

THE STRATHBLANE. IDA BAY AND CATAMARAN COALFIELDS

During the period 18th to 27th February, a visit was made to the Strathblane, Ida Bay and Catamaran Coalfields to determine whether or not further prospecting for coal was advisable and whether an economic return could be won from further development of the fields.

The fields have been the subject matter of many reports, the earliest of which appears to have been written in the year 1902 when W.H. Twelvetrees reported on the state of progress at Catamaran and Ida Bay. In his report on Catamaran, Twelvetrees refers to "old workings" so that development of the field commenced at an even earlier date.

The coalfields are situated in the county of Kent in the south-eastern part of Tasmania and are accessible by road from Hobart, via Dover, in from 50 to 70 miles over the Huon Highway. The fields are also readily accessible by water via the Derwent River and D'Entrecasteau Channel over which, until comparatively recent years, most of the goods were transported by River Steamers.

THE STRATHBLANE COALFIELD:

The Strathblane Coalfield is the most northern of the three fields. It is situated from one to two miles west from the Dover-Hastings road and north of Creekton Creek at a distance of about five and a half miles from the town of Dover. Old tramways, previously used for transport are now in a decayed condition and the last mile or more was done by foot over a marshy plain.

Little had been said of the Strathblane field prior to the year 1915 when Twelvetrees published Geological Survey Bulletin No.20 "The Catamaran and Strathblane Coalfields and Coal and Limestone at Ida Bay".

At that time some 640 acres were held by H.J. Colbourn as mining leases. In his report Twelvetrees states that "Coal was found here six or seven years ago". The mine was then idle "pending an attempt to secure capital for the enterprise".

Analyses quoted in Bulletin 20 show that

Fixed Carbon ranges from	...	55.1% to 55.6%
Volatile Hydrocarbon	...	26.0% to 27.9%
Ash	...	7.9% to 15.2%
Moisture	...	1.1% to 3.7%

For the preparation of "The Coal Resources of Tasmania" published in the year 1922, A.M.Reid in 1921 examined the Strathblane field. He records that the same area of 640 acres was leased to H.J. Colbourn and describes the few workings then open for inspection.

At the present time all the workings are in a collapsed condition and there is no possibility of obtaining first hand information relative to the coal seams.

The accompanying plan shows that the workings are reached by following a track cut by the Forestry Department. This track continues past the workings at least as far as the top of the ridge where it meets a second track trending southerly. The southern extension of this track was followed to a branch of Creekton Creek where further collapsed workings were seen.

The summit of the ridge is composed of Dolerite and there is a fairly distinct change in grade where the Dolerite is met on each fall of the ridge.

It is possible that the Dolerite is occurring in the form of a dyke. The following information given in an interview with Mr. W. J. Forster, who held the last lease in force on the field, gives an eye-witness reason for the closing of the mine.

From the information given it was gathered that the last operating company on the field commenced work in 1926 with a capital of £6,000. After clearing overgrown tracks two adits were driven in a south-westerly direction from the eastern slopes of the mountain. The first adit was driven as a crosscut for a distance of 90 feet to cut the coal seam and was then continued on the dip of the coal for a distance of 70 feet where Dolerite was met. The second adit, at a lower altitude, was driven from surface on the dip of the seam but it also encountered Dolerite. As previous workings from the Western side of the hill had also encountered Dolerite the Company ceased operations.

In 1932 Messrs. Bond and Gepp acquired a five-acre lease covering the principal workings and continued mining for a short period, chiefly by removing the pillars left by the company.

In 1933 the five-acre lease was transferred to W.J. Forster who held it till the year 1936 when the lease became void.

It would therefore appear that only a limited amount of coal would be available between the outcrop and the Dolerite dyke and would not justify the expenditure necessary to open up a new mine.

It was also suggested that the marshy flat crossed in arriving at the mine, may also carry coal seams. There is little doubt that the underlying strata would be sandstones which may contain coal seams but only boring would yield any confirmation of the presence of coal there.

THE IDA BAY COALFIELD:

The Ida Bay Coalfield is situated in the south-eastern corner of Tasmania about four miles south-west from Southport. The mine workings are situated about 5 chains west of the Hastings-Cockle Creek Road at a point about a mile south from the Lune River Crossing. The area is therefore readily accessible by road from Hobart a distance of approximately 62 miles. The area is also reasonably accessible by water for the present loading stage used by the Australian Commonwealth Carbide works is situated within $1\frac{3}{4}$ miles of the mine.

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The earliest reference to the Ida Bay Mine was one by W.H. Twelvetrees in 1902 when he mentioned a dip tunnel driven westerly in a dip of 40° at the entrance to the tunnel. In 1915, Geological Survey Bulletin No. 20. Twelvetrees stated that the seam dipped south-westerly at an angle of 100-110°. "Its thickness at about 50-60 yards in is 5 ft. It has been followed down on the dip for that distance and has been persistent in character with not more than a band or two an inch or so thick".

Analyses quoted show a range of -

Fixed Carbon from	....	55. 5% to 67. 3%
Volatiles	....	15.56% to 28. 9%
Ash	....	11. 8% to 17.55%
Moisture	....	1.54% to 3. 8%
Sulphur one analysis	....	0.45%

Twelvetrees suggested that the high Fixed Carbon and comparatively low Volatile matter was due to proximity of the dolerites.

During the period of investigation prior to the publication of "The Coal Resources of Tasmania", A.M. Reid reported that "none of the openings were accessible at the time of this investigation".

During the present investigation three collapsed adits were located, two of which could yield no information at all. In the third adit, although collapsed at the entrance some six feet of coaly material was visible. Three samples were taken. The visible coaly material was the upper section of a seam of which the lower section had been worked by dip tunnel. The old timbers of the original tunnel were just visible above the level of the fallen earth. Below the visible coal there was about 2 feet of shaly material.

The section of the seam which was visible was recorded as follows:-

Indefinite roof below Felspathic sandstones.

Sample 3 (4 ins. coal No bands visible but
(9 ins. coal cleavage at these points
(6 ins. coal is strong.

Sample 2 (1½ ins. pug band
(9 ins. coal
(½ ins. brown band
(6 ins. Flaky coal

4" Clay band widens to 12 ins. to south.

Sample 1 (3 ins. flaky coal with 2 penny bands
(4 ins. band coal
(2 ins. flaky coal
(1 ins. Brown band
(5 ins. Coal
(1½ ins. Brown band
(3 ins. Bright coal
(1 ins. Brown Band
(2 ins. Bright coal fairly soft
(11 ins. clean coal fairly hard

Shaly floor between the two sections of seam. The seam dips to 260° at 10° .

No section of the seam actually worked could be obtained but it is considered that the two seams together make up the one seam which in the "Coal Resources of Tasmania" has been referred to as the Delta Seam.

If that is the case the seam is the one being worked by most operating coal mines in Tasmania.

The adits have been driven in a westerly direction from creek level. The seam dips westerly at about 10 degrees so that it is feasible to believe that the mine was fairly wet. I can trace no reason for the mine closing down except that it was originally opened up as part of a scheme, which never materialised, for the manufacture of cement. Dolerites do not occur on the surface for at least a quarter of a mile to the west. The sandstone ridge ahead of the adit rises to a height of about 150 feet. The sandstone area has been mapped previously by Mr. Everard and extends for a total of about one and a half miles in a southerly direction widening in the south to about a mile.

The area is one which may yield results from further prospecting.

A line of bores westward from the old adits would quickly reveal whether or not the coal continues as an unbroken seam and would indicate whether or not further work on the southern extension of the sandstone is warranted.

As Twelvetrees in 1915 recorded a 5 ft. seam of coal at 50 to 60 yards in the adit some work seems justified.

THE CATAMARAN COAL FIELD:

Coal has been recorded from positions further south than Catamaran, but as no development has taken place there, the Catamaran Coalfield becomes the most southern coalfield of the State.

The Catamaran Coal mine is situated on Swampy ground about one mile west from the Hasting - Cockle Creek Road about a quarter of a mile north from the Catamaran River. It is therefore reasonably accessible by road although throughout its operation the product of the mine was shipped either from the mouth of Catamaran River or from Everol Point at Recherche Bay to which points it was conveyed over tramways.

The history of the Catamaran Coalfield dates back at least to the year 1902 when Twelvetrees reported on that and the Ross Glen Companies' holdings. At that time Twelvetrees suggested that advisability of prospecting the higher ground and the possibility of meeting Dolerites in the underground workings.

Several attempts have since been made to work the holdings and although some success has been obtained in developing the area it is doubtful whether the work was economically successful.

5.

It is on record that in 1927 and in 1932 the Government was approached for financial assistance.

It has been suggested that several factors were responsible for the final closing of the mine but it is almost certain that the unstable nature of the ground coupled with the occurrence of dolerite dykes in the workings were the principal factors which caused the closure.

Some boring has been carried out in the vicinity of the workings the earliest being done in 1903 and the latest in 1937. Little of this boring was placed to prove the extension of the field and most was placed in close proximity to the workings.

The mine operated intermittently between 1905 and 1939 the longest continuous period of operations being from 1925 to the final closure in 1939. During that period an amount of 113,000 tons of coal were produced of a total production from the mine of 119,000 tons.

As previously stated the mine is situated on swampy ground a little to the north of the Catamaran River. To the north and west of the mine higher ground occurs with sandstones rising to heights approaching 400 feet.

To the west of the workings and close to the river Dolerite occurs at a relatively low altitude. In a westerly direction the dolerite continues and gains in altitude over a distance approximating a mile when it trends northerly. There is little doubt that close to the river the dolerite is transgressive with respect to the sandstones but where the northerly trend occurs it is either in sill formation or has reached its present position as the result of faulting.

The mine workings are at present in a collapsed condition but the approaches to three dip tunnels were seen. These have been driven in a north-westerly direction and the dip is of the order of 10 degrees. Near the river and westerly from the main dip tunnel are remains of old workings. In parts the openings have the appearance of collapsed workings and are suggestive of adits driven only a few feet below surface in a southerly direction.

All the mining leases have become void and the only tenement in force is a licence to search for coal over an area of 200 acres. This licence is held in the names of M.M. Roche and A. Lancaster. It is situated northwest of and adjoining old lease 8242/M. It has a tenure of 2 years from the 24th August, 1951.

The original area at Catamaran may be regarded as having been worked out. The area of higher ground to the westward of the workings has still to be prospected. Should coal be discovered there it is doubtful whether a suitable large area would occur unless it can be proved that the dolerite occurs as a Sill.

Adjoining the river the available coal is limited to what is left after the shallow mining operations.

Dept. of Mines.
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