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1. BACKGROUND

The majority of coal mining in Tasmania has been by underground methods, partly for historical reasons, and partly because conventional opinions held that most of the black coal was situated in the north east of the state, (where the host rocks are covered by large thicknesses of dolerite).

Prior to the early 1970's, a low demand for coal by both domestic (in Tasmania) and export markets, had resulted in a virtually non existent level of coal exploration by industry in the state.

Following the escalation in the price of oil during the early 1970's, there followed an upsurge in coal exploration in mainland Australia, which by 1977 reached Tasmania.

This exploration took place initially in the north east of the state (Fingal Tier - Douglas River area), by the Shell Company of Australia, and subsequently in early 1981, Capricorn Mining Ltd. commenced drilling programs in the Sandfly Cygnet, Hamilton and Colebrook areas around old coal mines.

!!! | However, it wasn't until Victor Petroleum and Resources Ltd. discovered coal at Woodbury, in early mid 1981, that public comment was seriously directed at consideration of open cut mining of coal in Tasmania.

The move away from the north east of the state as a focus for coal exploration, was facilitated in part by regional mapping in the southern Midlands by the Geological Survey of Tasmania during the last decade, (Brighton 1:50 000 sheet in 1975, Oatlands 1:50 000 sheet in 1976).

In particular, the pioneering work by S. M. Forsyth on the Oatlands 1:50 000 sheet, in conjunction with the accelerated program coal exploration over the Fingal Tier by the Geological Survey (1978 - 1981), resulted in a much improved understanding of Triassic age freshwater sedimentation in southern Tasmania.

Other important contributors to the knowledge have been Bacon (1979), Calver and Castleden (1981), Bacon and Everard (1981), Smyth (1980) and Kind (1980).