

A Field in Decline

Battye (1912 [1985]: 1010) states that in 1912 the Great Fingall employed close to 500 and the population of Day Dawn had surpassed Cue. However, minutes for the meeting on 30 October 1912 were the last for the Day Dawn Municipality (Day Dawn Municipality 1908-1912), and on 31 October 1912 the respective councils resigned and the Cue-Day Dawn Road Board was created (Heydon 1987: 175). The offices of the newly amalgamated body were initially located at Day Dawn but moved to Cue in October 1919 where they remained (Heydon 1987: 175).

With the decline in available workers and the static gold price during WWI, employees were retrenched from the Great Fingall. In April 1918 Bewick Moreing, the company controlling the Great Fingall, announced that the mine would close due to falling profits and the electrical supply to Day Dawn also ceased (*MTDDG*, Friday 12 April 1918: 2). The mine's closure irreparably affected the surrounding area and people began to leave Day Dawn, dismantling homes and selling the iron for what they could (Heydon 1986: 108; 1987: 60-61). The mine continued to be worked by tributers (*MTDDG*, Friday 19 April 1918: 3) until it collapsed in October 1921 (Heydon 1986: 118).

Informal interviews and a site visit with local Aboriginal women who have lived in the area since they were children suggest that nobody was residing at the DDT site in the late 1940s/1950s (pers.com Mavis Mongoo, Karen Little and Noelene, 26 July 2008).

Austin (The Island) - LKA

Environment & Geology

Austin (otherwise known as The Island) is situated 25 kilometres south of Cue and comprises low greenstone and quartzite ridges, rising approximately 30 metres out of Lake Austin, a large salt lake. The lake is mostly dry, very flat, and generally devoid of vegetation besides a fringe of salt lake species such as *Halosarcia* spp. (Van Etten & Vellekoop 2009: 68). The surrounding area is sparsely wooded with mulga scrub (Commonwealth of Australia 2009). Little is known of the specific hydrology of the lake and no detailed lake levels have been reported (Van Etten & Vellekoop 2009: 70). However, historical and recent data suggests Lake Austin is prone to flooding after heavy rains (*WM*, 13 October 1921: 46, Van Etten & Vellekoop 2009: 70).

Mining

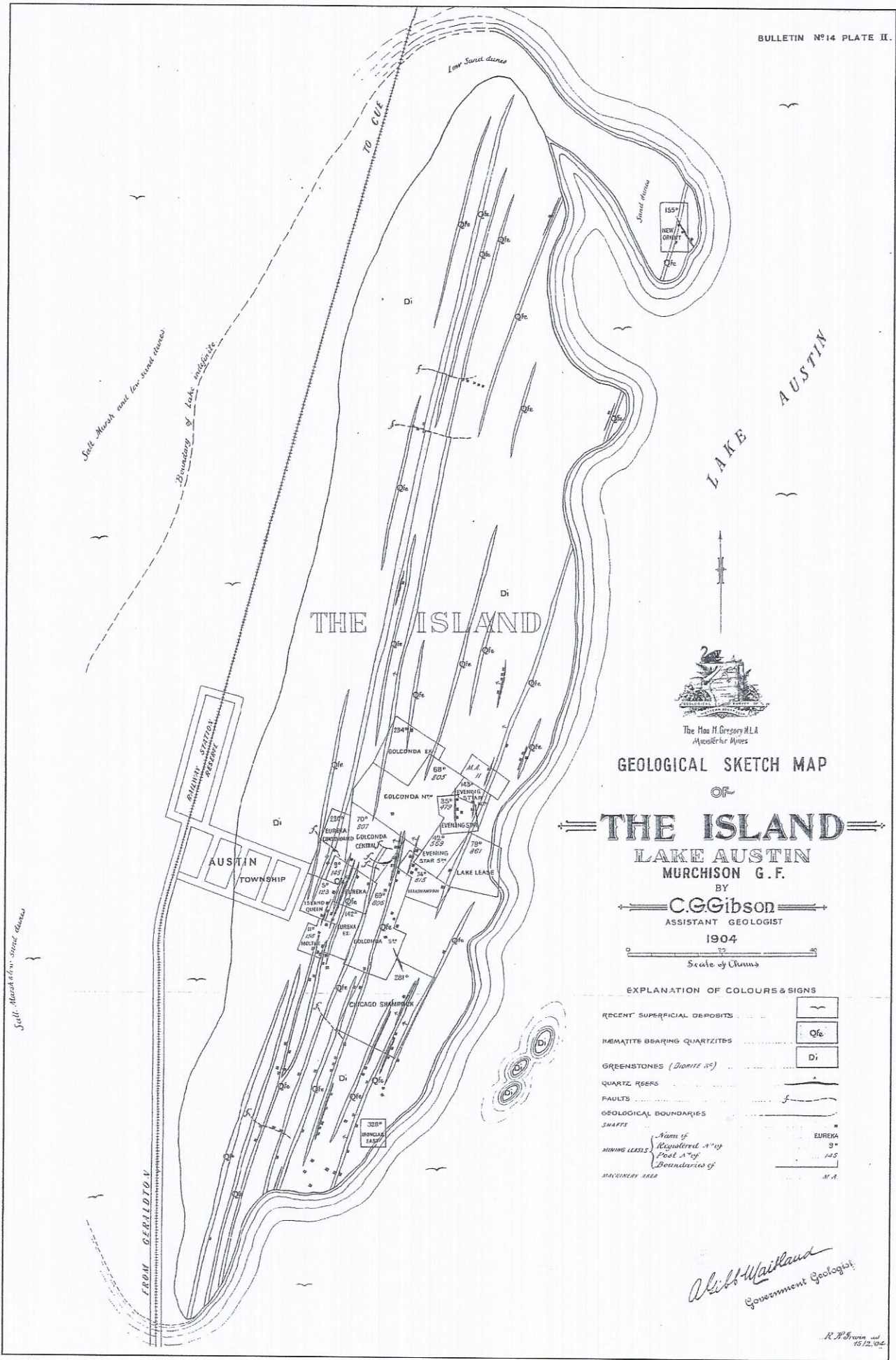
Department of Mines records indicate that Reginald Larard was the first to apply for a lease at The Island in October 1892 (Department of Mines 1892-1907) and, while numerous other leases were held across the location (Figure 18) until at least 1912, most payments on these ceased by 1907 (Department of Mines 1892-1907; 1893-1906; 1893-1907; 1894-1903; 1895-1898; 1895-1903; 1897-1903; 1897-1907; 1901-1905; 1901-1912). *The Murchison Times & Day Dawn Gazette* on 15 August 1894 (*MTDDG*, 15 August 1894: 2) reports that the Golconda Mine had been taken over by a Glasgow company represented by a Mr Walter and that prospects were looking favourable. A newspaper report in March 1895 suggested yields of gold from the Island had not increased in the last three months but a large amount of work was being done (*MTDDG*, Saturday 2 March 1895: 2).

It can be inferred from descriptions of the workings and equipment present at the Austin and Golconda mines that they were relatively large operations and confidence in their continued operation into the future was quite high (*MTDDG*, Saturday 2 March 1895: 2). Registered mining companies listed in the newspaper for 1895 were the Austin G.M. Co. Ltd, the Golconda G.M. Co. Ltd, and the Island, Lake Austin G.M. Co. Ltd (*MTDDG*, Saturday 21 December 1895: 2).

In January 1903 the *Murchison Times and Day Dawn Gazette* (*MTDDG*, Tuesday 6 January 1903: 2) stated that the monthly clean-up (December) at the Island Eureka Mine was exceptionally good with 880 tons yielding 528oz of gold and that the mine was looking well, which supported planned expenditure on sinking a new shaft and erecting new machinery. However, there are virtually no reports in the local newspaper about The Island after this time (*MTDDG*, 1903-1910).

In 1904 the Geological Survey reports that 'a fair amount of alluvial gold was obtained [on The Island] in the early days, but appears to be all worked out now, as nothing is being done in that line', though Gibson (1904: 19, 24) does mention that 'one or two alluvial miners' were at work during his visit. The principal mines are described as the Island Eureka, the Island Eureka South and the Golconda but of these only the first two were still being worked, albeit in a limited capacity, while the Golconda was all but abandoned (Gibson 1904: 20-23).

Figure 18 - Geological Survey (1904) showing leases at The Island, Lake Austin (Gibson 1904: Plate II).



GEOLOGICAL SKETCH MAP
OF
THE ISLAND
LAKE AUSTIN
MURCHISON G.F.
BY
C.G. Gibson
ASSISTANT GEOLOGIST
1904

Scale of Chains

Alfred Warkland
Government Geologist

R.F. Brown and
15/2/04

Transport & Communications

In September 1897 the state of the crossing between Day Dawn and The Island was discussed in the Day Dawn minutes, suggesting that traffic between the two locations was fairly frequent (Day Dawn Municipality 1895-1897). May Vivienne (1901: 321), travelling through Lake Austin in approximately 1899, caught the train from Austin to Mount Magnet. As the rail was extended from Mullewa (*MTDDG*, Wednesday 19 September 1894: 2) The Island may have had rail communication prior to Day Dawn and Cue (Figure 8).

In November 1897 the Island Progress Committee discussed the denial of their application to have a money order office established at The Island due to the absence of a chartered bank, and the appointment of a messenger at the post office was seen as unwarranted as insufficient business was being done (*MTDDG*, Thursday 25 November 1897: 2). This suggests established infrastructure and basic services were still relatively limited.

Built Environment

Photographs dated c.1897/04 (Battye Library c.1897/04: 3558B/1; 1900: 3558B/3; c.1900: 3558B/2) show the Golconda mine, engine room, and the manager's residence (Figure 19), which were all substantial structures though not of the same scale as those at Day Dawn or at Cue.



Figure 19 - Golconda Mine Manager's Residence, Lake Austin c.1900 (Courtesy State Library of Western Australia, The Battye Library c.1900: 3558B/2).

A photograph of camels hauling wood at Lake Austin (c.1897; Figure 20) shows a substantial mining operation in the background, the Golconda (Department of Mines 1895-1903), and a number of small huts which have been identified as some of the ruins recorded at the site.

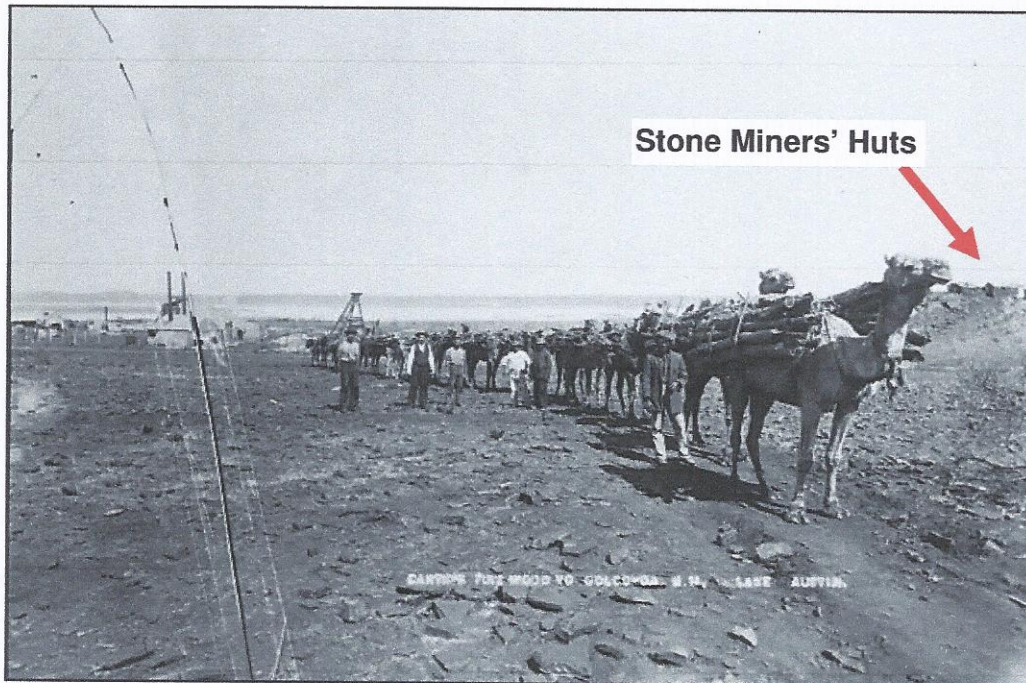


Figure 20 - Camel Team Carting Firewood to the Golconda Gold Mine, Lake Austin c.1893/1897, photo by R.A. Farquharson, Department of Industry & Resources (c. 1893/1897: 1065).



Figure 21 - The Island, Lake Austin (2008) showing general site.

Structural remains associated with the railway were recorded to the west of the Great Northern Highway and numerous remains of house structures, tent pads, industrial complexes, and shafts lie to the east, dispersed over a wide area with associated occupational and mining artefact scatters (Figure 21).

Demography

The Post Office Directory for 1893 does not list The Island, and in 1894 the only entries are for Carlisle Payze & Co. Butchers and a P. Philbin is listed as a hotel and storekeeper (Pierssene 1893; 1894: 131).

No municipal records have been located for The Island and it appears that occupation of the Austin Townsite, although surveyed in 1895 (Department of Lands and Surveys 1895), was limited to only a few commercial establishments. Maps showing the town boundaries for the Austin (Island) settlement in 1895, 1898, 1904 and 1912 indicate the only change was the addition of the railway when it passed through in the late 1890s (Department of Lands and Surveys 1895; 1912; c.1898; c.1904). However, an entry in the Government Gazette in 1894 abolishing the Warden's Court established at The Island in August 1893 would suggest that, at least early on, The Island may have been viewed as having the potential to develop into a substantial settlement (Colonial Secretary's Office 1894: 907).

Additional evidence for this early potential prosperity is suggested by an advertisement in *The Murchison Times and Day Dawn Gazette* in September 1894 (MTDDG, Wednesday 19 September 1894: 1), which states that arrangements can be made for the newspaper's prompt delivery to '.....The Island of Gold.....and other important Mining Centres'. The Island is not listed separately in the 1895 Post Office Directory and the only listing noted as being at Lake Austin, the Miners' Arms Hotel with P. Philbin as proprietor, is under the Cue listing (Pierssene 1895: 68).

Lake Austin is listed separately in the 1897 Post Office Directory with eleven residents, though P. Philbin's hotel and the Lake Austin G.M. Co. Limited appear under Cue (Wise 1897: 78, 81). A Jane Philbin is listed at the Miners' Arms Hotel, perhaps the wife, daughter, or sister of P. Philbin (Wise 1897: 177). *The Murchison*

Times and Day Dawn Gazette reported on 27 February 1897 (*MTDDG*, Saturday 27 February 1897: 3) that water could be obtained at condensers south of The Island, Lake Austin.

The 1898 Post Office Directory notes post and telegraph offices at Lake Austin, and lists fifty-nine names (Wise 1898: 177-178), increasing in 1899 (Wise 1899: 170; Figure 23). However, the Day Dawn Minutes for January 1899 referred to an application by the Island Eureka Company to rent the council chambers for their meetings, suggesting Austin was a small settlement without such infrastructure (Day Dawn Municipality 1897-1903).

May Vivienne (1901: 321) states that there are ‘about 150 people at the Island and Mainland...in comfortable positions’ during her visit in 1899. Local historian Wilson (1969: 65) suggests that ‘although the government got as far as laying out a townsite on the western (sic? eastern) slope of the island, it never really developed into a mining centre of any importance’. In addition Vivienne (1901: 318-321) does not mention any substantial public buildings at the settlement, which she is in the habit of doing at others, so it is probable these were few. She does make the following observation about some of the residents of The Island:

seeing a peculiar-looking place on a hill, I climbed up to see what it was, and found a large hut composed of big flat stones....some men were working near, but they were Italians, and as they could not speak English and I could not speak Italian, our conversation was nil (Vivienne 1901: 318).

It is probable Vivienne is referring to the location of a number of stone huts and may suggest Italians were the builders and/or occupiers. The 1899 Post Office Directory lists three names potentially of Italian origin: Leander Bonfanti, Domenici Marracani (both bakers) and a Bernard Parradani (miner) living at Lake Austin (Wise 1899: 170).

An undated photograph in the Battye Library collection (possibly c.1900) shows a corrugated iron structure labelled ‘hotel, post office and store’ (Battye Library n.d: BA598) and signage suggests it is the Railway Hotel (Figure 22).