



# COCKSCOMB VETERANS BUSH RETREAT INC

A SHORT HISTORY FROM 1997 TO 2018





**Bruce Acutt** made Cockscomb Veterans Bush Retreat possible, a haven for so many over the years who have needed a special place to go when suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Cockscomb wishes to thank all of **our volunteers** who attend every Tuesday.

We also wish to thank our **Patron Rose Swadling** for 21 years of assistance and connections to supply and donations

Cockscomb wasn't built in a day, many thousands of hours has been provided by so many people and organisations, you only need to compare the original railway camp wagon in 1997 to the aerial photo of Cockscomb taken in January 2018

**Cockscomb wishes to thank the following businesses and individuals for their donations and assistance in these major projects**

### **The Bruce Acutt Center**

Michelle Landry MP  
Australian Lions Foundation  
Yeppoon Lions Club  
Emu Park Lions Club  
Caves & District Lions Club  
Gracemere Lions Club  
Rockhampton Fitzroy River Lions Club  
Rockhampton Lions Club  
Rose Swadling  
Rocky's Own Transport Co.  
CQ Crane Hire  
Luke Hinton Concreting  
Athol Boto Contractors  
Webby's Transport

### **Solar Panels**

Power unit - DVA grant funding  
Troy Lobergeiger - The Power Shop

### **Bore, pump and solar infrastructure**

Barnes Bros Drilling – Alan Barnes, Arthur Barnes, Clay Weston  
Solarain - Stewart Dunlop  
Livingston Shire Council  
Inverness & Keppel Bay Sailing Club Community Grants  
QLD Country Musc Inc  
Shane Nipperess - Centrepont Finance Yeppoon  
Brooke Roberts - Meridian Accounting  
Ron Milne - Milne Bros  
Tim & Catriona - McCall McCall Consulting  
Col, Gail & Nathan Stevens - Lake Mary Pines  
Ian Weigh Motors – Natasha Heiniger  
John & Dee Gavel - Rosslyn Bay Fish Market  
Gordon Taylor - Central Qld Plasterers  
Shannon Lamb - Kev's fastening Supplies

## **The History from 1997 to ... 2018**

### **COCKSCOMB VETERANS BUSH RETREAT**

#### **Inc IA36116**

Cockscomb, a dream that came true... **Stan Brown, Bob Richardson (Bunker), Jim Drever, Dennis Murray (Decd), Ivan Cullen (Decd) and Mick Cook** were the original Veterans who met up with **Bruce Acutt** to look at Bruce's farm and the site for the Veterans.



Bruce said that the land was called Cockscomb when he bought it. I can remember a small board on the fence near the five ways and our green sign post that read 'Cockscomb'. I'm just sorry I didn't take a photo of it.

After some discussions within the ranks and with Bruce, he offered the Veterans the use of a section of his land on some 60 acres. An old gold mining and farming community, approx 30 km from Rockhampton, half way between Rocky and the Capricorn coast. This was considered to be an ideal location and the gracious offer was accepted.

#### **From TROVE**

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/38478938?>

This extract is copied and pasted directly from Trove  
**Mount Wheeler was named The Cockscomb by Captain Flinders, Ki-i-e by the natives, and was called Mount Wheeler after the first prospector who worked the country. Frederick Wheeler was Sub-Inspector of Native Police, and was stationed near Marlborough, some 70 miles from Rockhampton. I doubt if ever he was near Mount Wheeler. Wheeler left Queensland in 1876. He settled in Italy, and died at Rome**

#### **First official meeting of Cockscomb Veterans**

The First meeting was held next to the only building on site, a red lead railway Camp Wagon, in about **July 1997** and was attended by **Dennis Murray (decd), Ivan Cullen (decd), Ray Lawson (decd), Chas Hilliard, Mick Cook, Paul Muscat (Spider), Barry Gill, Phil Aplin and Stan Brown**



Then Bruce said to the Veterans 'what are you going to call this group?' The conciseness of opinion was to call it Cockscomb Veterans Retreat. Bruce didn't like the word Retreat because it inferred medical help was available. So the name was then suggested to read **Cockscomb Veterans Bush Camp**. Years later when the name was registered with Incorporated Associations, it became **Cockscomb Veterans Bush Retreat IA36116**. Before this time I had put up the website and called it **veteranretreat**.

*Cockscomb is a place where fellow veterans could go, when things were getting tough, or when they felt the need to be out of it and alone for a while, or the need to lean on someone for moral support, or find someone who could walk the walk, talk the talk and understand the burden. It was promoted as a good place to be amongst the Veteran community.*



Bruce pointed out a **unique ecosystem plant** that only grows in the Mt Wheeler area. This particular plant with a small purple flower called **Stackhousia tryonii** is occasionally seen after rain on the area of Cockscomb and it accumulates more nickel in its leaves than any other plant in Australia. If found or identified it should be protected.





A permanent awning was needed off the camp wagon. **Denis Hubbard**, a Veteran and a carpenter from Rockhampton, measured up for five posts wide because of the size of the spans and the weight on bearers.

Trees were selected for the job and approval given from Bruce to cut them down.

Then the hard job started, drilling the holes for the posts. **Denis Murray (Decd)** a local Veteran from Yeppoon leaning on the crowbar and **Graham Jensen** sitting on the jib while **Ivan Cullen (Decd)** worked his tractor. But along the way, either the ground was too hard or someone else overruled and said four posts will do. All posts were set in 600mm concreted holes.

With the posts up and hardwood and iron from a demolished house the first section of the awning was in place.



I have a feeling that the original concrete water tank was put in by Bruce when he and his boys used the property for recreation. I remember assisting **Brian Donnerly Ex Engineers** to put in place our first poly water tank donated by **Adrian Browne (Decd)** from **BetaPoly** on Lakes Creek Road. The truck that delivered the tank had a jib, so we strapped the concrete tank and lifted it full of water to its present resting place near the Ba-Me-Bah.

The camp wagon had a colour change in Feb 2000. **Graham Swadling** provided all the equipment and from memory the paint came at a good price too. But as usual there was only a small band of grinders and painters.







A really dusty couple of days. All the red-lead was ground off and the carriage was undercoated and top coated and trimmed in Heritage colours. The main



### **The Old Cockscomb**

At times I think that the basic Cockscomb had a special friendly atmosphere to it. We had shade, we had water and we were able to cook on a BBQ and it was a well known fact that you could visit and not be expected to do anything, if you wanted to you could just sit and watch the mountain.

There were occasions when the parties were so loud and next day was very quiet.



painting took place on Valentines Day 14<sup>th</sup> Feb 2000. Not a very romantic date said Helen Quigley (Decd). Graham also painted the roof with a sun reflector to try to keep the inside of the wagon cool.



Because nobody from the new crew knew what the sign post down by the Caretakers house meant, it was taken down. But there was a lot of history and some wonderful nights around the fire when the **MacDamia Brothers** visited Cockscomb. **Stan Brown** and **Bob Richardson** were the brothers and great entertainers who lived in Scotland and they had heard that the Australian men were not as well endowed as the Scotts so came out for a visit. Dressed in their kilts and colours with accents to go they burst into the camp area swinging their horse like ding-a-lings made from several stuffed long socks. The roars of laughter





and the squeals of excitement coming from some of the ladies including **Carol West** who at the time was Bruce's secretary have all been lost with the removal of the sign.

Did you know we even had a couple of **native bee hives** until somebody decided the logs needed cutting and burning. **Possums Place** still exists, but in it's hay day mum and baby did live near the house and fruit was left out at night.



An on going problem is collections of **donations of material** dumped on site. Some sort of control is needed to only allow usable items. We much prefer good hearted people to contact us and tell us what they have.

### The Main Kitchen



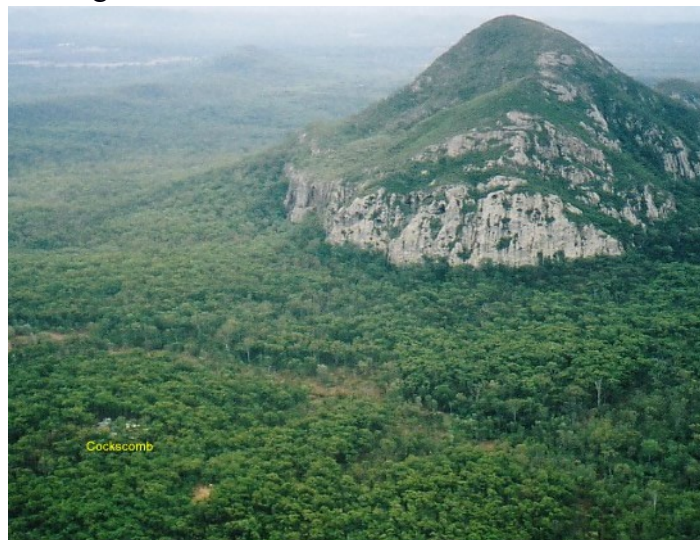
**CSR Concrete** was experimenting with no reinforcing steel in flooring and Cockscomb had a number of slabs poured as demo floors using fibreglass in the mix. The prospect of building a kitchen was looked at and it was decided to place a log barrier and pole uprights and in fill, then pour a **CSR concrete** floor. **Tony Dawes (Decd)** is on the

shovel and **Ivan Cullen (dec'd)** on the tractor. The original kitchen had a brick BBQ and a wet back to heat water. An ingenious method of a beer keg on the roof fed water through the wetback to the sink. The BBQ was built by **Graham Jensen's son Heath and his boss.**

The BBQ wasn't overly successful, smokey and greasy and was eventually removed when the floor began to crack and slip towards the mountain. The floor was restored and a permanent bench built in its place.



The large slab table was milled from one tree. The miller got one slab, Bruce another and Cockscomb the



third. The table was in the sun and really needed to be covered even though it was painted with special sun protection paint. An extension of the awning from the railway wagon over the table had to be built. More trees, timber and iron. Mind you, some of the iron was full of holes and rust, but it kept the sun off.



Building materials were donated and sourced from across the whole area. One of our Veterans worked for **TF Woollam Constructions** and said that if someone visited the yard and talked to the boss, we may benefit. I walked through the yard and pointed out the items we could use and a few days later seven truck loads of building products arrived. Most of the bricks used as pavers, the slate in the Bar and timber, nails, bolts and screws and lots of other stuff.

**Bunnings Hardware** donated a huge amount of hardwood flooring which found its way into the **Coral building**.



Coral originated as a caravan donated by **Tony Dawes (Decd)** and was progressively added too over a number of years before being destroyed in the cyclone and has been replaced by the new ablutions block donated by one of the Mines. **Wilson and Hart** gave us timber and nails & screws and under the guidance of **Allan Evans** and **Dan Connolly**, both Carpenters, building progressed.



The **Uc dai Loi house** was to be covered in timber fitches, but getting enough at the time was a problem. So **Graham Jensen's** son in law **Dale Howland** who was a carpenter, constructed the frame and **Allan Evans** was running A&S Timber products at Yeppoon at the time, and he arranged enough Coppers logs to clad the building.

**Sarg Lyons (Decd) and Bindi Yow Yeh (Decd)** lined the inside walls with 3 ply sheeting donated by Laminex Building materials store in Kawana Queensland

The doors came from the Rockhampton Southside Police Station via **John Webber** a Veteran carpenter working on the Police renovations. Some of the Veterans wives and partners made the curtains, and the building was wired for 12Volt lighting by **Bob Richardson** and powered by its own solar system. The original house had a horse trough and hitching rail out front, a hollow log for a weary Veteran to rest on and room in the hollow section for his dog to rest.



The site for the **And A Wakey House** started out as a huge pile of timber. When 42RQR left the Archer Street Depot in Rockhampton, a number of buildings became available. **Tony Dawes (dec'd)** and **Graham Jensen** worked together to try to get one of the buildings released for Cockscomb. A long procedure involving the Rockhampton City Council, the Defence Dept and finally through the office of the local member **Kirsten Livermore MP**, they obtained the building and it was transported by **Rockys Own** and placed on its new foundations and became '**And A Wakey House**'.



**Bob Richardson** worked at the CREB (Now Ergon) and was able to organise a street light pole and a digger and the Cockscomb **flagpole** appeared.



Around the flagpole stone masons working for the Rockhampton Regional Council designed and built the **sandstone memorial**.



**Graham Jensen** came up with the design for the bar seating area, with a center pitched log roof and a camouflage net over the top. More recently it has been sheeted in custom orb.



The toilet block, along with a septic system was built around a no longer used **Lakes Creek Railway Station** and a steel tank stand was constructed beside it. Having a 15,000 litre poly tank on top of the stand worked out well but because it was not engineered, it couldn't be looked upon as safe.



There was a time that **one of the caretakers** built his own quite elaborate campsite called "**Back to Basics**" just down the slope toward the mountain. Ray Stanley, his wife and son lived there for a couple of years.

For a while all was well, but as time progressed animosity and differences of opinion began to brew and in the end he left to live elsewhere. A number of



items and infrastructure was left behind and used in other projects.

The front brick entrance wall was made from kiln bricks left behind by Ray.

At that stage it was decided that a permanent caretakers rooms would be built for ongoing times.

The caretaker's building started out as a caravan donated by the Emu Park Caravan Park. Then an annex was built, a shed like roof over the top of the van, a patio and some partition walls, and concrete flooring were all added. Then the white ants had a feed and although poison was laid they made a bit of a mess.





The caretakers cottage has since been renovated and painted and tidied up to a good living standard. The original caravan was sold and the renovations have brought the Caretakers Cottage up to a far better living standard.

A need for a **second kitchen** area near the front gate was constructed, and having large portable BBQs made cooking for Vietnam Veterans Day, Christmas Parties and other Veteran occasions far easier and less congestion at the Main Kitchen.



A plaque above the second kitchen reads the '**Denis Murray Kitchen**', and was consecrated by Cookie by tipping a can of beer over the sign.

**Cockscomb wives and partners** have payed an enormous price looking after the whims of their partners but also being roped in to cook and clean at all the functions many hands made lighter work. Margaret Grieves, Ann Evans, Rose Cullen, Rose



Swadling, Liz Acutt, Pauline Aplin, Kathy Jensen, Krys Dawes, Helen Quigley (Decd), Kay Murray, Di Stanley, Julie Richardson, Mary Elson and probably many more that I can't remember.

Now one of those ladies **Rose Cullen** worked with Bruce on the Welfare of veterans. She also did a lot of work re welfare of veterans when not with Bruce.

The saga of generators was spread out over years. From small to extremely large generators.

**Wilson and Hart in Rockhampton** had a 415Volt 6cylinder diesel generator which at the time the members thought that they could run reticulated electricity to all buildings. It was big enough to power all of Cawarral.





**Robroy MacGregor** a Veteran friend of mine working in the field of Emergency Power and installing gensets at airports and hospitals, donated his time and an Onan Genset and took the large yellow genset away.

The Onan ran well for many years, then needed repairs, so the Honda 17KVA was purchased with DVA funding. This genset has worked hard and an underground system of reticulation was installed.

At the same time a solar Remote Area Power Supply (RAPS) had been installed with panels and batteries and connected to the electrical system. Along with the Genset it was hoped that there should always be power on hand.



For so many years Cockscomb struggled along with small donations, raffles and a lot of voluntary effort. But things have changed I think it is the change in management and the overall need to grow and make Cockscomb a better place and to encourage other groups to use the facilities.

You have probably noticed that **Rose Swadling** is seen in many photos. Rose is our **Patron** and she and Graham have helped in many ways with fundraising, organising transport, donations of items and helping out on special occasions. When we were looking at stand alone solar on buildings, it was Rose who arrived one day with a panel.



A thank you to the **Robinson Family** for the special donation to have a licensed shed builder erect the 9x9

meter shed now called **Robinson's Roost**. This shed is vital for safe storage of equipment used to maintain Cockscomb.



**Jono Elson** a Veteran in Rocky was renovating his back yard and the pine tree behind the Uc Dai Loi House was transplanted and has survived the cyclones. Other trees in that area were planted by **Gene Owens**, mostly fruit trees, now some are established and producing.

**History can change at any time**, sometimes for the good and sometimes with unfortunate ends.

Unfortunately Bruce and Liz split up and of course as part of the settlement Cockscomb was to be sold. But Bruce can be commended for his offer to survey one (1) Hectare of land off the original Cockscomb block and donate it to the Cockscomb Veterans Bush Retreat Inc. It was surveyed by **Rod Schlencker** and approved by **Livingstone Council**. It is there for the community of Veterans and Emergency Services and all others who wish to use the facility.

Remembering that **Vietnam Veterans are getting older and slower** and if we are lucky we may get another five to eight years before we will need another group to take on the continuation of the Dream.



There was a time when Cockscomb paid Bruce a small sum to help him pay the Rates and Insurance



It has been reported that Bruce is holding a map of Cockscomb. Where in actual fact it was a specially bound edition of the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Task Force area in Vietnam and was presented to Bruce so he knew what we were talking about when we said we spent a week at Xuan Loc.



**Water** was always a problem and great care was and still is needed to ensure there is no waste. Often during the dry, hot summer months water needed to be bought to fill the tanks. There is a system of pumps and pipes and a number of poly water tanks all connected together. Every roof area catches water.

Cockscomb Veterans Bush Retreat has had a welcome relief with the donation of services to provide a more reliable water supply, thanks to long term member **Lester Soblusky (42<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Piper)** and **Barnes Bros Drilling**.

**Barnes Bros Drilling** divined the area for the most suitable spot to drill then bored down and hit water at

55 feet but continued on to 120 feet producing 500 gallons per hour of good drinking water. The power of a Diviner has changed the way we think about water. How can we thank Barnes Brothers for donating such a good bore?



So the many years of carting water is over and it is a relief to have water. It is now connected to a solar pump and to the main water tanks. A job well done!

Thanks to **Trish Bowman** and her article in the Capricorn Coast Mirror, a consortium of businesses and individuals got together and donated enough to connect the bore to the water tanks. Our heart felt thanks go to each of you for this special project.





Fires and Cyclones have taken a toll on Cockscomb. But now with better fire breaks and less trees near buildings, things should be safer. Cyclone Marcia caused the worst damage in the life of Cockscomb. However, good came of it and with the assistance of the community, Emergency Services, Veterans and our politicians, Cockscomb has started a new chapter.

### **Vietnam Veterans Day**



Every year on the **18<sup>th</sup> August at 1100hours** the Cockscomb community remembers the sacrifice of 524 Australian men and women killed during the Vietnam War and we remember all the local Veterans who have passed away since the war.

Center place at the foot of the flagpole a memorial holds the names of more than 100 Veterans including one who served with the New Zealand army. Allan Young 43556 was brought up in Mt Morgan and at the time of the war he was backpacking in New Zealand. His number was drawn from the Australian barrel and he asked to join NZ Army instead of returning to Australia. At the end of his two years he remained in NZ and married a lady from Christchurch. His sisters still live in Queensland.



**Harry Gympie Mimi 16249** was a well know Veteran member of the Rockhampton community. He was well known at Stockland for his colourful clothes and hats. He died on the 8<sup>th</sup> December 2015 and on the 18<sup>th</sup> August 2016 **Kerri-Anne Mesner** a local

artist and journalist presented a sketch of Harry to his family which is now housed in the Cockscomb Museum in the Bruce Acutt Center.

### **2018 Power and Water and a new building**

It all happens in leaps and bounds. Up the page you read about Barnes Brothers boring for water. Next is a better power supply and a new generator.

But before that **Michele Landry MP** found a prepacked Military shed of the type used in Vietnam as HQ buildings. This particular shed was due to go to Vietnam in July 1971, but never got there. Packed like a giant meccano each box had its own instructions, nuts and bolts and when put together formed a 20 x 9 meter galvanised shed.

It arrived on site in six large hardwood packing cases delivered by Rockys Own.

A slab of concrete to build the shed on comes at a hefty price. **Lions Clubs International** paid to have a professional concreter put the slab down



**Lions Clubs International Supporting  
Cockscomb Veterans Bush Retreat  
Australian Lions Foundation  
Yeppoon Lions Club  
Emu Park Lions Club  
Caves & District Lions Club  
Gracemere Lions Club  
Rockhampton Fitzroy River Lions Club  
Rockhampton Lions Club**



The construction of the shed involved a team of volunteers, professionals and members of the Army.



The new shed will be **officially opened on the 17<sup>th</sup> February 2018 at 11am** by our Member for Capricornia, Queensland, **Ms Michelle Landry MP**



Although I had said that we had installed a RAPS power system after all the renovations the old system was too small.

A new Solar system is being installed and the old system will be reinstalled on the Bruce Acutt Center



The new Solar power system includes a more up to date battery storage system and later around March a new Diesel generator will replace the old 17KVA Petrol model

With more reliable solar power, Cockscomb purchased a refurbished i5 computer from **WorkVentures**. This came with Windows 10, Microsoft Office 2010, monitor, keyboard and mouse.

I said 2018 had a big start, the latest addition is a **SkyMesh NBN** internet connection which will provide reliable communications to the outside world.

**Military Exercises** at Shoalwater Bay are held every two years. Cockscomb invited the training military

organizations to assist with the development of Cockscomb.

The US Marines and Navy have left their mark and have had a good day out at the same time. The wood box, the fence around the property, some garden beds, general clean ups made easy by many hands in a much shorter time.

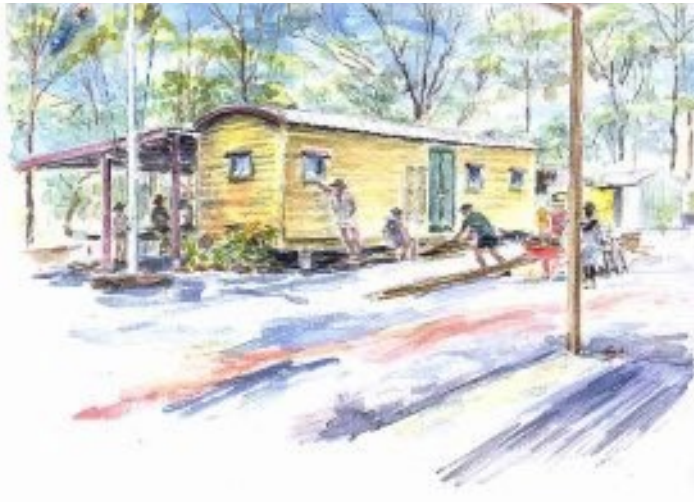


**Ray Harbourne** painted the Cockscomb motif on the bricks under the awning and if we have any budding painters the motif needs a repaint.

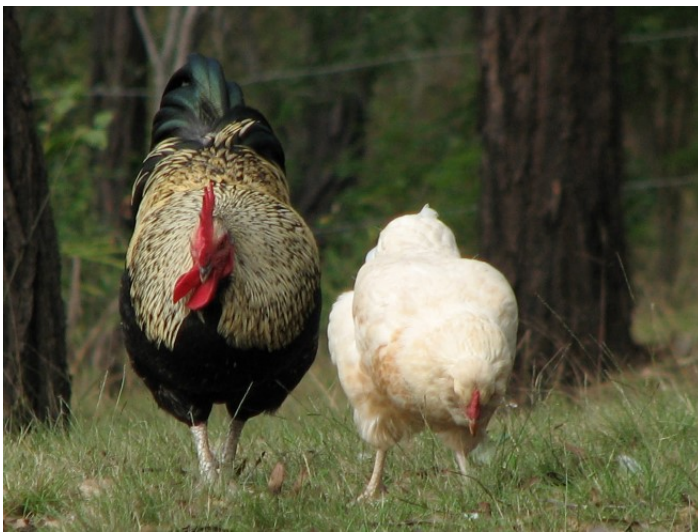
We have had a number of Artists visit, one left his impression of the workings of Cockscomb in 19 water colour paintings. **Bruce Weightman (Decd)** was a friend of Gene Owens and painted us into history







**Gorgeous George and Pinky** roamed around Cockscomb for many years. They were the morning alarm clocks.



### Nothing is wasted

The timber in the packing cases that contained the new Bruce Acutt Center has been put to good use too. A number of special Hardwood Tables have been made by **Jeff Meiland** ex 9 RAR Veteran and have become raffle prizes.



### Mid 2017 the Friday Night Dinners Started

We have had good social evenings and some very enjoyable food. Cooking is not left to one person. After deciding on the theme members put their hand up to volunteer dishes. The night is a fundraiser too. Each member pays \$10 to participate. Some of the dinners have been curry night, Hot Pot night, Roast night, Corned meat and trimmings, Bar B Q night and one of our ladies, Amy is a dab hand at cooking and making sweets. Jellies, apple crumble, banana cake and Pav.

### A little history from this area and Camm's Road

Camm's Road was named after the Camm Family who lived in the Cawarral District many years ago. Mrs Camm was a Matron and Mid Wife for the district. At the time Gold had been discovered in and around Mt Wheeler.

About mid 1868. A 12-year-old boy found one of the largest nuggets ever found in the area on the 14th July 1869. The nugget weighed 258oz. Another boy found a 178oz nugget the following day.

By 1889, Cawarral was a flourishing township with a population of 1000 - all supported by the Gold mines. Mt Wheeler gold was obtained easily and quickly. The field proved not to be extensive and the population soon dwindled down to less than 100. Gold is still to be found in the area. **There are still open shafts and care should be exercised when walking near old workings.**



**Cockscomb has memorabilia on sale.** One of the first items was to design a logo for shirts and caps. Over the years many have been sold.

If you have enjoyed reading this history and know of anything missing or incorrect, please let me know via the email in the footer. I'm not a scholar in literacy, but I've tried hard to make it interesting– Thank You