

I had by then spent 13 days in New Zealand reporting about its science, and had kept in constant telephonic touch with the Antarctic Base Headquarters in Christchurch. On 9 November 1969 I learnt that the special radar survey aircraft would still not be available for another 10 days, and as there was nothing further for me to report from New Zealand, I looked for other subjects abroad. I had heard that at Bluff in the South Island, where there was surplus hydro-electricity, bauxite was being smelted into aluminium metal. The bauxite (naturally occurring aluminium oxide) was mined on a very large scale from an open-cast bauxite mine at Weipa in the North of Australia by COMALCO, a company which had large British interests. I decided that this would be a good story, and I telegraphed my Foreign Editor; he agreed.

The mine is situated 15° degrees south of the Equator in the York Peninsula, North Queensland, and to reach it from Christchurch, New Zealand, I had to fly first to Auckland, then to Sydney, Brisbane, further north to Cairns and then on by private company plane to Weipa, a total distance of 4800 km. Weipa bauxite was discovered by a geologist of the Australian Conzinc Rio Tinto Company in 1955, and it has been estimated that the mine contains one quarter of all known reserves of bauxite for smelting aluminium. It is run by the Commonwealth Aluminium Company, COMALCO, in which the British Rio Tinto Zinc had at the time a 42 % interest, the American Kaiser Aluminium 50%, and the remainder held by the Australian company.

The Weipa Mine was as immense in all respects as the Mount Tom Price iron ore mine on the north-west coast of Australia which I had seen [See Title 134]. A man working at Weipa received a weekly wage of £ 100 Australian pounds, a huge wage in those days. With a temperature of 32 °C at 08.00 hours, I was not surprised to be informed that the average consumption of beer per man per day was 1.87 Imperial gallons, a truly Gargantuan statistic. Mammoth shovels scrape up the bauxite ore and dump it into 100 ton trucks which move their load to a central tip. Then a conveyor belt transfers it directly to ships at a rate of 3300 tons per hour and the loading is completed during one tide.

But Weipa was also historically interesting, as in 1602, the first landings on the Australian Continent by a European, a Dutchman, took place there. Then in 1870 an Aboriginal Mission was founded, but had to be moved when bauxite mining started, and the Company had to build a modern equivalent housing estate for them. I saw it and found it better than the townships built by the South African Government for their Bantu natives, which I had also inspected. [See Title 171] My story, airmailed to Fleet Street, was never published, 10000 km travelled in vain! To me this was proof of the wealth of the *Daily Telegraph*, able to throw away a story, that must have cost £ 1000 at least to find, visit and report.