



QGMJ retrospective: the making of Mount Isa

In 1923, a gold prospector on his way to what is now the Northern Territory stumbled upon on the world's richest deposits of minerals.

Queensland's 150th celebrations coincide with Mount Isa's 85th birthday—the rural oasis that grew from the ancient dusty plains of north-west Queensland.

While prospecting on the banks of the Leichhardt

River, John Campbell Miles retrieved some samples of dark, heavily mineralised rocks. Being unable to identify some of the stones, Miles sent the samples to the government assayer in Cloncurry who verified that he had come across possibly the most important minerals discovery of the early part of the century—lead, silver and zinc.

John Miles, in party with William Simpson, staked a 42-acre lease to the north and named the new field Mount Isa—a variation of the name of the Western Australian goldfields, Mount Ida.

As with many parts of rural Australia, isolation was a problem to begin with. Initially, the site was too

remote to attract capital or infrastructure investment. The logistics of freight and haulage were more cost-prohibitive for small prospectors.

It took a recommendation to the State Government by the Mining Warden at Cloncurry for a geologist to survey the site. Reporting back to the government, geologist EC Saint-Smith's report, published in the Queensland Government Mining Journal, in 1923 (Vol XXIV, November 1923), verified the wealth of the site and triggered a rush of prospectors to the area in late 1923.

Among these prospectors was William Corbould. He bought out Miles and Simpson for

500 shares (approximately 330 000). Mount Isa Mines Limited was listed on the stock exchange the following year.

This capital investment provided the impetus for developing the remote city into the regional oasis that it is today.

This Q150 retrospective takes a look at how the Queensland Government Mining Journal recorded the most exciting Australian mineral find of the 20th century. ■

For more information about Australian mining history, visit the Australian Prospectors and Miners Hall of Fame at www.mininghall.com