‘Taking the Waters’: Mineral Springs, Artesian Bores and Health Tourism in Queensland, 1870–1950

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Introduction

In late 1907, Charles Fraser, the Victorian government entomologist, travelled to North Queensland. His observations of the flora and fauna in this part of Australia were later published in the *Victorian Naturalist*. However, this journey was not motivated entirely by his desire to study natural history. As a sufferer of ‘rhematic [sic] troubles’, he spent a few days soaking in the mineral-impregnated waters at Innot Hot Springs, a small inland village approximately 150 kilometres south-east of Cairns.[1] First established in the late 1880s, the tiny settlement is still visited during the winter months by many ‘grey nomads’ en route to Karumba, where the fishing is promoted as being excellent. They break their journey at Innot Hot Springs to soak in the indoor or outdoor swimming pools filled with mineralised water of varying temperatures sourced from the nearby Nettle Creek.[2] Some view it simply as a place to relax after the long journey from southern Australia, having perhaps already tried the artesian bore water baths at Moree and Mitchell en route. Others may consider the mineral waters to have healing qualities; like Charles Fraser, they are literally ‘taking the waters’.

Whatever their motivations, visitors to Innot Hot Springs are engaging in a very ancient practice. ‘Taking the waters’, or ‘taking the cure’, has a long history — especially in Europe. The practice was usually a quest for healing waters: hot waters, mineral-impregnated waters, cold waters or holy waters. Sometimes invalids sought healing muds and gases. By the nineteenth century, the search for a healing climate could also be part of the ritual, with different parts of the globe (such as the Riviera, southern Italy, California and southern Australia) being promoted as places where invalids would find a cure for various maladies, including the dreaded consumption or tuberculosis.[3]

Little has been written about the practice of ‘taking the waters’ in Queensland, and the attempts to create an industry around a natural resource in the new colony/state during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The mineral springs at Helidon have attracted the most attention, with Joan Webster’s book on the history of the Helidon Spa Water Company containing comprehensive details about the bottling of the mineralised water for sale throughout Australia and the development of the Helidon Spa Park. The historian Richard White, in his article on mineral spas in Australia, briefly mentions that Innot Hot Springs in

Volume 20 | Issue 2 | 2013 | pp. 157–173 | © Cambridge University Press 2013 | doi 10.1017/qre.2013.18

Queensland had sparse facilities for visitors, but the focus of his account is upon activities in southern Australia.[4] These accounts, however, fail to acknowledge that 'taking the waters' was happening in other localities in Queensland, such as Aramac, Barcaldine, Dalby and Muckadilla.

Drawing upon contemporary medical publications, government-sponsored tourism brochures, newspaper reports and archival files, this article examines the extent of early health tourism in Queensland by focusing upon the therapeutic use of water from mineral springs and artesian bores before 1950. The article begins by briefly examining the use of water as a treatment for ailments and the establishment of spa resorts by Europeans when they colonised new lands. It then turns to identifying the main sites of hydrotherapy in Queensland, the treatment procedures adopted at each site and the promotion of these places as a cure for many maladies. Finally, the article considers the fate of the places that were once used for this form of health tourism in Queensland.

Water as a Treatment for Ailments

'Taking the waters' colloquially refers to bathing in mineralised waters at a spa. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, 'taking the waters' involved a range of activities. The term may have meant balneotherapy, which included soaking in mineral waters, taking peat and mud baths, and drinking mineral waters. Minerals in the water were believed to exert a therapeutic effect on the body. Hydrotherapy, or hydropathy, is similar to balneotherapy; it emphasises the capacities of water to purify the body by undertaking one or more of the following: wrapping individuals in wet sheets or applying wet packs; having water treatments — usually general immersion in hot or cold waters or being subjected to fine jets or sprays of water; and drinking vast quantities of water. The essential difference is that hydrotherapy, although using water, is not concerned with its mineral content.[5]

Loring Bullard, an American historian with an interest in the use of Missouri's mineral springs and spas, has written that 'mineral waters have been consumed, bathed in, valued and even prized since the dawn of human civilization'. Thermal springs were highly revered by the Greeks and Romans, and the practice of 'taking the waters' continued during the Middle Ages. By 1800, Continental European spa centres such as Carlsbad, Baden-Baden and Aix-les-bains owed their reputations principally or in great part to the presence of thermal mineral waters that attracted invalids. In England, Bath — after suffering a period of disfavour — again prospered, becoming the site for the Royal Mineral Waters Hospital, established in 1739. Other English towns, such as Malvern, Tunbridge Wells, Harrogate and Matlock, also emerged as spa resorts.[6]

As European colonists exploited new worlds, they discovered new thermal springs and the medicinal use of mineral waters found new life in the European colonies. In the United States and Canada, the presence of mineral springs provided opportunities for the development of health and spa tourism, and nature-based tourism, as these springs were often incorporated into national parks. Similarly, mineral springs at Rotorua and Hammer Springs were set aside as health resorts by the New Zealand government to encourage international tourism and domestic health improvements.[7] European beliefs in the benefits of hydrotherapy were also transferred to colonial life in pre-Federation Australia. By the turn of the century,

the commercial extraction of mineral waters and the establishment of spa resorts had occurred in several Australian locations, including the Daylesford-Hepburn Springs District and Clifton Springs (Victoria), Moree (New South Wales) and Innot Hot Springs and Helidon (Queensland). Therefore, the small spa resorts established in Queensland using water from either mineral springs or artesian bores were part of a wider global trend.[8]

The popularity of 'taking the waters' during the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries resulted partly from the use of curative medicine reaching an impasse in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Bleeding and blistering, purges and emetics, and a vast array of pharmacological concoctions were all being questioned. Specific alternatives were still limited, however: vaccination as a preventive for smallpox, quinine for malaria and mercurial compounds for venereal diseases. 'Natural cures' such as sea voyages, open-air sanatoria and hydrotherapy became increasingly fashionable. Indeed, all manner of maladies were reputedly 'cured' by hydrotherapy. By 1910, the American physician Guy Hindsdale provided an exhaustive list of medical complaints that could be treated by hydrotherapy, including typhoid fever, scarlet fever, tuberculosis, asthma, rheumatism, arthritis, insomnia, insanity and epilepsy.[9] Moreover, attending spa resorts and 'taking the waters' provided not only a form of health care that was less threatening than bleeding and blistering, but one that potentially was accompanied by pleasant recreational activities. Nineteenth-century European spa resorts often contained theatres, sporting facilities and grand hotels with billiard, music and reading rooms. Some spa resorts in Missouri even built ten-pin bowling alleys, tennis courts and horse-racing tracks, laid out golf courses, and offered visitors opportunities to participate in musical recitals or dramatic productions. These spa resorts promised a wide experience of sociability.[10]

The idea of treating ailments via hydropathy surfaced in Australia in the mid-1840s. R. T. Claridge called for the founding of hydropathic establishments under the 'management of skillful practitioners' in the Australian colonies. However, fifteen years passed before a 'water-cure' establishment was founded in the Melbourne suburb of Malvern. Here, patients received treatment either by being wrapped in wet sheets or soaking in bath tubs filled with hot and cold water.[11] By the late 1860s, the promotion of the use of mineral waters in Australia had definitely commenced. William Gillbee, the Honorary Surgeon to the Melbourne Hospital, for example, was reported in 1868 to be recommending that patients drink the mineral water found at Ballan and being assured by them that they found it a 'valuable remedial agent'. In 1872, Dr W. Crooke of Fitzroy, Melbourne, announced that he 'confidently recommended Hepburn mineral water as a tonic'.[12] Such advice continued into the twentieth century. John Springthorpe, senior physician to the Melbourne Hospital and lecturer on therapeutics, dietetics and hygiene at the University of Melbourne in the 1900s, supported the therapeutic use of spring and mineral waters. An entire section in his Australian textbook on therapeutics was devoted to discussing which diseases were aided by bathing in and drinking mineral waters and where patients in Australia could find mineral springs. The most enthusiastic endorsement, however, came from Dr E. W. Kerr of Brisbane who, at a meeting of the Queensland Branch of the British Medical Association, advised his colleagues how he had recommended that patients should bathe in the artesian bore waters at Muckadilla and that some of them had secured relief from

'obstinate rheumatism'. In the mid-1920s, Henry O'Hara, a Melbourne surgeon, claimed to have 'constantly prescribed' the Hepburn Springs mineral waters and had achieved 'best results'.[13] This fragmentary evidence suggests that at least some Australian medical practitioners between 1880 and 1930 willingly endorsed the use of mineralised waters to treat ailments. However, 'alternative' treatments such as hydropathy, herbalism and homeopathy had their critics amongst the Australian medical profession. Some late nineteenth-century Australian doctors believed that such practices were no more than quackery.[14]

Major Sites of Hydrotherapy in Queensland

Before 1950, six localities with mineral springs or artesian bore waters were identified as places in Queensland used by visitors for therapeutic purposes (see Figure 1). By 1910, Innot Hot Springs, Helidon and Muckadilla had established their reputations as places to 'take the waters'; Barcaldine, Dalby and Aramac probably only attracted visitors after 1910. At these localities, infrastructure such as standpipes, hand pumps, bathing pools, bath-houses and small accommodation houses were built to cater for visitors. Other Queensland localities are known to have mineral springs, but were not places used extensively for therapeutic purposes. Mineral springs at the locality that became known as Ban Ban Springs, near Gayndah, had been identified by 1860, but appear never to have been used in an organised manner by Europeans (unlike their use by Aboriginal peoples). Similarly, the mineral springs on Tallaroo Station between Einasleigh and Mt Surprise in Far North Queensland were known in the late nineteenth century, but they are very isolated and were probably only visited infrequently by small groups of highly motivated visitors. Other Queensland towns also had an abundance of artesian bore water, but they were not promoted as places where visitors could obtain relief from ailments. The artesian waters from the local bore at Longreach, for example, were reported in 1915 as having curative properties for rheumatism and gout, but no evidence could be found to suggest that visitors used them in any organised manner.[15]

Helidon was the first centre in Queensland to be associated with the practice of hydrotherapy by Europeans, although previously local Aboriginal people had used the water from the mineral springs in the district, believing that it made 'the sick strong and the strong stronger'. Initially, the local Helidon publicans used the spring water during the 1850s as soda water with brandy and whisky. The mineral waters were eventually exploited for their 'curative' properties from the 1880s onwards. The Helidon Spa Water Company Pty Ltd was formed in 1880 and began decanting the water and filling large wooden barrels. The casks were transported by rail to Brisbane, where the water was bottled and distributed.[16] Helidon spa water was promoted extensively as an alkaline table water containing bicarbonates of lithium and sodium and as a 'health-bringer and a health-preserver'. Advertisements for the product claimed it could be 'taken daily and consumed in unlimited quantities'.[17] Visitors started coming to the locality to sample the water (see Figure 2), but no bathing facilities were established in the town during the colonial era.

Mineral springs at what became the small village of Innot Hot Springs were also a place where invalids 'took the waters'. In the early 1880s, A. C. Grabutt, the original lessee of Woodleigh Station where the springs were located, became the first European to discover them. Seeking to capitalise on the potential healing properties

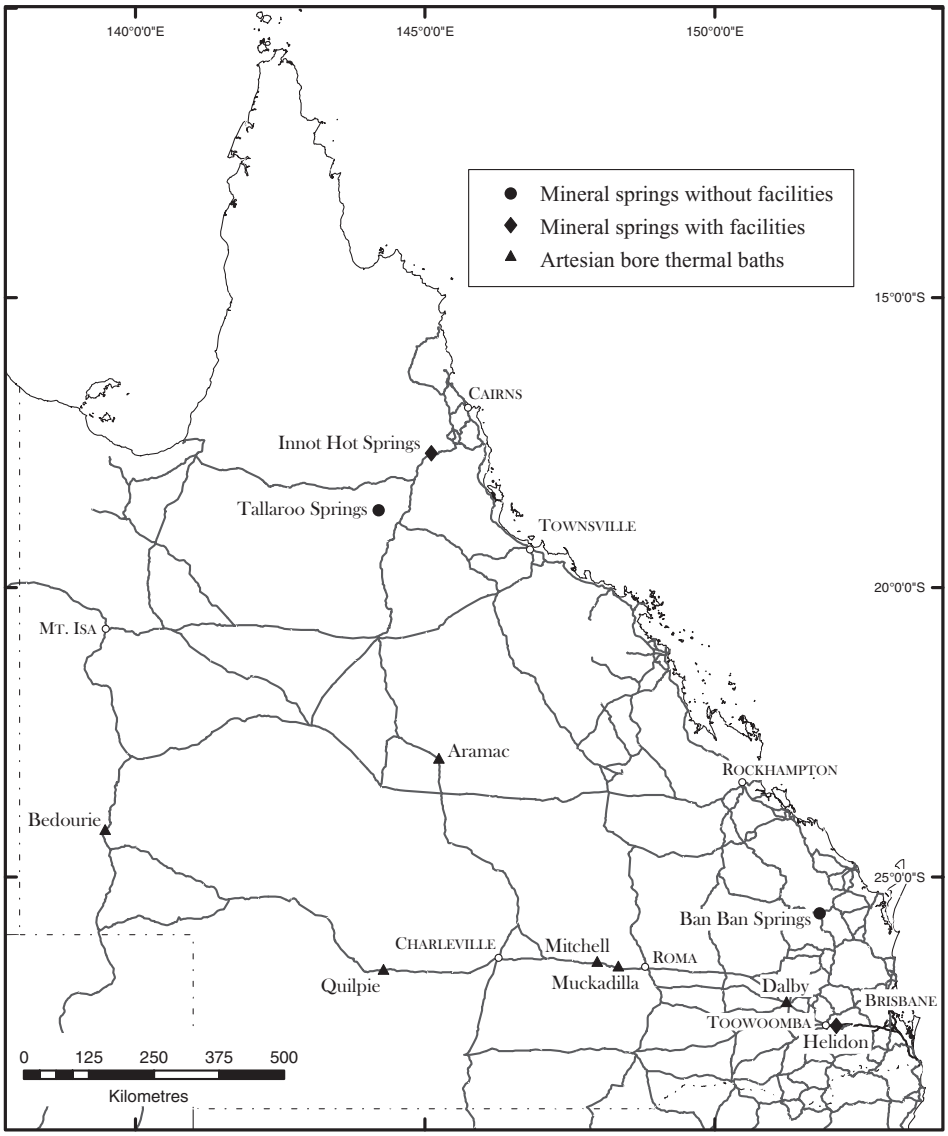

Figure 1 *The location of mineral springs and artesian bore thermal baths in Queensland.*

of the springs, Garbutt established a local sanitarium. By 1889, he had erected a two-storey house and three bath cubicles beside the springs. Garbutt advised the Queensland Under-Secretary of Lands that he was already attracting patients from the main centres in North Queensland. By 1895, the growing settlement was reported as having become 'a resort for many invalids'.[18] At the turn of the century, Garbutt's two-storey house had been converted into a hotel catering for visitors. By 1912, the small sanatorium could cater for ten patients. Ted Cronin, a Townsville entrepreneur, also took advantage of the purported medicinal properties of the spring water, and formed the Innot Spa Water Company. The tanked water was

Figure 2 *Visitors sampling the water at the Helidon Spa, c. 1918.*
Source: Image No. oai:bishop.slq.qld.gov.au:81655. Image reproduction courtesy of John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.

shipped to a bottling factory in Townsville, where it was exported to Europe until the outbreak of World War I.[19]

Successful boring for sub-artesian water commenced in Queensland in 1882, and over the next fifteen years an extensive program of artesian bore drilling was undertaken throughout the colony. In 1889, a bore was established at Muckadilla, a small railway stop located 516 kilometres north-west of Brisbane. The waters from this bore quickly gained a reputation as being 'radioactive' and for having curative powers. By 1900, primitive facilities had been built at Muckadilla, consisting of a standpipe that delivered water into a bath-house of one room, roughly constructed

(SYDNEY BULLETIN CARTOON)

Figure 3 *A cartoon from the Sydney Bulletin depicting the original bath-house at Muckadilla. Date unknown, but estimated to be c. 1910. The original bath-house was later replaced by a larger complex in 1916.*
Source: Muckadilla Hotel, *Famous Muckadilla Bore* (Brisbane: Biggs and Morcom for the Muckadilla Hotel, c. 1922), p. 21.

of galvanised iron (see Figure 3). Visitors could also soak in an open mud-bath near the artesian bore. The owners were charged a penny for each bath. By the outbreak of World War I, the Queensland Government Intelligence and Tourist Bureau was promoting Muckadilla as a place where its waters had cured 'many chronic cases of rheumatism', including that of Sir William Irvine, Premier of Victoria, who had visited the baths during the early 1900s.[20]

The growing popularity of Muckadilla prompted some investment in the village's accommodation facilities. By 1915, the small settlement contained a boarding house and a single storey wooden hotel. Both places of accommodation were reported as having bathrooms reticulated with the famous bore waters so that patrons could take full advantage of its curative properties during their visits.[21] Moreover, the bathing facilities at Muckadilla were improved following the Queensland Railways Department assuming control of the bore in 1912. By 1916, the old bath-house had been replaced by a more elaborate building containing four plunge baths (i.e. a bath large enough to immerse the entire body) and showers attached to a rest room. A swing worked by a pulley was used to lift invalids in and out of the plunge baths.[22] There was also a small open-air swimming pool, with a dressing room and shower attached. However, the Reverend R. Dey, who visited Muckadilla in

1924, was unimpressed with this swimming pool, observing that it was no more than a small 'hole' shored up by railway sleepers with a tiny dressing shed made of galvanised iron in which two people would have trouble dressing or undressing. He proclaimed that he would not have entered the Muckadilla swimming pool for 'all the tea in China'.[23]

Barcaldine also took advantage of artesian bore water heavily impregnated with minerals. An artesian bore had been established at the town in 1887, but its water flowed to waste, being unsuitable for steam train engines. Yet by 1891 the local doctor had recognised that the artesian bore water contained soda and potash, although he failed to convince the authorities to exploit the water's potential therapeutic benefits. Eventually, the local council decided in 1907 to make use of the artesian bore water by building a swimming pool. An invalids' pool, consisting of a plunge bath and shower in a separate compartment, was also constructed as part of the complex. Following complaints by the local doctor that invalids visiting the thermal baths were catching chills, the town's council built a dressing room for invalid patients at the complex in 1912. By the time Sir Matthew Nathan, the Queensland governor, visited the facility in 1921, the thermal baths had been further enhanced by the installation of electric lighting that allowed night bathing.[24]

Two other inland Queensland towns also tried to engage in health tourism. By 1914, Aramac boasted thermal baths filled with artesian water, and the town was promoting itself as a health resort, although it is doubtful that the town attracted many invalids because of its isolation and poor promotion by the local shire council.[25] Further south, Dalby, located on the western edge of the Darling Downs, had also become known as a therapeutic location because of its supposed 'healthy climate'. In 1900, the Queensland government built the Jubilee Sanatorium for consumptives at Dalby. Four years later, the Dalby Municipal Council leased a local artesian bore from the Water Supply Department and erected thermal baths, although the nature of the facilities at this complex could not be determined from the historical sources.[26] Even though visitation rates were not great, the Dalby Municipal Council decided in 1924 to replace the old thermal baths, which had fallen into a 'state of disrepair'. The new facilities contained plunge baths and showers, with each bathroom and waiting room illuminated by electricity. Visitors were charged threepence for a shower and sixpence for a plunge bath. The facility was staffed only by a caretaker.[27]

A feature worth noting about the development of Queensland's mineral and artesian spas between 1880 and 1920 was that their promoters resorted to science to establish the credentials of the water. Samples of the water were analysed, often by the Queensland Government Analyst, and the chemical compositions used in advertising material. The mineralised waters of Innot Hot Springs were rich in chloride of sodium and silica; Muckadilla's bore waters contained a high concentration of sodium carbonate and chloride of sodium; the composition of the Helidon spa-water was dominated by bicarbonate of soda, chloride of sodium and lithium carbonate.[28] This pattern mimicked the nineteenth-century trend in Europe, where the chemical composition of the waters of hundreds of health spas had been exactly defined and claims had been made about their specific curative powers. Indeed, the medical practitioner and publisher Ludwig Bruck, an immigrant to Australia from Silesia, claimed in 1891 that the waters of Innot Hot Springs had similar characteristics to those of Karlsbad in Bohemia.[29]

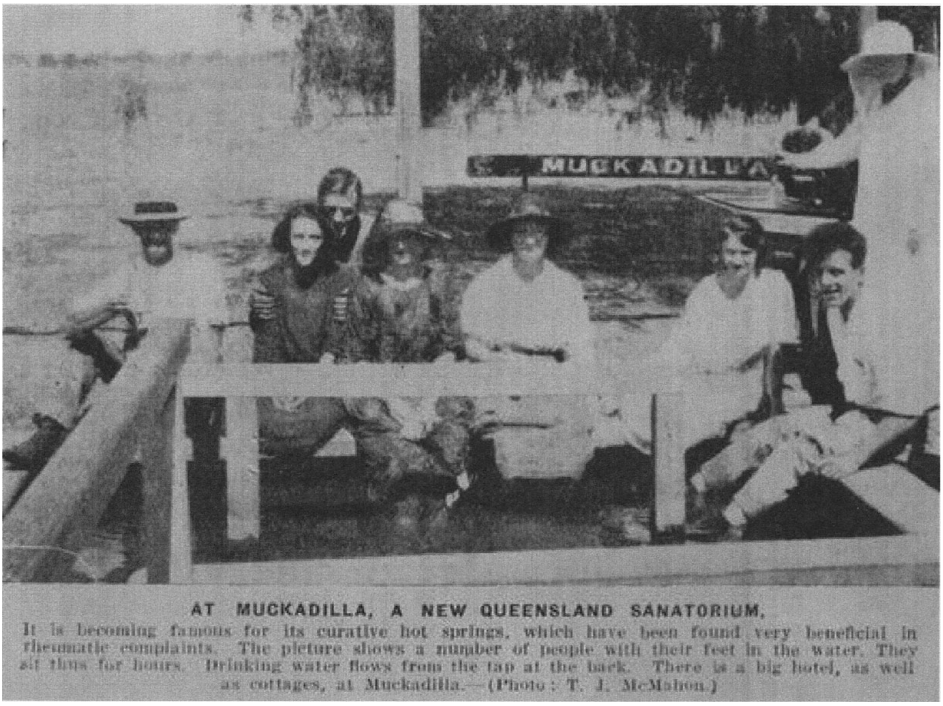

Figure 4 *Visitors soaking in the hot artesian waters at Muckadilla, 1924.*
Source: Sydney Mail, 17 December 1924. Image No. oai: bishop.slq.qld.gov.au:63523. Image reproduction courtesy of John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.

Treatment Procedures

The English physicians Herman Weber and F. Parkes Weber wrote that 'medical supervision is absolutely necessary' for patients 'taking the waters'. Some patients drank far too much mineral water; others took too many baths. Resident physicians were present at some of the larger spa resorts in the United States during the nineteenth century, while Bath attracted many physicians and fringe medical practitioners.[30] Resident spa doctors do not appear to have been present at any of the Queensland localities where visitors 'took the waters'. Indeed, patients at the Muckadilla Baths complained in 1921 that the lack of medical examination of potential patients for contagious diseases was endangering everyone. Instead, visitors to Muckadilla relied upon a nurse who staffed the bath-house between 1916 and 1939. She provided 'expert advice free of charge', although in 1921 the resident nurse was accused of favouring the more affluent clients and the less acute cases. Some advertising material for Muckadilla also promised the presence of a qualified masseur at the bath-house. However, this claim was revealed to be false in 1921, when one visitor from Sydney alleged that the Queensland government had engaged in misleading advertising in its brochures promoting the facility.[31]

Bathing or soaking limbs in the mineral impregnated waters was common at all localities (see Figure 4). Patients visiting Innot Hot Springs in the early 1890s were reported to be taking 'two or three baths of duration of 20 to 30 minutes' each day. Patrons at the Muckadilla bath-house were warned to take only two or

three baths a day, and to immerse themselves in the hot waters for ten minutes only. Cold showers were particularly recommended for those suffering insomnia or nervous troubles. Following their showers or baths, patients at Muckadilla were then wrapped up well in blankets and retired to a room for over an hour to cool down between the blankets.[32] Invalids visiting Muckadilla could also soak in mud. They were winched from wheelchairs to a wooden stool and pasted all over with mud, which was then allowed to bake dry in the sun.[33] Patients at Muckadilla were also advised to drink the bore water 'copiously', and several descriptions of the facility mention that its attendees or visitors to the town were drinking the bore water.[34]

A Cure for All Maladies

Soaking in the mineralised waters at Barcaldine, Innot Hot Springs and Muckadilla reputedly brought relief from rheumatism. Sir William Irvine, Muckadilla's most famous rheumatic visitor, was carried from the railway station when he first arrived, but at the completion of his treatment a month later he walked to the station and purchased his return ticket to Melbourne. According to the advertising material, other sufferers of rheumatism who soaked in Muckadilla's artesian waters received so much relief that they were able to discard their crutches and were even known to return to the most active exercise such as 'fence-vaulting and wood chopping'.[35] Such claims need to be treated with caution, given that they form part of the promotional material for the thermal baths. Moreover, not all visitors received relief from their ailments. The Queensland author William Corfield wrote that he began to suffer rheumatism in the hips in 1911. A visit to Innot Hot Springs gave him 'no relief' and trying the Muckadilla waters on several occasions led to 'no improvement'.[36]

The advertising literature promoted the mineral and artesian bore waters as cures for a range of other medical conditions involving joint and muscle pain. The water at Innot Hot Springs had 'valuable qualities' for the treatment of gout; cases of gout were being 'benefited to a marked degree' by soaking in Muckadilla's bore water; consuming the mineral spring waters from Helidon prevented gout, as they were believed to be diuretic, preventing the build-up of uric deposits.[37] Soaking in the waters from the mineral springs or artesian bores also supposedly relieved various 'nervous conditions': Dalby's artesian bore waters were promoted as curing 'nervous exhaustion'.[38] The 'severe pangs of indigestion' were eliminated by consumption of the mineral spring waters from Helidon. Muckadilla's bore water reputedly cured 'chronic digestive troubles'. Advertising literature for the Helidon Spa Water urged patients to drink its product daily and in 'unlimited quantities', as it was a 'powerful aid to digestion'.[39]

Failure to Flourish

Determining levels of visitation to Queensland's spa resorts is difficult, given the lack of comprehensive historical records on the topic. Occasionally, newspaper articles mentioned the number of patients in attendance at one of the centres: Muckadilla hosted eleven and twenty patients in April 1921 and February 1926 respectively; ten patients were present at Innot Hot Springs in February 1912.[40] This fragmentary information suggests that annual visitation levels were not high, and

were most likely in the hundreds or low thousands — and nowhere near the standard claim that '100,000 holidaymakers' visited the Hepburn-Daylesford locality each year by the late 1930s.[41] Moreover, the evidence suggests that many visitors were locals taking advantage of the facilities. Innot Hot Springs was particularly attractive to residents of North Queensland, while Muckadilla attracted plenty of visitors from Central Queensland, especially Rockhampton. A small number of visitors came from southern Australia.[42] One 'international' visitor is mentioned: E. Fletcher, a resident of New Guinea, recalled spending several weeks at Innot Hot Springs during 1913 in an attempt to obtain relief from neuritis.[43]

Just how well these places were promoted as destinations is also unclear, and this may have contributed to limited visitation rates. The Queensland Government Intelligence and Tourist Bureau did mention Innot Hot Springs, Muckadilla and Barcaldine in some of its publicity material.[44] However, no advertising material produced by the Bungil Shire Council about Muckadilla or by the Mareeba Shire Council concerning Innot Hot Springs could be located. The only local authority that appears to have engaged in publicity was the Dalby Town Council. Its advertising brochure claimed that in addition to the artesian baths, the town was 'recognized by medical men throughout Australia for its life-giving climate'.[45] Unlike the local authorities, the proprietor of the Muckadilla Hotel produced at least one promotional brochure. As well as highlighting the benefits of the artesian baths, the brochure boasted that Muckadilla enjoyed 'one of the most bracing and invigorating climates in Queensland, free from the enervating humidity incident to a coastal residence'. Visitors were advised that 'the invigorating air of the Western Plains can be drunk in by the believers in the fresh air cure by night as well as by day'. In addition, visitors to Muckadilla were urged to engage in other relaxing recreational pursuits and exercise if possible. Other attractions promoted included fishing, shooting kangaroos, wild duck and bustards (Plain turkey) or hunting wild pigs, although it is hard to image sufferers of severe rheumatism engaging in the latter pursuit. The owners of the Muckadilla Hotel would also arrange trips to neighbouring sheep stations if visitors wished to view aspects of the operation of a pastoral property, especially sheep shearing.[46]

The travel distances to Queensland spa resorts also probably contributed to their low visitation rates. Innot Hot Springs was particularly isolated. Before the building of the North Coast Railway linking Brisbane to Cairns in 1924, visitors from southern Australia wishing to reach Innot Hot Springs would have had to travel by ship to Cairns, then by rail for 64 kilometres to Mareeba, and then another 85 kilometres by a weekly buggy or coach over what was described in 1897 as 'an extremely bad road'. Depending upon the starting point, such a journey could take a week or even ten days. Moreover, the road journey to Innot Hot Springs in 1923 was still described as being 'very unsatisfactory' for an invalid.[47] Barcaldine was easier to reach, being linked to Rockhampton and Brisbane by rail after 1903, while Muckadilla and Dalby were connected by rail from Brisbane by 1890. Nevertheless, these centres were 1000–1250 kilometres from Sydney and 1500–1700 kilometres from Melbourne, so reaching them would have involved a lengthy journey by railway or ship and railway. Moreover, such journeys were expensive. Train fares from Melbourne to Toowoomba in 1922 were advertised as being between £7 and £12 depending upon class; another £2–£3 then had to be added to this cost to travel by rail from Toowoomba to Muckadilla. Accommodation costs for stays that could

last for several weeks would have made such journeys even more costly. Indeed, it is not surprising that Charles Conroy, the state member for the electorate of Maranoa, complained in state parliament in December 1930 that old-age pensioners suffering rheumatism could not afford the accommodation at Muckadilla and were forced to camp in tents near the town if they wished to use the bath-house.[48]

Consequently, despite the numerous claims of cures from soaking in or consuming the waters from Queensland's mineral springs or artesian bores, the places where these therapeutic activities occurred failed to flourish. In 1929, a journalist named Thomas McMahon visited Innot Hot Springs. He noted that although the springs had been discovered fifty years earlier, the settlement still remained a small village, with only a two-storey wooden hotel for visitors and some small nearby stores. Similarly, Muckadilla in 1930 still only contained the government bath-house, a boarding house and one hotel, similar to what had been in existence in 1915. Development at Helidon had also been limited to the establishment of a small swimming pool in 1926, so visitors could bathe in spa water as opposed to just drinking the mineralised water from the spa bore.[49] Health tourism apparently had not led to any significant growth in these settlements; the warm mineralised waters did not become a significant tourist drawcard. Indeed, no grand bath-houses, hotels, guesthouses or recreational facilities for invalids had been established in these towns. They contained limited therapeutic facilities, and remained very unsophisticated places compared with overseas spa resorts — particularly those in European cities, or Rotorua in New Zealand, which boasted a magnificent ornate bath-house situated in beautiful Government Gardens.

Waning Use

The historian Richard White asserts that 'the decline of the spa in the 1950s appears to have been a general phenomenon at least through the west'. He suggests that this trend occurred in Australia because of a combination of factors such as the pleasures of a holiday no longer needing an excuse (such as health improvement), the rise of family holidays that were not suited to spa resorts, and the growth in mass car ownership that promoted the rise of the beach holiday. Moreover, by the second half of the twentieth century, medical science and popular opinion had begun to discount the immediate medical usefulness of mineral waters. New drug cures for many ailments emerged from the advances made in the sciences of microbiology and biochemistry. In addition, physiotherapy, with its emphasis on specially designed exercises, began to assist those suffering from muscular injuries. Australians embraced the new medical breakthroughs and their promises of rapid cures. Spa treatments over several weeks and in hard-to-reach places in Australia did not fit well with an increasingly fast-paced lifestyle.[50]

The post-World War II decline in the popularity of spa resorts in other parts of Australia was also mirrored in Queensland, although perhaps it started a little earlier. Dalby was the first Queensland locality to abandon the promotion of 'taking the waters'. In 1938, the Dalby Town Council closed the artesian bore baths, claiming that the number of people who patronised the baths for curative purposes did not warrant keeping them open any longer. Barcaldine was still being described as a town 'noted for its mineral baths' in the mid-1930s, but interest in visiting Barcaldine to soak in its artesian waters probably declined during the late 1930s

and 1940s.[51] At Muckadilla, visitation began declining during the mid-1930s. One problem was the poor accommodation in the village, with the hotel being described in 1936 as having a 'poor and uninviting appearance'. The Railways Department eventually closed the bath-house in 1943, but leased the facility in the following year to the lessee of the Muckadilla Hotel, who reopened it for business. Patronage did not improve, and finally the buildings were removed from the site in 1957; three years later, the hotel burnt down. However, a modern hotel-motel has been built on the site of the former one, and the bore water is still used to fill the swimming pool used by the hotel's patrons — although there is no longer mention of any supposed curative properties of the water.[52]

Expansion, not closure, characterised Helidon's spa facilities, ensuring that the town went against the post-World War II trend of decline of spa resorts in other parts of Australia. The Helidon Spa Park grew in popularity after World War II, a consequence of increased vehicle ownership making it more accessible, especially by day-trippers from Brisbane. Eventually a caravan park was established at the complex in 1958 and the bathing pool was extended considerably during 1966 so that it became an artificial lake holding 800,000 litres of mineralised water. Hot and cold hydrotherapy baths were opened in 1973, but had fallen into disuse by 1994 because of concerns about radioactivity from the high lithium content of the water and bacterial contamination of the water. Following the closure of the Helidon Spa Park, only Innot Hot Springs contained limited facilities where tourists could still bathe in mineralised waters.[53]

The demise of Helidon's bathing facilities ironically coincided with a revival of spas in Australia and elsewhere in the Western world, a consequence of an upsurge in tourism that highlights leisure, relaxation and general recovery from the rigours of a fast-paced lifestyle.[54] Queensland was not immune from this trend, although the new facilities established in Queensland still remained relatively unsophisticated, and were not associated with any specific medical benefits. During the late 1990s and 2000s, several western Queensland towns decided to capitalise on the growing number of self-drive domestic tourists, especially 'grey nomads', visiting their districts. Mitchell, Bedourie and Quilpie, for example, all established complexes containing swimming pools filled with the local artesian water. Mitchell has marketed its facility as the 'Great Artesian Spa', where visitors are offered a 'relaxing and unique outback experience'. One pool has naturally heated waters from the Great Artesian Basin, while the other pool is designed for those who prefer a cooler experience. Beauty or therapeutic services are not available, however. Similarly, visitors can still soak in mineralised water of varying temperatures at the Innot Hot Springs Leisure and Health Park, but again the 'wellness' facilities associated with a more recent spa resort developments in southern Australia or traditional European spa resort are absent.[55]

Conclusion

European beliefs in the benefits of hydrotherapy contributed to the establishment of small spa resorts and the commercial extraction of mineral water in Queensland between 1880 and 1920, just as in other parts of the world colonised by Europeans. Yet the presence of mineral springs or hot artesian waters did not become a vital tourist drawcard, with considerably fewer visitors attracted to these more remote

sites in Queensland than to the mineral spas at Hepburn Springs and Daylesford in Victoria or the artesian baths at Moree in New South Wales. The Queensland spa resorts failed to flourish, remaining unsophisticated places offering limited or no therapeutic assistance, modest accommodation facilities and few recreational opportunities, unlike their European, North American or New Zealand counterparts. By the early 1950s, 'taking the waters' had waned in Queensland, although the practice never completely disappeared, with individuals continuing to seek out the warm waters at Innot Hot Springs and Helidon. In their most recent incarnation, the state's newest spa resorts in Western Queensland are drawing upon the claim of engaging in an 'outback experience', thereby demonstrating the longevity and flexibility of the spa resort as a tourist attraction and as a place of recreation with possible healthy consequences.

Acknowledgements

I am particularly grateful to Ms Sandi Robb, who acted as a research assistant on this project.

Endnotes

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