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**CONSERVATIONISM AND FARMING IN NORTH
QUEENSLAND, 1861-1970**

Thesis submitted by

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In December 2003

For the degree of Master of Arts
in the School of Humanities
James Cook University

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STATEMENT ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF OTHERS

I declare that this thesis is my own work. My supervisor, Dr Russell McGregor, has guided me with suggestions for background reading, with conceptualising my problem and with editing, as stated in the acknowledgements. Beyond that I have worked alone and have received no financial assistance for the project.

Ian Frazer

19 December 2003

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ABSTRACT

This is a study of the ideas behind natural resource use in North Queensland. I argue that settlers followed an implicit code which valued caring for, as well as exploiting the land. The earliest settlers took pride in being pioneers who conquered, reshaped and harnessed Nature. Later generations could not claim this status, but found virtue in hard work and practicing a frugal, “tread-lightly” form of stewardship. Legislators promoted the settlement of the coastal strip with morally charged rhetoric: to secure the North for White Australia, to render the wilderness bountiful and produce contented human beings, away from dehumanising cities.

North Queensland’s conservation activists of the 1960s advocated a different vision to that of closer-settlement enthusiasts, yet they shared an ideal of a restorative working relationship between human beings and Nature. Naturalists in Cairns and Townsville in the 1930s and 40s had exercised public advocacy for conservation based on a sense of custodianship for native flora and fauna. Activists of the 1960s extended their stewardship to the North’s rain forests and the Great Barrier Reef.

The farmers’ stewardship and state’s piecemeal land-management and nature-conservation laws both seem to have assumed a safety net supplied by Nature entwined with Providence. In contrast, the activists

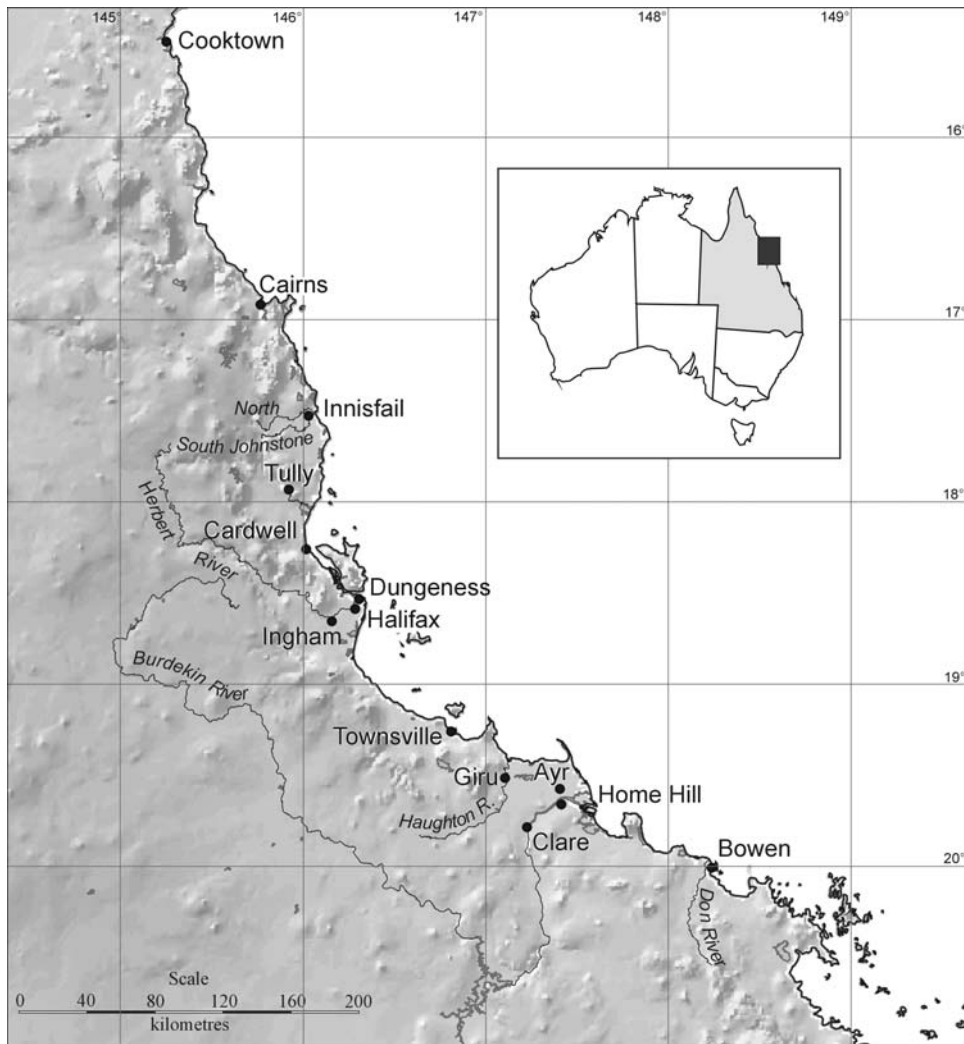
acted on a belief held by some conservationists since the 1870s,
reinforced by evidence of damage since World War II, that Nature was
being irreparably damaged and must be rescued.

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North Queensland, Bowen to Cooktown. Source: Geoscience Australia, 1:1000,000 scale vector data.