

Luke Keogh

The Storied Landscape: A Queensland Collection

History's train travels across the country capturing a film as it goes. The view from the train makes immediate the motion intrinsic to all landscapes. But this train, this film of the landscape, is not silent. Listen. There are words and stories and storytellers to be found: an intimate and evocative map of the landscape embedded with literatures and histories. To celebrate its sesquicentennial of responsible government a historical steam train travelled throughout Queensland, a north-eastern state of Australia that prides itself on primary production. The train moved along a resource pathway from Mount Isa in the far west and travelled all the way to Townsville on the east coast; from cattle country to cane country, and all the while it was powered by Blair Athol's famous steaming coal. It was an extraordinary moment in Queensland environmental histories where an image of resources collided with history and landscape. Sites of such wreckage are not just to be found with celebratory historical steam trains, but are scattered across Queensland. Indeed, so frequently do stories, landscapes, and commodities collide, that they fuel *The Storied Landscape*.

Resources are a defining way that Queenslanders have engaged with their environment. And so the archive of the land, the feel of its history, continuously leaves the residue of things. This project is a collection of stories and landscapes but it is a distinctly Queensland collection with resources framing the study. Three exploratory historical case studies focus on the Queensland resources of pituri (a pre-colonial psychoactive commodity of trade for Aboriginal Australians), coal, and sugar. Challenging the normative economic perspective often given to these resources, especially coal and sugar, the approach adopted here develops new ways of looking at landscapes transformed by resource extraction. In other words, not how big the hole in the ground is or how many acres of land have been cleared, rather how the landscape enters the mind and remains there. Such visions and contradictions are critical in the ways we continue to look at landscapes and the decisions made about changing them.

This is an environmental history with a creative logic, which engages with recent anthropological works of "ethnographic natural history." Stories and landscapes have material connections and to explore this means looking at the roots that stories take in the landscape. Such material connections form this Queensland collection. There is a map, a road sign for tourists, a lost natural history specimen, a colonial novel, an Aboriginal dreaming story collected by a pastoralist, a government report about a coal seam, a poem by a miner's son, an ironbark prop, a pyramid, a collection of historical bulletins, and a grave. A collection so diverse one wonders if a train could ever travel through so many places. Yet throughout this journey the storied landscape will persist as a critical way to understand and see landscapes transformed by resource extraction. Moving like a resource train across the country, the project stops at certain moments in time and space and collects stories and landscapes and explores the roots between them.

Archival and field research has been completed for this project, the final aim of the research project is the publication of *The Storied Landscape* in various journals and books, this will be achieved in the stay at the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society.