

*Landmarks: People and Places across Australia, a gallery bringing together over 1500 objects, explores the history of Australia since European settlement.*

## OBJECT BIOGRAPHY

### Rock Shovel Bucket

Mount Tom Price is located in the north of Western Australia in the mineral rich Pilbara region.

Geologists identified the Pilbara's vast mineral deposits, including iron ore, as far back as the 1880s and 1890s. It is only since the 1960s that mining companies have been allowed to extract the valuable resource from this region. Today, the Pilbara, and more particularly Tom Price, is known to have one of the world's largest iron ore deposits.



**The rock shovel bucket measures nearly three metres high and is made of solid steel, weighing 15.2 tonnes. Photo: Jason McCarthy, National Museum of Australia.**

This rock shovel bucket was used at Mount Tom Price, which is located in the Hamersley Range, 1500 km north of Perth. The rock shovel bucket, which was donated to the National Museum of Australia by Rio Tinto, is displayed in Landmarks: People and Places across Australia, a gallery bringing together over 1500 objects, exploring the history of Australia since European settlement.

Used during the 1990s, the rock shovel bucket was attached to a hydraulic mining excavator. It scooped up large amounts of iron ore and loaded it into trucks, which took the iron ore to be crushed. The rock shovel bucket measures nearly three metres high and, being made of solid steel, weighs 15.2 tonnes. Today, buckets three times the capacity of this one are used at Tom Price. The sheer size of mining machinery like this rock shovel bucket shows the massive scale of mining activity.

In 1952, Lang Hancock famously discovered iron ore in this region. While flying south to Perth with his wife, heavy storm clouds forced Hancock to fly his small plane through a gorge. He noticed the iron ore deposits in the gorge's rust coloured walls. Hancock became known as 'the flying prospector,' as he flew around the Pilbara aerial prospecting.'

One of his plain, white prospecting jackets will go on display alongside the rock shovel bucket.

At the time, Hancock's discovery was virtually worthless. During World War Two the Australian Government placed embargoes on the export of iron and steel. After his find, Hancock began to lobby the government to remove the bans placed on these resources. The restrictions were finally lifted in 1961, opening the resource rich Pilbara region to mining. This allowed companies like Hamersley Iron to establish mines at places like Mount Tom Price.

Hamersley Iron, a privately financed mining venture and now a subsidiary of mining giant Rio Tinto International, established an open-cut mine on Mount Tom Price in 1966.



**The installation process of the rock shovel bucket. Photo: Ainslie Greiner, National Museum of Australia.**

**Conservator's notes:**

The installation of the 15 tonne rock shovel bucket into the Landmarks gallery space could have posed some real headaches. However, after much consultation a practical solution was hatched. Bill Lang and his team (Wee Jasper Pty Ltd) designed and engineered a support cradle trolley and movable loading platform that would support the transfer of the rock shovel bucket.

The bucket was fitted onto the support cradle trolley with a 55 tonne forklift and then lifted and

lowered onto the loading platform that was positioned in front of the National Museum's loading dock. The rock shovel bucket was then towed through the doors into the gallery space utilising a 4.5 tonne forklift and drawbars. Steel metal sheets had to be laid down over the door recesses and bumps in the path of the bucket to ensure even transfer of weight and smooth rolling of loaded trolley wheels.

Planning and execution of the install of the bucket was conducted by Bill Lang in conjunction with Conservation and Registration staff.

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Object biography prepared by Leah Bartsch, Curator and Conservator's notes prepared by Ainslie Greiner, Senior Conservator-Technology, National Museum of Australia.

**Landmarks: People and Places across Australia** is the National Museum's newest and most ambitious gallery to date, bringing together over 1500 objects to create a history of Australia since European settlement.

For more information about the exhibition visit  
**<http://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/landmarks>**