

**GEOFFREY BLAINNEY**



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# **MINES IN THE SPINIFEX**

**THE STORY OF MOUNT ISA MINES**



Few great mines of the world have had such a dramatic struggle for survival as Mount Isa. This book recounts that struggle.

The red ranges in north-west Queensland have taunted men for a century with a mirage of easy wealth. The first prospectors died from thirst, fever, bad rum, and the spears of blacks, or went away disillusioned; the first mines were worked with machinery dragged across vast plains by horse teams. This was perhaps Australia's harshest mining frontier.

The frontier was old and almost deserted when the best ore-body, Mount Isa, was found by a horseman within a mile of a road. But that mine had a chain of crises that perplexed financial giants of London and New York for nearly a generation before new riches were found far underground.

Strong men dominate this book: Ernest Henry the Crimean veteran who rode his horse 800 miles after discovering the first metal, only to learn that it was worthless; Simpson the prospector who was killed in a city street the week he arrived to spend his fortune; Leslie Urquhart, the optimist who promoted and lost Russia's largest mining empire and then lost Mount Isa.

*Mines in the Spinifex* is both a fascinating history and a clear survey of the problems Australia has to master to populate its huge wastelands.

New sections have been written on events of the 1960s—the rapid expansion of mine and city, the celebrated strike, and the growth of the region of which Mount Isa is the capital.

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