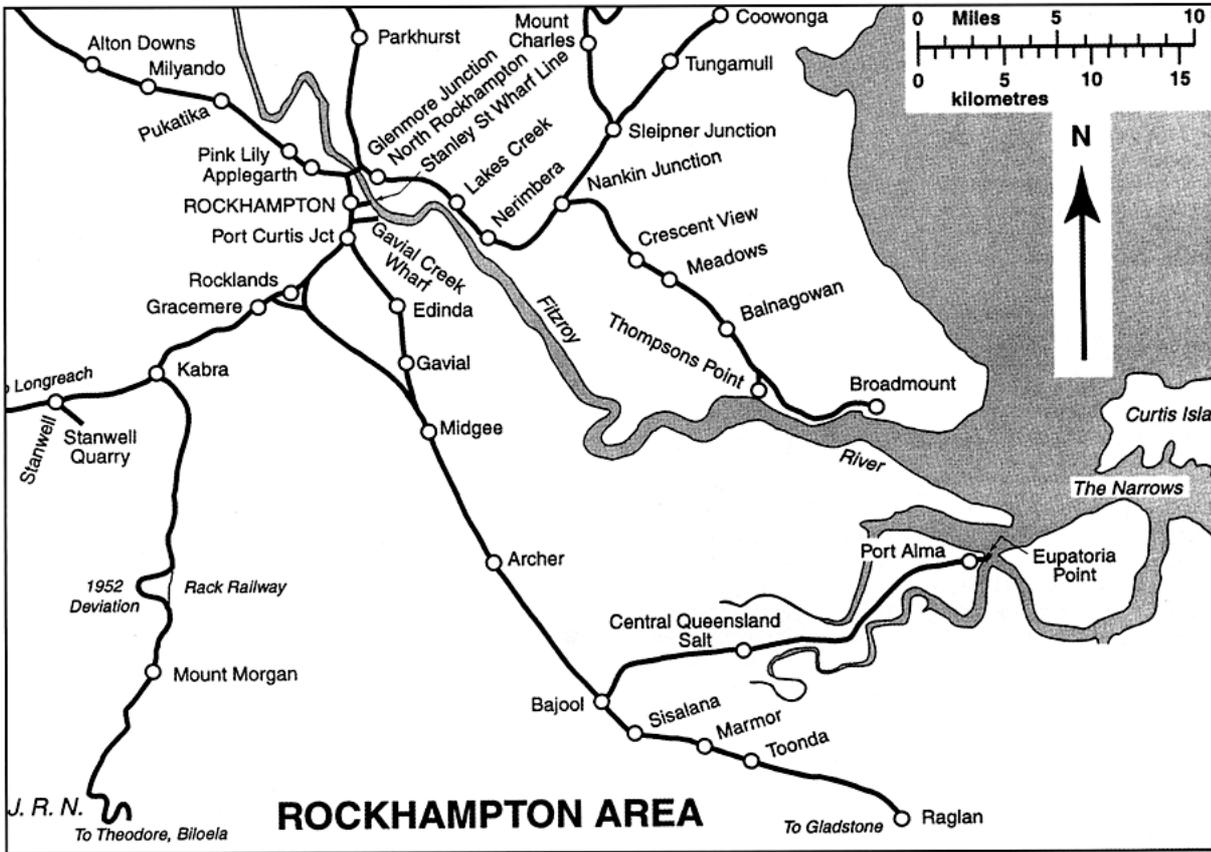




Rockhampton's Ports



Kerr, John
Politics - Priority Over Practicality:
The Port Railways of Rockhampton
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Imagine building a wharf beside deep water but not providing any access to it. Follow that with a rival site without dredging a deep wide channel to attract ships to it. Next, build a railway across the mud-flats to the first wharf that had been slowly decaying for 30 years. Top that off by imposing penalty freight rates on anyone who tried to avoid this port by using the best port in the region.

That far-fetched sequence is the story of Rockhampton and its merchants as they protected their interests and emasculated the rival Gladstone.

[Kerr]

Timeline*

- 1861: Tenders for first Rockhampton wharf called
- 1884: Port Alma screw pile wharf completed
- 1888: North Rockhampton-Emu Park railway opens
- 1892: Central Railway to Longreach opened
- 1898: Nankin to Broadmount Port rail line opened; coordinated rail-steamer service via Gladstone
- 1899: Alexandra Bridge links Emu Park Railway to Central Railway
- 1903: Rockhampton-Gladstone line opened

- 1902: Rail line to Gavial Creek wharf opened
- 1909: Yeppoon line via Mount Chalmers opens
- 1911: Port Alma wharf extended
- 1912: Bajool-Port Alma rail line opens
- 1921: Rockhampton-Mackay rail line opens
- 1929-31: Broadmount line closes and rail line from Nankin Junction removed
- 1961: Road to Port Alma completed
- 1965: Rockhampton river port closes
- 1986: Port Alma rail line closes

Rockhampton: The River Port

The amount of trade coming through the river port of Rockhampton grew to the extent that in the 1880s and 1890s it was the second largest port in the colony and in this period the value of exports annually broke the £1 million barrier for the first time....

The depths of the Fitzroy were a constant problem. Difficulties with shipping in the river port continued around the turn of the century, with many ships anchoring in Keppel Bay and

offloading passengers and goods into lighters for passage up the river. Broadmount and then later Port Alma were established and connected by rail to the city centre but it was not until 1950s that the port at Quay Street finally closed, the wharf structures were dismantled and removed and an era had ended. Despite this loss of the working port much of the building infrastructure remains such as the run of warehouses along Quay and East Streets, in particular the Customs House, constructed in 1900, remains as a grand testament to that period of Rockhampton's history. [Allom Lovell Architects]

Broadmount and Port Alma

In the 1880s and 1890s, sea ports were established on the coast, adjacent to the mouth of the Fitzroy River. Broadmount was on the northern side and Port Alma on the south. Railways were subsequently constructed to carry goods to the wharves at these locations, the railway to Broadmount opening on 1 January, 1898 and the line to Port Alma opened on 16 October, 1911. Maintenance on the Broadmount line ceased in August, 1929. The following month, the wharf caught fire and the line was effectively closed in July, 1930. [Wapedia]

The Port Alma branch line lingered on until 1986 with very low traffic levels, but the Broadmount Branch (off the Yeppoon/Emu Park line near Nankin) was possibly the least successful of all QR

branch lines, and was the very first to close in 1929, before even Ravenswood had gone.

[Railpage]

Shipping Figures

While tonnage through the ports most years was significantly lower, the best years were 1910 with 212,814 tons for the town wharves, 1911 with 62,522 tons for Broadmount, and 1938 with 52,102 tons for Port Alma. [Webster]

References & Further Reading

* Dates collated from QR Corporate, Webster, etc.

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Wharves at Broadmount, ca 1900 - Adapted from State Library of Queensland Image #14275



Thompson's Point, June 2009: Remains of timber wharf, rusting boiler and derelict river boat or barge. While Thompson's Point continues to be used by local fishermen, Broadmount is only reachable by 4WD.