

The Seventeen-Mile Rocks

The former Seventeen Mile Rocks farming district and the current suburb are named for the



The Seventeen-mile Rocks, early 20th century, showing line of submerged ridge. Courtesy of Thelma Dempster.

submerged ridge of rock that runs diagonally across the river near the end of Counihan Road (see early 20th century photo opposite). First noted by explorer and surveyor John Oxley in 1823, concerns about the navigational hazards posed by the rocks, 17 miles upriver from the penal settlement, were raised from early days of settlement. The rocks were the site of many shipping accidents, some resulting in severe damage to a vessel or (occasionally) in total loss of a vessel.

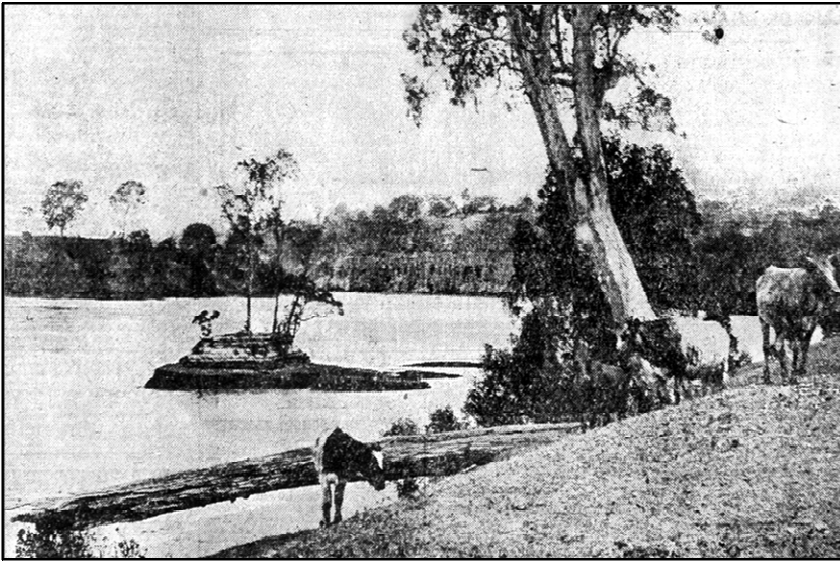
steamer trade between Brisbane and Ipswich. Substantial works were undertaken between 1862 and 1866 to widen and deepen the channel. This included the construction of a stone cairn with beacon on the south rock and the installation of another beacon on the north side.

The island created by the cairn became the subject of images by artists and photographers. It was also a symbol of the local Seventeen Mile Rocks farming district for approximately a century.

The area was a popular destination for day trippers on the river steamers from the last two decades of the 19th century. With increased use of road transport, people travelling by motor vehicle or bicycle used the Seventeen-Mile Rocks riverside area well into the 20th century as an excursion destination or picnic spot.



Man-Made Sandstone Cairn, built 1860s, on the Submerged Seventeen-Mile Rocks. Brisbane City Council: BCC-B54-16845.



Picnic Spot at the Seventeen-Mile Rocks. Brisbane Courier 15 Dec. 1923. Courtesy of State Library of Qld.

At low tide, the rocks on which the cairn was built could be seen (as the two images on this page illustrate).



Sandstone islands, Seventeen Mile Rocks, c. 1887. Image no. APA 026-0001-0004. SLQ.



Though the works of the mid 1860s improved the situation, there were still navigational problems for shipping. Further blasting was carried out in 1964-5 as a result of pressure from the gravel and coal industries. The photograph opposite, from State Library of Qld files, shows the force of the blasting. The tower of water could be seen as far away as Darra. Unfortunately, the historic man-made cairn on the south rock was blasted out of existence.