



## PIONEERING HISTORY

Kuranda Scenic Railway is enjoyed by hundreds of thousands of visitors and locals alike each year. However, the Kuranda Scenic Railway was not originally built as a tourism attraction.

In 1873 the cry of "gold!" echoed through the mountains of North Queensland. Supply routes from the coast to the gold fields were slow and dangerous. In 1882, a devastating wet season brought misery to the blossoming townships. Supply routes were impassable, and thousands of people came close to starvation.

Legendary bushman Christie Palmerston was tasked to find a reliable supply route for a railway to link the rich mining area to the sea. In 1886, construction commenced on the Cairns to Kuranda railway and to this day, it is one of the most ambitious railway projects ever undertaken.

The workers on the Kuranda Scenic Railway were known as 'Navvies'. Navvies is a shortened version of the word Navigator, used to describe the workers on major civil engineering projects.

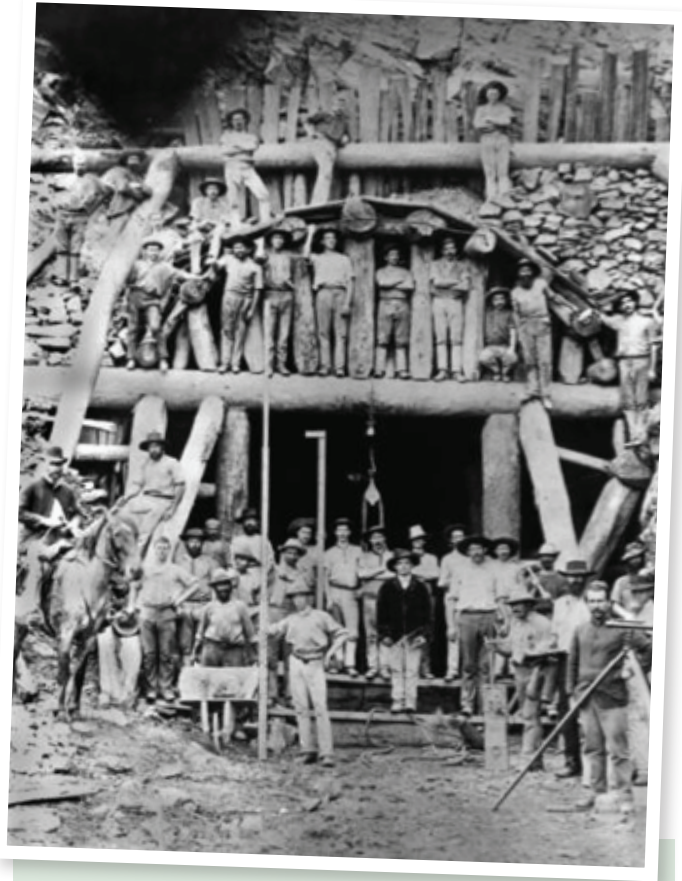
At one stage up to 1,500 men, mainly Irish and Italian workers were involved in the project.

They endured terrible hardship and an unforgiving landscape. Armed only with picks, shovels and dynamite, these men moved over two million cubic metres of earth. Impassable swamps, mysterious diseases, deadly creatures, dense jungle, deep ravines, raging waterfalls and sheer cliffs were to prove no obstacle.

During construction, 'navvy camps' were built at every tunnel and cutting. Accommodation, hotels and even churches were temporarily built on small ledges and cliff faces. Even narrow ledges supported stores for groceries and clothes for the workers. Small townships thrived at Number 3 Tunnel, Stoney Creek, Glacier Rock, Camp Oven Creek and Rainbow Creek. Kamerunga, located at the foot of the range, boasted no fewer than five hotels.

The railway line was completed in 1891 after five years of construction with 33 kilometres of track from Cairns to Kuranda ascends 328 metres above sea level and included 15 tunnels, 55 bridges and 98 curves. The construction was at a cost of £290,984-3s. With a reliable supply of goods and freight, the Tablelands bloomed into a wealth of rich grazing land.

Today, the Kuranda Scenic Railway stands as tribute to the courage, ingenuity and strength of the pioneers of this harsh and mountainous landscape.



### CONSTRUCTION OF TUNNEL 15

*Tunnel 15 is 429 metres long, the longest of the tunnels on the line. Construction of this tunnel took over two years and was delayed when seven workers were injured during a cave-in.*

*To make up for lost time John Robb had his men work on eight tunnel faces at once. Gangs of men tunnelled in from the mountain face and worked on digging sections of the main tunnel. Without modern survey equipment, it was a remarkable achievement to join all 8 tunnel faces.*

*Imagine the difficulty of digging these tunnels with just picks and shovels. To add to the hardships, the men had to supply their own tools if they wanted a job.*



Workers camp c. 1890



NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

## PIONEERING HISTORY QUESTIONS

1. From what countries were most of the workers from?

- a) England and New Zealand
- b) Ireland and Italy
- c) Russia and India

2. What were some of the facilities that could be found in a worker's camp?

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3. Up to how many men worked on the construction at any one time?

- a) 1,800
- b) 1,500
- c) 10,000

4. Why were workers on the railway line called 'Navvies'?

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5. Navvies were once paid 8 shillings per day! In today's currency 8 shillings is worth approximately 80 cents. List what you can buy for 80c today.

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6. Who was the bushman who found the route for the Kuranda Scenic Railway?

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7. Approximately how much did it cost to construct the Kuranda Scenic Railway?

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8. What year was the Kuranda Scenic Railway line completed?

- a) 1891
- b) 1873
- c) 1849

9. What was the main reason the Cairns to Kuranda railway line was built?

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