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1986/11. Minor coal areas in southern Tasmania

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Abstract

A number of minor occurrences of coal are recorded, and limited prospecting work has been done in areas outside of the recognised coalfields in southern Tasmania. These small, economically insignificant deposits are of historical and regional interest.

SOUTHPORT

The Cygnet Coal Measures crop out on the foreshore near Southport. One of the first commercial mining operations in Tasmania unsuccessfully attempted to exploit these coal measures.

In 1840, Charles Swanston and eight others approached the government of the day for assistance to sink a shaft near Southport. The proposal was that the government provide the labour for sinking the shaft and operating the mine, and the company provide materials and, if successful, lease the mine for 99 years at a cost of 2½% of the profits (Executive Council Minutes, 19 May 1840). The scheme was proposed again in 1841 and 1842 (Hartwell, 1954).

The government partly agreed to the proposal, and a shaft was sunk in 1842. Some 1300 tons of coal were brought to the Hobart market (Colonial Times, 17 May 1842; CSO 8/108/2279, July 1844), but the operation was not profitable and collapsed, owing the government 4,316 pounds (\$8,632) (GO 1/54, 9 May 1844, p.90).

The company had a brief period of 'paper prosperity' in 1840, when shares rose from ten shillings (\$1.00) to ten pounds (\$20) each (Hobart Town Courier, 1840). However, on the collapse of the company, the shareholders could not be traced and the government was forced to forfeit the sum owing (GO 33/78, p. 713-717, 31 March 1853). Government Surveyor Jones commented in a letter to the Colonial Secretariat office that the coal was taken from the beach outcrop and not from any regular working, so the coal was dirty (CSO 8/108/2279, 13 July 1844). The affair became known as the 'Southport Swindle' (Booth, 1962), and speculation remains that the proposers made a tidy profit from the scheme. Swanston was at the time one of two Attorneys General for the Colonial Government, and was later involved in coal mining on Schouten Island as well as many other industrial ventures.

Milligan (1849) noted that a shaft was sunk near Southport "half a mile (500m) from the Southport station some beds of shaly matter were penetrated but coal was not obtained." This description most probably refers to Swanston's shaft.

A diamond-drill hole was put down at Southport in July 1893 for the Southport Coal Prospecting Association. The hole was drilled to 186.7m, at a point "70 chains (1.4km) north of The Narrows and one chain (20m) west of the beach, at 30' (9.1m) asl" [i.e. approximately at DM971908]. The log of the hole is given in Twelvetrees (1902). No coal was intersected.

SOUTH CAPE

Coal was first discovered in Tasmania in 1793, when a 100mm seam of coal was found by a party from Labillardiere's expedition whilst on route from Recherche Bay to Mt La Perouse.

In 1824, I. Scott, R. Roberts and J. Hobbs embarked on a tour of discovery around Tasmania with two boats and twelve convicts. Three seams of coal were seen cropping out in a cliff at South Cape Bay. An expedition to examine the coal in 1826 returned with the opinion that the coal was of poor quality (LSD 1/48/208, 25 October 1826).

The seams were described by Milligan (1849). Two shafts were sunk 450m inland from the cliff but no coal was intersected. Of the seams in the cliff, one about one metre thick was of the most interest and of better quality than the other two seams. But even this better coal was full of pyrites and stony matter.

RANDALLS BAY

Thureau (1881) briefly mentioned two shafts sunk to the south of the Cygnet coalfield. One shaft was sunk at Randalls Bay [EN100120] where a very small seam (125-150mm thick) was cut. Another shaft was sunk between Randalls Bay and Mt Cygnet but no economic coal was discovered. Both these shafts were through the Cygnet Coal Measures.

ADAMSONS PEAK

Four small seams of coal and black shale outcropping in a creek below the plateau of the mountain, to the north of the track leading to the forestry lookout, were seen by Hughes (1955). The seams varied from 450mm to 1.2m in thickness. A sample from the 1.2m seam, described as "coal with some black shale", gave the following analysis:

Moisture (%)	3.0
VCM (%)	14.5
FC (%)	36.0
Ash (%)	46.5
Sulphur	0.47
SE (MJ/kg)	16.2

These seams are part of the Cygnet Coal Measures and are of Permian age.

LUNE RIVER

In 1922, a coal bed of three seams containing three metres of coal was opened up by means of a shaft on the north bank of the Lune River. Hughes (1955) recorded that some shallow shafts were full of water at the time of his visit.

The coal is of Triassic age.

FLYNN'S CREEK

Thureau (1881) referred to this area as being six miles (9.5km) north-east from 'Picnic Victoria' on the Huon River. This area, around EN089376 and EN090368, is near Flynn's Creek.

The coal was recorded as being 1.12m thick at the adit entrance, and 1.2m at the end of the 5.5m long adit.

The coal measures are part of the Triassic Kaoota Coal Measures.

GORDON

The Cygnet Coal Measures crop out on the seashore near Gordon [EN195100]. A Mr Abbott extolled the virtues of the Three Hut Point coal to the Senate Select Committee on Coalfields in 1864. On 10 June 1870 he wrote to the Melbourne Chamber of Commerce trying to find a market for his coal from the Rockwood Coal mine (between Three Hut Point and Long Point) near Gordon (LSD 1/48/310). Abbott had a drive 60m long and was sinking a shaft at this time. In 1879 Abbott complained to the government of the day that coal-bearing land at Adventure Bay was being sold and the coal worked, and he could not compete with these operations (LSD 1/48/214). The area was inspected by Reid (in Hills et al, 1922), who recorded that the seam was 200-250mm thick.

RECHERCHE BAY

Across the bay from the Moss Glen coalfield, near Coal Pit Bight [about DM928800], two shafts and a drift (an adit) were dug by a company in the 1840s in search of coal. Milligan (1849) visited the site but could not examine the workings as they were full of water. The main shaft was circular and masonry lined. The coal seam mined from these workings was not more than 0.6m thick and of inferior quality (Hills et al, 1922).

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RECORDS HELD IN STATE ARCHIVES

- LSD - Lands and Surveys Department
- CSO - Colonial Secretary's Department
- GO - Governor's Office

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