

Mining

The Brisbane Valley has participated in every mining boom in Queensland history. Individual Councillors, such as Councillor Simeon Lord, are descendants of gold and tin miners as well as graziers, while others have invested heavily in fledgling mining companies in the hope of fostering local development. Although mining has always been on a small scale compared to the Gympie and Charters Towers goldfields, or the north Queensland tin and copperfields, the Brisbane Valley can boast the first discovery in Queensland of coal, by Major Lockyer in 1825 just above Kholo Crossing on the Brisbane River, and amongst the first discoveries of gold in the colony at Neurum Neurum Creek in February 1852. Settlement at Esk, the headquarters of the Shire, resulted from the early 1870s copper boom when leases were taken up at nearby Biarra and Cressbrook Creek. Since then companies have been formed in every boom to explore for copper, gold, tin, nickel, coal, and even oil. Small gold mines have prospered intermittently in the Taromeo, Monsildale, and Nukinenda areas, especially during the 1930s depression when itinerant prospectors scoured pockets of the Valley. Gold seekers were following the leads in Cressbrook Creek, Brisbane and Stanley Rivers, and the creeks at Taromeo east of Nanango before gold was discovered at Gympie in 1867 by Nash. They learnt the geology of the whole region, covering it minutely seeking outcrops.

The Queensland Government Geologist for Southern Queensland, C.D.O.H. Aplin, visited the Brisbane Valley in 1868-1869 to report on the gold discoveries in the entire Brisbane Valley. After six months examination he concluded that there were no payable goldfields south of the Bunya Range between the Brisbane River and the coast. That opinion has been vindicated by the subsequent mining history of the region.

Geologically, spurs run from the schists of the D'Aguilar Range to the Stanley River and merge eventually with the granites of the Bunya Bunya Range. Opposite the junction of Neurum Neurum Creek, granite extends across Scrubby Creek and Mary Smoke's Creeks (ten miles from Kilcoy Station) and on towards Durundur Station, but varies in character and constituents. Intrusions of basalt occur in this portion of the granite tracts near Mary Smoke's Creek.¹

Another report was made in 1879 when A.C. Gregory, geological surveyor and former Surveyor General, studied and described the alluvial strata of the Valley for its coal contents. Recent alluvials are found in the valley of Lockyer Creek, between Helidon and Tarampa and along the banks of Warrill Creek and Bremer River. Fossil drifts exist on the Main Range around Crow's Nest dividing the two river systems. Granite rocks (greenite, mica schist, and erupted crystalline series) occur near Crow's Nest, but in a very small area compared to the much larger tract near Stanthorpe. Mount Esk is a detached point of eruption of porphyritic rocks. The coastal range and an isolated patch near Cressbrook Creek contain Devonian rocks and are the principal depository of metalliferous veins containing gold, copper, lead, antimony, and mercury in the Brisbane Valley. Gold occurs at Eskdale on the Upper Brisbane under peculiar conditions. Thin quartz veins containing gold and arsenical pyrites, run across a vertical granite which intersects the Devonian rock. The gold in igneous rocks at Eskdale is exceptional compared to the usual occurrence in veins of quartz deposited from aqueous solution in deep fissures in slate, or metamorphic rocks of the Devonian period.²

One of the most detailed reports on the general geology of the Brisbane Valley was done by Dorothy Hill in 1930 as a student of the University of Queensland. The trip was paid for by the recently formed Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR — now CSIRO) and the results were published by the Royal Society of Queensland. The purpose of the trip was to explore for the possibility of coal in the Valley. She worked on horseback boarding at private houses and hotels — Mrs T.J. Coleman of Toogoolawah, Mr and Mrs B.G. White of Moorabool, Mr and Mrs Geoffrey Graham of Ettswold, Mrs and Miss Moore of Colinton, Mr J.H. McConnel and Miss Ursula McConnel of Cressbrook, Miss Gardner of Dingyarra, Mr Marson and Mr George Launder of Toogoolawah, and Miss R. Whyte of Happy Creek. A car was arranged for the outlying Happy Creek area, with local work there done on horseback.

Dorothy Hill summarized the region as comprising three series of Mesozoic strata — Bundamba, Esk, and Borallon series. The Esk

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series of Triassic rocks lie north of the junction line from Esk to Paddy Gully and are freshwater basin deposits laid down by rapidly changing currents with intensive contemporaneous volcanic activity. The volcanic stage was close to Paddy Gully. She reported that the Esk series are not indicative of a large field of workable coal but the synclinal areas were considered interesting prospects. The Bundamba series extended along the Mount Hallen sandstones, from one mile south of Esk to Borallon. The rocks contain an abundance of fossils but produce poor sandy soil. There is greater development of the volcanic rocks in the Borallon series around Esk. J.H. Reid and C.C. Morton of the Geological Survey of Queensland reported similar geological opinions earlier in 1923.³

Coal and gold have been sought in the Brisbane Valley since original settlement. Other minerals have been discovered and worked in small operations during booms. Salt was extracted in small quantities after 1846 to supply the Brisbane and Redbank boiling down works. Andrew Petrie discovered coal near Pine Mountain, twelve miles from Ipswich and sent samples to Sydney for testing in 1838. Mining in the Brisbane Valley in

the 1850s was a pageant of frontiersmen seeking resources in the Queensland colony to equal the bonanzas discovered in the south. Squatters sought local discoveries as a means of retaining their station labour and providing a market for their meat.

In 1851 a reward of £900 was put up in Brisbane for the discovery of gold in Queensland. That stimulated extensive superficial prospecting over the Darling Downs and in the Brisbane Valley. Small amounts of gold bearing quartz had already been discovered at Thane's Creek by October 1851. John McConnel of Durundur already knew of an untested discovery near Brisbane in 1851. Within eight months there was a prospecting party directed by a Brisbane Committee washing specs of gold near Delaney's Creek close to Neurum Neurum Creek. Another reward of over £2,000 was offered in 1853 for the discovery of a workable goldfield in Queensland but no worthwhile discovery resulted.⁴

Copper was discovered in the Brisbane Valley in 1854 by John Williams, a Brisbane coal merchant, near the Brisbane River on one of Bigge's stations.

Kilcoy Creek Gold Mine, 1933.

John Oxley Library



It appears that he went to the spot after having been told of green-blue rocks and he sent the specimens for testing. No developments ensued in the 1850s. The following year Stutchbury reported the discovery of coal high up the Valley in the shales and conglomerates in Balfour's Creek in the range dividing that creek from Taromeo Creek. Numerous fossils were seen in the coal.⁵

The richness of the northern New South Wales goldfields at Tooloom, Boonoo Boonoo, and Fairfield (later known as Drake) and the direct road from Brisbane attracted men away from the Brisbane Valley in 1858 and 1859. The member for Ipswich in the Legislative Assembly, Arthur Macalister, proposed that a further reward be offered in 1860 by the newly-established Queensland Parliament for discovery of a payable goldfield in Queensland to hold the population and produce local wealth. Nothing of note happened in the Brisbane Valley. It was not until 1866 when the Queensland economy was in dire straits, that there was any interest shown in gold near Brisbane. Local prospectors obtained specs of gold and the blue colours of copper. Russell of the Burnett brought specs of gold which he said were found by Perry and party eight miles from Cooyar Creek, in the present day Yarraman area. Hughes and Campbell sent samples, reputedly of copper from Pine Mountain and the Little Liverpool to Sydney for testing.

Meanwhile more people were working in the northern part of the Brisbane and Stanley watershed — especially east of Nanango town and on Taromeo station. Gold was being worked in numerous gullies surrounding the town but was not payable. Mason of Colinton obtained gold in quartz which was more promising. The Nanango mailman found that prospectors were earning good wages prospecting coarse and shotty gold on Taromeo — £1 per week and rations. Men boasted £3 per day and claimed they had opened a new goldfield by May 1867. There were a hundred men on McDougall's Taromeo station sinking on alluvial down to two feet but the miners gradually realized these diggings had been vastly over-rated, resulting in riotous behaviour in the winter of 1867 and a longing for a permanent discovery. The sense of expectation that the source of the gold ought to be found in the ranges and James Nash's persistence in following the leaders across the range into the Mary River culminated in an extensive and exciting discovery of gold. The news of Nash's discovery attracted miners from all the Australian colonies and substantially stimulated the Queensland economy. Gympie denuded the Brisbane Valley of labour.⁶

In 1868 amid rumours of gold strikes there were numerous parties mainly from Ipswich prospecting in the neighbourhood of Mount Brisbane, Kilcoy, and Mount Esk. Others like James Darrasan were working small lodes near the South Pine River which was now on the road to the Gympie diggings. The Brisbane Valley also lost out on trade along the Main North Road from Ipswich to Nanango with the opening of the shorter route via Petrie's, the Caboolture River, over the Blackall Range and down the Upper Mary River.⁷

By October 1868 there were 300 to 400 men seeking gold on Monorambah Creek fifty miles from Colinton. J.C. White had originally prospected the area and named it Googoomjam but the miners called it German Gully after the German named Macher who discovered gold there. Most of the men had come from the Jimna diggings to the east. J.C. White displayed a nugget of shotty gold from Googoomjam at Flavell Brothers' jewellers in Queen Street, Brisbane. As the field was 'not much chop' diggers quickly moved back to Jimna and on to Gympie. Gold had also been discovered in 1868 in Neurum Neurum Creek on Bigge's station, Mount Brisbane. Cobb and Co seemed convinced of the value of the Brisbane Valley mining areas, diverting their coach route via Jimna in August 1868.⁸

The Valley was quiet until diggers came to McConnel's Cressbrook run seeking out gold in the 1870 winter. Samuel Watson of Tarampa was working persistently, obtaining four ounces per ton on the tableland between Eskdale and Emu Creeks three miles north east of Eskdale station. He sent one hundredweight of ore to Sydney Mint for testing, which immediately attracted a new wave of miners. The *Queensland Times* warned on 28 February 1871 that 'unless they carry quartz crushers in their pockets, they might as well have stayed at home' for the discovery needed liberal amounts of capital. The workings were confined to the two Prospecting Claims which they named 'The Blackall Reef' after the previous Governor, and the 'Mysterious' on the same reef, taken up by Samuel and Richard Watson, Fredrickson, and Coshien on the original line, discernable for four miles. They had two shafts sunk to thirty feet. By March 1871 there were a large number of tents and a few bark huts erected beside the reef but storekeepers did not settle there.⁹

Then came the copper boom. Blue copper rocks were sighted throughout the Brisbane Valley especially in the known mineralized areas around Taromeo, Eskdale, Cressbrook, Mount Stanley, and Cooyar Creek. Small rushes occurred and these sites have been explored and reworked and

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companies formed during every copper and share boom since. Twenty-one Mineral Selections were applied for in the Eskdale and Biarra areas — Nos. 945-948, 1138-1139, 1165, 1213, 1709-1712, 1714, 1741, 1745, 1751, 1797, 1840-1842, and 1927 between May and October 1872. The applicants included the Watson Brothers of Tarampa, Martin Henrickson, William Wilson, William Ginn, Benjamin Cribb Snr, George Thorn Jnr and William Field, Lucius O'Brien (Eskdale copper mine), John Pettigrew, George H. Wilson, John Blaine, Thomas Hamilton James Fullerton, Robert Sparrow, Thomas Bennett, and Joseph North Cribb of Ipswich, James Allison and P. C. Hawkes of Walloon, and James Campbell, Thomas G. Robinson, David Pierce, Michael Gannon and George H. Davenport of Toowoomba, and Patrick Clifford of Goodna, later an Esk Shire Councillor.

The initial application was by Samuel Watson, Martin Frederickson and William Wilson on 30 May 1872 and their's was the only one for which a deed was issued and the land freeholded. However after six months the deepest shaft was only twenty-five feet. The partnership exposed a lode four feet wide, appointed a manager, Curlewis, and formed the West Moreton Pioneer Copper Company of one hundred £30 shares of which they held thirty-four. They planned to take their ore to Ipswich on the surveyed road from Sandy Creek (later known as Esk) to Gatton. A by-product of the mine was the opening of a hotel at Mount Esk in January 1873, which became the nucleus of a new town.

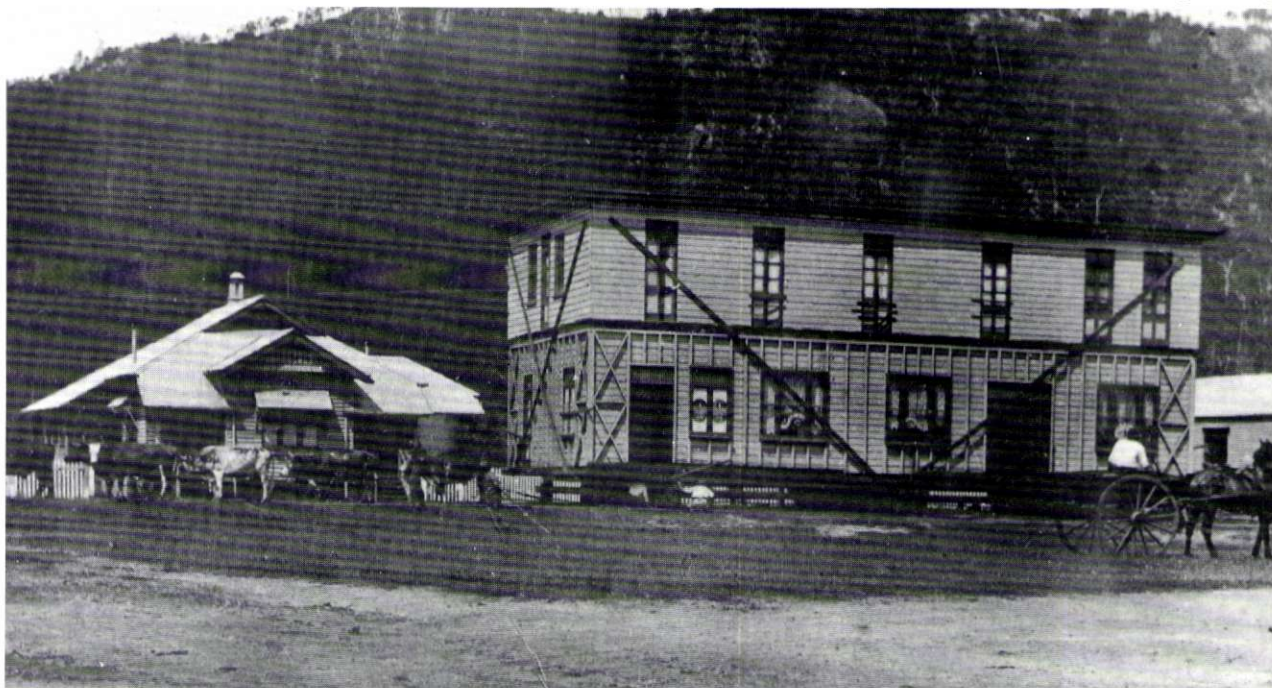
On Saturday 21st September 1872, at Cooyar, twenty-two miles west of Rosalie Plains, the Whites also opened a copper lode, virgin copper in a blue oxide outcrop; they immediately planned to form a company. On the Taromeo selections Lennon of Ipswich and Walter Scott, pastoralist, obtained phenomenally rich ore samples of 50% copper when smelted in December 1872.¹⁰

Of equal significance was the discovery of tin at Crow's Nest in 1873 which brought miners from Gympie including one of the Lords, ancestor of one of today's Shire Councillors. There were 960 acres of selections in red granite country, less porphyritic than the Stanthorpe tinfields discovered a year earlier. The wash was very shallow and only one rude sluice box was used. The tinfields were unsuccessful and Lord took over Eskdale run in 1874.¹¹

The mining boom was over by 1874 and the field languished until the next boom in 1897. The Mineral Selections were forfeited on 24 October 1874 and many were taken up by surrounding graziers. A little tin and gold was worked spasmodically in the Eskdale area. The timber from the copper mines was sold to local farmers in the mid 1880s.

The 1890s depression brought out more prospectors. J.G. Trenery was supervising the excavation of an iron ore deposit on Pine Mountain in August 1892. To the north there was an unsuccessful silver prospect, very likely the

Club Hotel, Esk, being moved by bullock team in 1906 from south of Redbank Creek where the town was established in the mining days. Terry Conway



Monsildale, prospected by Selby Ord, a former north Queensland manager. Silver had been discovered in the mid 1880s silver boom on Portion 46, Parish of Monsildale, on the eastern side of a high spur, 420 feet above Monsildale Creek. It was worked by the station owner until 1893 and investigated by John Moffat of Irvinebank, north Queensland base metal magnate. The station owner took it up again and retained possession until 1900.¹²

A small company took up a 320 acre copper lease in the high spur above Cressbrook Creek near Biarra, in 1895 and worked it quietly for several months. The Esk Divisional Board improved the road to the mine in 1897. By 1899 the Rising Star Copper Mining Syndicate were employing a dozen men driving a tunnel. The North Star Copper Mining Syndicate had two men prospecting, and the Great Pyramid Copper and Silver Mining Company was working the Mountain Maid, Pyramid, Lord Roberts, Iron Duke, and Saxon shafts. Saxon shaft reached fifty-three feet in 1901. The rocks were all stained by carbonates but there was little ore, and all were failures.¹³

The Dattu Dattu mine, discovered by a stockman in 1902, was one of the more interesting gold mining enterprises, located eight miles from Milford Rocks station on Emu Creek. Hindered by difficult access, the ore was packed up a dray road to Crow's Nest at £2 per ton. Palethorpe and Thorn prospected the area unsuccessfully, Hemstead took up Dattu Dattu and amalgamated his resources with Palethorpe, Thorn, and Langan who agreed to spend £500 on the property. Palethorpe died in 1904 and the property passed to Hemstead who abandoned it. Langan took it up as the Snowdrop and in June 1906 applied for a deep sinking subsidy from the Mines Department. He took up the Iceberg, Alexandra Queen, Silver Knob, and Silver Star as well, each of 400 by 400 yards, but he only ever worked the Snowdrop. Tin and bismuth were also present and in the 1905-1906 tin boom the tin was profitable. The shaft was seventy feet above Emu Creek with a main shaft twenty feet down the hill. The stone was sent to Aldershot smelter and assayed one ounce of gold per ton and thirty-seven ounces of silver per ton. However no significant mining was done.¹⁴

Another copper boom began in 1906 with mines being re-opened at *Perseverance*, at the Dundas mine and near Blackbutt. These latter mines — Ashington and Red Queen — had been worked on and off for over twenty years. The deepest shaft in the Ashington was eighty-two feet with copper at 2.7% and two pennyweights of gold per ton. The Red Queen yielded ten pennyweights of gold per

ton and 1.3% copper on testing. The reefs in both were too small to be worked remuneratively.¹⁵

There was considerable interest in possible use of local coal in the district's condensed milk and butter factories after 1900 when dairying came to the fore. Although good coal was found, the seams were too thin for working. The Geological Survey Office was also interested in coal. Several outcrops on the Nanango Road were worth prospecting in 1906. E.O. Marks of the Geological Survey Office noticed small seams of coal in the Esk area — at E. Broad's Glenrock paddock and in a well on J.H. Chaille's property at Biarra in 1912. There were several thin coal seams at the junction of Coal Creek and the Brisbane River, railway cuttings near Ottaba, on Happy Creek near Colinton (Portion 132, Parish of Colinton) and at the head of Splitter Creek on the Stanley side of the divide.¹⁶

In the depression people went gold prospecting as a subsistence lifestyle and because gold rose in price following devaluation of the Australian pound. Parties went out to the rough country between Linville and Yarraman after rain in the wet season of 1931. The Toogoolawah Amateur Gardening and Progress Association applied for government assistance for prospectors in March 1931 and two were granted immediately. At the same time H.B. Poole, E. Bustin and A.J. Callender went out to prospect for gold in the Monsildale Ranges and others up to German Gully. There were fourteen men working in Squirrel Creek. Gold was also discovered at the head of Grass Tree Creek between Cressbrook and Ivory's Creek on Harding Estate by Tony Lohman, J. Taylor, and R.J. and Walter Andrews. The Nukinenda Mines NL were also operating in 1933 on Maria Creek. Hendry and Haskins discovered gold, silver, copper, and lead at twenty-two feet depth on Bunker's Hill off Ravensbourne Road in 1933.¹⁷

There was an excellent find of limestone at Ottaba in Eric Baughan's paddock (Portion 28V, Parish of Biarra) in October 1933; John Joseph Kelly was the discoverer and Doreen Mary Kerwick co-leaseholder. The deposit was pure calcite and Kerwick set about forming a private company to operate the quarry for Brisbane fertilizer businesses. H.W. Searl, caretaker of the Toogoolawah Nestle's factory, became a director of the new company. They formed Queensland Calcite Pty Ltd and lit a local lime kiln; they were unfortunately defeated by the depression.¹⁸

National Petroleum, advertized as a 'People's Company', was formed in 1957 to explore for oil between Chinchilla east to Gatton and north up the Valley. Exploration superintendent was R.W.

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McFarlane and 600,000 of the 1.6 million shares issued at par were taken up by Brisbane and Brisbane Valley investors. While local investors hoped the company might bring industry to the Brisbane Valley, the only result for them was the loss of their savings. Councillor Wells of Linville was Chairman of Directors of the Taromeo Prospecting Company which issued five shilling shares and explored for silver and lead and other minerals in the Moore district in 1960. Sanderson, the managing director, continued to prospect and by 1964 had taken up mines on Taromeo Creek as specs. During the mining boom of the late 1960s so many geologists were entering private property that the Esk Shire Council was concerned for the rights of landholders. The Blue Hills Mining Company and Nickel Mines Limited both explored at Biarra in 1970. Eagle Exploration Limited issued five million ten cent shares and a million options for their copper areas at Biarra, Kilkivan, Mount Perry, and Lawn Hill. They held 2,851 acres in the Esk area. Test drilling was done in 1971-1972 by Exoil No Liability — prospecting for coal — and by Minerals Exploration Company, Blue Mountain Mining Company, and Nickel Exploration NL. There has been little mining interest since that boom, although Queensland Petroleum Pty Ltd conducted a seismic survey at Tarampa in 1984 and enterprising individuals have continued quietly prospecting for gold in the well-known areas.¹⁹

The mining history of the Brisbane Valley has been one of endless hope for a rich discovery to match the Gympie field. Mining has always been a side line for local farmers and graziers. City promoters, looking for cheap properties to float, have exploited the mines in the Valley in every mining boom.

Ever since the 1860s, mining has been a disappointment.

ENDNOTES

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4. MBC 18 July 1846, 4 October 1851, 14 February 1852 and 18 March 1854; T. Pugh, *Brief History of the Moreton Bay Settlement op.cit.*; Letter, John McConnel to William McConnel, 18 August 1851 89/59 Fryer Library, U.Q.
5. MBC 14 January 1854; NSW PP (LC) 1855 Vol 1 p1186.
6. MBC 8 May 1858, 29 June 1859, 6 August 1859 and 11 September 1860; BC 28 and 31 August 1866 and 18 October 1866; QT 30 August 1866, 25 September 1866 p3, 20 November 1866 p.5, 25 May 1867 p3 and 4 July 1867 p2.
7. QT 30 July 1868 p2; BC 28 August 1868 p2 c4.
8. BC 1 August 1868 p5 c2, 5 August 1868 p2 c5 quoting QT; 10 October 1868 p5 c4-5, 23 October 1868 and 29 October 1868 p3 c2 quoting *Gympie Times*; Report of the Government Geologist for Southern Queensland. QV&P 1868-1869 pp607-608.
9. QT 7 July 1870 p2, 28 February 1871 p2, 14 March 1871 p2; 15 April 1871 p2.
10. Mineral Selection Registers, Mines Department; QT 3 October 1872 p4, 17 December 1872 p3, 6 and 15 March 1873 p2, 19 April 1873 p3, and 30 August 1873 p3; BC 30 September 1872 p2 c5 quoting *Darling Downs Gazette* and 7 February 1873.
11. QT 19 April 1873 p3.
12. QT 31 January 1888, 27 February 1891, 21 September 1891 and 22 October 1891; BC 27 March 1888 p7 c2 and 28 August 1892 p6; Letter, John Moffat of Irvinebank, to Selby Ord, 18 March 1892 Letterbook 1890-1892 p376; C.V. Jackson, 'Some Mines and Mineral Deposits at the Heads of the Brisbane, Burnett and Mary Rivers' QPP 1901 Vol 4 p619; C.V. Jackson, 'Silver-Lead Deposit at Monsildale' QGMJ Vol 2 No 18 (November 1901) p530.
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14. C.V. Jackson, 'Milford Rocks Station, near Esk: Report of Gold Bearing Rocks' QGMJ Vol 2 No 17 (October 1901) p469; W.E. Cameron, 'The Dattu Dattu Mine, Brisbane River Valley' QGMJ Vol 4 No 35 (April 1903) p188-189; L.C. Ball, 'Mount Langan, Upper Brisbane Valley: Gold Silver and Bismuth Prospecting Areas' QGMJ Vol 7 No 76 (September 1906) p468.
15. QT 13 July and 9 September 1905; *Esk Shire* by 'Orion' 1908; L.C. Ball, 'Mines in the Parish of Taromeo' QGMJ March 1912 pp111-112.
16. L.C. Ball, 'Mount Langan, Upper Brisbane Valley: Gold, Silver and Bismuth Prospecting Areas' QGMJ Vol 7 No 76 (September 1906) p470; The coal was on Portion 33, Parish of Esk and Portion 28V, Parish of Biarra; E.O. Marks, 'Prospects of Coal at Esk' QGMJ July 1912 pp322-323.
17. ER 24 January 1931, 14 and 21 March 1931 and 4 November 1933; BVA 6 May 1931; ESKM 6 December 1933 p238.
18. ER 21 October 1933, 17 February 1934, 19 May and 8 August 1934.
19. BV5 18 October 1957 and 2 December 1960; ESKM 18 June 1970 p9240, 16 July and 15 October 1970 pp9249 and 9290, 15 July and 23 September 1971 pp9427 and 9454, 19 October and 14 December 1972 pp9634 and 9669 and 24 May 1984 p3578; QT 14 July 1970 p2.