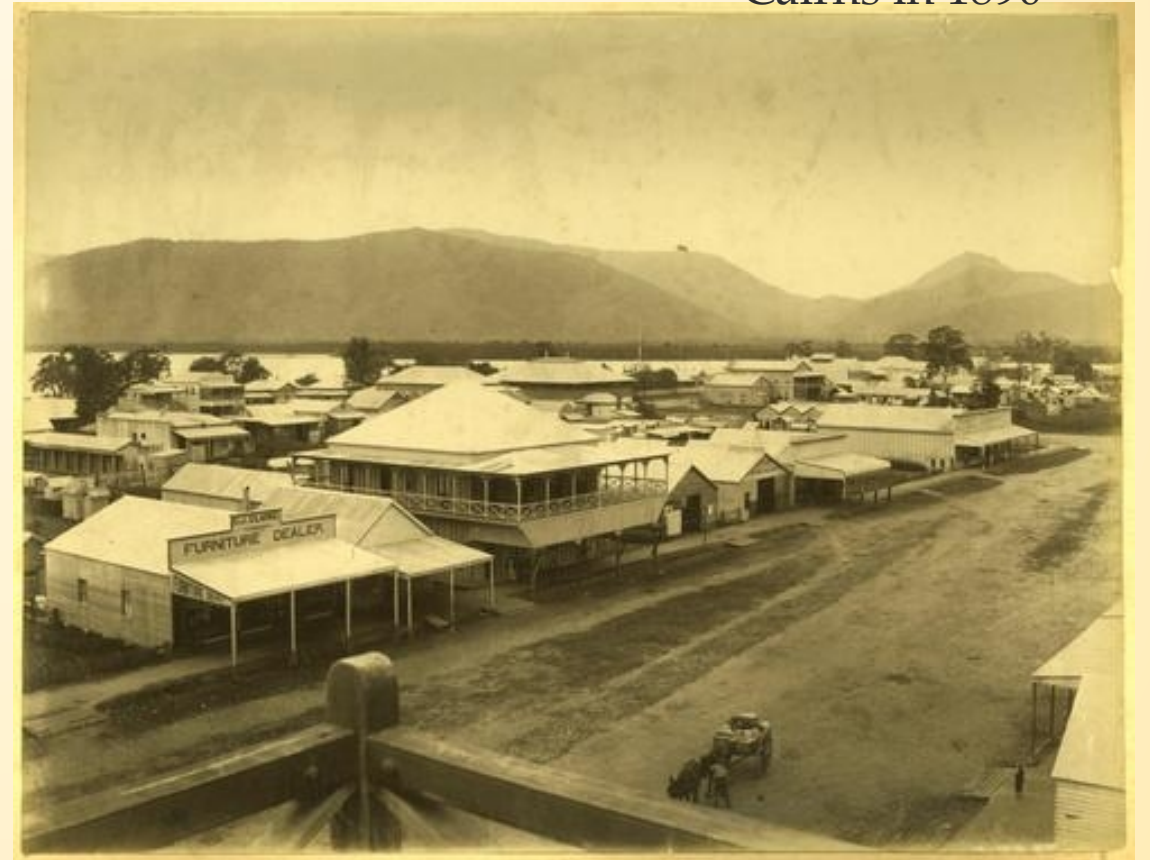
# Mining towns and their ports in Far North Queensland

- Named towns still exist (even if only as a station homestead)
- Every speck is a former mining settlement



# Created and/or boosted ports

Cairns in 1890



Cairns was founded as the port for the Hodgkinson Goldfield, but lost that trade to Port Douglas. The Mulgrave Goldfield saved Cairns' economy in 1879 – and the railway connecting the port with a mining hinterland made it the Far North's biggest town

# Boosted ports

Normanton, first a pastoralism port, gained some impressive buildings thanks to copper mining at Cloncurry and the Croydon Goldfield



Contrast with Burketown, a pastoral centre which had only the short-lived Lawn Hill silver lead field



# Created inland transport links

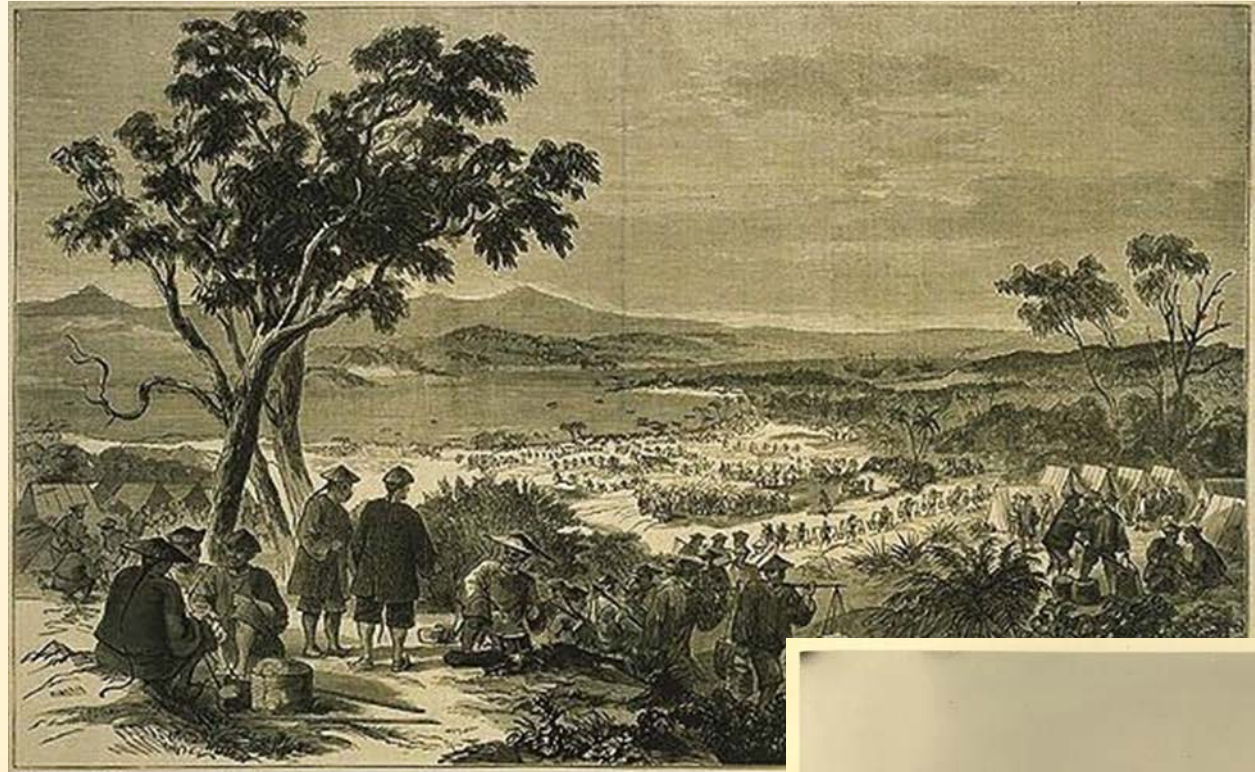
- Nearly all of the North Qld railways were mining railways
  - Cooktown to Laura (meant for the Palmer Goldfield)
  - Normanton to Croydon
  - Mareeba to Herberton
  - Dimbulah to Mt Mulligan
  - Townsville to Charters Towers, Cloncurry, Mt Isa
  
- Some built by mining companies:
  - Mareeba to Almaden/**Chillagoe /Mungana**
  - Almaden to Forsayth
  - **Mareeba to Mt Molloy**
  - **Dimbulah to Irvinebank**
  - **Lappa to Mt Garnet**



Red = no longer in operation

# Multicultural

- Goldfields were cosmopolitan
  - Aborigines
  - Europeans – British, Danes, Swedes, Poles, Germans, Russians, French, Italians, Americans
  - Asians – Chinese, Filipino, Sri Lankan



National Library of Australia

Distinctive Chinese alluvial workings, Palmer Goldfield

Italians produced charcoal for smelters





# When the mining fields declined

- As mining declined, people left for the coast or mining fields elsewhere
- Became a labour force for other industries
- Many became farmers (sugar on the coast, dairying and maize growing on the Atherton Tablelands)
- Mining provided capital to set up other businesses, farms

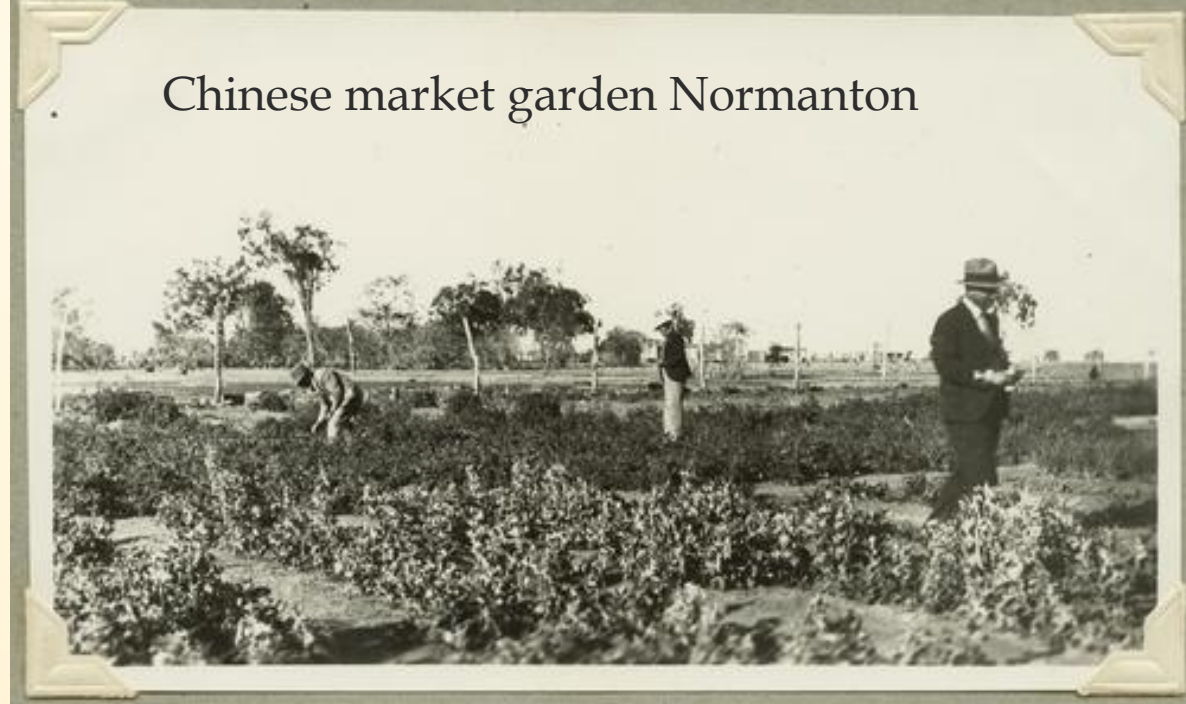


The Mulgrave Sugar Mill (Gordonvale, south of Cairns) was built partly on money from mining field businesses

# Chinese ex-miners

- Chinese miners:
  - Went market gardening across North Qld – only source of fresh vegetables on mining fields and cattle stations
  - Began the sugar industry in Cairns
  - Began the banana industry in Cairns and Innisfail
  - Cleared much of the land around Cairns and Atherton for agriculture
  - Pushed out by discriminatory legislation but a Chinese Australian community still exists

Chinese market garden Normanton



Chinese banana growers, Innisfail

# So, the impact of mining on North Queensland was...

## ▪ For Europeans:

- Provided a market for the ailing pastoral industry until freezing technology allowed beef exports
- Spread much larger population across the region and created nearly all the inland towns
- Provided roads and railways
- Provided or boosted ports
- Began agriculture on the Atherton Tablelands
- On the Cape, established European settlement

## ▪ For Aborigines and Asians:

- Heavy local impact on Aboriginal people, who experienced massacres, exploitation and further decimation from disease, but
- Provided much better economic and social opportunities for Aborigines after frontier violence ended (up to c.1939)
- Introduced a much more cosmopolitan population
- Chinese in particular
  - enormous contribution to agriculture