



Historical Notes: Vilele Plantation

Bauer & Sons, Bloomfield River

From the Ted Ward Collection

The most northerly mill in the early days was on the Bloomfield River. A large sum was expended on sugar machinery and cultivation but without success. Subsequently the mill was sold to a southern firm and transferred to Knockroe near Childers, The original owner of the mill was named Bauer. [Queensland Sugar Industry]

We landed at a substantially built wharf erected by Bauer & Co. on the north bank of the river about two miles from the mouth, a well built tramway connecting it with the mill. Some distance back from the wharf a spacious and substantial sugar house has been erected, the tramway running through the centre with raised platforms on each side containing over 100 tons of sugar awaiting shipment.

Leaving the wharf the tramway traversed the main street of the new town of Ayton, which at present consists of a Chinese garden and two public houses....Leaving the township the line bisects the estate known as Captain Lake's selection.....

After a drive of four miles we arrived at the mill, which, with surrounding buildings, constitutes quite a thriving and well-built township. The mill was built by Mirrlees & Co. of Glasgow and is capable of manufacturing 10 tons of sugar a day. [Queenslander 6-1-1886, page 58]

Bauer and Sons' Vilele plantation, Bloomfield River has 10 miles of permanent and portable tramway. The wharf is eight miles upstream and is the terminus of the railway belonging to and leading to Vilele. The company's tramway passes through the township thence through the square mile of land formerly owned by Capt. Lake towards Vilele, which is five miles distant from the wharf. [Queenslander 27-1-1886, page 349]

Acknowledgments

These notes have been reproduced from the research typescript prepared by Ted Ward, a Brisbane railfan. Attribution for the notes is as shown on the typescript and extracts are reproduced as found in the collection notes.

This note could have been included with CTN_13 on the Mossman Mill but has been separated as Vilele Plantation seemingly operated with its

own tramway/mill and Mossman Mill appears not to have extended its track this far north. While Ted's notes did not include any photos from the plantation/mill, some are available on the web (see next page).

Researchers should always check primary sources before relying upon information extracted from journals, newspapers, etc., as errors may have been introduced through typing/retyping, etc.

The best resource for more recent research on Northern Queensland tramway activities is the Light Railway Research Society of Australia.

<http://www.lrrsa.org.au>

A collection of drawings and locomotive/rolling stock photographs, etc., from the region is accessible from the online Queensland Rail Heritage Image Collection:

<http://QldRailHeritage.com/mrqc/>

<http://www.zelmeroz.com/CaneSIG/>



Google Maps image showing location of the Bloomfield River (top centre) relative to Mossman and Port Douglas (lower right), a distance of roughly 68 km as a crow flies. [110921]

Vilele Plantation in a Google search

A Google search on 21 September 2011 provided links to some additional details and a number of photographs from the 1880s.

The Douglas Shire Historical Society has a page on Bloomfield and the Bloomfield River area,

<http://www.Douglas-shire-historical-society-org/bloomfield.htm>

1882: Frederick Bauer and two sons began the Bloomfield River Sugar Company. The plantation was named Vilele.



Buildings on the Vilele Plantation, Bloomfield River District, c 1884. State Library of Queensland, John Oxley Library image 103848 (<http://hdl.handle.net/10462/deriv/90816>), downloaded from <http://commons.wikimedia.org/>, 21 September 2011. The image clearly shows the design of the 4 wheel cane trucks: a flat platform, presumably of timber, with upright timber ends.

Library Description: Buildings on the Vilele Plantation, Bloomfield River district, ca. 1884 The Vilele Plantation was founded on the northern bank of the Bloomfield River by the Bloomfield River Sugar Company and the manager was Frederick Bauer. By 1884 over 200 acres had been planted with cane and the property had its own sugar mill. By 1885 the company was in financial trouble because of depressed sugar prices and in 1886 was taken over by Weary Bay Sugar Company. The Vilele Plantation was closed down completely in 1890. [sic]

1885: The first full scale crushing at the mill.

1886: There was a steam sawmill and ten miles of tramway including portable track. This was the first railway in the Shire. ...

1888: The crush of 314 acres was only a quarter of the mill's capacity. 30 Europeans, 110 Chinese and 132 Malays and Javanese were employed

1890: The sugar enterprise closed for economic reasons.

A more detailed time line history has been published as a Bulletin and is available from the Douglas Shire Historical Society.



Bloomfield River Sugar Company Mill c 1887. State Library of Queensland, John Oxley Library Image 103550, downloaded from <http://www.douglas-shire-historical-society.org/bloomfield.htm/>, 21 September 2011. Note what appears to be an 0-4-0T locomotive with a rake of 4 wheel cane trucks on the right.

Library Description: View of the Bloomfield River Sugar Company Mill, ca. 1887. Image shows the mill buildings framed between two tall trees. A dog sits in the foreground.