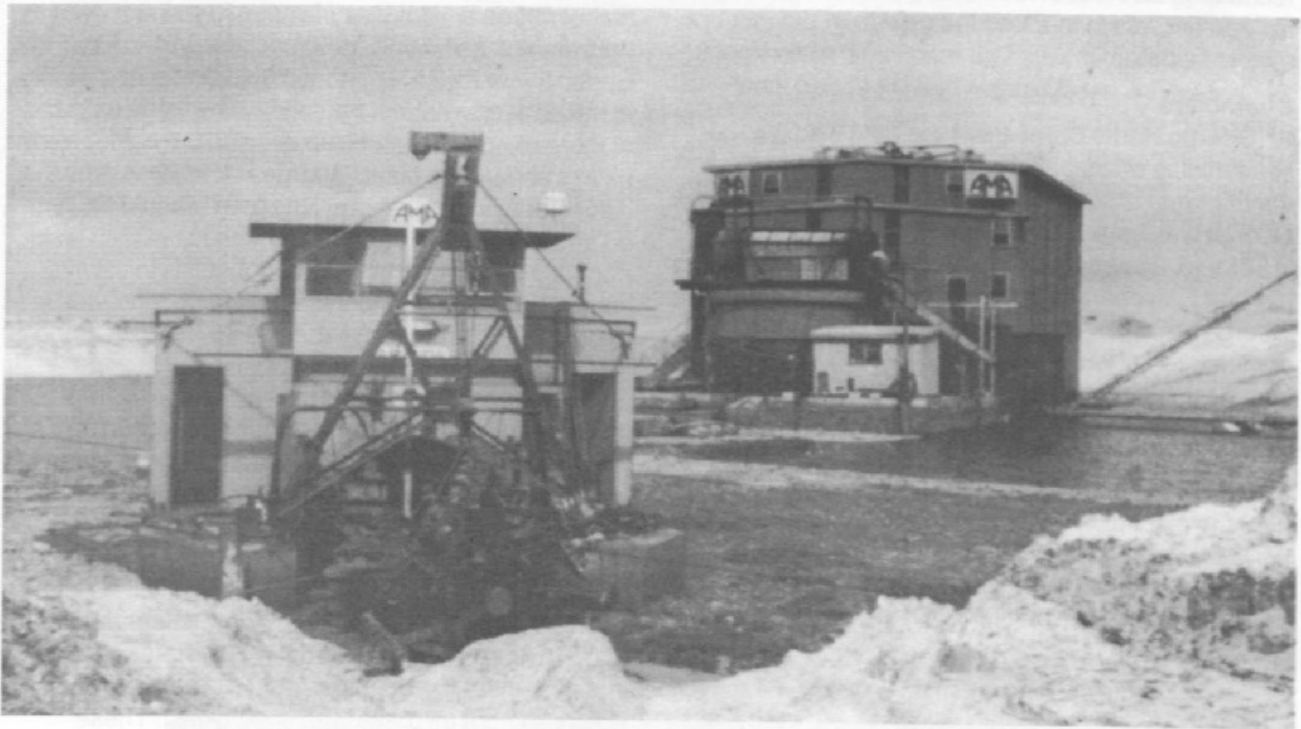


Sand Mining at Wooyung Beach

By Kathy Cherry

Introduction



A floating dredge for sand mining at Wooyung.

Sand mining on beaches between Pottsville and New Brighton has been an integral part of the story of Crabbes Creek because it has been a part of the daily life of many locals who were employed in the industry.

The story of sand mining is entwined with the history of the world—its conflicts, its economic fluctuations and its technological advancements, because the beaches of this part of the east coast of Australia are the world's greatest source of rutile and zircon. Up to 1980 Australia supplied 90% of the world's rutile and it is estimated that our reserves are 70% of its future supply. Australia has this ranking in the world because it is made of the oldest rocks in the world and black sands have eroded from these ancient rocks, been washed down the rivers and offshore and then been blown by cyclones back to the shore. The story of sand mining is also entwined with the lives and character of its main players.



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The world of sand mining was a man's world—men were attracted by the outdoor life, the chance to go fishing at the end of a shift, the great camaraderie that existed among the miners and the opportunity for advancement that the industry provided. One story of promotion was that of Doug Wright; he was a baker's boy who became a farmhand for Jack Foyster and began shovelling mineral sands at Jack's plant in 1951. He went on to invent the concentrating tray named after him and became a director of the Foyster company. Conditions could be tough, as they were one night when Ron Richards and Keith Bashforth were working on the pontoon and the cold wind whipped in from the west. They built a curtain of corn bags and lit a fire to try to keep warm, then Ron took a nap. Keith poured diesel on the fire because the wood was wet but dropped the tin and Ron woke suddenly and jumped straight through the blazing curtain to escape being burnt alive. Cyclones also made it a dangerous game, but cyclones sometimes brought treasure ashore—many a maranti board found on the beach became part of a farmer's shed and once a whole ship's bridge was washed up at Wooyung.

Ninety-seven percent of our black sand is made up of rutile, zircon and ilmenite while the remaining three percent comprises garnet, monazite, gold, platinum and cassiterite. The uses of these minerals are many and varied, ranging from the production of titanium from rutile for use in the aircraft, space and missile industries and for making artificial hips to thorium used in the nuclear industry and from ceramic glaze made from zircon to polish for optical glass made from