Background Information

John Campbell Miles was the prospector and pastoral worker who discovered the mineral deposits that established the famous Mount Isa Mine. Born in Melbourne in 1883, Miles had a restless and adventurous spirit. As a boy, he ran away from school, initially to work with a bootmaker, but soon moved on, taking up a number of jobs in quick succession, including as a ploughman, miner, carter, railway navvy, wild-pig hunter and windmill repairer. In 1907, at age 24, Miles rode his bicycle 1,500 miles (2,414 kms) from Broken Hill to the Oaks goldfield in north Queensland. His time there, though short and uneventful, would inadvertently lead to his discovery of Australia’s greatest mine of the 20th century.

On leaving the Oaks, Miles worked as a farm labourer and spent the next decade drifting from station to station, continuing to fossick to supplement his income. In 1921, he decided to follow up on stories he had heard about gold on a cattle trail in the Northern Territory. Slowly travelling west he reached Camooweal where he met William Simpson of the Native Bee mine, who later became his partner – it was February 1923. Miles’ next camp was on the Leichhardt River where he prospected dark, mineralised samples before striking the Black Star lode. During this fossick Miles discovered the rich central lodes that would become the Mount Isa mineral field: the Black Star, Racecourse and Rio Grande.

The find inspired a prospecting boom in the area. Among the new arrivals was William Corbould who, in January 1924, floated Mount Isa Mines Limited. Simpson and Miles each received 500 shares worth nearly £330,000. Sadly, Simpson was accidently killed only a few days later, while Miles continued to prospect in the area for another year. Unable to settle down, Miles maintained his wandering lifestyle and gradually sold his shares. By 1933 he no longer held interests in Mount Isa Mines. Miles died in 1965 and his ashes are buried in under a memorial clock tower in Miles Street, Mount Isa.

Quirky fact:

Until becoming a city in 1968, Mount Isa was Queensland’s youngest town!
Inquiry Questions

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<td>How is the mining community different from Outback farming communities?</td>
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<td>How have people influenced and managed this place?</td>
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<td>What is special about the landform of Mount Isa, and what are the reasons people migrated here?</td>
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<td>What were the challenges for liveability and how have they been managed?</td>
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<td>Who were the key people in the development of Mount Isa and what did they do?</td>
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<td>What science understandings are used in mining and management of this environment?</td>
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Points of Interest

- **Hard Times Mine at Outback at Isa**
  Explore the history of mining as experienced guides enthral you with their stories of the good times and the hard times that are had working deep under the earth.

  Outback at Isa, 19 Marian Street, Mount Isa QLD 4825
  
  **Hours:** Daily showings
  **Cost:** Fees apply
  **Phone:** (07) 4749 1555 or 1300 659 660
  **Email:** info@outbackatisa.com.au
  **Website:** www.outbackatisa.com.au

- **Riversleigh Fossil Centre and Isa Experience Gallery – Outback at Isa, Mount Isa**
- **Underground Hospital & Museum, Mount Isa**

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**
- Mineralogical Society
  New South Wales
  www.minsocnsw.org.au/
  minsocnewsletters/New%20Talks%2021%2009/mti%20isa.pdf
- Australian Mining
  www.miningaustralia.com

**REFERENCES**
- Diane Menghetti, *James Cook University*
- Mining-Technology.com
  www.mining-technology.com
- James Cook University
- Outback at Isa
  www.outbackatisa.com.au

**FURTHER INFORMATION**
- Outback at Isa
  Riversleigh Fossils Interpretive Centre and Mount Isa Tourist Information Centre
  19 Marian Street, Mount Isa QLD 4825
  Phone: (07) 4749 1555 or 1300 659 660
  Email: info@outbackatisa.com.au

![Map of Outback Queensland](image)