



# *A History of the Bohle Plains*

**Settlement and Transformation  
1865-2012**

by Christopher Taylor



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**A History of the Bohle Plains**  
Settlement and Transformation 1865-2012

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*Christopher Taylor*

# Foreword

The area of the Bohle Plains covered in this book extends from the coast inland to Hervey Range. The southern border is marked by the Bohle River and the northern border by the Black River. In the past decade master planned communities have developed in this area with large scale residential subdivisions such as Kalynda Chase, Cosgrove and North Shore.

This publication A History of the Bohle Plains: Settlement and Transformation 1865-2012 traces the history of the Bohle’s development from rural to residential and considers the environmental and social changes that have occurred through settlement, shifting land use and legislation. The factors that influenced settlement, land use, and closer settlement came primarily from outside the district and the fortunes of the Bohle have mainly been linked to those of Townsville generally. The Crown Lands Act and subsequent lands legislation influenced initial settlement and land use for much of the district’s history. Government policies for promoting closer settlement in the early twentieth century led to the construction of the North Coast Railway through the Bohle and further infrastructure improvements. External factors such as World War Two brought changes to life in the Bohle and contributed to the conditions that led to the post-war development of the area.

A History of the Bohle Plains: Settlement and Transformation 1865-2012 is a new addition to the series of local history publications published by Townsville City Council’s CityLibraries. I present it to you as another chapter of Townsville’s rich history and hope that it will provide a better understanding and appreciation of our past.

**Jenny Hill**  
*Mayor of Townsville*





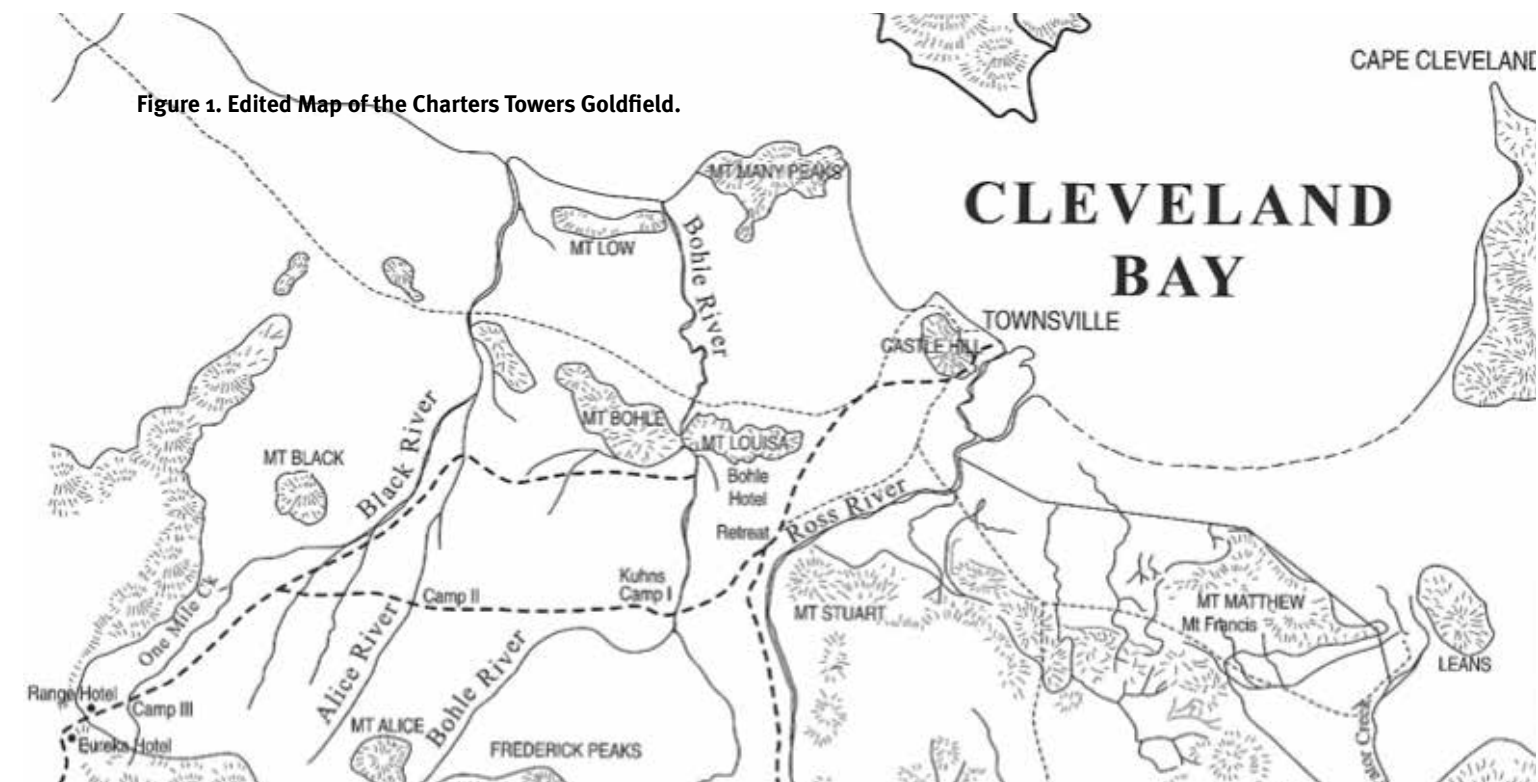


Figure 1. Edited Map of the Charters Towers Goldfield.

## Chapter One: The Bohle Plains

### Aboriginal Occupation of the Bohle Plains

Aboriginal Australians have a history of occupation in Australia that reaches back at least sixty thousand years. While elsewhere in Australia Aboriginal occupation has been identified as reaching back at least forty thousand years, in north Queensland clear evidence of human occupation over 20,000 BP<sup>1</sup> has been difficult to find. Nonetheless, there is evidence of Aboriginal occupation in the tropics from as early as 40,000 to 35,000 BP with pollen sequences at the Atherton Tablelands indicating that there were burning activities probably from humans in this period. To date, much of the archaeological evidence for early Aboriginal occupation in the region of Townsville and the Bohle Plains inland to Hervey Range, only dates back to about 2,000 to 4,000 BP but it is highly likely that occupation in Townsville and the Bohle Plains would extend much further back in time to perhaps 30,000 to 40,000 BP. Two archaeological sites are situated close to the study area in Hervey Range and have a history of occupation extending to at least 2,000 to 4,000 years<sup>2</sup>. These sites are located near the Black River, and the occupants would have used the Bohle Plains for their subsistence.

The Townsville region was originally occupied by two Aboriginal groups, identified by their linguistic differences: the Wulgurukaba (Wulguru) people and the

Bindal people. Wulguru was spoken at the south end of Halifax Bay, including the Townsville area, Magnetic Island and inland to Hervey Range and possibly as far north as the headwaters of the Star River<sup>3</sup>. It is believed that Cleveland Bay supported a large Aboriginal population, with one estimate for the population in the Herbert-Burdekin region in excess of 12,000 people. Different Aboriginal groups appear to have interacted with each other in a ceremonial and economic capacity and trade routes were established along Halifax Bay. For example, carved boomerangs were traded between the lower Herbert and the Townsville region and at Turtle Rock clear quartz was found which is believed to have originated from Hinchinbrook Island some 130km away.<sup>4</sup>

The labour involved in procuring and preparing food was divided between the sexes with the men being mostly restricted to hunting game, fishing and cooking flesh foods. However, the greater amount of food was provided by the women, who were responsible for gathering fruit, roots, chopping larvae out of tree stems, catching small game and when available providing crustaceans and shellfish. Women mostly performed the task of preparing the vegetable foods, which was a labour intensive task.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> before present

<sup>2</sup> John Campbell, "New Radiocarbon Results for North Queensland Prehistory," *Australian Archaeology*, no. 14 (1982): 63

<sup>3</sup> Helen Brayshaw, *Well Beaten Paths: Aborigines of the Herbert Burdekin district, north Queensland, An Ethnographic and Archaeological Study* (Townsville: James Cook University, 1990), 34

<sup>4</sup> John Campbell, "Preliminary Report on 1977 Surveys and Excavations at Turtle Rock, Hervey Range, North Queensland," *Australian Archaeology*, no. 8 (1978): 12

<sup>5</sup> Helen Brayshaw, ed. *Ethnohistory and Archaeology in the Herbert/Burdekin*, vol. 2, *Lectures on North Queensland History* (Townsville: James Cook University, 1975), 10

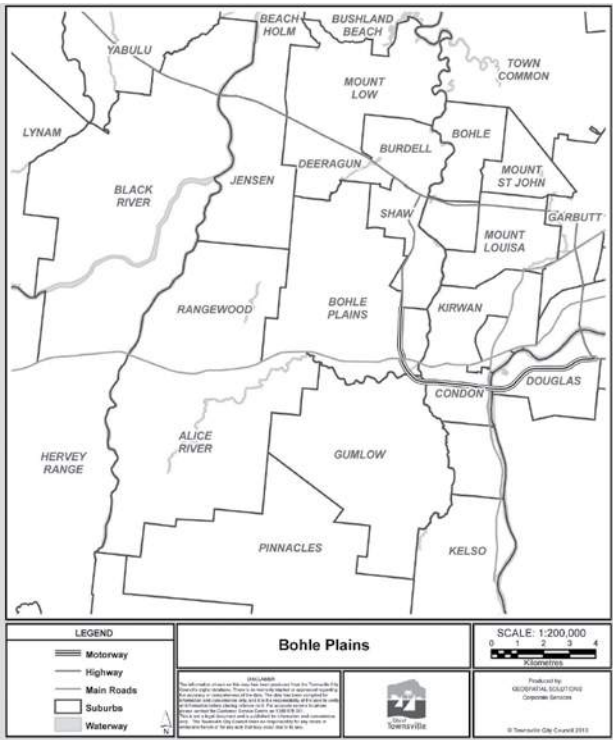


The ceremonial activities practiced by the Aboriginal people of the Herbert and Burdekin region were closely integrated with their relationship to the land. Both boys and girls received some form of initiation into adulthood, although the nature and importance of ceremonies varied throughout the region. Traditionally the initiation of boys into the knowledge, responsibility and privileges of the adult world was a major event involving the whole group, while the initiation of girls was marked by a less public ceremony. There was little ceremony associated with marriage, apart from a public declaration, usually by the man. Death was a matter for concern, not only for close relatives and friends but also for the entire social group as it affected everyone's economic and social relationships. The associated rituals were designed to assist the spirit of the deceased and to revenge the death, both responsibilities of the group. While there were a variety of mortuary practices adopted in the region, burial was one of the most common procedures and could be used with other practices.

### Land Use and Environmental Modification

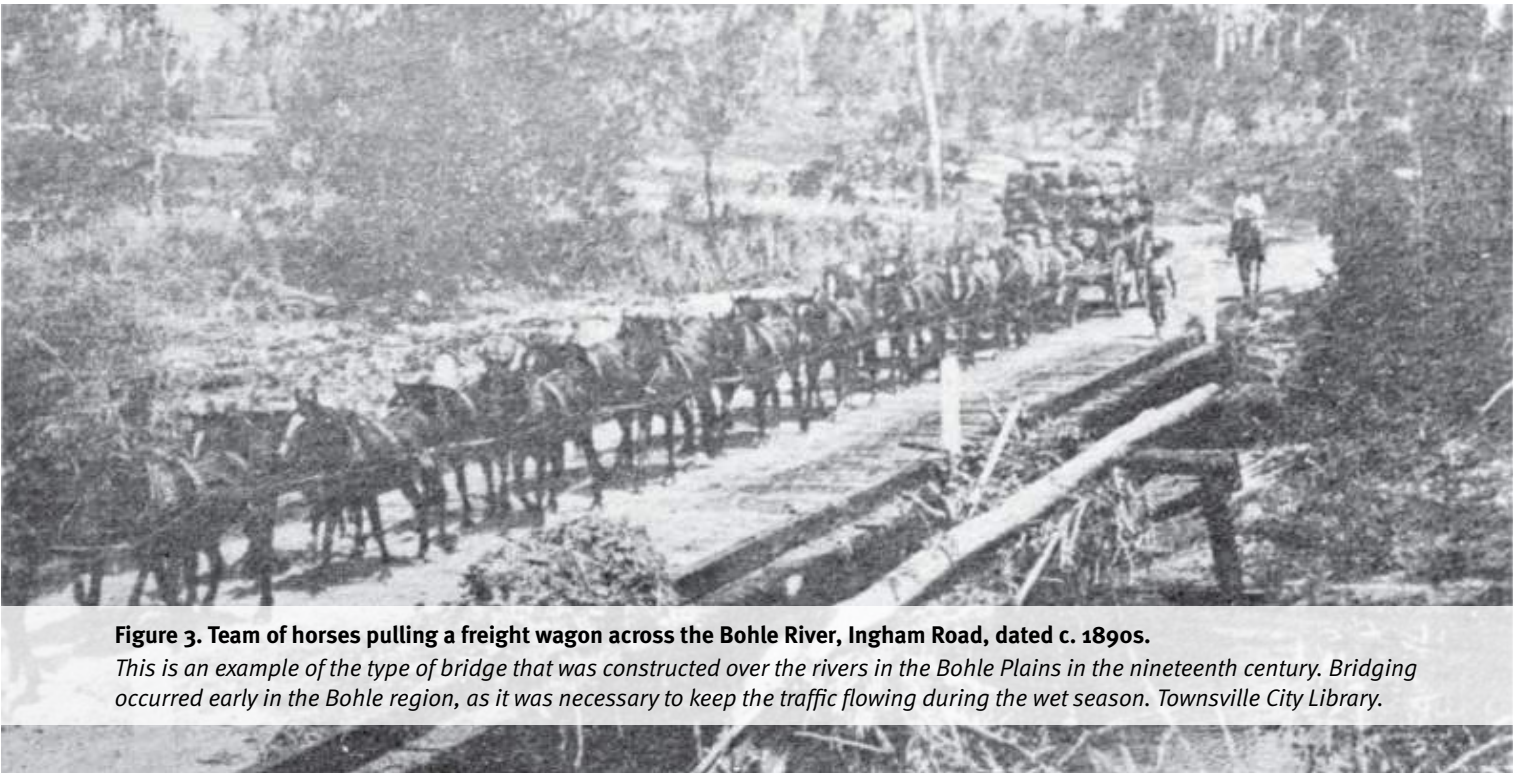
In his book *Invasion and Resistance*, Noel Loos describes north Queensland as being “a land of milk and honey for the Aborigines”<sup>6</sup>. Loos also noted that the tropical northern coasts and hinterlands of Queensland and northern Australia were first in order of importance to the Aboriginal system of economy. For the Wulguru people of the Bohle region, the river catchment areas would have been an important food source with the coastal areas providing a supplement to their diet during the drier months. The region's rivers and creeks were a rich source of food providing fish, shellfish, crustaceans, frogs, water birds, and edible plants. Plants were also used to make tools and equipment such as fishing nets and canoes. Other raw materials from the waterway such as reeds and rushes were used for making baskets, necklaces and mats. Sheets of bark could be used for making huts and canoes for fishing and transportation along the creek and river. Settlement and movement by the Aboriginal people was heavily influenced by seasonal variation. During the dry season the Aboriginal people lived a relatively settled existence concentrating near lagoons and large water holes and making use of the riverine environment. In the wet season, when neither water nor game was restricted, the Aboriginal people were much more geographically dispersed.<sup>7</sup>

While it is difficult to determine the entire impact Aboriginal activity had on the environment in the region, the most likely source of environmental modification was fire. Several European explorers recorded the widespread use of fire by Aboriginal people along the coast of North Queensland. The maritime explorer, Philip Parker King noted on sighting Dunk Island in 1827 that “the smoke of their fires, as usual, line the coast”<sup>8</sup>. Fire was used primarily for hunting, by flushing out animals and to encourage the regrowth of grass. The effect of frequent burning was to increase the area of grassland and to reduce the undergrowth of scrub, creating the open well grassed and ‘park-like’ landscape that Europeans encountered upon their arrival. Therefore, the very conditions that made the lands of the Kennedy District attractive to pastoralists were, in part, created by the Aboriginal people over thousands of years of occupation.



This section of the map shows the boundary of the Bohle Plains in relation to Townsville at the time of settlement, as well as the roads leading through the district. Queensland Votes and Proceedings 1879.

**Figure 2. Map of the Bohle Plains, 2011.**  
*The map shows the Bohle Plains as it is today.*



**Figure 3. Team of horses pulling a freight wagon across the Bohle River, Ingham Road, dated c. 1890s.**  
*This is an example of the type of bridge that was constructed over the rivers in the Bohle Plains in the nineteenth century. Bridging occurred early in the Bohle region, as it was necessary to keep the traffic flowing during the wet season. Townsville City Library.*

## Chapter Two: Tracks, Roads and Hotels – 1864-1900

The Bohle Plains has been shaped by its relationship to the settlement of Townsville and its position within the colony of Queensland. The vast distances between settlements made improvements to infrastructure such as roads and railways expensive and time consuming in north Queensland. This and the lack of funding shaped the pattern of settlement and increased the isolation and self-reliance of the settlers of the Bohle. One of the advantages of Townsville, compared with other coastal ports in north Queensland, was the settlement's good access to the hinterland and goldfields by road. This access allowed for Townsville's continued survival and growth. The roads running north and west out of Townsville passed through the Bohle Plains, which provided the district with opportunities for European development in the 1860s and further settlement in the 1870s and 1880s.

### Hervey Range Road

The main barrier between Townsville and its inland hinterland was Hervey Range, located about 40 km west of the settlement. The range caused difficulties for inland traffic between Townsville and the goldfields of Charters Towers, the Etheridge and Cape River. However, the mountains of Hervey Range were much less of a barrier for transportation than the range behind Cardwell and the

Burdekin River were for travel and carrying<sup>9</sup>. The range behind Cardwell caused significant difficulties for road construction and maintenance, while the Burdekin River flooded to such an extent in the wet season that Bowen was cut off from much of its hinterland for several months of the year. John Melton Black and his employees were responsible for the development of the first tracks and roads in Cleveland Bay. They searched the area in the early 1860s to establish an adequate road network to serve the needs of Black's stations. Black decided that before a port could be established at the present site of Townsville, he would need to first establish a road from the proposed port to the hinterland. For this purpose Black secured a £500 grant from the Queensland Government to survey and construct the road. By 1864 he had a reasonable line of road marked out to the Upper Burdekin settlement of Dalrymple. This would evolve into 500 km of track into the Flinders district, following a line close to the present-day Hervey Range Road. However, it is probable that Black used local Aboriginal knowledge in selecting the route into the region's hinterland. John Kerr notes in *Black Snow and Liquid Gold* that the early roads in north Queensland were not built as such, but evolved over time. They commonly followed the tracks of the Aborigines who had mastered the topography of the region and establish their pathways over thousands of years.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Noel Loos, *Invasion and Resistance – Aboriginal-European relations on the North Queensland frontier 1861-1897* (Canberra: Australian University Press, 1982), 3  
<sup>7</sup> Brayshaw, *Well Beaten Paths*: 158

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>9</sup> Susan Hands and Howard Hands, *Road Rage: Trials of Twisted Trails: The Government Dray Road to the Palmer Golden Rainbow 1873-1875* (Ingham: Palmerston Publishing, 2007), 35.  
<sup>10</sup> John D. Kerr, *Black Snow and Liquid Gold: A History of the Burdekin Shire* (Ayr: Burdekin Shire Council, 1994), 44.



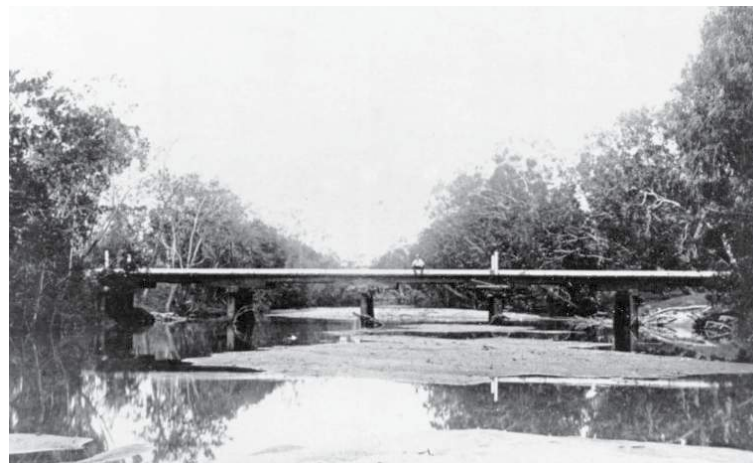


**Figure 4. The Kelso family walking on the old wagon road up to Hervey Range, Thuringowa c. 1929.**  
*This photo illustrates the extent to which Hervey Range road was neglected until the 1930s. Townsville City Library.*

For the colony of Queensland surveying and developing new roads across such a large area on a very limited budget resulted in a number of problems in the 1860s. The Engineer of Roads for the Northern Division prioritised the construction of new roads throughout north Queensland with a number of settlements competing for the vital links to their hinterland. This was achieved despite a limited number of trained personnel, a lack of equipment and funding, a disruptive wet season and the logistical problems created by the remoteness of the Kennedy district. In July 1863 a Parliamentary Select Committee attempted to address the poor state of Queensland's roads by increasing funding. This resulted in £5,000 of extra funding for the Northern Division with £1,000 reserved for the Kennedy district.<sup>11</sup> The funding also allowed for the construction of several new roads leading inland from Mackay to Peak Downs, Bowen to the Suttor and Cardwell to the Valley of Lagoons between 1863 and 1865. It was not until 1865 that the government began work to improve the road from Townsville through Hervey Range to Dalrymple.

The roads engineer, Frederick Byerley, recounted some of the problems with progress on the road in his 1866 report, stating:

*And at Cleveland Bay, where the expenditure was entrusted to gentlemen living in the neighbourhood, a fifth of the grant for cutting the range has been expended in the transport of a party from Brisbane, commission and charges alone, and the plant purchased – since sold for a trifle, – when plant was lying idle in Bowen, from which a party might have been equipped and forwarded at slight cost.<sup>12</sup>*



**Figure 5. Bridge over the Bohle River, c. 1890s.**  
*The width of the river made it a considerable barrier for overland transport, especially during the wet season, making bridges an early necessity. Townsville City Library.*

Byerley also foresaw the benefit of the new road to Cleveland Bay, describing how it was an improvement on the old track by the Haughton River noting: “when the cutting at Thornton’s Gap has been substantially constructed, [it will] prove a good boon to Cleveland Bay”.<sup>13</sup> Byerley reported that the road was open in 1865. However, due to delays caused by damage to the cutting at Thornton’s Gap during the wet season the road was not fully completed until the following year. When the new road was finally completed, squatters and carriers quickly took up the new route. This was due to the road’s increased reliability and the time saved when travelling to the closest port, Townsville. Over time many squatters and carriers began to abandon Bowen for Townsville as the preferred port and commercial centre of the northern Burdekin Basin.

With the road to Hervey Range becoming the main outlet for trade between Townsville, the goldfields and western stations a large amount of traffic began to move through the Bohle Plains. An article in Cummins and Campbell’s Magazine estimated that at times there were at least 300 carrying teams utilising this road, making it a well-trafficked route throughout the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>14</sup> It was also noted that many of the carriers lived in Townsville with several selecting land along the road in the Bohle area. The article also described the carriers’ trip across the Bohle Plains from Townsville. Teams would begin their trips in Flinders Street often making their first stop at the Rising Sun Hotel. From there they would proceed to the next hotel at the Ross River for a short rest stop, with the third and longer stop being at the Bohle Hotel before the next leg of the trip. The subsequent stopping point was not reached until the teams had reached the foot of Hervey Range, possibly at the Range Hotel, which was in operation at this time and presumably used regularly by teamsters. The ensuing leg of the trip was a daylong climb up the range. Mrs Alice Fulford, gave a personal account of the difficulty of travelling up the range road in 1870 in her memoirs.

*She recounted: My husband had procured a spring cart for station use and had a calico tilt put on it as protection from the weather and in this we proceeded on our journey. The cart was drawn by two horses driven tandem fashion, by my husband, and we were accompanied by a young black-boy who drove spare horses. Our first stage was to the foot of the range, thirty miles, where we camped for the night. Next day we ascended the Range, now known as “Hervey’s Range”, the road then being very rough and steep. I walked up carrying the child, taking my time and keeping in sight of the cart coming behind me. The horses could only pull the cart up a few yards at a time, on account of the steepness, and the black-boy had to carry stones to chock the wheels to keep the cart from going backwards each time.<sup>15</sup>*

They would often rest for a couple of days at the top of the Range at the Eureka Hotel before continuing on to Dalrymple and beyond.

These trips were long and arduous for both carriers and their teams. Thuringowa pioneer, James Kelso acted as a carrier to supplement his pastoral income. His son, James, aged eight years travelled with his father on his carrying trip to Richmond, as “spare boy” driving the spare horses along after the wagon from camp to camp, about ten or twelve miles a day. The round trip took six months.<sup>16</sup>



**Figure 6. Teamsters camped on top of Hervey Range, c. 1900.**  
*Teamsters often camped overnight at the top of the hill near the Eureka Hotel after spending the day travelling up the steep climb, before continuing onto the next leg of the trip. Townsville City Library.*

## Hotels and Wayside Inns

Michael Cannon writing in *Life in the Country* emphasised that hotels fulfilled a vital social function in the pioneering days of Australia.<sup>17</sup> Often hotels were among the first permanent buildings to be erected in newly established settlements as they were perceived to provide many essential services. Often overlooked, yet vital in north Queensland before motorised transport was common, hotels provided water, fresh fodder, stabling and secure pastures for horses and bullocks. These functions were enforced in the Publicans Act 1863, which required licensed premises to provide at least two moderately sized sitting rooms, two sleeping rooms for public accommodation and stabling and fodder for at least six horses. In addition, the hotel was to be kept clean and display its name on a signboard (which had to be illuminated at night) within 6 metres of the door. The hotels in the Bohle Plains were classed as country hotels and were often referred to as ‘wayside inns’. Wayside inns were usually erected at regular stopping points on main roads or on the outskirts of a settlement. These hotels were among the first buildings constructed in a new district. The country hotels were important stopping points providing food, drink and shelter for squatters, prospectors, travellers, pastoral workers and carriers. They were also often the focal point of a new district. In most regions hotels remained important until the arrival of the railway and in some cases long afterwards.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Frederick Byerley, “Report from the Engineer of Roads, Northern Division,” in *Queensland Votes and Proceedings* (1866), 1480.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> “Hervey’s Range in the Carrying Days,” *Cummins and Campbell’s Monthly Magazine*, June 1931, 65.

<sup>15</sup> *Memoirs of Mrs Fulford, Senior, Queensland Pioneer Book*, p.45.

<sup>16</sup> R.J. Kelso, *The Kelso Family History*, pp.1-2.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Cannon, *Life in the Country: Australia in the Victorian Age*, vol. 2 (Melbourne: Currey O’Neil Ross, 1983), 243.

<sup>18</sup> J. M. Freeland, *The Australian Pub* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1966), 89-101



The hotels on the Bohle fit the description of the country hotel perfectly, usually providing the bare minimum of services required by the Publicans Act. Most of these hotels were established in the mid to late 1860s, before selectors extensively settled the area, mainly to service the carriers travelling through Hervey Range. The Bohle Hotel was one of the first hotels to operate in the area. It was situated at the upper crossing of the Bohle River on the original road west towards Hervey Range about six miles (9.6 km) from Townsville. The first licence for the hotel was issued in November 1865 to Herbert Keller. The hotel consisted of two sitting rooms and six bedrooms and would have been sited to take advantage of the traffic travelling out west. Between 1866 and 1878 the licence changed hands twice, by which time the hotel had probably closed due to the diversion of heavy traffic away from this route.<sup>19</sup>

The Eureka Hotel (also called the Range Hotel) was erected in 1865 while the road through Thornton's Gap was being constructed.<sup>20</sup> It was well placed to capture the traffic along the road. Located at the summit of a steep incline it was the perfect rest stop for carriers and travellers. William Bailey built an unlicensed 'shanty pub' on the boundary of Dotswood and Woodstock stations probably to avoid paying the fee for the right to build on the station owners land.<sup>21</sup> In the early phase of settlement squatters would often sell the exclusive rights for wayside inns (or shanties) to be built on their land for a considerable fee ranging between £100 and £150. The hotel was later licenced in November 1865 to Charles Rowe. It consisted of two sitting rooms, four bedrooms and was constructed using hardwood slabs placed horizontally and had an iron roof. In March 1867 Rowe left the hotel around the same time that a cyclone destroyed the roof and William Randall took over the licence later that year. At that time the hotel boasted three sitting rooms and four bedrooms, in addition to those of the family. By 1869 an ad in the Port Denison Times described the hotel as having seven bedrooms and "a never-failing supply of beautiful water.. from a permanent well within a few yards of the house". Randall held the licence until 1875. The licence next passed to William Rolfe and his wife Johanna, who ran the hotel for the next thirty years. In 1880 the hotel's name changed to the Range Hotel. This name change has caused confusion

between this hotel and another of the same name that operated from 1866 at the base of Thornton's Gap. Little has been recorded of the original Range Hotel which operated until the early 1880s. James Mead built the hotel and its original name was the Royal Oak. A small settlement developed around the hotel. All that remains of this settlement is a small cemetery containing some of the earliest surviving headstones from this area. The change of name by the proprietors of the Eureka Hotel to the Range Hotel would appear to coincide with the demise of the Range Hotel at the foot of the range. After Johanna Rolfe died in 1901, the licence of the Range Hotel (formerly Eureka Hotel) passed on to a Mr Andrews who operated the hotel until sometime around 1908 when the licence was surrendered.

The Alice Hotel was located on the junction of the Alice River and Hervey Range Road. It appears likely that the Alice Hotel was located on selection 220 in a subdivided section of 50 acres on the corner of the property bordering the Alice River and Hervey Range Road. Thomas McCarey built The Alice in 1867, which he and his wife operated until 1873. The building was simple consisting of two sitting rooms, four bedrooms and was probably of slab construction using local hardwood.<sup>22</sup> The Alice Hotel was sketched and described in the diary of Lucy Gray, the wife of pastoralist Robert Gray. In 1866 Robert bought the station Hughenden, located about 379 km west of Townsville. At this time Lucy was on her way with Robert to their new station. She would have been one of the first white women to settle in the more remote part of the Kennedy District at the time. In 1868 when Lucy stopped at the hotel en route to her station, she described her short stay:

*About 15 miles on our way we stopped at the "Alice Hotel" (all the inns are Hotels) a rough wooden house with the usual wide verandah where travellers arriving deposit their baggage, saddles pack bags etc. A big rough-looking woman came out & after inspecting, welcomed me like a sister & took me into the house the funniest little box of a room nearly filled up with a large four post bed... My hostess brought me an immense iron tub & bucket after bucket of water. This was an expression of great hospitality, as it was all brought up a steep bank from the creek behind the house – I envied the others who bathed in the creek itself, a delightful shady place... I was so hungry I could have eaten sawdust – but I much preferred the fare provided – tea, good bread, fresh eggs, butter, cream, fried bacon & pork in various shapes – which (our hostess*

**Figure 7. The Eureka Hotel, c. 1930.**

*One of the few slab huts from the 1860s still in existence in north Queensland. The hotels in the Bohle would have been of similar construction and design, evident from the drawing of the Alice hotel. Townsville City Library.*



*who waited on us herself) was very anxious that we should eat. She had reared [the pig], tended fattened, & finally cooked it herself... After supper the horses (who no doubt thought their day's work was done were quietly feeding, their bells tinkling as they moved about, close by) were brought up & saddled again as we had to go to the foot of the range 15 miles further where we were to camp for the night.*<sup>23</sup>



**Figure 8. The Alice Hotel 1868.**

*Drawn by Lucy Gray while resting on her way over Hervey Range. The hotel appears to be of standard construction for a country hotel in North Queensland. The hotel would have been constructed of locally sourced hardwood and the roof was probably of iron.*

After the original owners left the hotel in 1873 it seems that it did not operate as a licenced premise until 1879 when William Butcher was granted a new licence, which he held until 1882. Between 1882 and 1888 the licence for the Alice passed through the hands of five licensees until Anna Walker took it over. She and her husband held the licence until the Alice closed in 1903.<sup>24</sup>

One of the last hotels to be built during this period was the Sherwood Hotel, located at the junction of the Bohle River and Ingham Road. Wallace Hind applied for permission to erect a public house on the reserve at the Bohle River in July 1888. He built a single-floored building made of wood with an iron roof. Over the next fourteen years, the hotel's licence changed hands five times until the hotel burned down on September 1904, seven months after Annie Harris had acquired the licence.<sup>25</sup> The hotel was not rebuilt suggesting that by this time the long-term viability of the hotel was not good. There appears to be some confusion whether the Bohle and Sherwood hotels were one and the same. However, it seems likely that these were in fact separate hotels. The confusion probably originates from the fact that the Sherwood was also referred to as the 'Bohle River' by locals, which would not have been confusing for locals as the two hotels were never in operation at the same time.

Over the forty-three year period between 1865 and 1908 two common themes have emerged for all of the hotels operating in the Bohle. First, they all ceased operating around the turn of the century. Second, the licences changed hands frequently during the life of most of the hotels. This would indicate that the hotels were not very

<sup>19</sup> Dorothy Gibson-Wilde and Bruce Gibson-Wilde, *A Pattern of Pubs: Hotels of Townsville 1864-1914* (Townsville: James Cook University, 1988), 126.

<sup>20</sup> *The building still exists at Hervey Range and is now operated as a tea-house. The building still retains many of its original features and is one of the oldest slab buildings in north Queensland. It is on the Queensland heritage register.*

<sup>21</sup> "Christmas Supplement," 30.

<sup>22</sup> Gibson-Wilde and Gibson-Wilde, *A Pattern of Pubs*: 117.

<sup>23</sup> Anne Allingham, "Victorian Frontierwomen: The Australian Journals and Diaries of Lucy and Eva Gray, 1868-1872, 1881-1892" (James Cook University, 1987), 104-06

<sup>24</sup> Gibson-Wilde and Gibson-Wilde, *A Pattern of Pubs*: 117.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 232.



**Figure 9. George Brabon's horse team carrying telegraph poles along Hervey Range road, c. 1930.**

*Until the mid 1930s, horse and bullock teams were the only way of travelling along Hervey Range road due to the poor condition of the road. Townsville City Library.*



profitable, relying on seasonal trade, which by the 1900s had virtually died out. Another significant factor was the arrival of the railway in the 1880s, which would have had a negative affect on the westbound traffic through the Bohle.

## The Decline of Hervey Range Road

The disappearance of all the hotels in the Bohle by 1908 reflects a significant loss of traffic along the road. Another indication of the decreased traffic was the lack of maintenance of Hervey Range road during this period by the government. By the 1930s the road had deteriorated to such an extent that it was virtually unusable by anything other than horse and bullock teams. The road's decline began shortly after it was constructed when in October 1867 the government decided to erect turnpikes at Thornton's Gap to collect a toll from the carriers heading to the goldfields.<sup>26</sup> The toll was to help recover the costs involved in continually repairing the road, especially since the cutting in the road needed constant supervision due to rockslides and damage caused by the wet season. However, the toll was priced at a higher cost than most carriers were willing to pay and the traffic through Thornton's Gap quickly began to dry up. It is likely that the government did not count on the resourcefulness of the carriers who found another route about 40 kilometres south of the range near the Haughton River. Over time the carriers would favour this route heading to Charters Towers rather than continuing to use Thornton's Gap. By 1869 the annual toll collected

was £156, only £45 more than the toll keeper's annual wage. This most likely contributed to the toll being lifted sometime around 1870. After the lifting of the toll carriers recommenced use of Thornton's Gap, although at a reduced rate compared to the period before the toll.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the establishment of a toll instigated the near abandonment of the road over the next two decades by triggering the need to find an alternative route that proved to be more popular over time. The diminishing use of Hervey Range road can also be directly attributed to the development of the Townsville to Charters Towers Railway, completed on 2 December 1882.<sup>28</sup> Not only did the railway reduce the competitiveness of the carriers, over time the road following the line of the railway became the favoured route to Charters Towers from Townsville. With the decreased importance of the road through Thornton's Gap the government neglected the road and maintenance was reduced particularly on the stretch up the range.

The development of the roads through the Bohle Plains was an important precursor to its settlement by Europeans. They linked the Bohle with Townsville and importantly with the stations of the Northern Kennedy District and the northern goldfields. The first Europeans to settle in the Bohle were the publicans and the families of the owners of the hotels established shortly after Hervey Range and Ingham roads were constructed. All of the hotels had a tumultuous time with licences

changing hands, yearly in some cases, and all of them ceasing operation by the early twentieth century. Hervey Range road in particular provided an important lifeline for Townsville in the first decade of its existence and assisted to establish its dominant economic position in the Kennedy district. The roads also helped to open the Bohle up for the selectors that began arriving in the 1870s. During this period the Kennedy District was still very much on the periphery of Queensland with funding for roads and other infrastructure projects rare. For example, in the years between 1871 and 1875 the Northern Division received just 13 percent of the total road funding allocated to Queensland compared to the Southern District that received 46 percent of funding.<sup>29</sup> The government's attempt to establish a toll on the Thornton's Gap route highlights the lack of planning and local knowledge of the area, firstly in not realising that there were alternative routes and secondly in making the toll too high. However, this also highlights just how small the carriers' profit margin was since many preferred to establish a new route to paying a fee of around three shillings per wagon. The early development in the Bohle resulted from a mix of private entrepreneurs and financial support from the Colonial Government. This type of arrangement was common in colonial Australia with the government essentially outsourcing many of its responsibilities in remote regions. Hervey Range road was completed despite numerous setbacks and the continual need for maintenance, especially at Thornton's Gap. Once the road was completed it did not take long for merchants to take advantage of the economic opportunities that became available in the Bohle as a result of the traffic passing through the area.

<sup>26</sup> "Government Notifications," *The Queenslander*, 19 October 1867, 6.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Bell, *A Short History of Thuringowa* (Thuringowa: Thuringowa City Council, 2000), 24.

<sup>28</sup> "Country News: Charters Towers," *The Queenslander*, 23 December 1882, 804.

<sup>29</sup> *The Northern District consisted of all of North Queensland from Mackay north, while the Southern District consisted of Brisbane and Southeast Queensland to Bundaberg. "Roads and Bridges in Southern, Wide Bay, Central and Northern Districts," in QVP (1875), 1009*



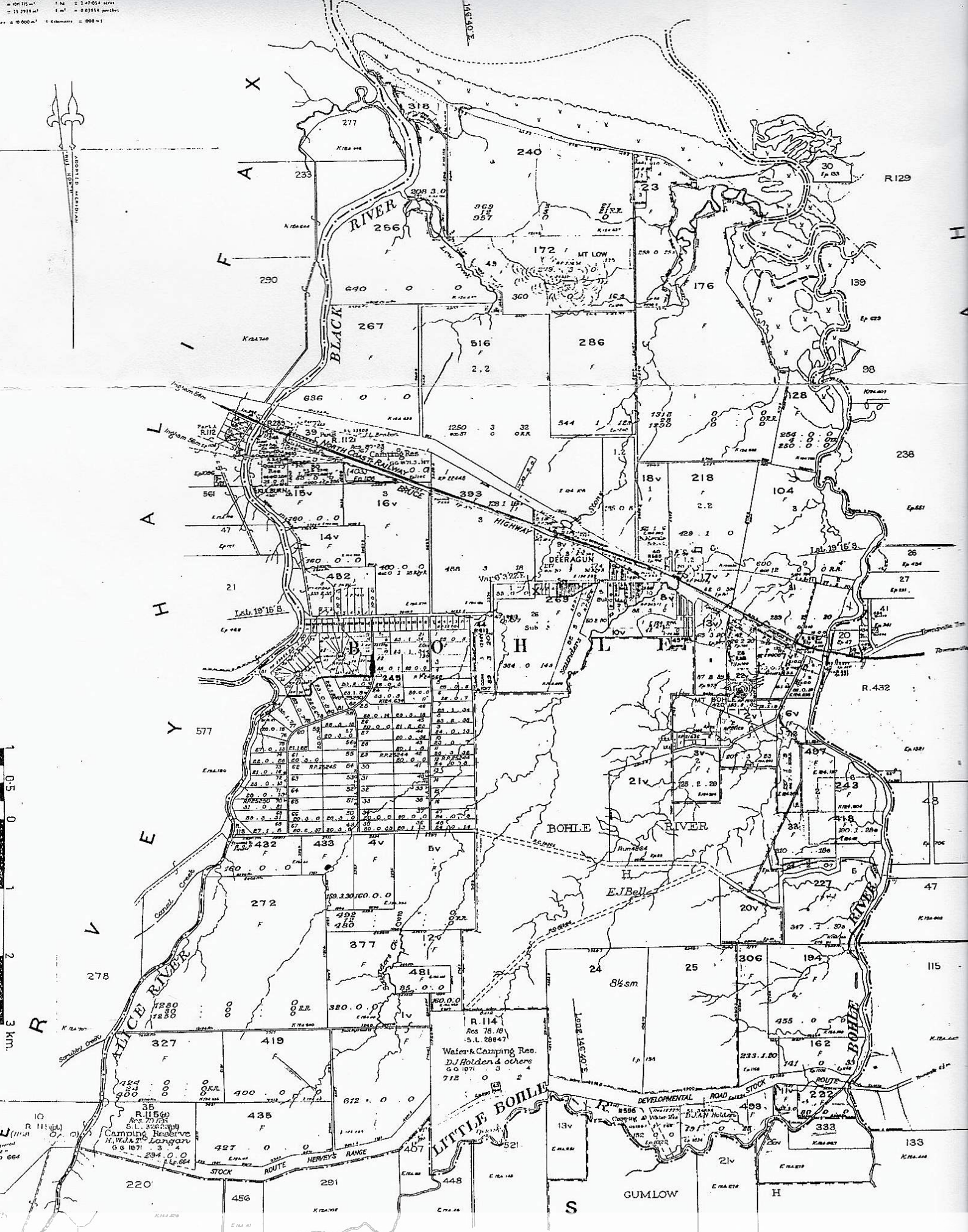


Figure 10. Parish of Bohle Map, 1978.

The map shows the boundary of the Bohle Plains as well as the locations of the selections throughout the district. Of particular note are selections: 104, 128, 176, 218, 220, 222, 227, 240, 243, 266, 267, 272, 277, 286, 318, 327, 377, 418, 419, 456 and 516. Note that this map contains later subdivisions and development. Townsville City Library.



Figure 11. Man sitting on the bank of the Bohle River, Townsville 1890.

The photo highlights how much land was cleared within two decades of settlement. Virtually all of the land of the selector's side of the river has been cleared, while on the other side, land presumably belonging to the crown is still intact. Townsville City Library.

## Chapter Three: European Settlement – 1870-1900

At the time of Queensland's separation from New South Wales in 1859 the colony faced many barriers to its economic development including high levels of debt and a very limited source of income which was primarily derived from wool. Queensland had an abundance of land, which became the colony's most valuable asset and promised to lift it out of debt and ensure its economic future. However, at this time Queensland lacked the essential infrastructure needed to benefit from its land and natural resources. There were no railways or telegraph poles and outside of Brisbane there were few planned roads.<sup>30</sup> The government hoped that by encouraging settlement in north Queensland mineral discoveries would be made creating a dual economy with the pastoral industry. At the same time the British Government was promoting closer settlement in the colony hoping that the British equivalent of a yeoman class could be established to provide Britain with cheap food staples and raw materials.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the question of how best to utilise the land became one of central importance for the Colonial Government from the very beginning and quickly became the political issue of the day.

<sup>30</sup> Ross Fitzgerald, Lyndon Megarrity, and David Symons, *Made in Queensland: A New History* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2009), 18

<sup>31</sup> Kay Cohen, "Lands Administration 1859-1910," in *People, Places and Policies: Aspects of Queensland Government Administration 1859-1920*, ed. Kay Cohen and Kenneth Wiltshire (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1995), 132. Yeoman – a farmer with a small freehold

### Pastoral Selection in North Queensland

In 1861 the Kennedy pastoral district was opened up for selection resulting in a rush for the best available land as selectors indulged their unshakable optimism for the northern pastoral industry. Within two years pastoral settlement stretched almost to the limits of the Kennedy district with selectors confident that the demand from Sydney and Melbourne would keep the boom going in the north. This was true for the Thuringowa region with the best land being selected early in the 1860s with the establishment of pastoral properties such as Woodstock Station on the Haughton River and the Fanning River run. Initially, many pastoralists in the 1860s concentrated on wool production rather than cattle grazing due to the lower costs and ease of transporting the product to the southern markets. Unfortunately, in the tropics of north Queensland sheep proved to be unviable and by 1865 some stations began to change to cattle, reducing labour and running costs.<sup>32</sup> By the early 1870s many northern pastoralists had made the switch to cattle as a means of reducing overheads and in an effort to avoid the problems that they encountered with sheep in the tropical climate.

<sup>32</sup> G. C. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away: A History of North Queensland to 1920* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1972), 37.

| REFERENCE TO SMALL WORK |          |          |                     |          |             |
|-------------------------|----------|----------|---------------------|----------|-------------|
| No.                     | Plan No. | Area     | Purpose             | Notes    | Remarks     |
| 36                      | En 179   | 0.1.0    | I.L. 26-42          |          |             |
| 37                      | "        | 0.1.0    | I.L. 26-42          |          |             |
| 38                      | "        | 0.1.0    | I.L. 26-42          |          |             |
| 39                      | 836      | 27.20    | Quarry              | R280     |             |
| 40                      | "        | "        | "                   | R313     | 1944.1.1920 |
| 41                      | "        | "        | "                   | "        | "           |
| 42                      | 26.2.20  | 61.29427 | Forest Conservation | Ply Ltd. |             |
| 43                      | "        | "        | "                   | "        |             |



By the end of the 1860s the optimism of the north Queensland pastoral industry began to abate as serious issues emerged in the industry. These included the vast distances between the northern pastoral properties and the closest major markets (Sydney and Melbourne), high rents, and limited access to capital. Station owners started to sell off large portions of their land keeping just small sections of the best land for themselves. Before long, few properties in the north could find buyers forcing selectors to simply walk off their stations. In an attempt to avoid insolvency many smaller selectors took on carrying, butchering and any other kind of work they could find. By the end of the decade it became apparent that the Kennedy district would not become, as Bolton put it, “a big man’s frontier”.<sup>33</sup> Only some of the smaller owner-managers who could not afford to get out would survive. While some of the early pastoral enterprises of the Kennedy district in the 1860s were large consisting of up to 30,000 sheep and 3,000 cattle, the typical pastoralist was a young owner-manager. Some came from established squatting families who backed the enterprise, whilst others depended on a partner from the southern capitals or on a loan from a bank or merchant house. Often northern pastoralists had high levels of debt, as credit was easy to obtain in the 1860s partly due to the idea that the land boom would continue for some time. For the few selectors who managed to hold on to their stations into the 1870s better times were on the horizon. In 1873 gold was discovered on the Palmer, which triggered a second wave of pastoral expansion as the gold rush hit the region. The influx of the mining population into the new goldfields gave the pastoralists a ready local demand for their beef at a time when they were struggling to find markets. This gave the surviving pastoralists a relatively long period of boom. With the future looking more secure and moderately prosperous, many would not experience hard times again until the droughts of the 1890s.<sup>34</sup>

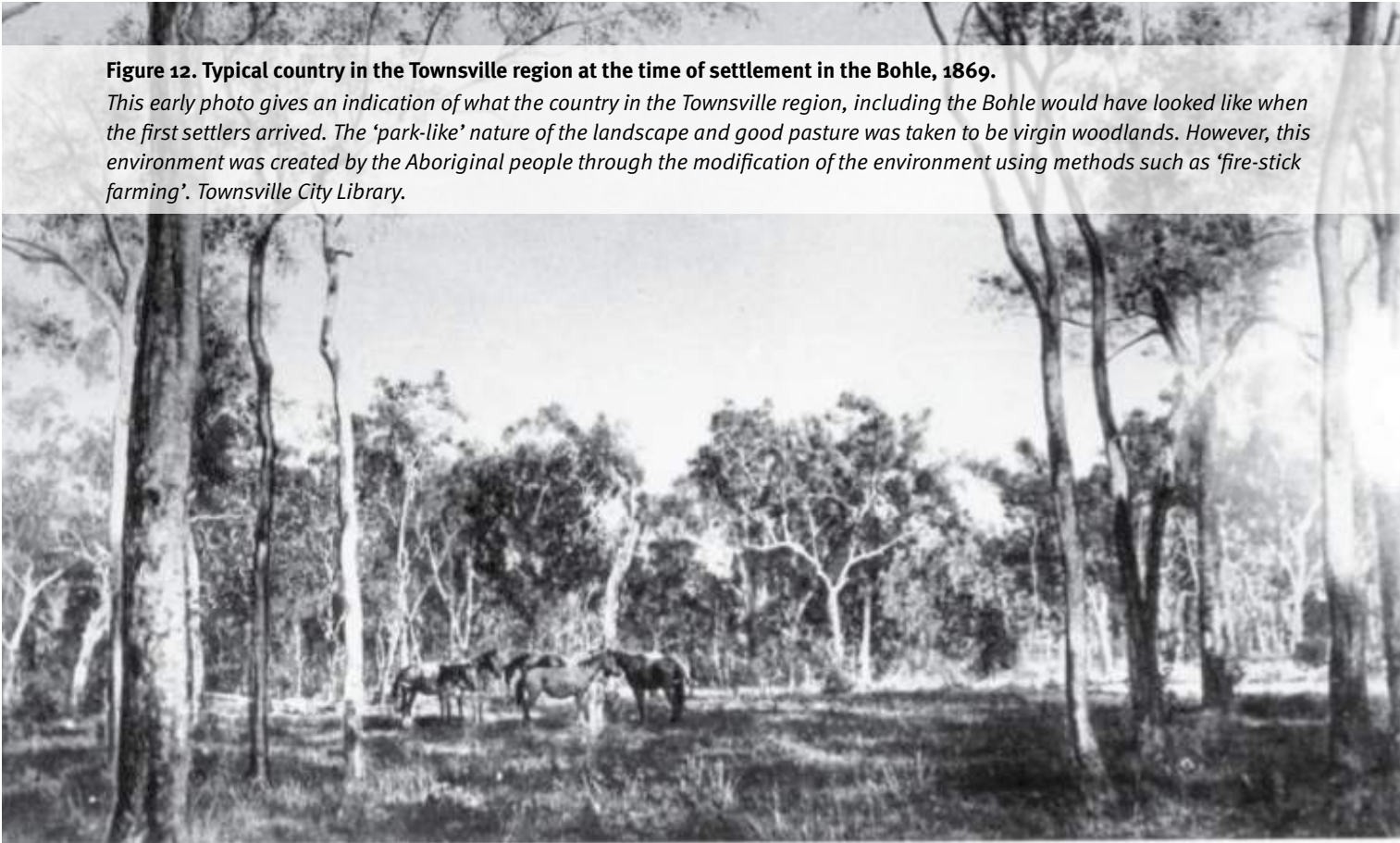
## The Crown Lands Act

In order to help establish new agrarian industries and a new yeoman class throughout the colony the Queensland Government introduced the Crown Lands Act in 1860. The Act was designed to encourage agriculture in the colony, reduce the power of the squatters and encourage migration from Europe. It was structured specifically to discourage land speculation, which the

government feared would hinder development and reduce tax revenue. This was to be achieved by imposing minimum stocking rates, fixed time periods to occupy and ‘improve’ the land and up-front payments for the lease. Initially, the largely pastoralist members of the Queensland parliament were determined to set the price of land at £1 per acre, a high price that had been abandoned by the other colonies as it discouraged small selectors. Together with the tough conditions for leasing the land, the result was that small selectors were often unable to make a living from their land. Consequently, they would be obliged to forfeit their selections to neighbours who had major financial backing and were in reality the only ones who could afford to purchase. While the initial selection legislation favoured squatters and large landowners, this was always intended to be a short-term solution to the settlement of north Queensland with closer settlement being the ultimate objective from the start. To achieve this goal the Act underwent several changes and restructuring during the late nineteenth century to address its shortcomings.<sup>35</sup>

While the Crown Lands Act was successful in encouraging pastoralism in Queensland it failed to significantly increase cultivation on selections. This is evident from the statistics of the colony compiled by the Lands Department and published in the Queensland Votes and Proceedings in 1877. The statistics illustrate that Townsville was well below average with only 1.75 percent of land under cultivation compared to an average of 7.21 percent in the colony. Mackay and Bundaberg had the most land under cultivation with 14.25 and 15.75 percent respectively, highlighting the stark contrast in land use between regions and climate in Queensland. Overall, Undersecretary Tully noted that with the exception of Mackay, there was little cultivation on conditional selections in the colony of Queensland. Tully pointed out that the statistics conclusively proved that selectors were using the land almost exclusively for grazing purposes. The Undersecretary expressed his and the Government’s concern over these findings when he stated:

*The tendency displayed on the part of selectors, both large and small, to devote the land to purely pastoral purposes, is not a satisfactory state of things. It is not the class of settlement which was contemplated when the Act of 1868 came into operation; nor is it the class of settlement which the small selector should be encouraged to engage in.*<sup>36</sup>



**Figure 12. Typical country in the Townsville region at the time of settlement in the Bohle, 1869.**

*This early photo gives an indication of what the country in the Townsville region, including the Bohle would have looked like when the first settlers arrived. The ‘park-like’ nature of the landscape and good pasture was taken to be virgin woodlands. However, this environment was created by the Aboriginal people through the modification of the environment using methods such as ‘fire-stick farming’. Townsville City Library.*

Not only did the Act fail to increase the level of cultivation it also failed to create a large class of yeoman farmers in the colony and this was acknowledged as early as the 1870s.<sup>37</sup> In the 1879 Queensland Votes and Proceedings Tully commented that an important consideration in selecting land throughout Queensland was to secure a piece of land that selectors could dispose of readily after fulfilling the conditions. Tully also noted that when sold the land often fell into the hands of the adjoining pastoral tenant or large freeholder. The Undersecretary expressed his concern over this development when he commented:

When the principal motive for selecting land is to sell it again, I do not think that settlement will be the result; and it remains to be proved how far such a practice is prevalent in Queensland. I fear that it will be found more general than has been anticipated, and that in some districts where small holdings now abound, the land will revert to the condition of large paddocks used for purely grazing purposes.<sup>38</sup>

This statement highlights the failure of the legislation to promote further settlement throughout the colony at a level that the politicians and government bureaucracy at the time considered acceptable. Instead of creating a

class of small freehold farmers, the result in the colony, especially the Darling Downs, was that large estates were growing larger. This is what Tully considered the “very reverse of what was desired” by the government. Ultimately, economic and environmental considerations influenced how selectors in Queensland used the land, with Tully himself recognising that in some places grazing was the only possible use for land.<sup>39</sup> While the Act gave an impetus for the initial selection of land, it could not enforce the government’s desired land use – small-scale agriculture – on land that could not support such activities.

## Settlement in the Bohle Plains, 1870-1900

For the new settlement of Townsville the 1870s and 1880s was a period of boom and rapid expansion. While most of the new arrivals headed straight for the goldfields, some stayed in Townsville to set up businesses, select land or find employment.<sup>40</sup> The settlement of the Bohle Plains by Europeans was driven by two major factors largely from outside the district. First, the Colonial Government encouraged small selectors to settle and farm land through the Crown Lands Act. Second, the boom in the pastoral industry

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-42.

<sup>34</sup> Anne Allingham, “Pioneer Squatting in the Kennedy District,” in *Lectures on North Queensland History* (Townsville: James Cook University, 1975), 94.

<sup>35</sup> Cohen, “People, Places and Policies,” 137-38.

<sup>36</sup> W. Alcock Tully, “Report of the Under Secretary for Land,” in *QVP* (1877), 88

<sup>37</sup> D. B. Waterson, *Squatter, Selector, and Storekeeper: A History of the Darling Downs 1859-93* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1968), 97.

<sup>38</sup> W. Alcock Tully, *Report of the Under Secretary for Lands. 1879, QVP* (1877). 88.

<sup>39</sup> Tully, “QVP 1877,” 88

<sup>40</sup> Dorothy Gibson-Wilde, *Gateway to a Golden Land: Townsville to 1884* (Townsville: James Cook University, 1984), 112-14.



which resulted from the gold rushes of the 1870s and 1880s created demand for land and beef cattle in north Queensland. While the selection legislation of the Colonial Government favoured mixed agriculture, the environmental constraints imposed by the land itself heavily influenced land use in the Bohle. Although the first thirty years of settlement in the district saw little development, the environment began to be altered by the activities of Europeans, thus beginning a long pattern of transformation of the landscape.

A decade after the first roads were constructed through the Bohle Plains selectors began to arrive in large numbers to settle the land. The selection of land in the district mainly occurred in two periods roughly five years apart. The first selection period was in 1877-1878, and the second in 1883-1884. Although the odd selection was taken up on either side of these periods, the vast majority occurred in these two periods. The first period of selection coincided with a minor downturn in Townsville's economy caused by a slump in mining activity. Several of the larger selectors may have used the period to diversify their investments from mining to land speculation and pastoralism. The first wave of selections were surveyed and leased in 1877-1878 and were initially concentrated along the Bohle, Alice and Black Rivers. The selections ranged in size from 80 to 2,360 acres; this vast range in the size of selections can be attributed to the varying levels of wealth of the selectors and the productivity of the land. While some of the selectors were already successful pastoralists and businessmen, such as George Saunders and William Butcher, many were of modest means and newly arrived in the colony. The selectors came from a diverse range of backgrounds, cultures and economic circumstances with selectors originating from Germany, Switzerland and Denmark as well as the United Kingdom and from around Australia. Many of the first selectors to arrive occupied their selections before they could be surveyed and officially leased from the government. This was common at the time as the Lands Department did not have enough surveyors to meet the demand from selectors. In north Queensland, surveyors were behind on their work in most regions until at least 1876 due to the remoteness of the region and the large distances needed to be travelled in conducting the survey work.<sup>41</sup> The selections taken up in the late 1870s were on average larger than those over the next two decades.<sup>42</sup> They were generally in more desirable locations, such as near major roads or

the coast, or had large river frontages. This suggests that the largest selections in the most desirable locations would have been the first to be taken up with the later selections being increasingly located on less desirable and smaller blocks of land. By the 1890s most of the land with river frontage had been selected with the pattern of settlement moving away from the rivers and beginning to concentrate inland along Ingham and Hervey Range roads.



**Figure 13. The Bohle River, c. 1890.**

*This photo shows the Bohle River as it looked like around the time of settlement. Mangroves and bushland would have lined much of the waterway before being largely cleared by the settlers. Townsville City Library.*

As in the Darling Downs, selectors in the Bohle Plains sought to increase their holdings by occupying neighbouring selections. Selectors such as George Saunders, John Collins and James Crowther took on multiple adjoining selections in 1877-1878, creating large estates that took up much of the coastal land between the Black and Bohle Rivers. They were able to apply for multiple selections at virtually the same time, with Saunders applying for several adjacent selections in 1878.<sup>43</sup> Throughout Queensland selectors would resort to deception in order to obtain cheap land. Dummying was one such practice that was employed by unscrupulous selectors. Under the Crown Lands Act selectors could nominate one selection as their place of residence, or 'bona fide residence', which could be leased at a reduced rent. However, a number of selectors would lease multiple selections under the false pretence that each selection was their 'bona fide residence' allowing the selector to have several selections at a reduced rent. The government found this difficult to counter because it could take years to establish that a selector was dummying the land, as it was hard to find evidence to prove a case in court. The practice of dummying

<sup>41</sup> Tully, "QVP 1877," 90-91.

<sup>42</sup> The average size of selections surveyed in late 1870s was 737 acres, compared to an average of 387 acres for selections surveyed in the 1880s, and 229 acres in the 1890s.

<sup>43</sup> Selection File: Saunders, George. 1884, QSA ID62803.



**Figure 14. A selector and his family on their selection at the Black River, c. 1872.**

*Many of the early huts in the Bohle were considered to be primitive consisting of a single room made from both locally sourced and imported materials. This hut seems to be constructed from a mixture of corrugated iron, horizontal slabs and a thatched roof. The hut would have been seen as a temporary shelter and would have been improved over time. Of particular interest are the two women in the photo. European women were scarce in North Queensland in the 1870s, and the Aboriginal woman who was presumably engaged in domestic duties is a rare example of documentation of Aboriginal women in the Bohle after European settlement. Townsville City Library.*

probably occurred in the Bohle Plains with at least one case being suspected in 1890. David Schmid had his property inspected by the local bailiff who suspected that the land was not being regularly used for pastoral activities. The bailiff noted that while the selector and his father, John Schmid, were on the land with him, the "hut did not present the appearance of a permanent and bona fide residence". The bailiff also commented that the: "selector stated that he resided on the land till four months ago when he took the butcher's shop in Flinders Street. By the appearance of the hut I hardly think this can be strictly correct".<sup>44</sup> Thus, the report suggests that Schmid was suspected of dummying but it is unclear what, if any, action was taken against him. This example indicates that settlement in the Bohle Plains followed similar patterns to those occurring elsewhere in the colony. The Crown Lands Act did not discourage larger estates from developing in the Bohle nor did it discourage speculators with several selectors owning multiple selections not only in the Bohle but also in other locations around Townsville.

<sup>44</sup> John Schmid was David Schmid's father. John owned selection 418, which was located on the Bohle River, while David owned selection 497, also located on the Bohle River. The two properties adjoined. Selection File: Schmid, David. 1890, QSA ID63205.



**Figure 15. Men Fishing at the Bohle River, c. 1890.**

*The Bohle River was always a popular fishing spot, and provided many locals their main income in the early years. Townsville City Library.*





Figure 16. Gathering at the home of the Schmid family at the Bohle.

## Family Life on the Bohle

Family life on the Bohle Plains was similar to family life in other areas of Queensland in the late nineteenth century. In north Queensland by 1876 men outnumbered women by about 4 to 1. Thus, the rural frontier was a male dominated society, and remained so until well into the twentieth century. There were many difficulties that women faced in north Queensland in living on the land. Women needed to be able to face all the problems that the bush entailed, including rustic housing made from bush timber, food shortages and lack of money. Women worked hard. Apart from the washing, cooking, cleaning, sewing and other household chores, women were often required to help with planting, weeding, feeding the stock and milking the cows. Family life on the land changed little in subsequent decades. Even in the 1920s, the life of dairy farmers on the Bohle Plains was arduous. Mrs Holden remembers that,

*For forty years my mother got up at midnight and she'd milk about thirty or forty cows and she'd come up and cook breakfast for my father and whoever was going on the milk run and ahh after they were gone she'd go back to bed for maybe an hour and then she'd get up and work all day. They worked hard.*<sup>45</sup>

Families were larger with older children looking after their younger siblings while mothers continued with their daily tasks, washing, cooking and gardening,<sup>46</sup>

Many of the first houses in the Bohle district were little more than one or two room huts, with only a few having a dedicated kitchen. These huts were largely iron and wooden structures built on primitive plans that were unsuitable for the tropics. Even if they had kitchens, there was usually no running water and the kitchen would have likely been sited on the hottest side of the house. Ice-chests and other appliances were uncommon in the area until the mid-twentieth century.<sup>47</sup> Peter Whalley, whose grandmother's ancestors were early pioneers of the Bohle Plains, remembers his grandparent's house as largely constructed of

*tin. It was ironbark posts and rails and corrugated iron. In the winter time, in the summer time, the grandfather'd kick a sheet of iron off the wall, that was his window, and in the winter time he'd nail it back up. Dirt floor, yeah, dirt floor. Never had any concrete. Wood stove, then they, they finally got the power on. That was a big occasion, got the power and got electric lights... Think the grandmother even got an electric stove.*<sup>48</sup>

These factors made the women's lives hard, as it was their job to ensure that all the domestic jobs were completed despite the uncomfortable conditions and with few timesaving devices. Children had set chores they were required to undertake before and after school.

<sup>47</sup> Cilento Raphael, *The White Man in the Tropics: with special reference to Australia and its dependencies* (Melbourne: Division of Tropical Hygiene of the Commonwealth Department of Health, 1925), 78-81.

<sup>48</sup> Peter Whalley, oral history interview, 20 June 1995.

<sup>45</sup> Mrs D Holden, oral history interview, 13 June 1991.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

Lack of social infrastructure was an issue for families in rural districts such as the Bohle. For the thirty-year period between 1870 and 1900 no clubs, churches or other infrastructure existed in the district. However, families did get together for social outings such as picnics. In the early 1900s women of the Bohle played a crucial role in the development of community infrastructure.

The role of women was limited to domestic duties, motherhood, and farm work such as milking and gardening. Their role in the establishment of the district was limited to these defined roles. Mrs Wagner for example, was well known for her expertise in butter making and housekeeping rather than for her role in helping her husband establish a successful dairy on their selection Rosedale. However, some women found that their role expanded when their husband died. For example, after the death of Per Swanson in 1901 Maria Swanson was forced by necessity to manage the family's property at the mouth of the Black River to earn an income. On top of this Maria continued her domestic duties and looked after her family of five boys. Although the family had turned to fishing after a tick plague of the 1880s had virtually wiped out their cattle, Maria returned to cattle (probably dairy cattle) for their main income. Her expanded role in managing the family property ended when she was married Edward Quarterman. The practicality of living on the land meant that the wives and daughters of male selectors often performed tasks that were not usually considered suitable for women.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>49</sup> P. Cahir, *Women in North Queensland*, ed. B. J. Dalton, vol. 2, *Lectures on North Queensland History* (Townsville: James Cook University, 1975), 114.

## Aboriginal Life After Settlement

By the 1870s frontier conflict which had disrupted the culture and quality of life of Aboriginal people in the Townsville region had mostly ended. Most of the surviving Aboriginal population in the region was 'let in' to camps such as at Ross Island on the fringe of Townsville. Some Aboriginal people continued to 'harass' the settlers, with 'outrages' still continuing in the Townsville district during the 1870s. One newspaper report in November 1870 described how a group of Aborigines surrounded the Eureka Hotel in Hervey Range threatening to "bail up the premises". At the time the hotel was occupied by two women who held out until "assistance came and drove the marauders off".<sup>50</sup> However, it would appear by this time that open hostilities between the settlers and Aboriginal people living close to Townsville were becoming rare. The surviving written records do not indicate that violent encounters occurred between Europeans and Aboriginal people in the Bohle district after settlement began. There is little left in the written record about the Aboriginal people living in the Bohle during this period. However, there is evidence of continued occupation after settlement in the district into at least the 1880s, with at least one group of Aboriginal people continuing to live in the vicinity of the Bohle and Black Rivers. About two hundred metres from the homestead of Gottfried Kuhn was a ceremonial ground where Aboriginal people would conduct ceremonial dances watched by the Kuhn family from their homestead. It also appears that for a

<sup>50</sup> "Townsville," *The Queenslander*, 19 November 1870, 2.



Figure 17. Aborigines from the Alice River, 1870s.

*This photo suggests that Aborigines continued to live in a traditional manner in the Bohle region into the 1870s. Photo courtesy of the Townsville Museum and Historical Society, also cited in Bell, A Short History of Thuringowa, p.11.*



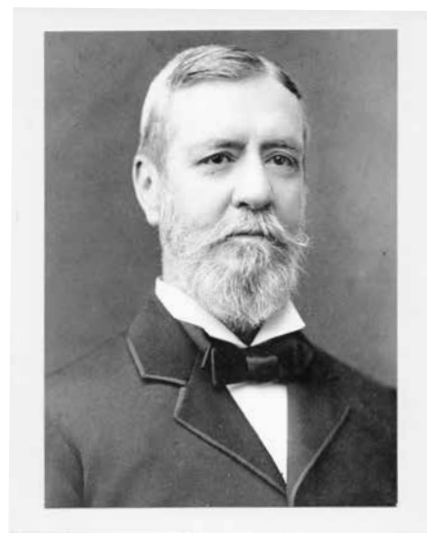
time Aboriginal people regularly raided the Kuhn family's garden for vegetables. Initially Gottfried Kuhn responded by firing warning shots into the air to discourage the Aboriginal people. However, before long this had little effect. So Gottfried made necklaces from beads and ribbon, which he distributed among the group as a token of goodwill. This act seemed to have the desired effect, as they left the vegetable garden alone after this encounter.<sup>51</sup> The settlers considered the use of the land to be exclusive to themselves and any attempt by the Aborigines to live off the land was usually met with the threat of violence and coercion. The apparent lack of violence in the district can be attributed to the devastating effect of frontier wars of the 1860s on the Aboriginal population and the Bohle district's proximity to Townsville, making violent dispersals hard to hide. Between the 1880s and the early 1900s it is likely that these surviving groups moved out of the Bohle into the fringe camps of Townsville. Following the controls put on their lives by the government most Aboriginal people were eventually removed to reserves such as at Palm Island by the start of the twentieth century.

## European Land Use in the Bohle

Throughout the nineteenth century most north Queensland cattle stations operated as cheaply as possible by herd management techniques and reducing the use of fencing. However, near the more settled areas along the coast, fencing was generally a requirement on cattle properties and this was true for the Bohle Plains. In the nineteenth century the typical cattle station consisted of a fairly primitive homestead, an assortment of buildings used as a store, saddle room and employees' quarters, a stockyard for drafting, branding and spraying and dipping against ticks, and in some cases a couple of paddocks near the homestead for horses and stud cattle. Although north Queensland was not a "big man's frontier", the capital required to form a station was considerable. With estimates being between £8,000 and £10,000 needed to establish the property and survive the two to three years before the property would provide an income.<sup>52</sup>

While selections in the Bohle were much smaller than the stations in western Queensland a considerable sum of money was still required to set up a relatively small property. One correspondent in the *Queenslander*

reported in June 1876 that a 45 kilometre ride from Townsville along Hervey Range was "over country that was taken up by small dairy farmers and others", indicating that by this time large tracts of land in the Bohle had already been taken up by small selectors.<sup>53</sup> One example is Heinrich Robinson, who was among the first selectors to arrive in the Bohle Plains, first applying for selection 245 in 1876. The selection was large for the area, 2,360 acres, located near the junction of the Alice and Black Rivers. Due to the size of the selection Heinrich spent 760 on improvements to the land in the first three years, including 620 chains of fencing (about 12.47 km), a house and two huts, and yards. This example highlights how much money was required even for the relatively small selections of those on the Bohle Plains compared to the cattle stations further out from Townsville. Even small selectors needed to have substantial savings or access to credit to be successful in the Bohle. George Ripley, borrowed £150 from the Bank of Australia in 1882 to help pay for his selection near the Alice River and it is probable that many other small holders borrowed money from banks or family to set up their selections. The use of credit to develop land would also encourage selectors to overstock the land in order to earn enough money to repay their debts, a practice that was evident throughout north Queensland.



**Figure 18. Henry MacKinnon Bohle 1842-1923.**

Settlers in the Bohle plains in the first three decades took to several economic pursuits in an effort to make their selections profitable. Initially, pastoralists in the 1860s concentrated on wool production due to the ease of transport over cattle and horses. Henry Mackinnon

Bohle<sup>54</sup> brought the first sheep through the Bohle Plains when he drove 22,000 sheep from Parramatta to the Fanning Downs and Victoria Downs stations in 1861-62 in a partnership with John Black.<sup>55</sup>

Some of the first settlers to arrive in the Bohle in 1877-1878 also tried sheep. However, as with the rest of north Queensland it appears that by the 1880s sheep were unpopular in the Bohle region. For the Bohle Plains cattle were always the stock animal of choice for the selectors with the grazing of both beef and dairy cattle preferred as the primary use for their land. Andrew Wagner and his wife used their 640 acres for dairying after making improvements such as cattle yards, fencing and paddocks. The Wagner's were successful with their dairy, which provided them with their main income source. In 1883 they were able to select a second selection of 640 acres for cattle grazing about 24 km from Rosedale. In the 1880s a few selectors began to cultivate a small section of their land with some of the first being immigrants from Germany, Switzerland and Scandinavia. Christen Jensen spent £50 to cultivate five acres of his 200 acre selection near the Bohle River. The bailiff's report describes the land as being used for "general farming purposes" and listed Jensen's occupation as a farmer. This suggests that a significant portion of his income probably derived from market gardening as well as pastoral activities. The Kuhn family<sup>56</sup> also grew vegetables on their selection near the Bohle River and sold them at the Saturday market in Townsville.<sup>57</sup> Patrick Ryan's selection included three acres under cultivation as well as a fowl house and a stockyard, suggesting that he grew vegetables, stocked his land with cattle and horses and also had chickens possibly as a commercial venture. Other selectors such as John Schmid and John Dunn created gardens on their selections, probably vegetable gardens for personal consumption. Many of the selections with large areas under cultivation appear to have been located near the Bohle River because the land was better suited for cultivation than elsewhere on the Bohle Plains.

Despite the successes of some families many of the selectors were not as successful in earning sufficient income from the land to ensure prosperity. The cattle industry throughout Queensland has been largely one of struggle against bankruptcy by the small holder.

Many of the selectors in the Bohle Plains needed to hold other paid jobs to supplement their incomes from their land. Not surprisingly, several selectors such as James Crowther, A.T Cook, and Patrick Ryan were also carriers, who could stock their land located along the major route inland to the goldfields and the north-western cattle stations with horse or bullock teams.<sup>58</sup> Others, such as the Swanson family, took to fishing near their selections as an alternative income source. The Casey family lived at the mouth of the Bohle River and used their property to run a charcoal burning business. To cure charcoal they burnt logs underground for a length of time, producing an easily crushed substance suitable for fuel and the smelting of iron. The family used boats to transport the charcoal from the mouth of the Bohle River along the coast to the inner harbour at Ross Creek. The charcoal was used around Townsville by steamboats, blacksmiths and households.<sup>59</sup> The residents of the Bohle district used their land for a mixture of primary industries to make the land productive for a Western based economic system. While some managed to earn enough from these activities to live off the land, many either established side businesses such as carrying or took on jobs in town.



**Figure 19. The Back-country Squatter, 1892 – Pastoralist's Review.**

This cartoon illustrates the difficulties and burdens of selectors throughout Australia. Selectors had very low rates of success, with many 'wading' through high levels of debt that they could not afford to repay from their earnings off the land, leading many to ruin. The *Queenslander*, 8 September, 1892.

<sup>51</sup> Gai Copeman, "Interview of Mr W. H. Towers," (Thuringowa: Thuringowa City Library, 1991), 5

<sup>52</sup> Dawn May, "The North Queensland Beef Cattle Industry: An Historical Overview," in *Lectures on North Queensland History* (Townsville: James Cook University, 1984), 123

<sup>53</sup> "The Pastoral Districts of the Far North," *The Queenslander*, 24 June 1876, 20.

<sup>54</sup> The Bohle River was named after Henry Mackinnon Bohle around 1873, which is also where the name the Bohle Plains originates.

<sup>55</sup> "Bohle's Origin," *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 2nd July 1981.

<sup>56</sup> August and Gottfried Kuhn arrived in Townsville from Germany in the 1870s and took up selections 267 and 227 respectively in 1878. It is believed that Gottfried grew vegetables on his Bohle River property as well as grazing cattle. August's selection was located on the Black River and was sold to Robert Mawby in 1883.

<sup>57</sup> Gai Copeman, "Interview with Mr W. H. Towers and Mrs Rooney," (Thuringowa: Thuringowa City Library, 1991).

<sup>58</sup> James Crowther occupied selection 256 in 1878. The selection was 640 acres located near Low's Creek. However, he lived in German Gardens (now Belgian Gardens). A.T Cook occupied selection 389 in 1883, the selection was 160 acres located on the right bank of the Bohle River. Patrick Ryan occupied selection 448 in 1883. The selection consisted of 2020 acres on the right bank of the Little Bohle River.

<sup>59</sup> *Our Years at Bohlevalle: 75th Jubilee 1911 – 1986*, (Townsville: Bohlevalle State School, 1986), 6





**Figure 20. Bohle River, 1890s.**

*The native vegetation was left intact in significant quantities along the river systems in the Bohle, especially on unselected land. Townsville City Library.*

### The Changing Landscape of the Bohle

The landscape of the Bohle Plains to a large extent determined how the land would be used by Europeans to carry out their economic activities. Much of the Bohle consists of coastal plains with a mix of open woodlands of ironbark, tea trees, bloodwood and moreton bay ash and well grassed areas. Nearer the mouth of the Bohle and Black rivers and in the lower lying areas mangroves were prevalent. According to the surveys of the early 1870s, the soil was grey, sandy and poor. Only the alluvial soils near the rivers would be sufficient for agriculture. Therefore, from the very beginning the selectors realised that the land would be best used for cattle grazing. Initially the land looked perfect for the pastoralists. In the months immediately after the wet season the native grass would have been green and long, the trees sparse and the land relatively flat. The selectors own ignorance of the land and the struggles that they would ultimately face would have fuelled their optimism for the possibilities of the seemingly productive land as they flocked to claim their selection. Stocking the land with cattle, horses and sheep, they endeavoured to transform this ‘unused’ and ‘unproductive’ resource into a productive future.

Environmental historian Don Garden noted that whenever grazing and agrarian pursuits occurred in Australia the clearing of indigenous vegetation followed at considerable ecological costs.<sup>60</sup> This trend was no different for the Bohle. At the time of settlement the

Ross-Black catchment area<sup>61</sup> consisted primarily of open woodland covering 53 percent and open forest covering 22 percent of the area.<sup>62</sup> A report on The Condition of River Catchments in Queensland in 1993 noted the vegetation in this area had changed little over time with the clearing of 4 percent of the eucalyptus open woodland being the major change in this area.<sup>63</sup> However, in the Bohle Plains it appears that the land was heavily modified by Europeans within the first thirty years of settlement. Trees were cleared for grazing and timber throughout the Townsville region, especially on the flat coastal plains, eventually leaving only small pockets of remnant bushland. Clearing was encouraged by the government, as clearing the land of trees was one requirement of a selector’s lease. Goats became a problem throughout Townsville, including the Bohle with herds of goats being left to roam at will destroying any new growth and surviving vegetation. Eric Rolls in *They All Ran Wild* noted that native pasture generally lasted six years in most districts when grazed by sheep and cattle with the European method of stock management hastening its destruction. The selection legislation in Queensland also encouraged the overstocking of land by graziers, who sought to receive a quick profit from their land before either taking up a new selection or selling off the now degraded land. The destruction of the district’s native grasses made room for the spread of pest

<sup>61</sup> This catchment area comprises of the sub-catchments of the Black and Ross Rivers, which together total 2,890 km. In this area grazing land now occupies 850 km2, and 10km2 is under cultivation.

<sup>62</sup> The open woodland consisted of medium Eucalypts of between 10-30 metres in height, with foliage cover of less than 10%. The open forest is much the same, however, the foliage cover is greater, between 30-70%.

<sup>63</sup> The Condition of River Catchments in Queensland 1993, .

vegetation that would largely replace the native grasses by the twentieth century.<sup>64</sup>

Often the new selectors overrated the value of the land, especially after the heavy summer rainfall. The lush pastures of April would become yellow and valueless to the pastoralist by the following spring. It would take Europeans decades to overcome the problem of native grasses, which were often low in phosphorous, potash and nitrogen causing it to deteriorate quickly after the wet season. This meant that cattle would lose condition during the dry season. Throughout north Queensland the spread of spear grass became a problem with the arrival of the pastoralists. Each year spear grass continued to spread, overtaking more nutritious grasses. As cattle and horses tended to avoid it, pastoralists burnt the spear grass in an effort to control it. However, overstocking the land combined with the practice of burning off pastures to encourage new growth probably encouraged the continued spread of spear grass. The spread of spear grass and other weeds is a sign of pasture degradation, usually occurring due to the overgrazing of palatable grasses, making them less able to compete with other species. The spread of spear grass also had the effect of hastening the move away from sheep in north Queensland, as the barbed seeds reduced the condition of the sheep and their fleeces.<sup>65</sup> With the first decade of settlement the landscape of the Bohle would have already been altered, with grazing leading to the deterioration of the native vegetation.

Settlement began in the Bohle Plains with the arrival of the selectors in the 1870s. The selectors utilised the land for multiple activities including fishing, market gardening and for its wood. However, the grazing of beef and dairy cattle would be the primary use of land in the district for much of the next century. For the Aboriginal people of the Bohle, the arrival of the selectors would lead to their final displacement as they moved to the fringe camps of Townsville. Many of the selectors arrived with their families, who would endure the isolation and harshness of rural life. For the selectors and their

<sup>64</sup> Lyn Henderson, “More than Rates, Roads and Rubbish: A History of Local Government in Action in Thuringowa Shire 1879-1985” (PHD, James Cook University, 1992), 57

<sup>65</sup> Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*: 40

families life in the early years of the settlement in the Bohle was tough. Women and men were forced to endure what was considered ‘primitive’ conditions, never-ending work and isolation. For the most part the pattern of settlement and the process of selection followed similar patterns as elsewhere in the colony of Queensland, as did the selectors who seem to have continued with the practice of dummieing and selecting land adjacent to their first selections in order to create larger estates. The transformation of the district from wilderness to that of a settled hinterland of Townsville was complete by the end of the century paving the way for the arrival of introduced species of flora and fauna that would plague the district’s pastoralists into the following century.



**Figure 21. Cattle on the Bank of the Bohle River, 1890s.**

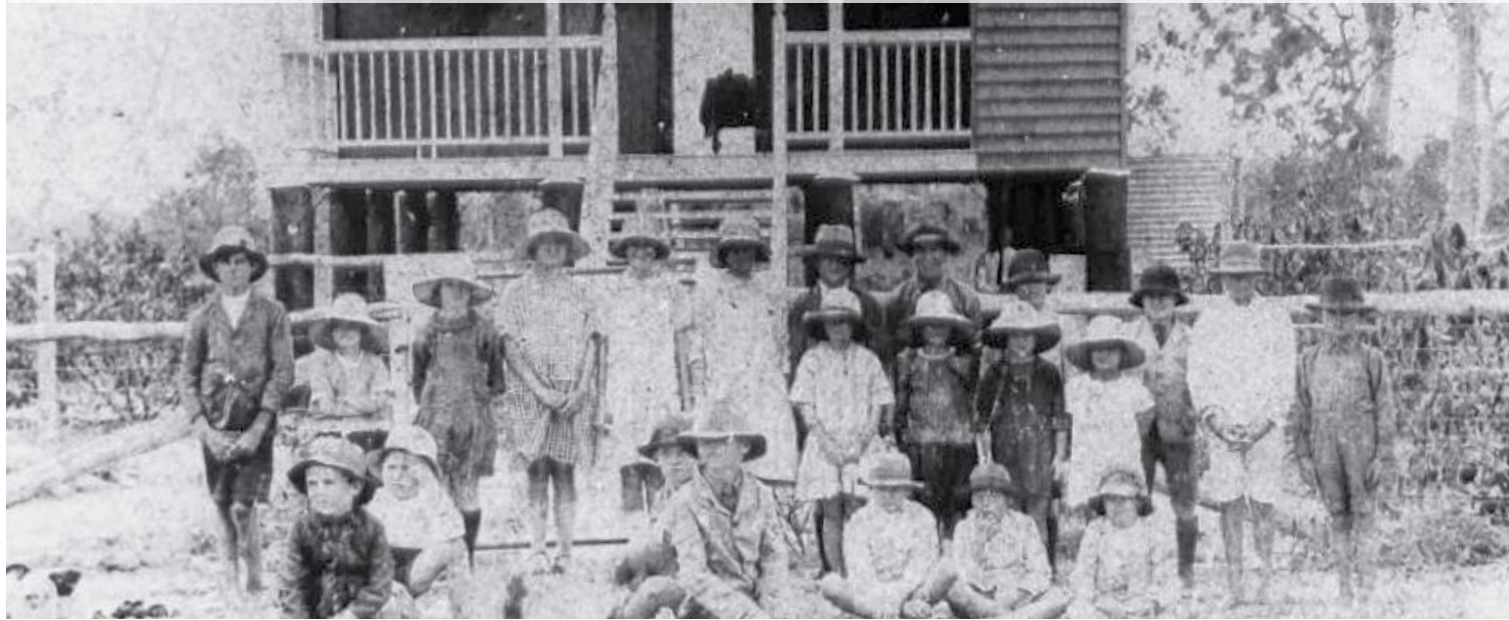
*This photo shows how land management practices have changed over time. The cattle were allowed to graze on the bank of the river, a practice now considered to be an example of poor land management. Allowing cattle near the riverbank leads to the degradation of the bank and reduces the water quality of the river. Townsville City Library.*

<sup>60</sup> Don Garden, *Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific: An environmental history* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO Inc, 2005), 81 & 86.



**Figure 22. Students in front of the Rollingstone School, c. 1930.**

Many of the early schools around Townsville were of a similar design to the one in this photo. The Bohlevale School would have looked much the same as this schoolhouse. During this period, the school consisted of one classroom and had an average attendance of between 15 and 20 students. Townsville City Library.



## Chapter Four: Closer Settlement – 1900-1939

Between 1900 and the start of the Second World War the State Government funded a number of infrastructure projects on the Bohle Plains. While the community lobbied for some projects, others such as the railway were part of the government's long-term and statewide plans to provide support for new industries and to promote closer settlement. Life on the Bohle continued in much the same way as it had in previous generations, although social and technological change was beginning to find its way to the Bohle. It is during this period that the area began to develop into a community with the establishment of the school, the Country Women's Association, sporting clubs, Progress League and public transport links to Townsville. This would instigate the Bohle's transformation from a scattering of outlying selections into a rural community.

### The Bohlevale School

In 1910 when the Burdell family arrived in the Bohle Plains the district had no infrastructure except for Ingham and Hervey Range roads, which were little more than dirt tracks. The Burdell family owned two beef cattle properties in the district, Bohlevale and Bellgrove. Bohlevale was portion 218 and was located on the western bank of the Bohle River off Ingham Road, while Bellgrove was located at the foot of Hervey Range. The Burdells lived in German Gardens (renamed to Belgian

Gardens during WWI) for twenty years until 1910 when Fred decided to move to Bohlevale to be closer to their pastoral interests. The nearest school to the Bohle district was in Townsville about eight miles away (12 km), too far for most families to travel. In November 1910, Fred and Mary Burdell organised a public meeting of interested parents to discuss the establishment of a school at the Bohle. At the meeting at their homestead it was established that there were twenty children who would attend the proposed school and they founded a building committee to oversee the creation of the school. The committee consisted of Fred Burdell as the secretary, Livingstone Casey, Mrs W. Brabon, W. Graham and Mrs Quarterman. In December, the committee sent the formal application that identified one of four possible sites for the proposed school, which they named 'Bohlevale'. The Burdells donated about five acres of their property, which was to include the schoolyard as well as a paddock for the children's horses. Initially about three acres were set-aside for this purpose. The construction of the school was completed by October 1911. However, it took the Department of Public Instruction nearly two months to find a head teacher for the school, delaying the opening until 20 November. On commencement, enrolment consisted of twenty-one students under the charge of the head teacher Mr Duncan Wallace.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Our Years at Bohlevale: 75th Jubilee 1911 – 1986: 2.

As the school, was small and somewhat remote from Brisbane, it had to continually fight for funding, equipment, repairs and improvements. The school committee began its first dispute with the Department of Primary Instruction just before the school opened, when its application for a fence around the horse paddock was rejected. As a result, the committee asked for permission to conduct a series of socials in an effort to raise the necessary funds so they could pay for the fence themselves. However, these social events were not overly successful with youths from Townsville 'overrunning' and 'disrupting' the events. The head teacher, Mr Wallace, described one incident in a letter to the Department in 1912:

*The school socials and dances have of late been anything but a success. Youths of the larrikin type in Townsville have come to regard them as occasions on which they can get away from police restraint and indulge in drink and rowdyism to their heart's content. The last dance ended in a drunken orgy. They arrived in cabs, singing lewd songs along the road and telling passers by what they were going to do to the Bohlevale girls.<sup>67</sup>*

The problems that occurred at the socials caused tension amongst the members of the school committee and the head teacher. Shortly after the last social in 1912 both Mr Wallace and Fred Burdell resigned from their positions. While it is stated in Our Years at Bohlevale that Mr Wallace resigned because he could not support his new wife, Annette Svensen (Swanson), on a teacher's salary, it is probable that the stress of these events may have contributed in part to his resignation.<sup>68</sup> In 1913, one and a half years after the school opened, the Department approved the construction of the fence for the horse paddock and it was completed in February. This example highlights both the problems the school faced in getting funding from the Department, and the locals' resolve to support the school by continually trying to improve conditions for their children and community.

By 1921 the school began to fall on hard times. Enrolments dropped to just fifteen students and complaints over poor teaching standards began to increase. The school inspection for that year was unfavourable stating that the school was "unsatisfactory", with the inspector doubting the qualifications and ability of Miss Wheeler to teach the children.<sup>69</sup> In July 1923 the Bohle and Black Rivers

<sup>67</sup> Letter from Mr D Wallace, 12th September. 1912, QSA ID13862

<sup>68</sup> Our Years at Bohlevale: 75th Jubilee 1911 – 1986: 2 & 10.

<sup>69</sup> E. Dunlop, Letter to the Under secretary. 1921, School Files for State Schools – Bohlevale no. 1299 State School – QSA ID 12607

Progressive League sent a letter to the Department complaining of the acting head teacher, Miss Wheeler, and requesting that the Bohlevale School be closed and moved to Kulburn, near the Black River. It appears that the motives of the Progress League moving the Bohlevale School was to get the suburban train service extended to Night Jar Siding. In its letter to the Department the League stated:

*If the school were removed we could get the suburban service extended... to Night Jar which would be a great boon to the residents, and children attending Bohlevale School now could get to the town schools where they would have a chance of being educated.<sup>70</sup>*

The residents of the Bohle district quickly rallied on hearing of the Progress League's intention, organising a petition that was sent to the Department before the League applied for the removal of the school. An inspection in September 1923 declared that the school had improved to a "fair condition" and that the average proficiency of the students was "moderate to fair". After this, the department decided to keep the school where it was and transfer Miss Wheeler – "a change [that] would probably be for the benefit to both herself and the school".<sup>71</sup> The Bohlevale School became an important focus for the community during the interwar period. In 1922 Mary Burdell formed the North Thuringowa branch of the Country Women's Association (C.W.A), requesting permission to use the school for meetings in 1924. The school was used for meetings over the next decade until a new hall was built in 1934.<sup>72</sup> In the 1930s Mary Burdell also used the school for Sunday school on every second Sunday. During the 1930s the residents of the Bohle Plains established a tennis club. In 1933 after several years of operating on the school grounds a number of residents applied to play tennis at the school on Sunday afternoons, which was granted provided that tennis was not played during the hours of church services. Hence, the school became the centre of the community, not only for the school children and their parents, but also for the wider community who attended socials and dances, played sport, or for the women who joined the C.W.A.

### The North Coast Railway

On 21 December 1910, the North Coast Railway and the Great Western Railway Acts were passed. The aim of the North Coast Railway Act was to link up the coastal

<sup>70</sup> Request for Removal of Bohlevale School to Kulburn. 1923, QSA ID13862

<sup>71</sup> Complaint Against Teacher, Bohlevale School. 1923, QSA ID13862

<sup>72</sup> Our Years at Bohlevale: 75th Jubilee 1911 – 1986: 14.



settlements to improve the sugar, agricultural, dairying, fruit, timber, mining and meat export industries of the State, as well as promoting closer settlement. The Act resulted in the construction of 731 km of rail to complete the coastal railway, linking Brisbane to Cairns. The new railway route passed through the Bohle district linking it with Townsville and Ingham. On 11 September 1911 construction of the North Coast Railway began in Townsville on the section of line to Ingham. The first section was 54 km long, which the Commissioner of Railways noted had “made fair progress” by June 1912. Due to the number of rivers between Townsville and Ingham several steel bridges were constructed, including bridges over the Bohle and Black rivers.<sup>73</sup> The construction of the railway and bridges over these rivers brought an influx of people into the area. A camp was set up near the Bohle River for the construction crew consisting of about 176 men. By June 1913 the bridge over the Bohle was completed and the other bridges including at the Black River were nearing completion. The first section of the railway to Ingham, 39 km between Townsville and Kurukan, was completed in April 1914. However, due to strikes by the day-workers there was little progress on the construction of the line in following years. Due to the strikes and delays caused by World War One the final 14 km to Rollingstone was not completed until April 1915.<sup>74</sup>

Beginning in 1914 with the opening of the railway to Kurukan, the residents of the Bohle began to benefit from the new link to Townsville. Married teachers of the Bohlevalle School who resided in Townsville could now use the railmotor to commute between Townsville and the school. Likewise, children attending high school in Townsville could use the railmotor service and children from around the Black River could use the service to attend the Bohlevalle School.<sup>75</sup> However, the service was not always reliable, nor did the timetable fit in well with the school. For example, in 1918 the school hours at Bohlevalle had to be changed to 10 am to 4 pm, to allow the head teacher to catch the railmotor to and from

the Bohle. The railmotor was also used for transporting products produced locally to sell in Townsville. The Whalley family, for instance, as part of their milk run transported milk by the railmotor to sell to a cafe in Townsville during the 1930s.<sup>76</sup>



**Figure 23. The Black River Bridge, 1928.**

*Due to the size of the rivers and seasonal flooding, large steel bridges were constructed over the Black and Bohle rivers for the railway. The Bohle River Bridge was probably of a similar construction style. Construction took over a year for each bridge and employed locals. Black River Bridge, Railway Batch File, 1928. QSA ID 1051469.*

## Hervey Range Road

In 1930 the Townsville Chamber of Commerce and the local media began to agitate for the road through Hervey Range to be upgraded in order to allow wheeled vehicles to use the route. The Chamber of Commerce and tobacco growers at Hervey Range wanted access to Townsville via Hervey Range Road.<sup>77</sup> Due to the road’s lack of use by this time, the steep incline at Thornton’s Gap had fallen into such disrepair that the road was unusable past this point by all but horse and bullock teams. In 1933 the State Government used funds from the Unemployment Relief Fund to construct a new road employing up to 200 men for several months. However, upon completion there was some angst over which council would pay for the upkeep of the road: Thuringowa, Townsville or the Dalrymple. The Commissioner for Main Roads resolved the issue by making the road a main road, thus transferring funding responsibility to the State

<sup>76</sup> Gai Copeman, “Interview with Doris Moncreiff,” (Thuringowa: Thuringowa City Library, 1991), 4.

<sup>77</sup> “Tobacco Growing in North Queensland – A promising industry,” Cummins and Campbell’s Monthly Magazine, November 1930, 33.

Government. The construction of the new road followed a similar line as the old road to the top of Hervey Range, cutting travel time from Townsville by eliminating a 126 km long detour. By the mid-1930s the Bohle region was more easily accessible by road and rail, strengthening the Bohle’s links with Townsville and Ingham.



**Figure 24. Crossing Canal Creek, Hervey’s Range Road, 1933.**

*By 1933, the road to Hervey Range was upgraded, allowing cars to travel from Townsville to Hervey Range for the first time. Townsville City Library.*

## Rural Life and Entertainment

During the first decades of the twentieth century life continued on with little change despite the social and technological changes that were occurring throughout Australia. Many of the men took on jobs similar to those of their fathers and grandfathers in the nineteenth century and managed the land in much the same way. However, changes in technology were beginning to force modifications to some occupations that were undertaken at the Bohle. Between 1911 and 1916 John Brabon joined his father as a carrier carting in the local area. By this time, the carrying routes had changed and carriers no longer travelled between Townsville and Georgetown due in part to the development of the railway. Thus, they took on jobs carting items such as telegraph poles and bridge timber to areas that did not yet have access to trains or motorised transport. As the carrying trade was dying out, other occupations began to become available to the residents in the Bohle. The improved links to Townsville made working in town more viable. Therefore, by the 1930s many of the residents were working at the meatworks, on the railway as navvies, on cane fields, were labourers or had taken up trades. When a branch of the Australian Labor Party was established at the Bohle in 1936, the Bohle was firmly a working class district. The Labor party spokesperson acknowledged that about 85 percent of people in the district were “workers living

on [a] wage”.<sup>78</sup> While many residents still classed their occupation as either dairyman, farmer or selector, few lived solely off the income earned from their property. More often than not, the women and children milked the cows and managed the cattle, while the men worked either in town or on stations around north Queensland for much of the year.

For women, life on the Bohle Plains up until 1939 had changed little since the nineteenth century. Most of the household chores were still performed by hand, taking up much of the day as few in the Bohle could afford domestic help. In addition to domestic duties (which included sewing, hand washing, cooking and cleaning), women continued to help with the livestock and tended the vegetable and fruit gardens. Ethel Clay, who lived with her husband on their poultry farm near the Bohle River during the 1930s and 1940s, described an average day: “I just got up in the morning and worked and worked all day”.<sup>79</sup> During this period there were few if any jobs available for unmarried women at the Bohle. Therefore, young women often went into Townsville for employment, mainly as domestics. There were some, such as Ethel, who left school to stay at home to help their mothers look after younger siblings and assist with the domestic chores. In 1922 support and regular contact with other women became more common when the C.W.A branch was established. The objective of the North Thuringowa branch was to assist in any form of recreation that would allow the women and children of the district to meet one another on a monthly basis, usually in the form of picnics. The branch was also involved in helping the elderly and people affected by natural disasters, as well as fund-raising for essential services in the community such as the ambulance service.<sup>80</sup> In 1934 the branch was granted a portion of a reserve on the Bohle River where a community hall was erected by volunteer labour. The hall then served as the branch headquarters, being used by the community for meetings, socials and church services for the next twelve years until damaged by the 1946 floods and later sold.<sup>81</sup>

During the first decades of the twentieth century the people of the community strove to find ways to entertain themselves, a task that became easier as travelling times to Townsville were reduced. For the period in question, dances and socials were a popular form of entertainment in the Bohle Plains. These were conducted at various

<sup>78</sup> “A.L.P at Bohlevalle,” Townsville Daily Bulletin, 23 April 1936, 12.

<sup>79</sup> Gai Copeman, “Interview with Mrs Ethel Clay nee Vickers,” (Thuringowa: Thuringowa City Library, 1991), 15.

<sup>80</sup> “Country Women’s Association,” Townsville Daily Bulletin, 30 March 1927, 6.

<sup>81</sup> Our Years at Bohlevalle: 75th Jubilee 1911 – 1986: 14.





**Figure 25. Jack and Edith Parker picnicking by the River, c. 1930s.**  
*Picnicking near the rivers and creeks has always been a popular pastime for the residents of the Bohle district. At larger gatherings sporting competitions and games were usually organised, including foot races and horse races. Townsville City Library.*

locations, including at the homesteads of local residents, the beach, the Bohlevale School, the C.W.A hall, and into the 1920s and 1930s in various dance halls around Townsville. Picnic sports days were also popular and often held at the beach near the Black River and Stoney Creek. At these events locals would have horse and foot races, play games, swim and have plenty to eat and drink.<sup>82</sup>

In 1925 John Robinson began to develop his property at Mount St. John into a zoo, importing exotic animals such as zebras, deer, llamas and monkeys. The zoo became well known for its crocodiles and the shows that Robinson performed for guests. One such show involved Robinson riding on the back of a crocodile, a trick he was credited for being the first in the world to perform.<sup>83</sup> In 1932 Robinson began to hold an annual rodeo at his property, an event that became popular among the residents of Townsville and second only to the Townsville Show in popularity. In 1933, in an effort to create a spectacle that would not be forgotten, he held a bullfight at the rodeo that was reported to be the first held in Australia. In 1938 Robinson held an aerial pageant to mark the opening of his new airfield at Mount St. John. In front of a crowd of around eight thousand, the pageant included a parachute jump by Miss Jean Burns, acrobatics by Miss Esther L'Estrange, an air race and even bombing a car. However, the pageant nearly ended in tragedy when Miss Burns became entangled in

the water lilies in the crocodile pond before being pulled out by one of Robinson's sons.<sup>84</sup> These events became 'must see' attractions throughout north Queensland drawing tourists from around the state and providing exciting entertainment for the residents of the Bohle and wider Townsville community. Thus, by the end of the 1930s the variety of recreational activities had increased dramatically, far surpassing that available in the previous sixty years.

### Environmental Changes

By the 1930s the landscape and environment in the Bohle had undergone further significant changes as a result of European settlement. The settlers cleared large sections of their land for paddocks, felling the largest trees for building materials for their homesteads and stockyards. Overstocking was common on most properties. It was initially encouraged by the Crown Lands Act and continued when economic conditions worsened as the small holders tried to make their properties economically viable. Reserves such as the Town Common and the camping reserve at the Bohle River were particularly abused by selectors who commonly overstocked these reserves all year-round for over forty years.<sup>85</sup> By the 1920s various invasive weeds had spread onto the cattle properties, including: lantana, chinee apple, rubber vine and snake weed or Patterson's curse as it was known in the north.

82 "Cummins and Campbell Ltd. Staff Picnic – Gathering at Bluewater," *Cummins and Campbell Monthly Magazine*, June 1939, 39.  
 83 "St. John Robinson is a Legendary Figure," *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 15 July 1961, 3.

84 "The Air Pageant," *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 2 May 1938, 5; *Aerial Pageant, Mt. St. John Aerodrome, Sunday, May 1st, 1938 – Souvenir Programme*, (Townsville: D. W Hastings & Sons, 1938), 9.  
 85 "Wild Lucerne: Suitable Legume for Tropical Queensland," *Rockhampton Morning Bulletin*, 1 March 1941, 8

For example, when John Brabon purchased Meadowbank in the 1920s he found the previous owner had poorly managed the property, allowing it to be overrun by lantana. While the district had most likely undergone many environmental changes during this period, bushland near the rivers remained in large sections and silt build-up in the Bohle and Black rivers remained low. Stoney Creek, the Black River and the Bohle River were popular fishing spots with locals constructing fish traps designed to catch fish during high tide. The traps often caught salt-water crocodiles and dugongs and being unregulated the traps would have contributed to overfishing in the area.<sup>86</sup> By the end of the 1930s the Bohle was coming under a moderate level of environmental stress. The clearing of bushland, development, introduction of plants and animals and fishing transformed the previously natural environment into a moderately modified environment better suited to supporting a mostly European population.

By the end of the 1930s the Bohle district had developed from a series of pastoral properties into a small rural community. The State Government encouraged closer settlement in the district by funding the construction of the North Coast railway and upgrading Hervey Range road. The government funded the construction of the Bohlevale School after action was taken by the local residents to get the school established. The improved transportation links between the Bohle and Townsville provided new employment and educational opportunities for the district and proved to be a lifeline for the community. The Bohlevale School became

an important focus for community development and social activities during this period, being used for the scholastic, sporting, social and religious activities of residents. By this time much of the landscape had been considerably altered from its condition prior to the 1860s. Pastoral properties had been cleared which opened the way for introduced weeds that had begun to spread by the 1920s. Introduced weeds such as lantana quickly infested poorly managed properties, reducing the district's biodiversity and the capacity of the land to support human activity. Despite all of the development and the fact that many of the residents worked in Townsville, most of the properties still stocked cattle and the land was used in essentially the same way as it had by previous generations.

86 Copeman, "Interview with Mrs Ethel Clay nee Vickers," 19-20.



**Figure 26. Men sawing a felled tree on a property in Townsville.**  
*The clearing of trees on properties and in the Bohle district continued for decades. Trees were cleared to create paddocks, while their wood was used for firewood and building materials. Gleeson Collection (Townsville City Library, Undated).*





**Figure 27. Aerial view of Bohle River Airfield, undated.**

*This aerial view shows the connecting taxiways and dispersal strips to the left of the airfield. Parked on the runway are 21 P-51 Mustangs, 2 Wirraways and 5 P-40 Kittyhawks from No 86 Sqn. National War Memorial.*

## Chapter Five: World War Two – 1939-1945

The attitude in north Queensland towards the war abruptly changed after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. With the outbreak of the Pacific War, the Townsville City Council realised that the region was vulnerable to attack and immediately set about implementing schemes for the protection of civilians from possible air raids.<sup>87</sup> This included constructing trenches around the city, appealing to the public to provide their own shelters at home, and installing search lights at key locations around the city. Despite the preparations made by the council, both the council and civilians felt that the city's defences were inadequate and initially many felt abandoned by the Federal Government. By 1942 preparations were under way to transform Townsville into a garrison town, with the city's population swelling from 30,000 prior to the war to about 90,000 by the middle of 1943.<sup>88</sup> This would affect the Bohle, with the construction of the Bohle River airfield, the Black River Hospital and a number of other camps in the district. All of this activity increased the district's population and brought the war to the doorstep of the Bohle community. The arrival of Australian and

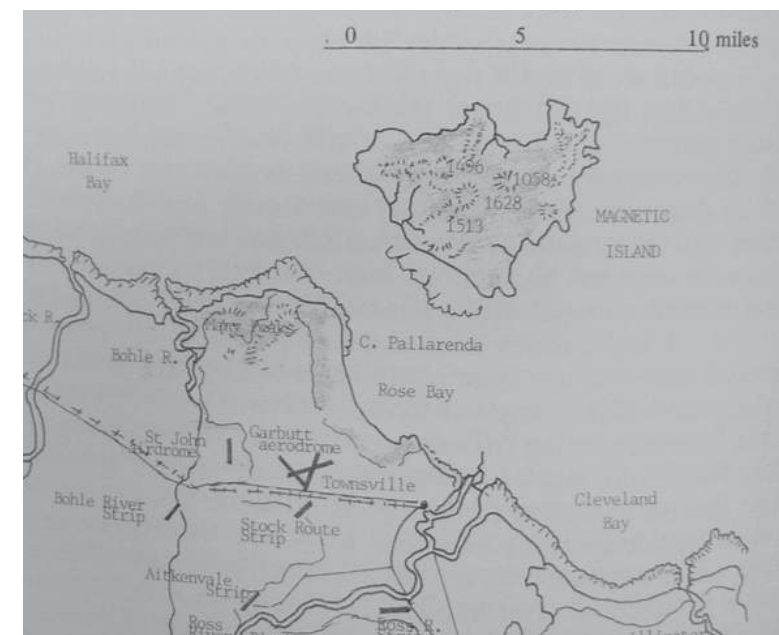
American military personnel would also expose the civilian population of the Bohle to new ideas and lead to a change in the way of life for the district.

### The Bohle River Airfield

In January 1942 senior American military officers arrived in Townsville to establish Air Corps installations. This included developing the Garbutt airfield and a number of satellite airstrips around Townsville, such as Aitkenvale Weir, Giru, Mount St. John, Civil Aerodrome, Antil Plains and Woodstock. It also included construction of Bohle River airfield in March 1942 as a dispersal strip. Dispersal strips were designed to reduce the potential risk of an air raid by dispersing the aircraft over a large area on numerous small airfields. They also had the added effect of reducing congestion in regions like Townsville that had hundreds of operational aircraft. Initially, the United States Air Force (USAF) considered building the dispersal strip at the Alice River, but decided that this site would need extensive road access and rejected it. On 25 March 1942 the Bohle River airfield was reported as finished. However, it is likely that this was only the first stage of the construction of the airfield. In March of that year the site consisted of a bare strip, cleared and rolled, with possibly a thin layer of gravel on top, common for dispersal strips in the region. In April the

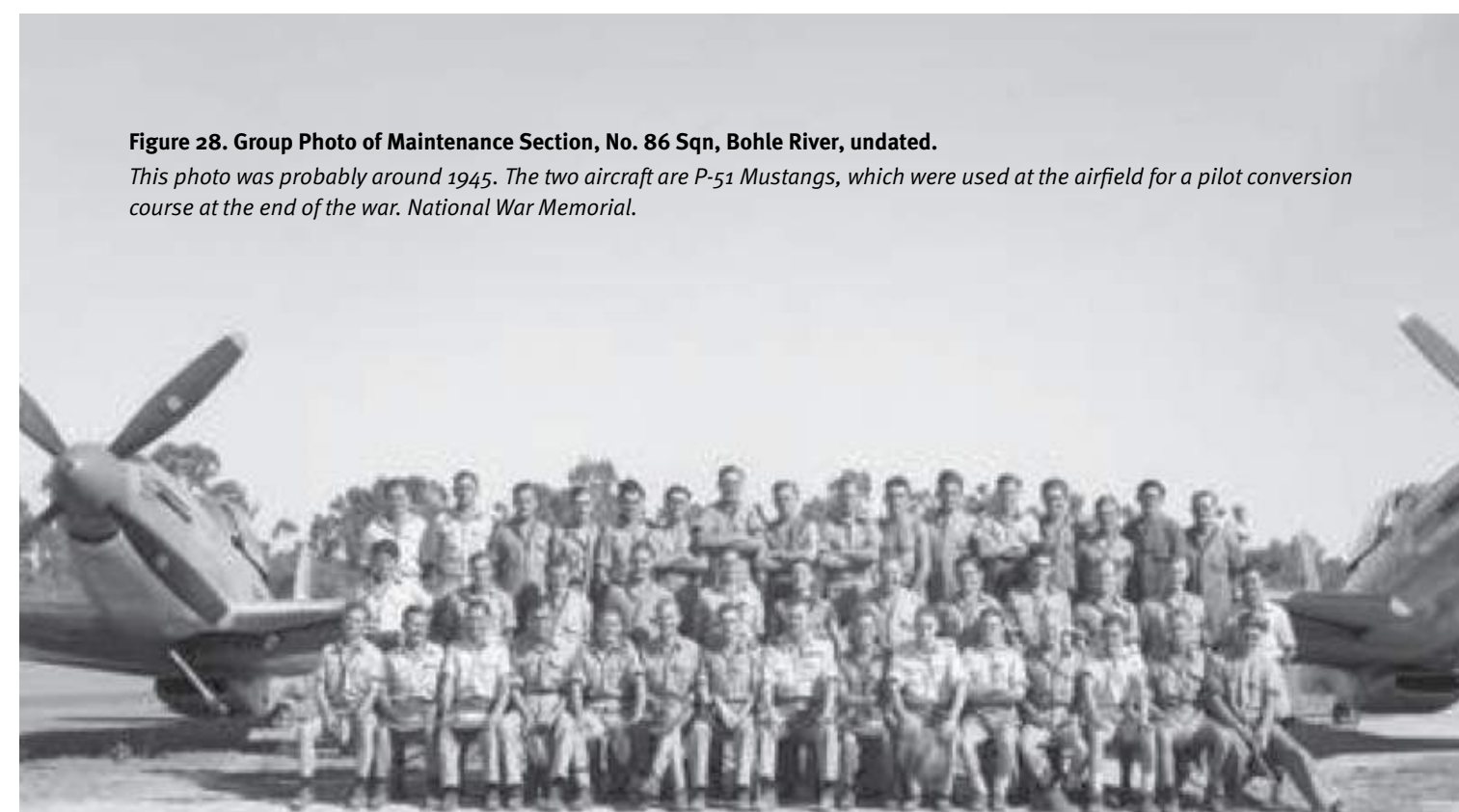
Department of Home Security and the Air Board began to develop these dispersal strips, primarily in the form of providing camouflage works consisting of dispersal points around the airfield, painting and other efforts to break up the outline of buildings and tents. The Allied Works Council also made plans for the construction of an anti-aircraft station at the airfield in May 1942, although it is not clear if this was actually constructed. By January 1943 the Bohle airfield (along with Aitkenvale Weir and the Ross River airfields) was developed into an all-weather satellite field. The first units to use the Bohle airfield were USAF fighter units, possibly the 40th Pursuit Squadron, using P-39 Airacobras upon their arrival to Townsville in April 1942. However, the primary use of the Bohle River airfield was as a Squadron Camp and staging area for fighter and bomber units on their way to operational service in New Guinea. In 1944 it was noted that the airfield was occupied for this purpose for approximately six months of the year, probably a reflection of its use throughout the war. By July 1945 the Commanding Officer of the North-East Area intended to use both the Bohle and Ross River airfields for fighter crews to undertake conversion courses to Mustang fighters, which were expected to take between eight to twelve months. The Bohle airfield remained operational by the RAAF until about 1950.<sup>89</sup> Dispersal airstrips, such as the Bohle, were important for the purpose of reducing congestion at the Garbutt airfield, allowing continuous operations during war in the Pacific.

<sup>89</sup> Roger Marks, *Queensland Airfields WW2: 50 Years on* (Mansfield, QLD: R & J Marks, 1994), 74.



**Figure 29. Map showing the satellite airfields around Townsville in 1942.**

*During the war Townsville was one large military base. All of the dispersal strips were linked to the Garbutt aerodrome, making it possible for Townsville to house hundreds of aircraft at the height of the war in 1942-43. Cardell, Rodney. *Wings Around Us*. (Brisbane: Amphion Press, 1991).*



**Figure 28. Group Photo of Maintenance Section, No. 86 Sqn, Bohle River, undated.**

*This photo was probably around 1945. The two aircraft are P-51 Mustangs, which were used at the airfield for a pilot conversion course at the end of the war. National War Memorial.*

<sup>87</sup> "Air Raid Measures," *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 13 December 1941, 4.

<sup>88</sup> I. N. Moles, *Townsville During World War II*, ed. B.J. Dalton, *Lectures on North Queensland History* (Townsville: James Cook University, 1974), 223.





**Figure 30. A row of prefabricated huts at the Black River Hospital.**

*These huts were specifically designed for the tropics, with the addition of adjustable shutters, that can be seen on the huts. These particular huts probably provided accommodation for the military personnel of the hospital. Each hut was insulated and provided with fly screens. The huts were most likely constructed of timber, plywood or Masonite, with a wooden floor and corrugated iron roof. Whalley Collection. Townsville City Library.*

## The Black River Hospital

The United States (US) general hospital located at the Black River operated for most of 1944 and when completed was the largest hospital in the Townsville region. In October 1943 the US Army made a request to the Department of Public Works for a 3,000 bed general hospital to be constructed at the Black River in three sections. The site was considered ideal by the US due to its proximity to a year-round supply of water, its distance from Townsville, access to transportation (being near the railway, road networks and the Bohle River Airstrip) and the appealing nature of the environment in the surrounding area. As the 44th General Hospital unit was due to arrive at the site in January 1944, the department needed to commence work immediately to ensure that temporary accommodation would be completed in time. Construction commenced on 15 November 1943 on the first section, consisting of a 1,000 bed hospital. However, in December of that year construction of the second and third sections of the hospital was cancelled and the extra construction crews were sent to the first site to complete the project ahead of schedule. The hospital would eventually consist of 157 prefabricated buildings. The materials were shipped to Townsville from Sydney and were then erected on a concrete base. By the end of March 1944, the site was reported to be 90 percent completed and was fully operational by April. Once completed the hospital contained two surgeries, 21 wards, a dental unit, pharmacy and six ‘psychopathic’ wards, as well as numerous accommodation huts, latrines, laundries, recreation huts and even a chapel

and outdoor theatre.<sup>90</sup> Between April and June of 1943, the 12th, 13th, 64th and 84th Station Hospitals based in Townsville were closed, leaving the 44th General Hospital at the Black River the only operational American military hospital in the Townsville region. Due to the Allied advance in the Pacific theatre during 1944, by October the 44th General Hospital had left the Townsville area, leaving the 89th Station Hospital to operate at the Black River site at a greatly reduced capacity of 193 beds.<sup>91</sup> Thus, with the winding down of troop numbers in the Townsville region, the hospital’s size along with operations were decreased as the Allied forces moved further into the Pacific in their advance towards Japan.

## War Games in the Bohle

Over the course of the war several stories emerged from local service personnel and notable events that occurred in the region. In June 1943 an Australian Army special forces unit conducted a secret training exercise for preparation for a commando raid against the Japanese in the harbour of Rabaul. Launching at night from the Black River with five collapsible canoes, they silently paddled past the Townsville harbour’s defences. The commandos then attached dummy limpet mines to several freighters and warships, before stealthily returning. The next morning the naval authorities in Townsville discovered, to their embarrassment, the dummy mines on many of their ships. This exercise highlighted just how poorly prepared Townsville was for an enemy attack.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 118; H.W. Barker, *Black River 1000 Bed Hospital 1944*, QSA ID269094.

<sup>91</sup> *Base Two – The Bayonet of Australia*.

<sup>92</sup> Bell, *A Short History of Thuringowa* 59.



**Figure 31. Entrance to the Black River Hospital, 1944.**

*The 1,000 bed 44th General Hospital was the largest military hospital in the Townsville region. However it operated at full capacity for only 10 months before moving to another location. Whalley Collection. Townsville City Library.*

## The Effects of War in the Bohle

For the residents of the Bohle, and in Townsville in general, their lifestyle changed with the arrival of thousands of Australian and American troops in 1942. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Queensland Education Department made the construction of shelter trenches in schools along the coast a condition of operation. The Bohlevalle head teacher Reginald Faulkner and the school pupils constructed slit trenches at the school, with time also being allocated for practice drills and first aid lessons in case of an attack. Starting from January 1942 the schools of Townsville were closed until March, with classes below the fourth grade remaining closed for the first half of the year. Students not attending school were given correspondence lessons prepared by their teachers who collected the work each week.<sup>93</sup> The children of Bohlevalle contributed to the war effort by devoting time each day to the manufacture of camouflage nets, used by the Australian Army. By the end of the war they had completed thirteen nets. For the women of the Bohle the war brought both hardships and new financial opportunities. A number of these women found employment during the war years washing the clothes of American servicemen stationed nearby. Doris Moncreiff recalled:

*One day ... one of the Yanks came in and they asked ... me if I’d do his washing and I thought oh well, I’m*

<sup>93</sup> Darryl MacIntyre, *Townsville at War 1942* (Townsville: Townsville City Council, 1992), 21.

*sitting here not doing much so I said yes, I’ll do your washing for you. So I did his, then he’d bring a mate and then there was another mate and I finished up I was washing for a terrible lot of Yanks. And then Emma, well she was in town working and she said well I ... I was doing better than she was, so she came home too, so we used to have a big washing day and then a big ironing day and then we’d have to put them all into their bundles. We made quite a bit of money out of that. A lot of women in Townsville done [sic] Yankee washing.<sup>94</sup>*

Generally life in the north became more difficult for families who stayed during the war. The average family suffered a number of privations due to rationing and the massive increase in population in Townsville during the war. In the average family more of the domestic load fell on wives and mothers, who had to manage the ration books, try to obtain scarce food supplies, and cope with the absence of husbands or male relatives serving overseas in the war. Food shortages became common with commodities such as ice and milk usually being hard to obtain for civilians. Foodstuffs such as tinned and dried fruit, biscuits, and alcohol were also difficult to obtain. Fresh fruit and vegetables were particularly scarce and exorbitantly expensive when available, because military personnel would also purchase their fruit and vegetables from local markets to supplement military supplies. This resulted in the “ordinary householder and his children” going without fresh fruit and vegetables, resulting in a lowering of morale for the civilian population during 1942-43.<sup>95</sup> Being a rural area that supplied a lot of its own milk and eggs, the Bohle would have been better off in some respects than more urban parts of the region. The Bohlevalle branch of the C.W.A. provided various services in support of the war effort throughout the 1940s. These included: supplying Red Cross parcels to P.O.Ws, supporting local civilians and military personnel, farewelling local men leaving to serve overseas and providing meals and refreshments. Thus, throughout the difficulties of the war, the community continued to pull together by offering support to each other and the wider community.

The war and the arrival of Americans would affect the operation of the rural industries of the Bohle, both for better and for worse. Prior to the war non-pasteurised milk was commonly sold from the local dairies to Townsville, a practice that continued into the early years of the war. At first, local dairies supplied the Australian Army and Air Force with non-pasteurised milk.

<sup>94</sup> Copeman, “Interview with Doris Moncreiff,”

<sup>95</sup> Moles, *Townsville During World War II*: 224.



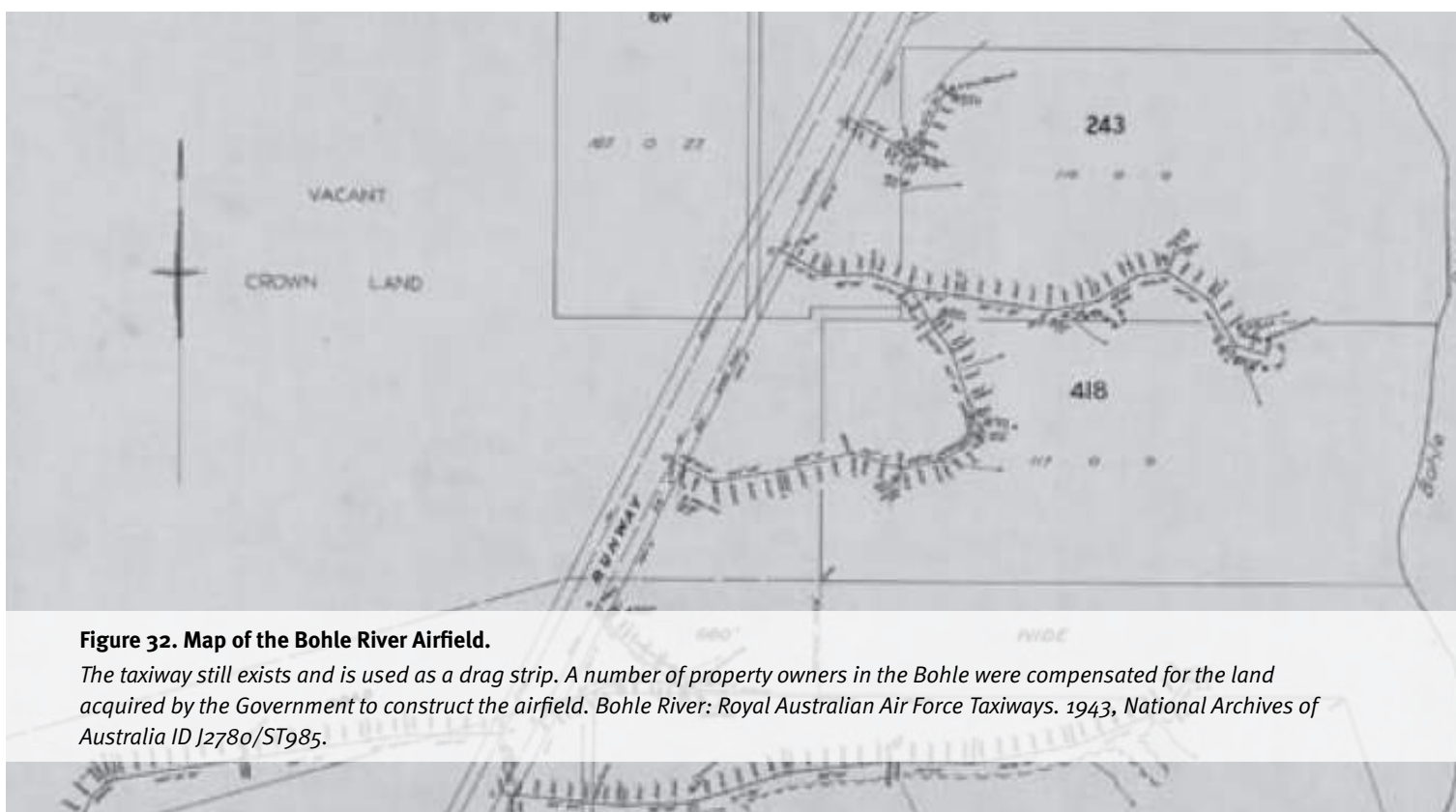
However, when the Americans arrived they would only accept pasteurised milk, which could not be produced to the standard required in Townsville. They sourced the needed milk for the Townsville based soldiers from the Atherton Tablelands. This, combined with the fuel rationing, led to the eventual collapse of the local dairy industry in Townsville by the end of the war, with only around three dairies still operating out of more than eighty prior to the war.<sup>96</sup> The beef cattle industry received a much-needed boost during the war. The industry in the Thuringowa region had struggled throughout the 1920s and the depression. Prices increased dramatically with the outbreak of war and the arrival of the Americans in 1942 gave local producers the largest local market for their product that they had ever known. During the American presence in Townsville, the supply of beef was a major problem and was constantly in short supply, ensuring high prices. However, because the graziers feared that the increased prices would drop at the end of the war and due to general shortages of material, much needed improvements to property were not considered to be a priority. Internal fencing, which promoted better herd management practices, was not seen as vital for better returns and new breeds of cattle (such as Zebu) that were better suited to the tropical climate were not introduced.<sup>97</sup> These improvements were delayed until the post-war period and the assurance of continued high beef prices.

The outbreak of hostilities in the Pacific brought numerous changes to the people of Townsville and the Bohle district. Townsville and many other northern settlements in Australia were affected more from the war than the southern centres, as the arrival of the Australian and American military disrupted life. However it also provided opportunities. The Bohle played a peripheral role to Townsville's war effort. As the city was transformed into a garrison, military units spilled out into the hinterland. For the Bohle this led to the construction of the Bohle River airfield, the Black River Hospital and several other smaller installations including a fuel depot along the Ingham Road. Despite the hardships that the civilian population of the Bohle experienced during the war, most still did their best to support the war effort in any way they could. The war affected the rural economy of the Bohle as well as the wider State economy. While the beef industry was buoyed by the influx of troops and rising beef prices, the local dairy industry was adversely affected by strict fuel rations and the American demand for pasteurised milk that could not be supplied in large quantities in Townsville. For Townsville and the Bohle district the war would change the face of the region. After 1945 many of the wartime structures were demolished and people returned to their previous lives. However, life would continue to change as Townsville, along with wider Australia, moved into a period of unprecedented post-war prosperity and growth.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Diane Vance and Gai Copeman, "It was a different town": Being some memories of Townsville and District 1942 – 1945 (Thuringowa: Thuringowa City Council, 1992), 30.

<sup>97</sup> Henderson, "More than Rates, Roads and Rubbish," 65.

<sup>98</sup> Bell, A Short History of Thuringowa: 61-63.



**Figure 32. Map of the Bohle River Airfield.**

The taxiway still exists and is used as a drag strip. A number of property owners in the Bohle were compensated for the land acquired by the Government to construct the airfield. Bohle River: Royal Australian Air Force Taxiways. 1943, National Archives of Australia ID J2780/ST985.

**Figure 33. View of a portion of Mt St. John zoo, Townsville, ca.1957. Fred Carew (Photos) Pty. Ltd.**



## Chapter Six: Post-War Development and Urbanisation – 1946-1970s

The postwar period was an era of growth for the western world of a kind not experienced since the second half of the nineteenth century. For the Townsville region, the twenty-five year period after the Second World War was characterised by an increasing population and economic growth. The Queensland Government continued to advocate for closer settlement and agriculture at the expense of secondary industry during the period, somewhat softening the boom in Queensland compared to the southern States. Due to the boom in agriculture, pastoralism and mining, port towns such as Townsville were the fastest growing urban regions in the State. As Townsville expanded in the 1950s and 1960s new developments flowed into the Bohle and new suburbs were created. The rural nature of the Bohle began its transformation as cattle properties gave way to suburbs. The influx of people into the district during the 1960s was for the most part unplanned by both local and State governments. Therefore, the post-war period was for the Bohle Plains a period of rapid expansion, which saw a major shift in the use of the land and how the population was supported.

### Bohlevale School

Although the first requests for extensions to the Bohlevale School building were made in the 1930s, it was not until the 1950s that both the School Committee and the head teacher intensified their demands for repairs and upgrades to the aging school building. In 1955 the Northern Region Director-General of Education provided two reasons why he did not consider it necessary for the Department to further develop the school. First, he noted that the average attendance for the previous four years was just 46 students and was unlikely to increase. Second, he pointed out that the district's soils were poor and would not support an increased population, specifically "new Australians".<sup>99</sup> However, just five years later the head teacher reported that attendance levels for 1960 had increased from 36 to 59 in one term alone due to the rapid expansion of the district and he again requested an additional classroom. During 1961 the Bohlevale School Parents and Teachers Committee and the Northern Region Director of Education continually applied to the Department of Education for a new classroom, the supply of electricity and town water and an upgrade of the toilet block. By

<sup>99</sup> A. Whitman, NR55/6261 Bohlevale – Letter to the Director-General of Education. 1955, QSA ID391844.



this time the situation had become urgent, as attendance at the school was now 64 students. Consequently, the conditions at the school got increasingly uncomfortable for the students and teacher. The Northern Region Director of Education commented on the conditions in a letter to the Department of Education:

*Three pupils occupy each dual desk and must be most uncomfortable during humid weather.... Alleviation of class-room congestion due to inadequate accommodation is urgent. This can be brought about only by the provision of an additional class-room. It seems likely that the enrolment will gradually increase due to the current expansion of the suburbs of Townsville.*<sup>100</sup>

In October 1961 the Department of Education approved the construction of a new classroom as well as a teacher’s residence. As construction neared completion in 1962, the architect for the Department of Public Works recommended that the original classroom be replaced as he considered it sub-standard both structurally and functionally and that an additional building should be constructed. Removal of the old school building and the construction of a second new classroom was approved in January 1963 by the Department of Public Works. The new addition would include a new classroom, library, staff room and a storeroom. For the rest of the decade school attendance continued to increase, as well as the school’s facilities and by 1964 the school had three teachers for the 90 students, requiring yet more new classrooms to be constructed at Bohlevale in 1965.<sup>101</sup> The rapid expansion of the Bohlevale School, both in attendance and infrastructure, reflects the population growth of the wider community during this period.

## Urbanisation

After World War Two economic activity increased in Townsville and the hinterland resulting in a population explosion for the region. The investment in infrastructure, especially new roads, and the expansion of the transport industry during the war, combined with long-term agreements between Australia and Britain to create a long-lasting boom in the beef cattle industry. The 1950s also saw a continuation of high mineral prices resulting in a mining boom for Queensland. This translated into prosperity for Townsville as new

industries moved in, resulting in a dramatic increase in population. Between 1947 and 1971, the population rose from 34,000 to 71,000 people, representing a doubling of the population in less than thirty years. By the mid-1950s the Townsville and Thuringowa councils realised that they needed to dramatically increase housing approvals after underdevelopment of new housing estates since 1939. However, even with new housing commission projects in suburbs such as Wulguru, the construction industry in Townsville struggled to keep up with increasing demand. It would not be until 1957 that house construction began to rise significantly. As prices for land increased in the older residential suburbs, the outward sprawl of new suburbs in the southwest and to a lesser extent the north of Townsville continued.<sup>102</sup> Prices remained relatively low in the Bohle in the 1960s probably making the subdivision of Innes Estate, at what would become Deeragun, attractive for low cost housing. This marked the beginning of the urbanisation of the Bohle Plains. Drinking water and a lack of infrastructure were major restrictions on further development at the Bohle and would initially limit its growth until the construction of the Ross River dam in the 1970s.<sup>103</sup> The residential development in the district was of a small scale, probably limited to no more than 50 allotments. This period of expansion also saw new styles of housing derived from the models of southern Australia. These were economical and expedient to build, although they were less effective than more traditional tropical houses in dealing with the environmental extremes of the tropics.<sup>104</sup> By the mid-1960s the Thuringowa Council began to address the restrictions to further growth in the Bohle, developing infrastructure and a town plan that allowed for future residential growth in the Bohle Plains.

From the late 1950s large-scale industrial development spilled over into the Bohle district, beginning with the Townsville Abattoir commencing operation in 1958. The abattoir was established on 800 acres bordered by the western bank of the Bohle River and Ingham Road. The aim of the abattoir was to service the local market allowing small holders to send cattle, sheep and pigs to slaughter locally. In 1967 land a few hundred metres east of the abattoir was acquired by the Department of Commercial and Industrial Development to create the Bohle Industrial Estate. The development of a

<sup>102</sup> *A Guide to a Developing City: Townsville*, (Townsville: Townsville District Development Bureau, 1973), 12.

<sup>103</sup> “From 1964 water was pumped from the Black River to a 5000 gallon reservoir on the north-eastern spur of Mt Bohle, thence to the 40 residents of Innes Estate and Gearney’s Lane.” Henderson, “More than Rates and Rubbish.” 550

<sup>104</sup> *Townsville-Thuringowa Urban Development to the Year 2015*. 1989, .



Figure 34. The Monier tile works at the Bohle industrial estate, Townsville. Alex Trotter.

new industrial estate was part of the Queensland Government’s policy to assist in the decentralisation of industry throughout the State. Stage one of the development began in 1968 and the low rents set by the government were successful in encouraging industry to move to the estate.<sup>105</sup> With the development of residential, commercial and industrial estates on the Bohle Plains beginning in the late 1950s, land use in the district began its long transformation from primarily rural activities to its future as an urban environment.



Figure 35. Humes Pipe Works at the Bohle industrial estate, Townsville. Alex Trotter.

<sup>105</sup> “Crown Estates in big demand,” *Townsville daily Bulletin*, 17 November 1982, 27.

## Post-War Land Use

The changing use of the land in the Bohle Plains resulted in a gradual shift away from the district’s focus on primary industry to residential, commercial and light industrial land uses. While this shift in land use was primarily because of the expansion of Townsville, it can also be attributed to the nature of the landscape and soils of the district. The flat landscape, its proximity to the city and the lack of agricultural value for most of the land meant that the Bohle Plains would feature heavily in the urban development of an expanding Townsville.<sup>106</sup> Despite the limited urban expansion during the 1950s and 1960s, the Bohle Plains mostly retained its rural nature, with pastoralism on a small scale continuing to be a major economic activity in the district. While the majority of holdings remained freehold, in 1961 the State leased 22 square kilometres of crown land to Bohle River Pastoral Holding. The pastoral holding was used primarily for breeding stock as the pasture was too poor for the fattening of stock. This and other pastoral holdings at Black River and Gumlow were likely the largest pastoral properties in the district and represented the principal use of land in the Bohle. The high beef prices of the 1950s and 1960s allowed pastoral properties throughout Townsville to make improvements to the land, increasing water holdings and introducing better pastures. Other small scale farming activities in the district continued to be undertaken in the post-war period, including pig raising, poultry farming and very limited cultivation. However by

<sup>106</sup> “Townsville-Thuringowa Urban Development to the Year 2015,” 60-61.



this time the local dairy industry was virtually non-existent.<sup>107</sup> As the urban sprawl began to encroach on the district's rural industries this would inevitably force changes in how the land would be used.



**Figure 36. Wirths Zoo.**

An example of the problems that urban development brought to the existing rural activities of the district is the fate of Mount St. John Zoo after World War Two. In the early 1950s the zoo came under threat when the State Main Roads Commission and the Department of Irrigation decided that the main dam at the zoo needed to be reduced in size. The departments, who considered the dam a threat to Ingham Road and future development in the area, decided to breach the dam. John Robinson fought the decision through the courts, but was unsuccessful. The government was allowed to breach the dam, significantly reducing the water stocks and virtually destroying the bird sanctuary the Robinsons had spent thirty years creating.<sup>108</sup> In 1955 John Robinson sold the zoo to Mr and Mrs Wirth, who struggled to continue the zoo's success with a lack of water playing a significant role in the its closure in 1968. While the development of the district created issues for the rural activities, the increase in the price of land would ensure that subdivision would eventually be the most profitable use of the land.

## Environmental Change

After a century of European settlement the Bohle district's landscape was significantly transformed because of human activities. This included the clearing of vegetation, the introduction of exotic plants, grazing, and development. The major change to vegetation came from the clearing activities of graziers to improve pasture or to encourage greater productivity from native grasses. Consequently, because of the increased environmental pressure placed on the land the spread of introduced plants such as chinee apple, lantana and rubber vine accelerated during the post-war period reducing productivity for graziers. In the grazing areas native grasses including kangaroo grass had been mostly replaced by this time with bunched spear grass or with introduced legume species such as Townsville stylo. Townsville stylo was first introduced accidentally in the 1920s and became popular throughout the region by the 1960s. This legume spread naturally making it easy for graziers to introduce it to their land and was much better fodder for cattle than native grasses.<sup>109</sup> By the end of the 1960s many graziers had replaced much of their native grasses with varieties of legumes leading to a rise in the native and feral animal population that adapted well to the increased grasslands. Both the Black and the Bohle rivers had been somewhat degraded after a century of european settlement. Both rivers had lost water flow because of silting, with the Black River in particular suffering a reduction in its flow because of sand mining in the river and irrigation. Urban development intensified the clearing of vegetation in the limited areas where it occurred during the 1960s and with urbanisation in the district expanding every decade this is a trend that continues today. While pockets of native vegetation remained, particularly along the rivers and at the foot of Hervey Range, the district had by 1970 seen significant change since European settlers first arrived in the 1860s.

The post-war boom of the 1950s and 1960s in Townsville instigated the Bohle district's transformation in land use and in the landscape from its former rural state into a future cluster of suburbs. As land in the older suburbs of Townsville became scarcer and more valuable, urban development spilled over into the Bohle Plains. This led to industrial, commercial and limited residential development in the district during the late 1950s and 1960s. As this expansion was not planned, the increased population in the district caught both the Thuringowa and Townsville councils and state government departments unprepared for the new infrastructure that

**Figure 37. Cattle at the new Bohle sale yard, Townsville, 1966.**

*The abattoir provided a market for the small holder in the Townsville region; it processed cattle, sheep and pigs. Townsville City Library.*



would now be required. Despite years of warning in the 1950s that the Bohlevale School would quickly outgrow its single building, the school was not upgraded until the matter became urgent as the state struggled to respond to the education boom of the 1960s. Urbanisation brought change to the Bohle as cattle properties were sold to developers, new roads were constructed and more land was cleared. Mount St. John Zoo became one of the many casualties of the unstoppable changing pattern of land use in the post-war period. After the first century of European settlement, the Bohle Plains had been transformed by human activity. Much of the district had been cleared for grazing, new species of vegetation infested the district during the twentieth century, and finally urbanisation would result in the almost total transformation of the landscape from its rural beginnings to an urban future.

<sup>107</sup> Townsville: Commercial & Industrial Centre of North Queensland, (Brisbane: Ashworth Publicity Services, 1958), 17.

<sup>108</sup> "St. John Robinson is a Legendary Figure," Townsville Daily Bulletin, 3.

<sup>109</sup> Henderson, "More than Rates, Roads and Rubbish," 66.



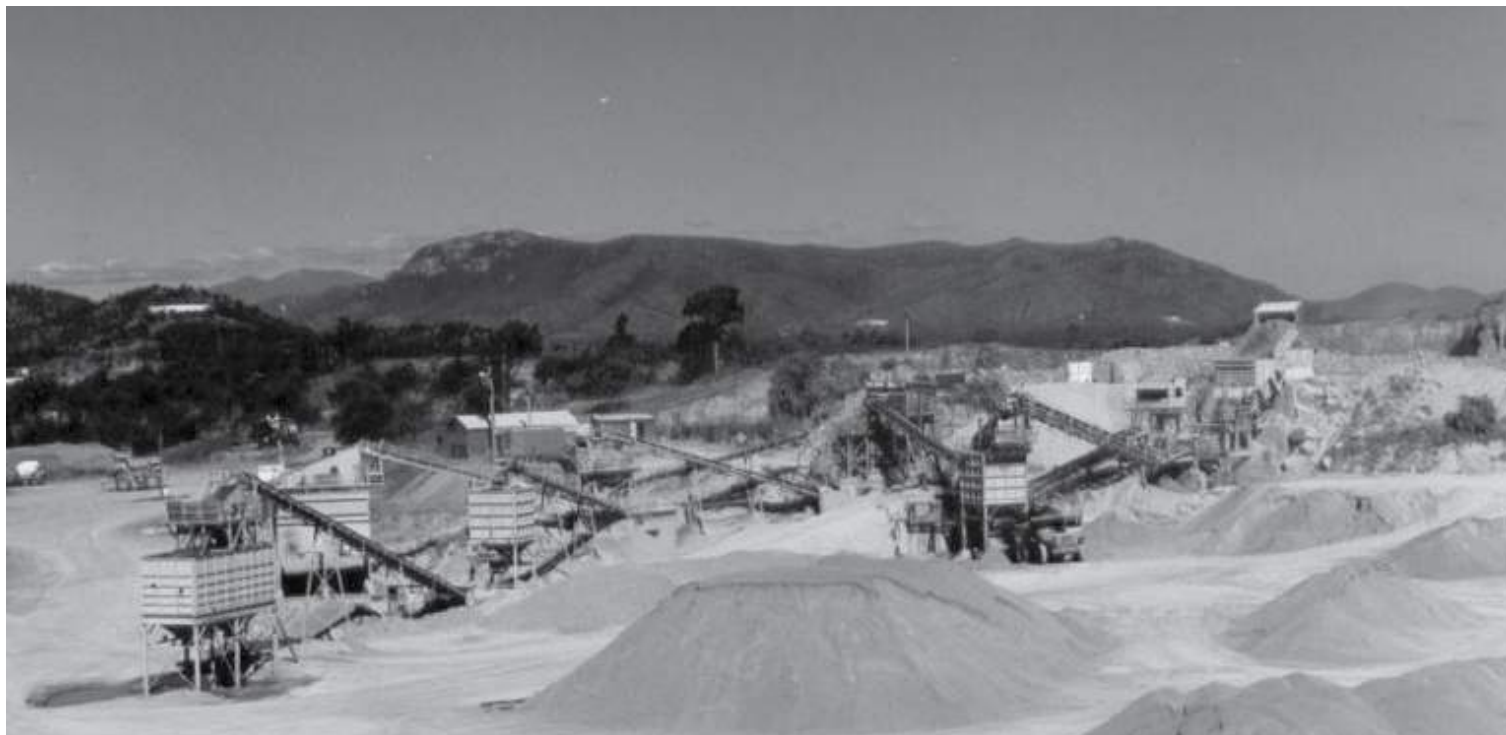


Figure 38. Thuringowa, Ready Mix Quarry, Bruce Highway, Bohle, 1990. Mick Lamont.

## Chapter Seven: The Northern Suburbs – 1980s – 2012s

### The Creation of a Suburb

By the 1980s the Bohle Plains had undergone significant development as the Thuringowa Shire urbanised and the council began approving semi-rural and urban residential development on an unprecedented scale. This led to the state government's decision to change the shire's status to a city on 1 January 1986, which better reflected Thuringowa's rising growth and importance. Rural residential lots began to spring up throughout the Bohle Plains at a rapid rate during this period and by the time Thuringowa became a city a number of developments were either approved or waiting on approval in the Bohle. These included a 6,500 lot residential development at Mt Low and 480 lots at Deeragun. This was in addition to a number of lots that had already been developed such as 200 lots at Bushland Beach, 175 rural/residential lots at Black River, and the second stage at Bluewater Park consisting of 400 lots. Rangewood and Rupertswood were also both subdivided into several hundred rural lots in the early 1980s. It was at this time that predictions were made that the Bohle Plains would ultimately reach a population of 25,000 people. The developers of Bluewater Park were particularly ambitious building a private 1,200 metre airstrip for "homeowners who chose to commute by air", along with plans to build a eighteen hole golf course, an equestrian centre and

rodeo grounds.<sup>110</sup>

The rapid development of the Bohle Plains and Northern Beaches region during the 1980s and into the 1990s led to a scattered settlement pattern, which became a problem for the council when it came to delivering infrastructure and services. As road usage increased and new subdivisions sprang up, the council needed to create and maintain an ever-expanding network of roads over a large but sparsely populated area. The provision of services also continued to be an issue in the Bohle and Northern Beaches area. The scattered nature of settlement created pockets where residents without their own transport found it difficult to access public services. In response to this, the Thuringowa Council began to expand public transport networks into the Northern Beaches and the Bohle Plains in the early 1990s.<sup>111</sup>

The mid 1980s also saw the creation of commercial infrastructure in the Bohle Plains. In 1986 the population of the Bohle reached over 2,000 people making commercial ventures not only viable but also necessary for new development in the district. The first major retail and commercial development began in the Bohle with the opening of the Woodlands Shopping Centre in

August 1985 and a BP petrol station in October 1986. In 1994 the Woodlands shopping centre was extended with the construction of a further 14 shops, including the Bohle's first bank. Hotels returned after nearly a century of absence in the Bohle Plains, which serviced the growing community. This began with the Bartlett Group of Companies accepting a tender from J. Scott Builders Pty Ltd for the construction of the \$2.5 million Bohle Barn in 1985, with construction starting that year. The construction of the hotel was seen as a much-needed entertainment facility that would serve the rapidly growing population of the Bohle Plains.<sup>112</sup>

By the early 1990s Bohlevale, Deeragun and Mt Low were the fastest growing suburbs of Thuringowa and they would continue to expand at a rapid rate throughout the decade. As suburbs developed support services were needed. In 1991 an ambulance station opened at Black River. The 1990s also saw development at other subdivisions around the Bohle increase in pace, most noticeably at Bushland Beach with about 500 house sites being established by 1995 and plans for another 2,500 were under way. Commercial infrastructure also began to be developed at Bushland Beach, starting with several small corner stores and the Ocean Palms Hotel in 1995. In 1994 and 1995 the Thuringowa Council and residents of Bushland beach, Rupertswood and Rangewood sought to officially take on the names of these subdivisions. Previously the three subdivisions were officially known as the 'Bohle Plains' or the 'Alice River' for Rangewood. Bushland Beach was the first to submit the changes to the Lands department, with Rupertswood and Rangewood following eight months later.<sup>113</sup>

In 1996 six thousand acres of land located between the Bruce Highway and Hervey Range Road, held by the Bohle River Holdings under a pastoral lease, was announced to be the site of a large housing development. It was estimated to eventually consist of up to 22,000 house sites spread out over five precincts, to provide accommodation for between 40,000 and 100,000 people. With the initial planning stages beginning only in 1996 it would be about ten years before the construction phase would begin. This subdivision can be seen as a turning point for the development phase of the Bohle. Prior to this, subdivisions were generally of a small scale and were scattered over a large area of land. This was important in keeping the rural nature of the Bohle largely intact. However, over time the Bohle Plains would become an increasingly densely urban cluster of suburbs. For example, in 1997 Tropical Homes completed construction of the first stage of on its new subdivision the Avenues.

Located on the bank of the Bohle River the subdivision would later consist of over 1,400 home sites, landscaped parkland, bike paths and 1.5 km of river frontage. The subdivision was also linked to schools, public services and shopping centres. This new direction by developers highlighted just how high land values had risen in the Bohle, making the provision of large tracts of parkland affordable for developers.<sup>114</sup>

As the suburbs grew and the population increased in the Bohle Plains area the need to meet the education needs of young families increased. St Anthony's Catholic College opened to primary students in 1992 and by 1997 the North Beaches State High School was providing secondary education for students in the area. In 2005 St Anthony's opened its secondary campus. Along with residential development came a need not just for education facilities but emergency services. The Deeragun police station and the Deeragun fire station both opened in 2000.



Figure 39. Bohle Catchment.

### Environmental Concern

The rapid development in the Bohle Plains in the post war period and into the 1980s led to a number of environmental problems. In 1985 the Bohle River and its tributaries were listed as one of Queensland's twelve most polluted rivers in a State Government report on water quality. However, Thuringowa Council Chairman Dan Gleeson noted that the Bohle River rarely contained any water except for a few sections near the mouth of the river. He insisted that the sewage would be isolated and should not pose any environmental or health risks.<sup>115</sup> By this time sewage treatment plants in Mount St John and Deeragun discharged sewage into the Bohle River and Saunders Creek respectively. While a common practice in Queensland at the time, this led to high levels of

110 "Supplement to the Townsville Bulletin," *Townsville Bulletin*, 31 December 1985 1985, 15 & 18

111 "2000 Forecast," *Sun Community Newspaper*, 26 June 1996, 11

112 "Homestead look to Bohle Barn," *Townsville Bulletin*, 12 July 1985

113 "Bohle Plains residents may seek new name for suburb," *Townsville Bulletin*, 30 August 1995

114 "New style of subdivision," *Townsville Bulletin*, 8 November 1997

115 Therese Millard, "T'ville rivers in dirty dozen," *Townsville Bulletin*, 20 November 1985



pollution in the Bohle’s waterways. One report noted that “most of the time there is no flow in the creek [Saunders Creek] other than effluent”. The problem continued with reports over ten years later still discussing the problems caused by treated sewage being pumped into the Bohle River. Algae blooms and reports of declining fish stocks in the Bohle River and the beaches nearby were identified as being directly caused by the discharge of sewage and other pollutants into the river system.<sup>116</sup> In the 1990s concern over the effect of sand mining on the Black River was widely debated by local residents and the council. After years of extensive and poorly regulated mining, large tracts of the riverbank had been stripped of trees allowing erosion to become a problem. It was also reported that water flow had been significantly reduced and salt water was encroaching on the freshwater sections of the river.<sup>117</sup> Thus, the urbanisation of the Bohle Plains brought with it a number of problems for the local environment. The water quality of the major water systems in the area suffered from reductions in water flow, pollution and the clearing of vegetation from the banks, which by the 1990s had led to greatly degraded river and creek systems. However, the 1980s and 1990s also saw a rise in recognition and action from local residents, the local council and the state government over the environmental damage that urbanisation and commercial and industrial activities were causing. A number of community groups were created to monitor and repair damage caused to local waterways, bushland and the coast with the local and state governments starting to take a more proactive role in improving the environment.



**Figure 40. Cartoon highlighting the effects of pollution in the Bohle River.**  
*This cartoon depicts the loss of fish stocks and wildlife in the Bohle River as a result of the high levels of bacterial pollution cause by the dumping of sewage into the river. Townsville Bulletin, 24 January 1989.*

<sup>116</sup> “Bohle Dirty Drain,” *Sun Community Newspapers*, 18 February 1997  
<sup>117</sup> “Sand mine meeting raises ire of council,” *Townsville Bulletin*, 8 February 1992, & D. Lyon, “Sand mining facts,” *Townsville Bulletin*, 26 February 1992



**Figure 41. Northern Beaches Leisure Centre Swimming Pool, 2008.**

## Conclusion

In the last decade master planned communities have begun to spring up in the Bohle Plains, with large-scale subdivisions such as Kalynda Chase, Cosgrove and North Shore being developed. These subdivisions continued the move away from traditional development, providing an element of exclusivity and luxury that had never before been associated with the Bohle. Developers included sporting complexes, large shopping centres, parkland with walking tracks and bike paths and rehabilitated bushland in their subdivisions. These developments helped to create a change in how the Bohle Plains was marketed and seen by residents and the wider community. The Bohle’s attractions began to be seen through its close proximity to both the Townsville city centre and Thuringowa’s town centre. No longer was it a quiet rural area, close but removed from the hustle and bustle of town life. The Bohle Plains has undergone an almost total transformation over the past 140 years. According to the 2006 Census, the population of the urban centres of the Bohle Plains, Alice River, Deeragun and Bushland Beach was 11,488 people. It has changed from a struggling rural region that constantly needed to fight for services and amenities into a small cluster of suburbs that boast world-class master planned communities and good access to transportation, schools, shopping centres and numerous recreational facilities.

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