

Notes on the history of mining and exploration at Adamsfield

by C.A. Bacon

Abstract

Alluvial osmiridium was discovered in the Adams River valley in 1925, prompting something of a 'rush' to the area. In 1929 osmiridium was found *in situ* in ultramafic rocks in the headwaters of Main Creek. Remnants of the early hard-rock and alluvial mining activity can be found in the area, although some of the early areas have been reworked by later prospectors. The large open cut was created in the early 1960s. Since that time the area has been explored intermittently; the last recorded production from the field was 12 ounces in 1968.

INTRODUCTION

The naturally-occurring alloy known commonly as 'osmiridium' is composed of the metals Osmium (Os) and Iridium (Ir). The scientific name for this alloy is iridosmine.

The two metals, which usually occur in association with platinum, were discovered in 1804 by the British scientist Smithton Tennant, who named iridium "from the striking variety of colours which it gives while dissolving in marine acid" and osmium because of the "penetrating odour of the acid obtained from the oxidation of the element when heated in a finely-divided condition"¹. The native alloy usually contains traces of the rare elements rhodium, ruthenium and palladium.

Miners called the substance 'osie'² or 'metal'³.

USES OF OSMIUM AND IRIDIUM

The main use of the naturally occurring alloy osmiridium was in the manufacture of fountain pen nibs, although the constituent metals had many other uses.

Osmium was used to produce osmic acid, used in fingerprint microscopy and recording. The metal was added to tungsten to make electric light filaments; osmium compounds were used in medicine, as a stain in microscopy, and osmic chloride was used in the manufacture of poison gas (wartime use).

Iridium was used in jewellery and as an alloy with other metals in the manufacture of some industrial products, such as laboratory apparatus. Iridium platinum alloys have a very high melting point and have a great resistance to corrosion, which led to their use in the manufacture of

electrodes, electrical breaker points, crucibles, spark plugs and so on. The alloy was also used to make standard weights and measures. Iridium oxide was used as a colour (grey-black) in pottery^{4, 5}.

OTHER TASMANIAN FIELDS

Whilst Adamsfield is remembered as Tasmania's premier osmiridium field it was not the only, or even the first, place in which the metal was found and mined. A thriving osmiridium industry existed long before the 1925 discovery at Adamsfield.

The first recorded occurrence of osmiridium in Tasmania was made by the Surveyor-General Sprent on one of his expeditions through the Western districts in 1876. Sprent records the occurrence of 'palladium' in the valley of the Wilson River on his exploratory chart. The identification was wrong, but palladium is another member of the platinum group and is closely related to osmiridium⁶. The alloy had been "authoritatively identified" in gravel in the Savage River area in 1881⁷, however there is no record of any production in Tasmania prior to 1910.

When first noted by prospectors in the northwest, this grey material with a specific gravity heavier than gold was considered to be something of a nuisance. Separation of the osmiridium from gold was difficult without the aid of quicksilver⁸ (mercury, which dissolved the gold but not the osmiridium), and in addition the mint imposed a penalty of 7 shillings and 6 pence (75 cents) per ounce for its removal.

Reviews of the industry were written by Campbell Brown (1919)⁹ and Reid (1921)¹⁰. These reports detailed the workings and occurrences near Savage River (Bald Hill, Heazelwood), Mt Stewart, Long Plain, Wilson River, Renison Bell, Dundas in the west and northwest; near the Styx, Florentine and Spero Rivers, Birchs Inlet, the Hamilton Range and the Gordon River further south; and in the Salisbury goldfield in the north.

Osmiridium was found in solid rock (serpentinite) at Bald Hill, near Waratah, in 1913. This was the first discovery of osmiridium *in situ* anywhere in the world¹¹ and the discoverer, H. Caudry, was given a Reward Lease of 40 acres¹². Up to this time osmiridium had only been found in alluvial deposits (which were derived from 'lodes' or *in situ* occurrences of the metal).

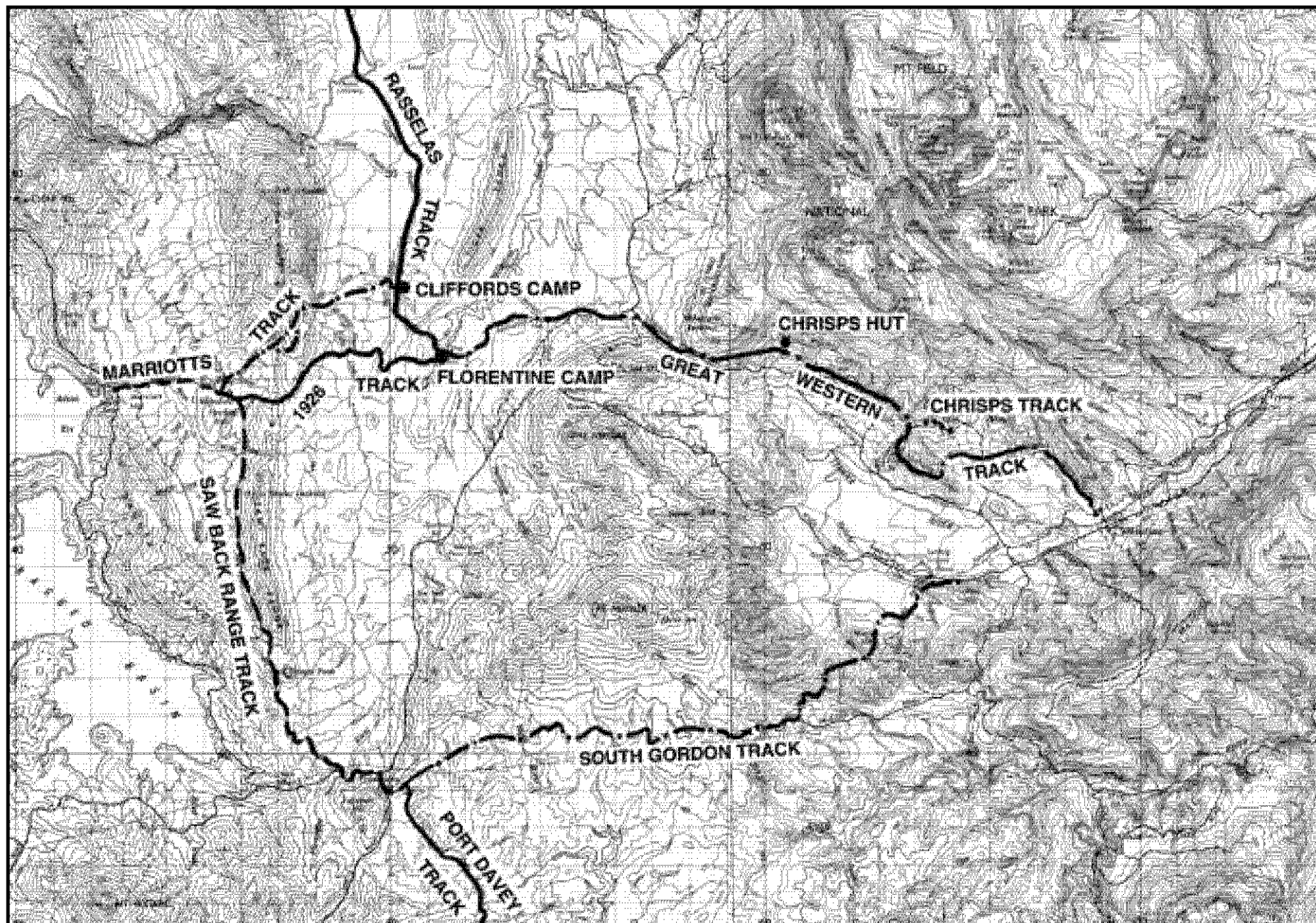


Figure 1. Location map, showing main access tracks

The geology and mineralogy of Tasmanian osmiridium deposits can be found in Burrett and Martin (1989)¹³. The geology of the Adamsfield area is shown on the Geological Survey Atlas 1:50 000 Huntley sheet¹⁴ and is described in the Huntley notes¹⁵.

PRODUCTION

Annual production figures¹⁶ are shown in Figure 2, with the portion of osmiridium won from Adamsfield shown separately. Production statistics are tabulated in Table 1.

Cumulative osmiridium production is shown in Figure 3 and the annual average price per ounce in Figure 4. Altogether some 31 100 ounces of osmiridium has been produced in Tasmania; half of this from Adamsfield and the remainder from other areas (principally the Heazlewood–Bald Hill area near Waratah). Practically no osmiridium has been produced since the late 1950s. The last recorded¹⁷ production was 12 ounces in 1968.

The Department issued two certificates for osmiridium in 1968¹⁸, one for 12 ounces in April and another for 10 ounces in November, certifying that the material lodged at the ES&A Bank on both occasions by N. Clark was osmiridium concentrate of the weight stated on the certificate.

MARKETING

The usual method of sale was for visiting “field buyers” to visit miners individually on the field. Campbell Smith¹⁹ notes that miners often felt aggrieved through the actions of the buyers who “in going rounds will tactlessly buy parcels for different prices in different localities, or even in the same locality. Ultimately the miners who carried out the deal find out what has happened and dissatisfaction and bitter feeling arises”.

In 1919 the *Osmiridium Act* was passed which provided for the licensing of buyers and the notification of all purchases and transfers of osmiridium from the State²⁰. In 1923 the low price prompted the miners to form a ‘pool’, with a buying agent being appointed within Tasmania and two selling agents overseas. Initially, this improved the returns to the miners, but Nye notes²¹ that the system eventually failed, due partially to “the disloyalty of some of the miners who sold to unlicensed buyers outside the pool”.

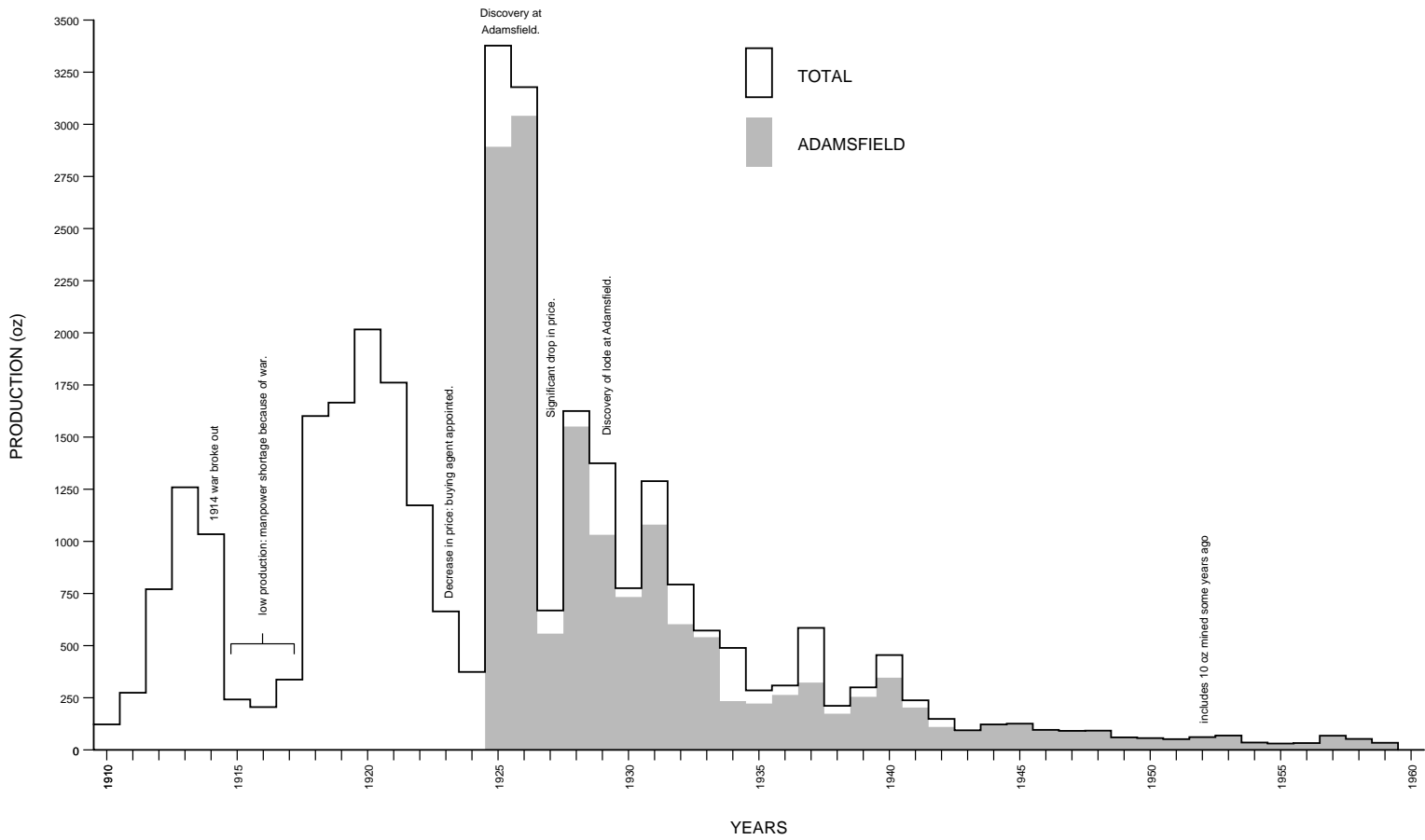
In 1925, after the discovery of the Adamsfield alluvial deposits, the Tasmanian Osmiridium Producers Co-Operative Association was formed by the miners and advantage taken of a Commonwealth Act “whereby advances were made by the Commonwealth Bank on a basis of 60% of the market price”²². This system also failed after the price reached a low £10/ounce, the Bank enforcing the finalisation of sales within six months and the selling through unlicensed buyers, and early in 1927 selling of osmiridium again reverted to a system of licensed buyers. Nye chronicles the failure of all of these marketing systems, and suggested that Tasmania combine with South Africa to arrive at a more profitable marketing strategy for both countries²³. In 1929 the South African production of osmiridium was 5,300 ounces while Tasmania produced 1,360 ounces, although the grades of material were different so there was not competition for the same buyers.

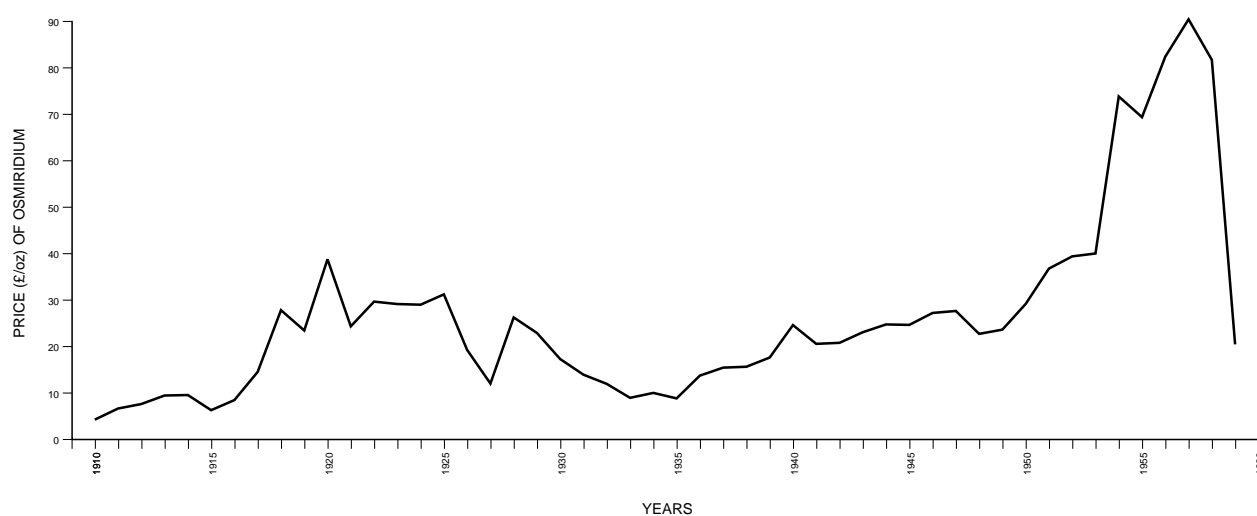
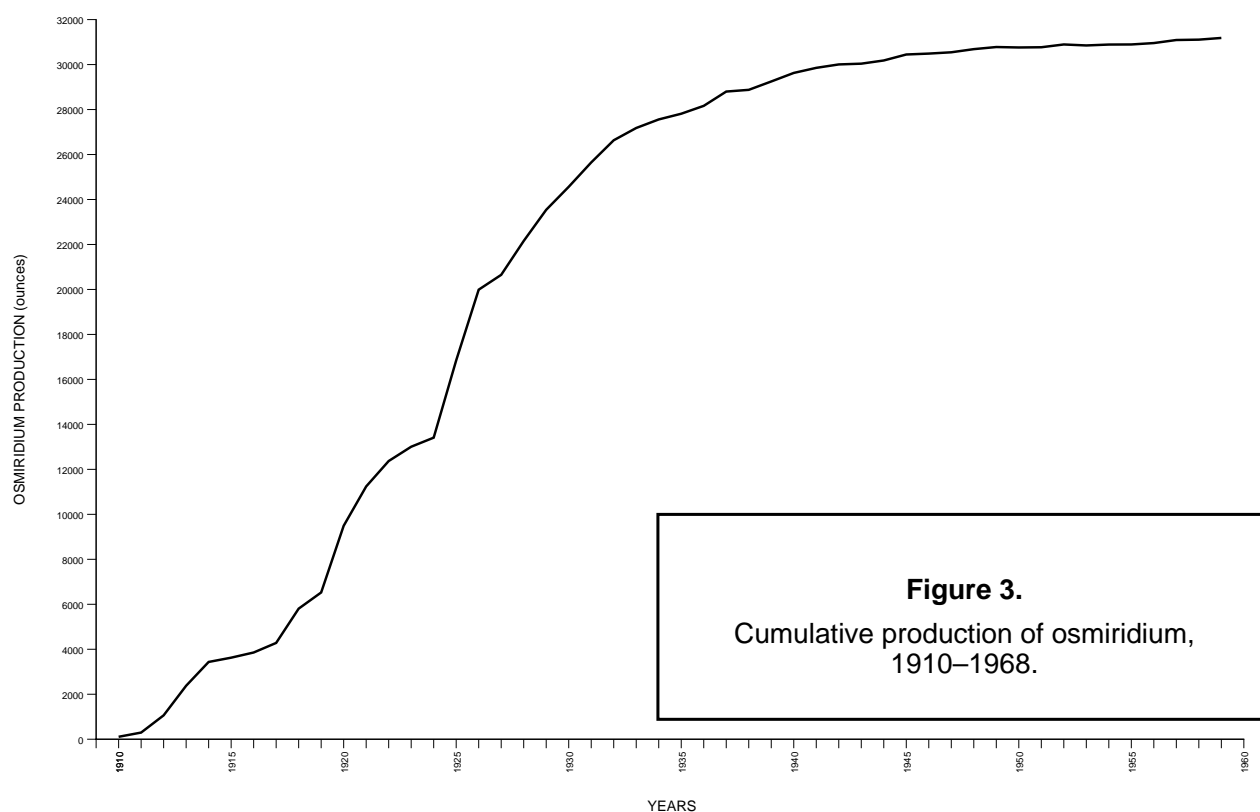
TABLE 1

Production of osmiridium

	Adamsfield (oz)	State total (oz)	Value (£)	£/oz
1910		120	530	4.42
1911		271.9	1 888	6.94
1912		778.8	5 742	7.37
1913		1261.6	12 016	9.52
1914		1018.8	10 076	9.89
1915		247.0	1 581	6.40
1916		222.1	1 899	8.55
1917		332.1	4 898	14.75
1918		1606.7	44 833	27.90
1919		1669.7	39 614	23.73
1920		2009.2	77 114	38.38
1921		1750.7	42 935	24.53
1922		1173.9	35 512	30.25
1923		673.4	19 642	29.17
1924		364.8	10 617	29.10
1925	2872	3365.5	103 570	30.77
1926	3042	3172.5	61 908	19.51
1927	551	632.7	7 456	11.78
1928	1547	1627.2	42 458	26.09
1929	1035	1360.0	30 624	22.52
1930	726	952.7	16 235	17.04
1931	1096	1275.5	18 028	14.13
1932	589	784.9	9 075	11.56
1933	536	548.0	4 843	8.84
1934	486	487.7	4 622	9.48
1935	234	235.0	2 103	8.95
1936	258	280.6	3 862	13.76
1937	328	586.4	9 077	15.48
1938	171	190.9	2 976	15.59
1939	265	283.1	5 015	17.72
1940	357	464.7	11 604	24.97
1941	190	206.6	4 212	20.39
1942	117	142.1	2 930	20.62
1943	85	89.7	2 087	23.27
1944	94	107.0	2 619	24.47
1945	104	108.8	2 665	24.51
1946	93	94.5	2 581	27.31
1947	99	98.8	2 700	27.34
1948	92	92.4	2 094	22.66
1949	39	39.3	914	23.26
1950	46	46.1	1 339	29.02
1951	33	33.4	1 216	36.43
1952	49	51.0	2 038	39.99
1953	59	58.8	2 354	40.01
1954	16	15.9	1 166	73.35
1955	21	21.5	1 504	69.98
1956	25	25.4	2 085	82.22
1957	66	66.0	5 945	90.08
1958	42	42.0	3 424	81.52
1959	3	3.0	60	20.00
1968	12	12.0	?	?

Figure 2.
Production of osmiridium, 1910–1968





ACCESS

In 1925 the railway ended at Fitzgerald, a small settlement near the present town of Maydena. Miners made their way to Adamsfield, 22 miles (35 km) to the west, by pack tracks, either by the South Gordon Track (now the Sawback Range Track) or the Great Western Railway route²⁴ (fig. 1). The latter route joined a track put in by R. Marriott in 1909, which involved a steep climb over the southern part of The Thumbs. This section of the track was re-routed in 1926.

The most common route used was the Great Western track, and although originally corded for most of the way the track was subject to heavy traffic (up to 50 horses a day in 1925) and much of the cording had rotted. This was

repaired by the Public Works Department at a cost of £5000²⁵.

The journey from Fitzgerald to Adamsfield involved an overnight stop at the Florentine River, where a “small township of log and paling huts” had sprung up to cater for the passing traffic²⁶. There was a “canvas bush restaurant”, where travellers could “indulge in a steaming hot cup of bovril (ugh!), cocoa, or coffee, a saveloy and a thick slice of bread for the modest price of 1 shilling 3 pence”. Another tent displayed a sign “Bed and Board”²⁷!

Supplies could be transported to the Florentine River (9 miles or 14.5 km from Fitzgerald) by pack teams; this cost 4 pence per pound (8c per kg) in 1926²⁸. From here supplies

had to be carried by packhorse or shank's pony to Adamsfield. Some hardy individuals could be hired to 'pack' or carry the loads to Adamsfield from the Florentine; the going rate was 1 shilling per pound (20c per kg)²⁹.

An oversupply of packers, drawn to the area by the lure of possible good earnings in 1926, caused a temporary drop in the price of packing to 35 shillings per 50 pound (14c per kg)³⁰. However, this 'cut price' packing did not last long.

Suggestions were made that a tramway should be laid to Adamsfield to alleviate the transport problem. Reid estimated that by tramway, transport costs would be reduced to 2 pence a pound (4c per kg), although such a tramway would cost the staggering sum of £8,000 and could not really be justified³¹.

A visiting party in 1938 noted that Mr Storey took a 'packet' of two horses and a narrow home-made cart mounted on motor wheels to Adamsfield twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, returning Wednesdays and Saturdays. The cost of cartage was 15 shillings (\$1.50) per 100 pounds (Queen Victoria Museum, 1986 P714).

In time the South Gordon Track became the primary route to Adamsfield. By the 1950s this route (now called the Sawback Track) was referred to as a 'jeep track' and could be negotiated (slowly) by 4WD. Two bulldozers were taken in along this track in the 1960s. Today the Sawback Track remains a rough, largely impassable 4WD track, gated at one end.

Vehicular access today extends all the way to the old Adamsfield township, via the Strathgordon Road to the (private) Clear Hill logging road; the turnoff to Adamsfield is 11 miles (17.5 km) from the Clear Hill gate. The (unsealed) road into Adamsfield is also gated. Keys to both gates may be obtained from the Forestry Commission office at Maydena.

ADAMSFIELD — DISCOVERY

Government Geologist W. H. Twelvetrees reported the discovery of iridosmine in Fourteen Mile Creek (near Pine Hill, 5 km west of Maydena) by the Clark brothers in 1909, following an excursion to ascertain information on "the mineral resources and tectonic features of the country between Tyenna and the Gordon River"³². This occurrence was described by Reid in 1921 as being uneconomic³³.

Twelvetrees also noted³⁴ the occurrence of serpentine rock about "a mile beyond the Florentine River". Pits were dug in this locality and small quantities of osmiridium and gold of "extreme fineness" were found³⁵. Reid reported that this find was "of small extent, and the production therefrom will not appreciably affect the total production"³⁶.

In December 1924 a prospecting party comprising E. Boden, A. Wright, A. J. Stacey and C. B. Stacey found osmiridium in the Adam River Valley, firstly above the falls (Adams Falls) and then further upstream near the Sawback Range. This party met up with R. J. Stacey and others on Christmas Day 1925 at the Florentine Hut. Both parties returned to the Adamsfield area in the New Year and prospected separately³⁷.

Two reward claims were issued in May 1925 for these discoveries: one to A. J. Stacey, C. B. Stacey and R. T. Kingston (10 acres near the Sawback Range); and one, of 5 acres, three miles to the south to R. J. Stacey³⁸.

News of the discovery travelled fast and something of a 'rush' started, with hundreds of hopeful miners making their way to the area. Nye records that over 1000 Miners Right Claims were issued by the Department of Mines in the last half of 1925, with over 800 men being on the field during September and October of that year. The price for osmiridium was around £30–£32 per ounce, but in December 1925 the price dropped sharply, primarily due to an oversupply on to the world markets from Russia.

Both McIntosh Reid and Nye made visits to Adamsfield in 1925. Reid was the first of the two Government geologists to visit, in October 1925³⁹. Reid noted that press reports had, so far, not noted the "immediate value to the community" of the field and went on to note that the metal could easily be won with only a little outlay in tools; "production is immediate and the value of the product is distributed among large numbers". Reid designated the area a "poor mans" field. The area was designated a Miners Right Field by the Department of Mines, which meant only Miners Rights, not leases, were issued by the Department. A Miners Right allowed a miner to hold a piece of ground 50 yards × 50 yards (½ acre) for a fee of 5 shillings per year. Up to ten rights could be held as a Consolidated Miners Right by a group of ten miners. Each miner was allowed to hold only one Miners Right on a field at any one time. This ensured large tracts of ground were not consumed by big companies, and ground was available for individual miners. The exception to this was the granting of Reward Leases (which totalled three over the field in all) and the occasional granting of other leases, such as two which were granted to a company in 1937. In 1943 this policy was reconsidered, and the Minister for Mines approved, in principle, the granting of leases under certain conditions, but few applications were received⁴⁰. Leases, which could be granted for 21 years at a time gave a miner better security to the deposit, but were more expensive than the humble Miners Right which had to be renewed annually.

Reid estimated that the field had a life of "at least five years prosperous mining on the basis of its known extent"⁴¹.

Nye visited in December 1925⁴² and also noted that the field was "essentially an easily worked one", although he was more cautious than McIntosh Reid in estimating a life of one to two years for the field, unless new discoveries were made. Lack of water for sluicing was a problem during the summer months, while for some of the low-lying ground too much water was a problem, although this ground was not looked at whilst there was easier ground to work around the Adamsfield township.

By the end of 1925 there were between 400 and 600 men on the field⁴³. Numbers fell further to 200 people at the beginning of 1927, and then to 100 by the end of that year. The osmiridium price rose again in 1928 and by October there were "well in excess" of 200 men at Adamsfield⁴⁴.

In July 1930 Nye visited Adamsfield at the request of a number of miners, to report on a proposal to construct a

deep tail race along the valley of the Adams River with the aim of draining the flats, to construct races and so work some of the waterlogged, flat-lying country. Nye concluded that a good portion of the country could be worked as it was, without such a race, if the grades were payable. He recommended that an examination first be made to see whether or not the ground was worth working⁴⁵.

LIFE ON THE DIGGINGS

In 1925 Horace (Jim) Lane and Hector Barker established the 'Pioneer Store' in a tent at the Florentine River in September 1925. Lane records "it wasn't many days" before the brothers Quinn and Luttrell, the grocer from Fitzgerald, also opened temporary stores. For a short time a packers price cutting war raged, with the Halton brothers packing for Lane (from Fitzgerald to the Florentine) for 3 pence per pound (1 pence per pound cheaper than the going rate). A price war with the other two storekeepers cut the price to 2 pence per pound⁴⁶.

By the end of 1925 a bridge replaced the log over the Florentine River, with its wire 'hand rail', and the stores moved to Adamsfield proper. The three grocery stores opened side by side in Stacey Street, Arthur Jeffries opened a bakery (later sold to Storey's to become Storey's Store), and Bernie Simmonds built a "big paling place complete with billiard room" at which miners could enjoy games of cards, billiards and sly grog⁴⁷.

Lane records that one of the most existing times at Adamsfield was when Mrs Shirwood's bedroom at Bernie Simmonds "joint" blew up. Mrs Shirwood who was "not the nicest of females by my standards" in Lane's view, ran the establishment with her husband, Norm. As she was about to enter her boudoir one night it "was blasted out of existence"⁴⁸.

Most of the miners lived in tents, although some built log and daub or paling huts, which in 1926 were described by a visitor as lending "a primitive picturesqueness to the place"⁴⁹. The miners mainly lived on bacon, damper, tea with sugar and "tinned dog" (tinned meat). Food was expensive, and the cost of living at Adamsfield was "fully 100% higher than in more civilised parts". Miners had to earn around £30/month just to feed themselves⁵⁰.

In late 1925 a butchers shop was opened by George Inman and Herb Britton⁵¹. The cattle were taken into Adamsfield and killed for meat almost at once, as there was no grass suitable for grazing at Adamsfield⁵². Animals were often lost on the way.

Adamsfield developed into a small but thriving town, with the Luttrell, Quinn and Pioneer stores, Jeffries bakery (later sold to Storey's), Inman and Britton's butchery, Simmonds's pub⁵³, a community hall in which dances were held regularly and a church service monthly, as well as being used as a temporary camp for newcomers to the field⁵⁴. In addition there was a bush hospital, police station, school, and a Mines Department Office housing one Warden, and "Gumboot Smith's emporium"⁵⁵. Apparently Gumboot's forté was making and repairing boots, as well as acting as a general trader⁵⁶.

By the end of 1928 the field traders were "feeling the pinch" because sales were falling and the field was being deserted⁵⁷. Lane was forced out of business and went to work for Jeffries, who by now had established himself as "the bigtime packer from Fitzgerald"⁵⁸. Jeffries had a 20-stall stable built at Adamsfield and an enormous 60-stall stable on the Junee Road (near Maydena)⁵⁹. Eventually there was only one store remaining — Storey's, which combined with the Post Office.

The Alluvial Operations

A thorough inspection was made of the alluvial mining operations at Adamsfield by P. B. Nye between October and December 1925. The main osmiridium-bearing area was described as being along Main Creek from its source to below the junction with Smith Creek, and on the eastern, northern and western slopes of Football Hill. Some 146 sets of alluvial workings were described by Nye in these and surrounding areas⁶⁰.

Extracting the osmiridium from the alluvium (gravel, sand and clay) was done by sluicing the 'wash' (i.e. material containing osmiridium, which was called 'osie' or 'metal'). Barren layers of alluvium with no 'metal' were called 'strippings'. The 'wash' was either picked up by shovel and treated in a sluicing box, or occasionally this was hosed into fortuitously-dug trenches and directed into a sluicing box this way; the hosing of material *in situ* is called 'ground sluicing'. The larger operations had suction pumps called 'lifters', which extracted the gravel and pumped it to a sluice box.

The sluice boxes collected small grains of osmiridium while the remainder of the material (gravel, sand, etc.) was washed away. The trenches had to be periodically cleaned of the collected gravel, and the material so removed was dumped adjacent to the drainage channel. Piles of stones and gravel removed in this way were termed 'forkings'. Extracting osmiridium from the clay which occurred in some parts of the field was harder, and usually involved 'puddling' or mixing the clay to a slurry before treating the mixture in a sluice box.

Water shortages plagued the Adamsfield alluvial operations and some quite long water races were built in an attempt to overcome this problem. The remains of a long pipeline can be seen alongside the vehicular track into Adamsfield; the pipes were rolled from flat sheets of iron on site and dipped in a pitch bath to protect them from the corrosive acid waters of the button grass. The remains of a raised flume, once on trestling, can be seen at DN458694.

Hard-rock Mining

Osmiridium was recovered in the alluvial detrital deposits up to a certain point in the vicinity of Main Creek. On the various mining claims the points at which the metal 'ran out' lay, geographically, in an approximate line trending north-south. Miners suspected that the metal was derived from a 'lode' somewhere near the head of Main Creek. The onset of barren ground was marked by the presence of a 'bar' of talc-like material.

Nye noted after his 1925 visit⁶¹ that as alluvial osmiridium was being found on a number of Miners Rights (MR)

claims close to the boundary of the serpentinite, “it is obvious that some, at least of the osmiridium must have been shed from the serpentinite or near them”. Nye further notes that the ‘lode’ (i.e. serpentinite) formation could be seen on MR44 (N. H. Doak, later the area held by Hill, Sweeney and Gladstone) and on O’Reilly’s claim (in the area later worked by the Ivory Brothers, adjacent to the Reward Lease).

In October 1929 Samuel McAteer found osmiridium in serpentinite rock adjacent to this ‘talcose formation’ or ‘bar’ on an existing Miners Right, originally pegged by D. J. Fullerton but worked (for alluvial osmiridium) at the time of the find by McAteer⁶², who was awarded a Reward Lease, 10550/M of 10 acres, for this discovery⁶³.

A poem relating to the discovery of the lode has been given to the writer by Mr S. Morley. The author of the poem is Mulga Mick, and the year “1929” is written at the top of the page.

“Mulga Mick” is undoubtedly Mr M. O’Reilly, referred to by Fairweather as “Mulga Mick O’Reilly, Sydney Bulletin correspondent and author of several books and poems”⁶⁷. O’Reilly held a Miners Right near Doak Creek at the time of Nye’s 1925 visit. Nye records that the lode formation crossed O’Reilly’s claim⁶⁸.

Jack Brennan was working a claim on Hopper Creek in 1925 with G. Dunn⁶⁴, and from the poem he must have spent some time postulating about the ‘lode’ from which the osmiridium came. The ‘mother lode’ is a common enough legend on most mining fields, and must have been discussed by the miners after Nye’s 1925 visit. ‘Chum’ is a term used to describe newcomers to the field, especially if they are not ‘locals’. How annoyed the locals must have been when the Scot, McAteer, actually found the lode! Some lucky ‘newchums’ had already struck it rich in 1926, when they arrived at Adamsfield, re-pegged a claim already abandoned because the original owner could not make a living, and in less than a month had uncovered £1,000 worth of osmiridium!⁶⁵

Following on from McAteer’s find, the idea of ‘lode’ material must have had every miner on the field looking for more. Nye was called on to look at a gravel pit, from which gravel for paths in the town was taken, as in April 1930 this was suspected as harbouring a ‘lode’. Nye ascertained that the deposit, into which a shaft of 11 feet had already been sunk, was comprised of surficial detritus⁶⁹.

Interest was renewed in the field and a number of individuals quickly set about prospecting in the vicinity of the ‘lode’, both on existing claims and on Miners Right

Jack Brennan’s Osie Lode

*There was hell to play, just up our way, a week or two ago
When the Osie Lode was found upon the Thumbs,
So once again the Diggers were a little bit slow,
And another find is booked up to the Chums.*

*But Jack Brennan has been searching for three long years I know
This is the Lode he sweetly talked about,
When he said some day the Diggers would find a Dinkum Show,
And it would be running truly North and South.*

*Oh you should have seen the Diggers when the news was passed around,
They were like a lot of ants upon a hill,
They rushed about both night and day pegging all the ground
And what’er you say you could not keep them still.*

*And one rushed off to town to secure a big reward.
A little Scot, whose name is Mac Ateer,
Now the boys upon the Thumbs, all think with one accord
That he’s going to give the Diggers a big spree.*

*But I’ve got Ma Doots about it, since he found Jack Brennan’s Lode,
He will not set the blooming town on fire,
The only cash he squander he might buy a new “Commode”
Or some other useful thing that he’ll require.*

*Now Ted Grieves has pegged the Saw-back, as it stands on grand parade
And if this lease the osie will not yield
Well it may come in for Lomnstones (?) so he can start another brawl (?)
As a “Monumental mason” on the field.*

*Since we found the osie lode we are all set up for all our lives
Ne’er again will one of us be poor
So we’re going to advertise for young and loving wives
And stay on at Adamsfield for ever more.*

Mulga Mick⁶⁶

claims taken out over the hard-rock serpentinite. Nye (1930) described six sets of workings on the 'lode', at the head of Main Creek and on a tributary of Doak Creek, following a visit in April of that year⁷⁰. All of these workings (since re-worked by subsequent generations of prospectors) were in the area now partly covered by the open cut, and stretching NNW from the eastern end of the large open cut to the small open cut north of the present 4WD hut (see figures 5–8).

The workings consisted of trenching to expose the mineralised veins, ground sluicing the surface of the lode, sinking shallow shafts and constructing drives (tunnels) into ore-bearing ground from the bottom of the shafts. In these early days there was no stamper or crusher to help separate the rock from the 'metal', and treatment was by sluicing and re-sluicing piles of serpentinite, allowing the rock to weather and partly decompose and sluicing again. The trenches are sometimes referred to as 'stopes'.

Nye (1930b) lists the workings on the lode as:

McAteers: (at eastern end of current large open cut)

- trenching

Ivory's: (adjacent to McAteers)

- deep trench 100' long on MR 58 (C. W. Ivory) and more workings by C. and R. Ivory to the north of this claim.
- lode being sluiced

Hill, Sweeney & Gladstone:(formerly Miners Rights 43, 44, 45 held by the Doak Bros and worked for alluvial material)

- sluicing a narrow open cut along lode
- shaft 25' deep

McAuliffes: surface trenching

- shaft 20' deep

Bests: on tributary of Doak Creek

- treating alluvial and detrital material in creek, Roberts claim to north

Sims: on the northernmost extremity of the lode (shown on a later chart as 'Bradleys' workings)

By 1931 there were three parties working on the lode, which was being developed by underground means 70' from the surface, as well as by surface trenching. Several sluicing plants were in operation, and there were a large number of fossickers working on other parts of the field⁷¹.

Photographs in the January 13 1932 edition of the *Illustrated Tasmanian Mail* show extensive open cut operations, consisting of a heavily timbered narrow trench. One part of the workings, described as a "new lode" had been opened to a width of 30' (10 m)⁷². These workings would be on Charles William Ivory's MR 58, as Nye (1930b) records that little osmiridium was produced on the workings of C. & R. Ivory adjacent to this trench. the brothers no doubt transferred all their effort to the more productive ground.

Low metal prices gradually caused numbers to dwindle. In 1934 there were only sixty persons on the field, none of whom were working the lode area⁷³.

In 1937 the Osmiridium (Tasmania) NL Company was floated on the Melbourne Stock Exchange with 50,000 shares at 8 shillings (80 cents) each⁷⁴, with the aim of acquiring two mining lease applications (11810, 11811, both of 40 acres in the name of John Whiteacre⁷⁵) and a number of Miners Right claims in the area of the lode.

The two leases were eventually transferred to the company (on 17 May 1938)⁷⁶. Work already done on these tenements was listed in the prospectus⁷⁷ as:

- top of lode sluiced to a depth of 10–20 feet over whole length of claims.
- shaft sunk to a depth of 47' (14.3 m) and a drive 240' (73 m) long put in.
- tram line 300' (100 m) from face of tunnel (drive).
- erection of battery house, ore bins, assay room, store room, and two miles of water race.

Machinery on site was listed as:

- one winch
- boring plant
- half ton truck
- blacksmiths bellows, anvil, tools
- crude oil engines and pan crusher belonging to the Mines Department.

Most of this work had been done on an area to the north of the large open cut. A mullock heap and part of the tramway are still visible. The original position is shown on Department of Mines charts as 'Machinery Reserve' with battery, hut and tunnel shown (see fig. 7). The building housing the battery and part of the tramway are shown in photographs of the area.

Mr H. J. Marks, manager of the Osmiridium Tasmania NL Company, visited Adamsfield (from Melbourne) in October 1938 to "inaugurate the company's extension of the mine on the lode". The shaft was then at 87 feet (26.5 m). Marks was accompanied by Mr A. Palmer, a mining engineer, and Mr Pryde, who was to manage the battery. A trial crushing of the ore gave six pennyweight per ton (about 9 g per tonne) of osmiridium (*The Mercury*, 25 October 1938).

This visit followed a three-day excursion to Adamsfield by Gordon Moore and two others in early October 1938. The trio visited the mine, being managed by Mr McLennan, noting that the works were "still in an experimental stage, and great hopes are entertained as to the richness of the lode". The shaft, on Wednesday 5 October 1938, was 85 feet (25.9m) deep, and being worked by two shifts of miners from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm and 4:00 pm to midnight (Queen Victoria Museum, 1986 P714).

The mining claims in the vicinity of the lode were surveyed by R. Campbell Smith in March 1939⁷⁸. Interest in the alluvial deposits had diminished and was now concentrated on the hardrock area. McAteer's Reward Lease and Ivory's adjacent Miners Right claim are shown as they were in 1930, although the Reward Lease was declared void in May 1939. In 1939 six Miners Right claims remained in the area of the lode (occupying the area of the long trench running

from the large open cut, behind the 4WD hut to the small open cut). The claims in this area had changed hands several times over, some had been cancelled and new ones issued. The claims shown on Campbell Smith's chart were occupied in 1939 by:

- 58 C.W. Ivory
- 64 E. F. S. England in 1925 alluvial workings of O'Reilly, worked in the early 1930s by C. & R. Ivory, together with the adjoining Miners Right of C. W. Ivory.
- 65 H.S. Marks occupies an area formerly covered by MR44 originally worked in 1925 by the Doak Bros. and in 1930 worked by Hill, Sweeney and Gladstone
- 66 C. A. Gallertly
- 67 V. F. A. Rundle
- 68 F. McNaughton
- 69 H.F. Thureau

The tunnel, on the mining lease eventually granted to the Osmiridium (Tasmania) NL Company in 1938, is shown, although by 1942 this had collapsed⁷⁹.

In November 1938 McAteer's Reward Lease area was marked out by Leslie William Beattie under Section 56 of the *Mining Act 1929*. This section of the Act deals with forfeiture and the awarding of leases which are not being worked to new applicants. The fact that the new lease was granted shows McAteer's lease was not being worked in accordance with the labour covenant. This new lease, 34M/39, was transferred to John (Jack) Byrne on 8 June 1939⁸⁰. Byrne apparently brought in the 10-head stamper now in pieces at the side of the open cut to crush the lode material⁸¹. This stamper is something of a puzzle, as the remains are of 10 shafts and stamps but only 5 cams. Possibly one driving shaft of 5 cams has been removed, as the remaining shaft would not have driven all 10 stamps.

A 1973 history of Adamsfield records that following Nye's 1928(?) report that "the diggings were too small to extract effectively all the osmiridium in the area" a company was floated on the Melbourne Stock Exchange known as the Lode Company, with Jack Burns (sic) as Manager. Two dams were built on Hopper Creek and a flume constructed to take water to the lode workings⁸². A more recent report states that the 'Lode Company' was formed in 1928 and attributes **all** of the workings on the lode to this company⁸³.

The lode was not discovered until late in 1929; a Reward Lease was applied for on 29 October 1929, and was granted for a term of five years from 1 March 1930. Nye's 1929 report describes in detail his visit to the **alluvial** field in 1925. In April 1930 Nye visited the field and found six parties (no companies, just individuals or partnerships of up to three people) working the lode. The most impressive workings in January 1932 were those of the Ivory Brothers, whose tenements adjoined the Reward Lease.

In 1937 there was an attempt to launch a company on the Melbourne Stock Exchange (the Osmiridium (Tasmania) No Liability Company) and in 1939, following the collapse

of the company, Jack Byrne **did** obtain a lease in the same area (but not the Company's leases) in his own name.

A 1942 plan⁸⁴ shows four shafts at the headwaters of Main Creek in the area of the modern open cut (Byrne's, Tributers, McAteers and one other) together with a section of the underground workings. A battery is shown near Doak Creek, with more workings, Bradley's, to the north of Doak Creek.

In March 1954 Inspector Besford visited Adamsfield and reported⁸⁵ that eight persons were working intermittently, all on the alluvial materials. These were: Mr Roach and son, who had been the principal producers of osmiridium for the past ten years; Mr Richardson, who was working on Lumsden's Creek and was the only person on the field to have a regular supply of water; Mr C. Cooper, who had very little water; Mr C. Kemp, who was looking for a suitable area to work; and Mr N. Clark and his two sons, who were working intermittently.

J. Byrne's lease (ML 34M/39), which had originally been McAteer's Reward Lease, was transferred to N. E. Clark in May 1952. A "fair amount" of osmiridium was won by underground means from this lease, although no underground work was being done by Clark, who had ambitions to open cut the lease area down to the level of the lode. Clark informed the Inspector he "desired the six head battery and pelton wheel situated on the old lease formerly owned by the Osmiridium (Tas) NL Company". Besford noted that this machinery had been damaged by fire. The outline of the machinery shed housing this gear can be seen today close to the remains of the old tramway. The machinery, including the six head stamper, are no longer in this location.

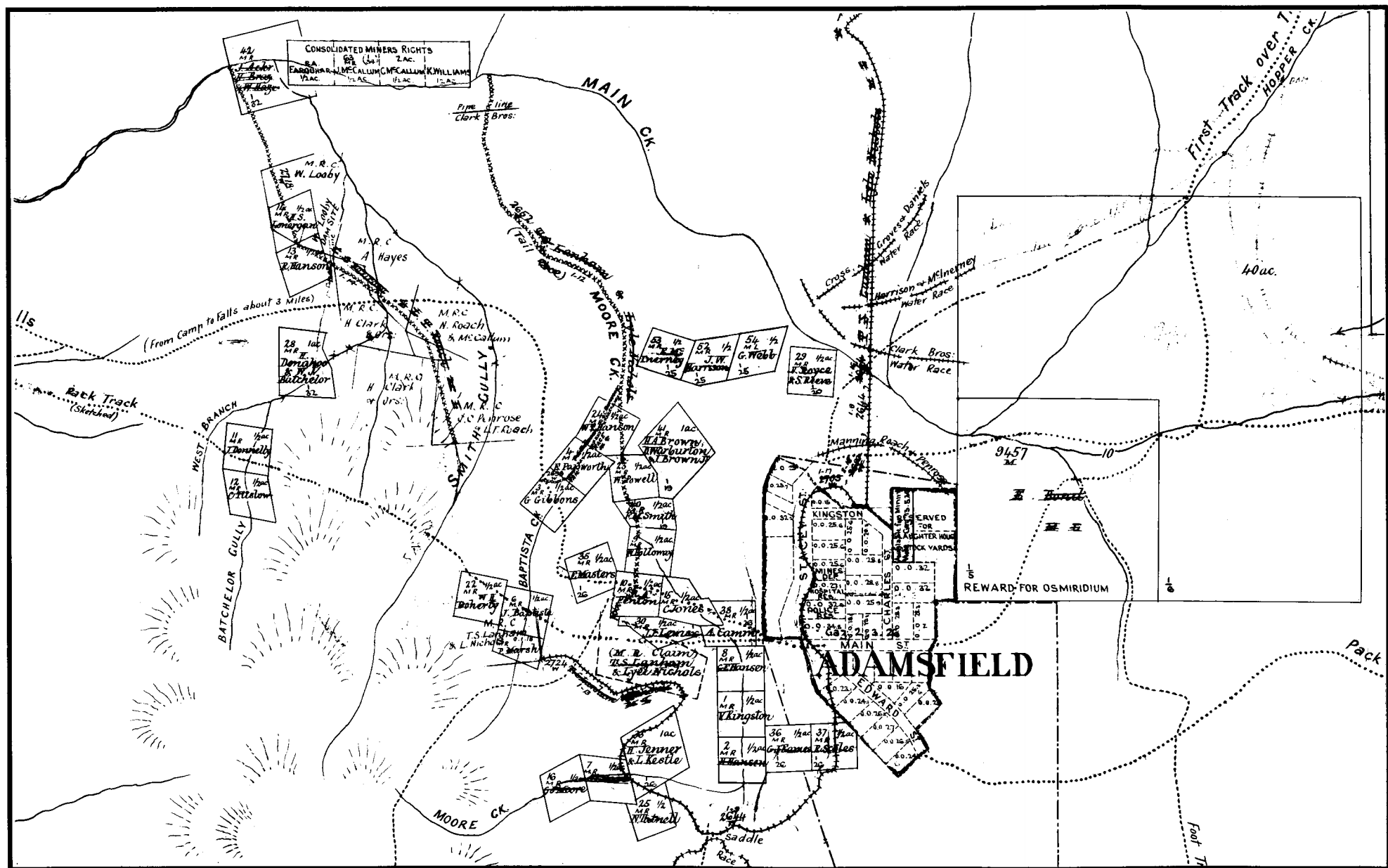
Besford also noted that a fire, allegedly started by Clark on ML 34M/39, had damaged winding gear, pump engines, the headgear and timbering in the top section of the pumping shaft. The cage had fallen to the water level⁸⁶. These relics would be on an area now consumed by the open cut.

In the late 1950's prices of £100 per ounce were quoted for Tasmanian osmiridium and some small parcels were sold at these high prices. The world market price was at this time around £30 per ounce. Apparently the discrepancy was due to the favourable grain size of Tasmanian osmiridium, which was sold as 'point metal'⁸⁷.

The old Reward Lease changed hands again in 1955, this time being transferred from N. E. Clarke to John Bibby⁸⁸.

In February 1957 T. M. Lipscombe extensively sampled the existing workings where they were accessible, drawing a plan of the workings and sending the samples to the Department of Mines Laboratory in Launceston⁸⁹. Later in the year a report was submitted, proposing a programme of geological investigation involving mapping, surface sampling of larger (¼ ton) samples, followed by drilling⁹⁰.

Another shaft must have been sunk, as Lipscombe records samples from 'Pollards' New Shaft (55' or 17 m deep) and notes that this had been "glory holed" (i.e. made bigger at the base of the shaft as prospectors dug away mineralised ground in a haphazard fashion). The position of this shaft is known and is shown on Figure 10. The only remnant visible



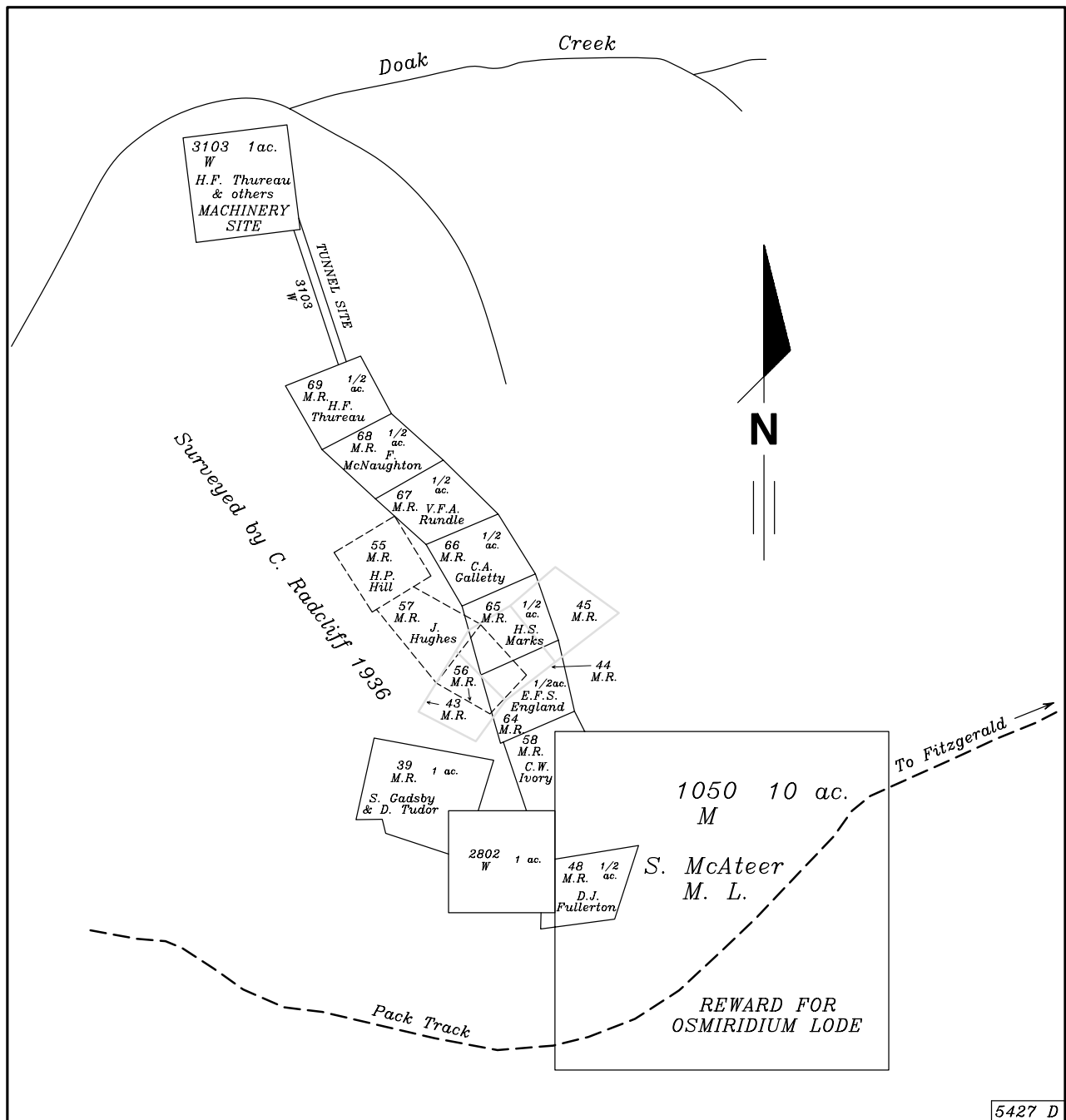


Figure 6.

Generations of Miners Right claims in the vicinity of the lode.
 MR43, 44, 45 1925
 MR55, 56, 57 1930
 MR64–69 1936.

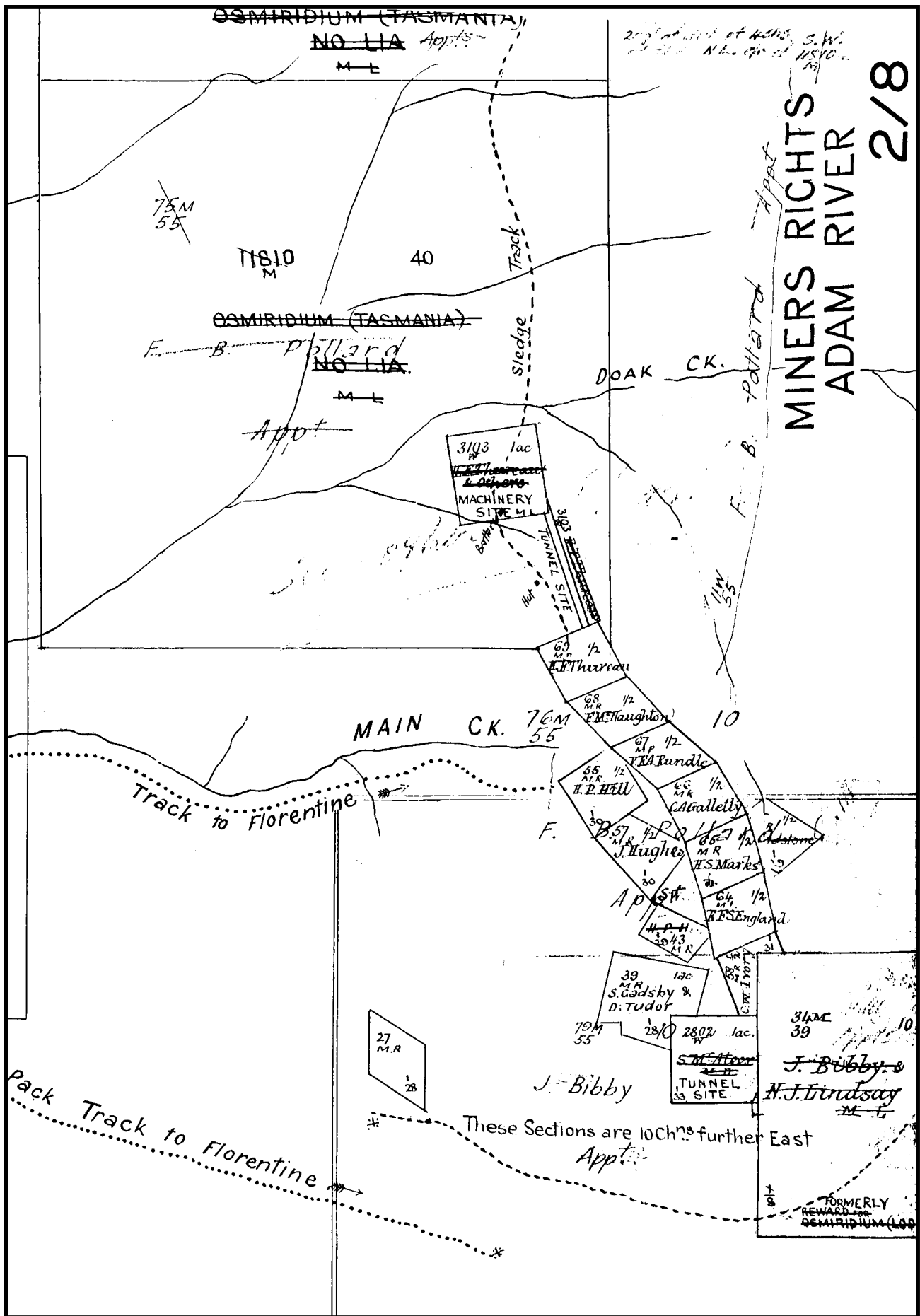


Figure 7.

Miners Rights in the vicinity of the lode, circa 1939.

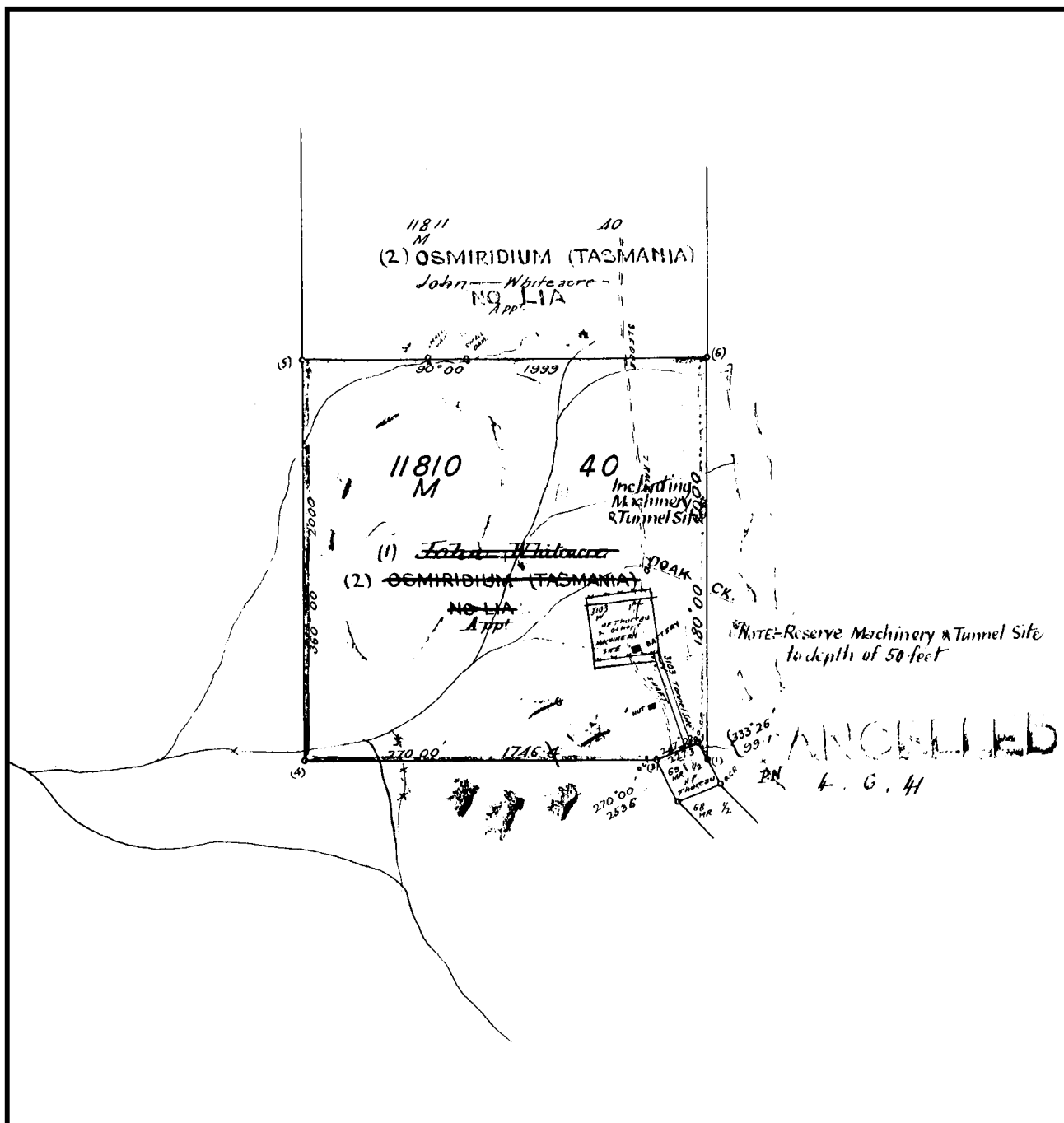


Figure 8.

Survey plan of one of the leases of the Osmiridium (Tasmania) NL Company leases, north of Hall's open cut.

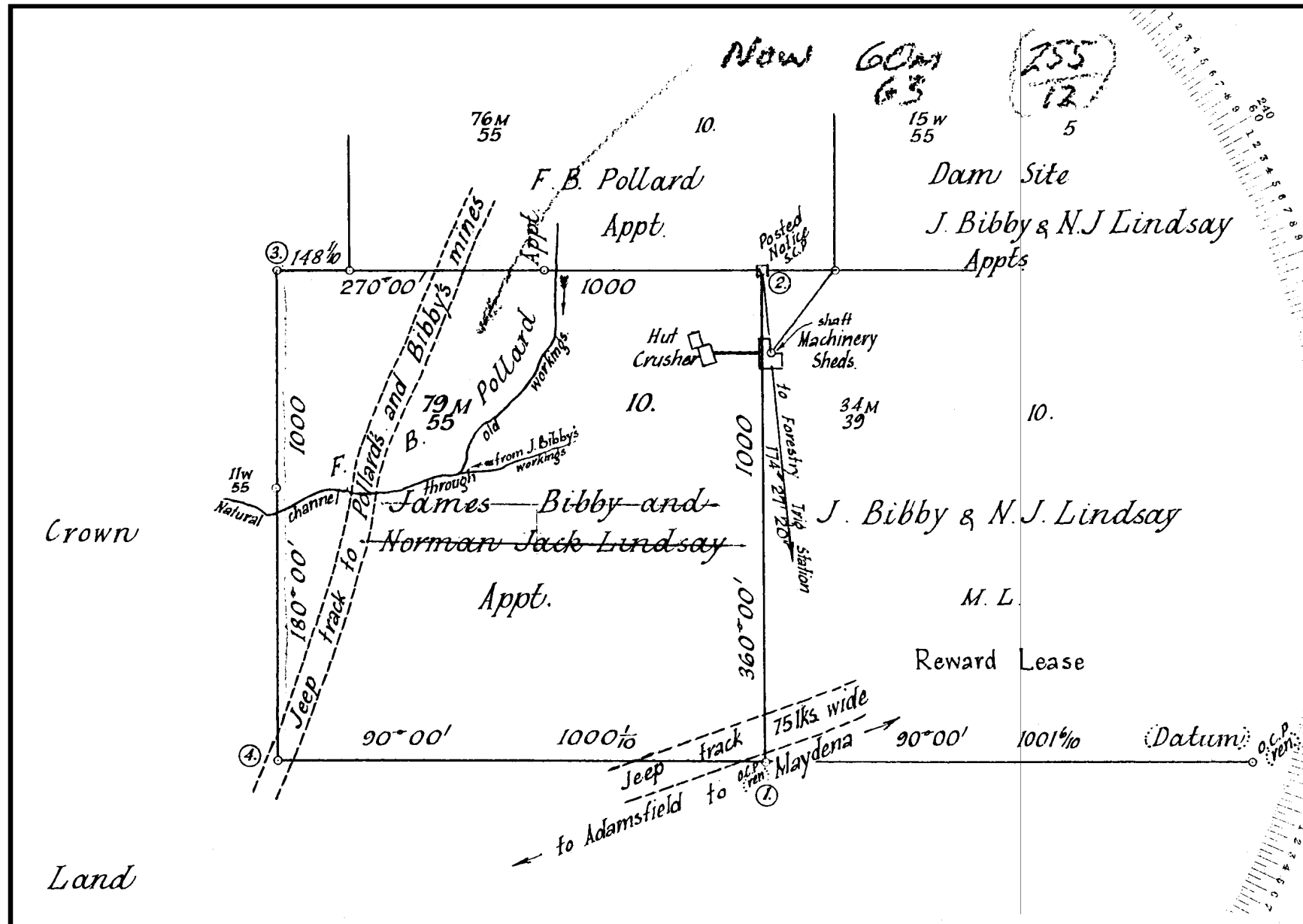


Figure 9. Survey of lease adjacent to former Reward Lease, showing machinery sheds in the vicinity of hall's open cut.

today is a piece of cement casing which originally stood as a collar to the shaft.

Pollard's lease adjoined and was to the north of the old Reward Lease, in an area covered by Miners Rights in the 1930s.

In the 1960s osmiridium was being sought for use in the electronics industry and there was a small surge of exploration activity. Two bulldozers were taken to the site in September 1964⁹¹ and were soon moving 1000 t of material per day to expose the 'lode'. The plan was to remove overburden to a depth of 40' (12 m) and then cut 30' (10 m) down into the mineralised zone. Two dams were built to supply water for a sluicing plant which was being worked by J. Bibby in 1966.

A Sydney company caused another flurry of activity in 1966 by indicating a German client would be interested in obtaining 1500 ounces/year at US\$180/ounce (£81A troy oz)⁹². A small 'rush' was made on lease applications over the field. However, by September 1968 the metal price had dropped and interest lapsed.

EXISTING RELICS

A few of the relics still visible in the area of the open cut are plotted on Figure 10. A brief archaeological inspection was made prior to earthwork activity by Metals Exploration, and where items noted during recent field inspections can be matched with descriptions from this work⁹³, the Division of Parks and Wildlife registration number is also given below.

1. Pulley wheels from 3-head stamper last used by a Mr Manning (PWH AF88-55).
2. Location from which 3-head stamper was removed by Mr S. Morley. Stamper is now outside Clark's Huts.
3. Remains of ten-stamp battery, apparently brought to the field by Jack Byrne. (PWH AF88-54 records this as five-stamp battery. There are remaining two sets of five shafts and stamps, but only one shaft with five cams still present.
4. Concrete collar — all that remains of Pollard's Shaft, 55' deep in 1957, and 'glory holed' (i.e. enlarged) at the base. Prospector Bibby was apparently injured by a cave-in whilst working in this shaft in the early 1960s⁹⁴.
5. Long trench ('stope') dug on McAteer's Reward Lease and adjoining Miners Right claims, including work by Ivory Brothers circa 1929–1932.
6. Large cog and shaft; possibly the remains of winding gear. Two pieces of equipment in thick scrub.
7. Small pit.
8. Collapsed shaft on edge of drillpad near 4WD hut (PWH AF88-41).
9. Trench dug on the Miners Right claims by various parties. Six sets of workings were visited by Nye in 1930. The water-filled part of the trench is possibly part of the 30' wide trench shown in the 1932 photograph dug by the Ivory Brothers (PWH AF88-39).

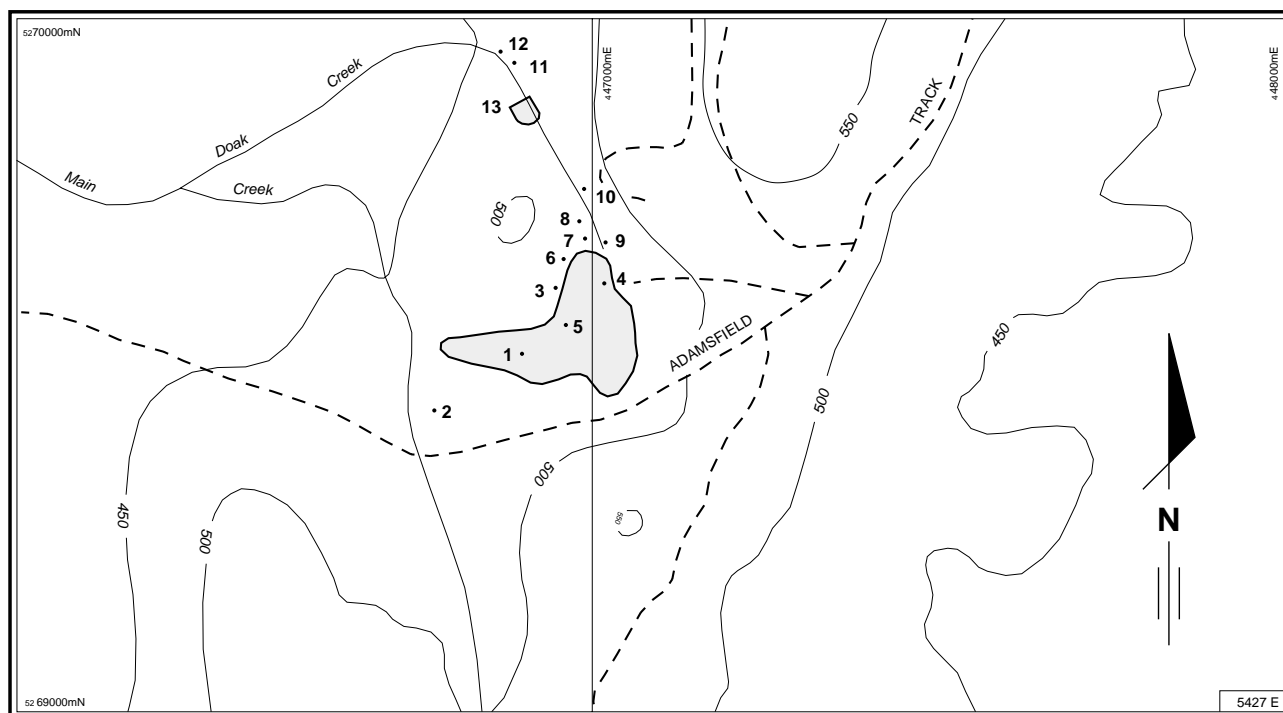


Figure 10.
Locations of some mining relics in vicinity of Hall's open cut.

10. Shafts in trench; two close together. Length of twisted iron rope with a metal ring on one end and hook and chain on the other on ground nearby (PWH AF88-43).
11. Mullock heap and piece of tramway, from Osmiridium (Tasmania) NL workings.
12. Wooden supports of machinery reserve building which housed 6-head stamper, jaw crusher and other machinery.
13. Open cut made by dozer, over area of collapsed tunnel originally dug in late 1930s.

This list contains only a few of the mining relics which can be seen in this area.

RECENT EXPLORATION

The area has been included in a number of exploration licences since 1959, as shown below:

EL	From	To	Held by
1/59	11.02.59	11.08.61	Lyell-EZ Explorations
1/64	06.08.64	06.02.65	Lyel-EZ Explorations
13/65	21.06.65	21.06.76	BHP
8/79	31.04.80	20.11.84	BHP (incorporated with 19/83; area reduced)
55/80	15.05.81	18.11.82	Shell Co. of Aust. Ltd
4/85	25.07.85	25.07.91	Metals Exploration

In the late 1950s the area was examined briefly for potential to host Cambrian mineralisation (stratabound copper-lead-zinc orebodies)⁹⁵. An aeromagnetic survey flown in 1965 identified a 1600 γ anomaly over the belt of ultrabasic rocks in the area, and this was followed in 1966 by ground geophysics^{96,97}. The target mineralisation sought during the 1960s exploration was copper-nickel, associated with the ultrabasic rocks. Nye (1930) reported the occurrence of millerite (NiS) in part of the lode area.

Access tracks were both cut by hand and bulldozed in the late 1960s. By May 1971 some 40,000 feet (12 km) of tracks (previously cut or bulldozed) had been surveyed⁹⁸.

The most recent exploration, done in the mid-1980s, focussed on the potential of gold, platinum group elements (PGE) and chromite in the Adamsfield area.

During this phase Marriots, Western and Boulters tracks were constructed and bulk sampling undertaken over the Adam River Valley. Temporary tracks were made out over the buttongrass plain. These tracks, and the Western Track, have been rehabilitated. Drilling was done in the area of the open cut. Drill pads were constructed in the open cut, behind the 4WD hut, and at places in between the hut and the small open cut. The drill pads (excepting those constructed in the open cut) have been rehabilitated. The area is currently largely covered by two exploration licences, EL 26/91 held by Jervois Mining Ltd, and EL 27/91 held by Helix Resources NL.

FUTURE EXPLORATION

The Adamsfield osmiridium mining field was included in the Southwest Conservation Area (SWCA) in 1980. In 1992 the whole of the SWCA was included in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA) declared under the Commonwealth *World Heritage Properties Conservation Act 1983*, and under State legislation most of the former SWCA was declared to be National Park. The Adamsfield area retained Conservation Area (ACA), within the TWWHA.

Exploration and mining are permitted within the ACA. Exploration licence and mining lease applications and work programmes will be considered by a sub-committee of the Mineral Exploration Working Group. Significant exploration work programmes and all mining proposals will require the approval of the World Heritage Ministerial Council.

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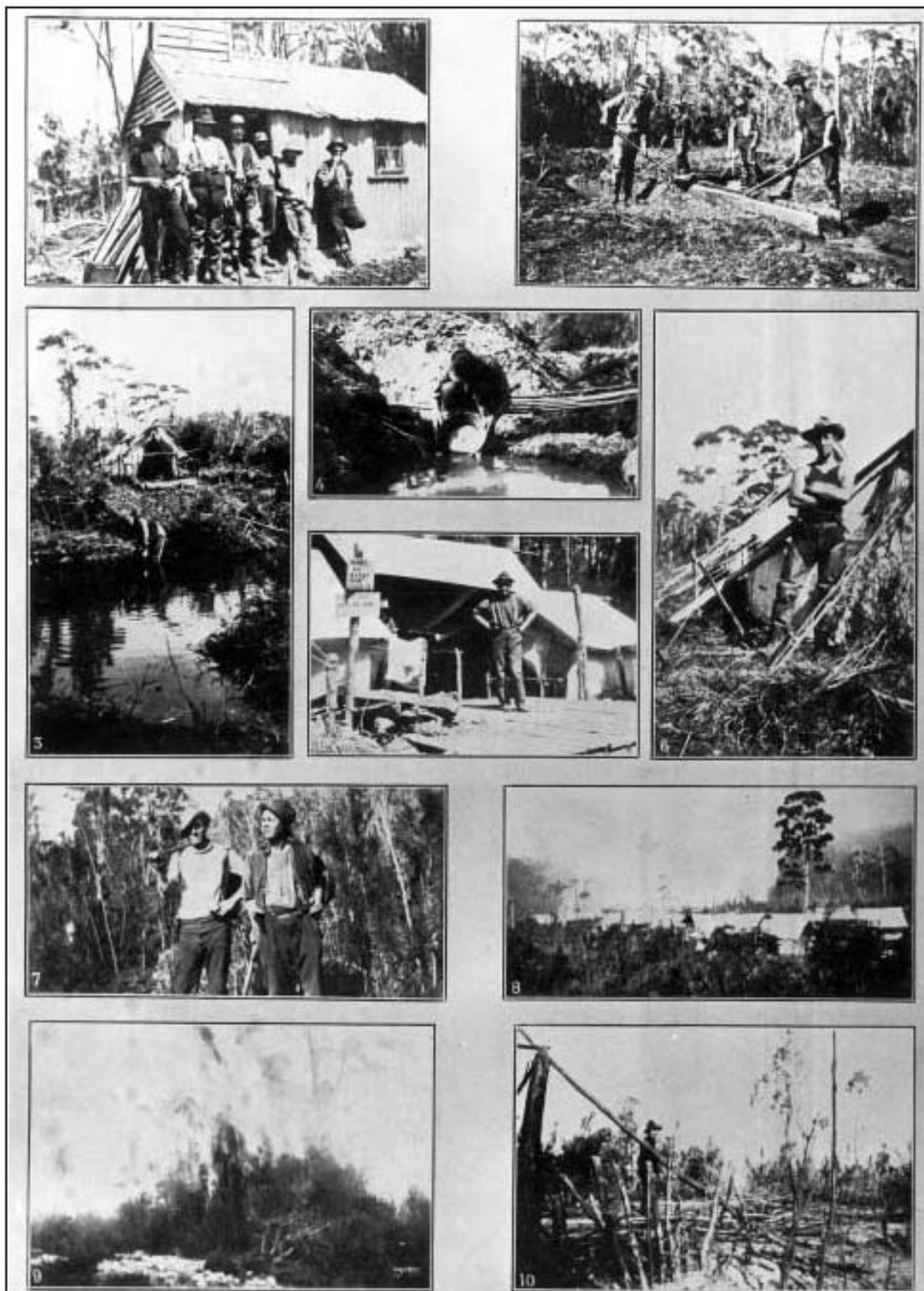
[6 May 1993]

Extract from the Post Office records, 1925–1948, of persons listed as living at Adamsfield

		29/30	30/31	31/32	32/33	33/34	34/35	35/36	36/37	37/38	38/39	39/40	40/41	41/42	42/43	43/44	44/45	45/46	47	48
Beattie, Les																				
Bond, Ernest	Grazier																			
Byrne, John	Store assistant, store keeper																			
Byrne, Jno	Storekeeper																			
Callaghan, Bernard																				
Cameron, Robert																				
Carmody, Hy	Gardner																			
Cashman, Patrick																				
Clark, Keith																				
Clark, Ethel	Home duties																			
Clark, Norm																				
Clark, Norm F.																				
Chaffey, Frederick																				
Chaffey, George																				
Chaffey, John																				
Churchill, Albert E.																				
Cole, Thomas	Postmaster																			
Cook, Andrew																				
Cook, Hy	Road man																			
Cooper, Charles																				
Cooper, Frederick																				
Coppin, Eric w.																				
Coppin, Lily	Storekeeper																			
Cornelius, Henry																				
Donaghy, Edward																				
Evans, Lillian	Bush nurse																			
Evans, Mary (Maisie) L.	Bush nurse																			
Farquhar, John																				
Fitzpatrick, Fras																				
Garth, John B.																				
Gerny, Stan L.	Miner, postmaster in 1944																			

		29/30	30/31	31/32	32/33	33/34	34/35	35/36	36/37	37/38	38/39	39/40	40/41	41/42	42/43	43/44	44/45	45/46	47	48
Gryan, Jno A.																				
Harris, Jno																				
Harris, George																				
Harrison, Jno																				
Harrison, Audrey	Bush nurse																			
Har, Bruce	Farmer																			
Hartnett, Patrick	Prospector																			
Hays, Jno																				
Hazelwood, Frederick W.	Miner																			
Hazelwood, Mrs Thurza	Postmistress 1935, nurse 1941-43																			
Henry, A.	Mine owner																			
Holloway, Walter																				
Hughes, Jno																				
Jans, Frederick																				
Jenkins, Percy																				
Jenkins, Robert																				
Jenner, Hy																				
Kemp, Claude S.																				
Kennedy																				
Littler, Edward																				
Lootz (Looby), William H.																				
McAteer, Samuel	Mine owner																			
McCallum, Trevor																				
McCallum, Archibald																				
McGuiness, George F.																				
McLeod, William																				
Moore, Gordon A.																				
Morgan, William																				
Papworth, Ernest																				
Penrose, Clarence																				
Powell, William																				
Prescott, Alfred	Teacher																			
Proposch, Frederick																				

	29/30	30/31	31/32	32/33	33/34	34/35	35/36	36/37	37/38	38/39	39/40	40/41	41/42	42/43	43/44	44/45	45/46	47	48
Raphael, Inez Bush nurse																			
Rayner, Raymond																			
Richardson, Ellis																			
Richardson, Frederick																			
Roach, Cecil																			
Roach, Clifford																			
Roach, Daniel																			
Roach, May L. (nee Evans) Bush nurse, married? Roach 1943 — see entries under Mary Evans																			
Smith, Harold E. Storekeeper (1935–44), postmaster (1937–44)																			
Smith, Percival Postmaster																			
Stacey, C. B.																			
Stacey, W.																			
Storey, Arthur J. Packer 1935, farmer 1938																			
Street, James																			
Spaulding, James Road man																			
Tunbridge, Reginald																			
Tunbridge, Ernest C.																			
Tunbridge, John																			
Webb, George																			
William, Les																			
Wright, Arthur Road man																			



“The quest for osmiridium” — a photo spread published in *The Weekly Courier* of Thursday 21 January 1926 showing various scenes of life on the “Adams River Fields”. The photos include miners at work (2, 3, 4), the Warden of Mines ‘office’ (5), various miners (1, 6, 7), and the ‘menace of bushfires’ (8, 9, 10).
[State Archives of Tasmania]

OSMIRIDIUM WEALTH FOR THE WINNING



The open cut on the newly-found osmiridium lode at Adamsfield, worked by Messrs. Ivory Bros.



The main shaft on Ivory Bros.' claim. Horse operated "whip" haulage brings lode material to the surface.



Trucked are at the bin tip to gravitate to tail race, where Falls Creek water at nozzle pressure will sift the sup. Left to right: Messrs. H. Hill, J. Harrison, M. J. O'Reilly.

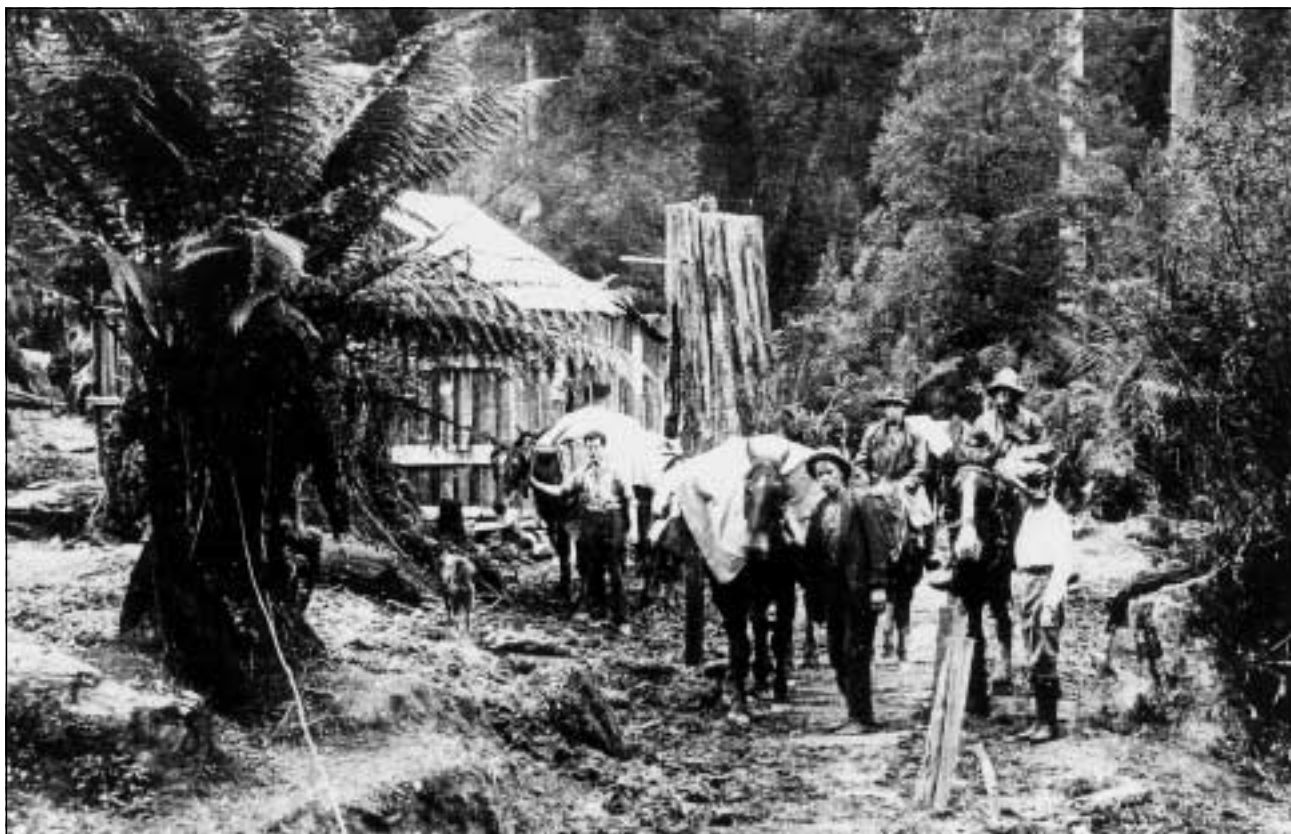


The new lode opened to 30ft. width and heavily timbered. Left to right: Messrs. M. J. O'Reilly, H. Hill (working for Ivory Bros.), and J. Harrison, a well-known identity from the Savage River.



"Osmiridium wealth for the winning" — a photo spread of mining operations at Adamsfield published in the *Illustrated Tasmanian Mail* on 13 January 1932.
[State Archives of Tasmania]

Photos on Page 26 (bottom), Page 27 and Page 30 from collection of Mr M Forster.
All other photos from F. Smithies Collection, Archives Office of Tasmania



Pack horses at the Florentine River, Adamsfield track



Florentine River crossing



Pack horses en route to Adamsfield



Adamsfield track near Little Florentine River



Florentine River crossing, Adamsfield track, December 1948



First jeep to Adamsfield at Florentine River, December 1948



Adamsfield, circa 1928



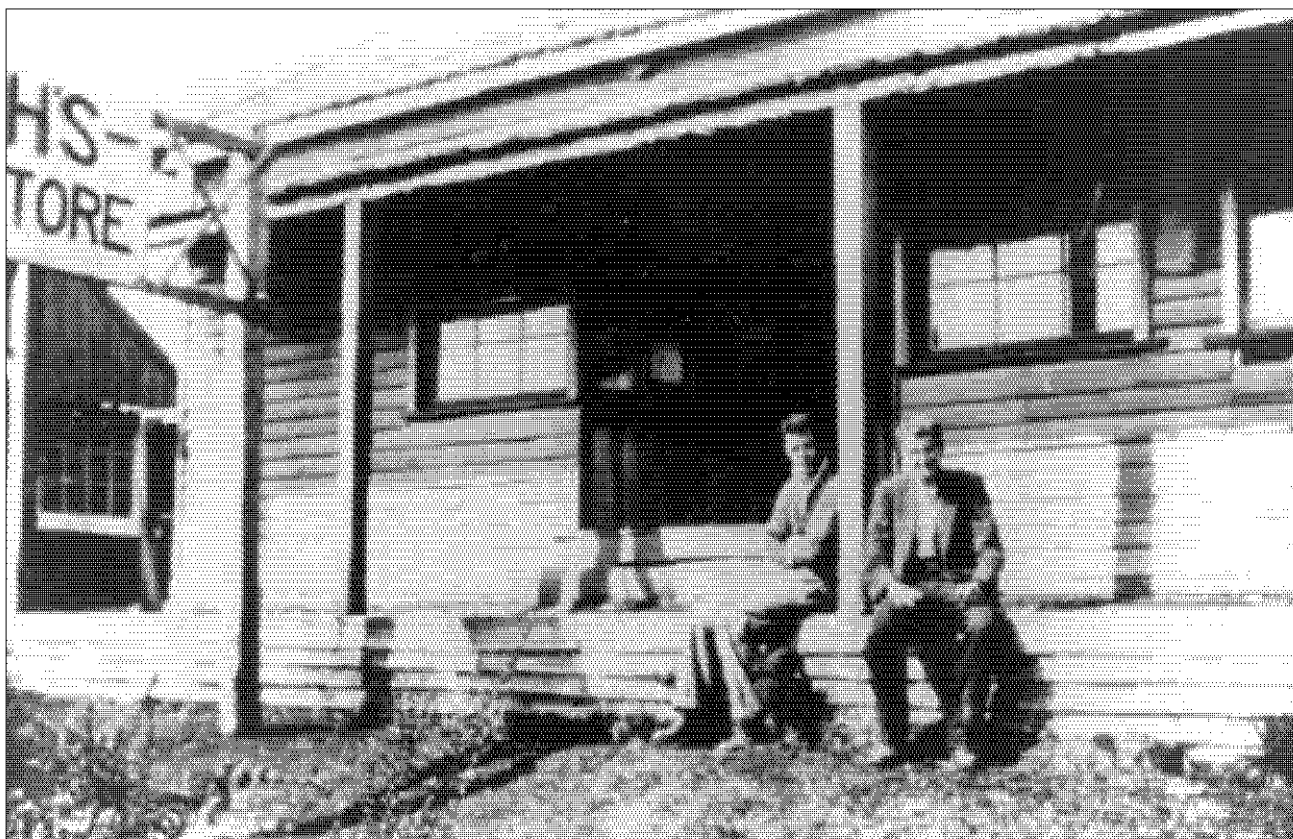
Miner's slab hut at Adamsfield, circa 1928



Miner's slab hut and tents at Adamsfield, circa 1928



Mrs Biddy Clark outside slab hut and canvas 'tent', circa 1928



Smith's store at Adamsfield, circa 1928



The 'store' at Adamsfield, with the first jeep to arrive in the town, December 1948



Alluvial mining



Carrying purchases from the store



*Processing 'wash' in a sluice,
Adamsfield*





Miners at work, Adamsfield

