

R.I.P Ron Kitching 1929-2011

– pioneer, explorer, author, family man, entrepreneur, scholar.

A print friendly copy of this report can be found at:

<http://think-right.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/rip-ron-kitching.pdf>

I first met Ron Kitching in 1966 – he took me to inspect a copper prospect called Mount Colin near Cloncurry. We struck a chord that day and since then our lives seem to have crossed many times over his long life. I never failed to learn something useful or interesting from him.

Ron was never luke warm – he was either engrossed and enthusiastic, or indifferent, or fiercely opposed.

He was engrossed and enthusiastic about exploration, drilling, soils, pastures, cattle, water, the principles of freedom, sound money, classical liberalism, the history of the universe and the battle for carbon sense.

Ron was born in Gin Gin, Queensland in 1929. Ron's father was a butcher, but he made sure Ron got a good education at BBC in Brisbane. For a short time Ron worked in the real estate department of Queensland Trustees in Brisbane. He started his real working life at Mount Isa as a diamond driller when he was 20 years old. Four years later he became one of the founders of Glindemann and Kitching, a renowned Australian drilling company. Probably his greatest achievement was his pivotal role in developing the Universal Drill, now used for exploration drilling all over the world. He told me recently that these drills were being used on every continent on earth. Ross Large Professor of Economic Geology at the University of Tasmania said:

“Inspiring and dedicated people like Ron Kitching have been critical to the success of the mining industry in Australia. In the 1970’s Ron perceived a need for a better drill and worked tirelessly to achieve his goals. He carried a lot of people along with him and he showed us all what can be achieved with a clear vision and a determination to succeed.”

Ron also enjoyed a good joke. The story of how he "discovered" a great new ore body under the Spear Creek sports ground, Mount Isa is recounted in his own words at:

<http://economics.org.au/2011/03/gk-discover-new-ore-bodies-at-spear-creek/>

Ron was often present and part of historic occasions. In 1954 he drilled what Geoffrey Blainey has called "one of the most remarkable drill-holes in the world". This hole, to the south of the main lead-zinc operations at Mount Isa, penetrated 500 feet of amazingly rich copper ore. This drilling revealed the magnificent 1100 ore body which contained plus 180Mt of plus 3.5% copper, Mount Isa’s source of copper ore for over 30 years.

Ron once told me how the General Manager at the time (Sir George Fisher) came by after work every day to chat to Ron and look in amazement at the glittering copper core laid out after that day's drilling.

He also drilled the discovery holes on so many other great Australian ore bodies, including Mary Kathleen uranium, McArthur River lead-zinc, Constance Range Iron, Blackwater coal, Warrego gold, Telfer gold and Mount Agnew nickel. For more of this history see:

<http://economics.org.au/2011/03/ronald-kitching-obituary/>

Ron also influenced world events, behind the scenes. He was a long time member of the prestigious Mont Pelerin Society and went to meetings they held behind the Iron Curtain. At one meeting in Moscow in Soviet days Ron took a port full of books on free markets and sound money. There were a few Russians who surreptitiously attended the meeting. After the meeting, Ron went into the aisle of the auditorium, opened his port and started giving his books away to eager Russian students. A few books went to one Russian who was later economic adviser to Gorbachev. Ron repeated these subversive activities later in China and influenced an economic adviser to Deng Xiaoping. Then he went to Chile and became a famous journalist and regular columnist for the leading Chilean newspaper.

One of his early notes from Chile was:

"Chile is a great place, Viv. Explorers are heroes here and mining is not a dirty word".

With no degrees to his name, Ron understood Classical Liberal Economics and monetary theory far better than most university professors. He is the only bloke I know who read the voluminous "Human Action" and "Socialism" from cover to cover and filled the texts with notes and underlining. He was a friend to Frederick Hayek and a great admirer of Ludwig von Mises. He initiated a tour of Australia by Hayek and I believe funded most of it.



At a celebratory birthday dinner, in Brisbane, Qld, for the late F.A. Hayek, Saturday May 1st, 2004

L-R Ronald Kitching, Viv Forbes, Ron Manners

Ron was a great supporter of Ken Yeoman's keyline system of land conservation and pasture improvements. Using Yeoman's principles he developed a magnificent Brahmin Stud at Tinaroo on the Atherton Tableland.

Ron was never afraid to stand alone or to support unfashionable causes that he believed were right. Causes like the Progress Party, the Foundation for Economic Education and the Carbon Sense Coalition. His great little book "Understanding Personal and Economic Liberty" has enlightened and delighted many readers. As Malcolm Roberts (Ex General Manager of Gordonstone/Kestrel Mine) says:

"His book changed my life. Any socialists who creep into heaven through the back door will need to be wary. He'll quickly sort 'em out. Meanwhile, we're the better for his earthly contribution."

He was fiercely opposed to inflationists, communists, socialists, alarmists and centralists. He believed that freedom, sound money, open science and protection of property rights would work miracles in solving the problems of the human race. He understood clearly how we were getting smothered in bureaucracy and weakened by taxation and debasement of the currency.

At the same time Ron was a great family man and his numerous offspring are a great credit to the values he gave them. He spent his last few years in the Mount Morgan/Yeppoon/Rockhampton district, exploring, promoting the Rahco mining equipment and combating climate alarmism.

Most people in Rockhampton were probably unaware of the intellectual and entrepreneurial giant who lived among them. As John McRobert (ex Civil Engineer, Utah Development Company) said:

"The world is the poorer for his passing, but the richer for his having been."

Ron died quietly at his home in Rockhampton on 2 March 2011 aged 81, survived by his seven children.

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For more information on Ron's life see:

<http://www.mannkal.org/hall-kitching.php>