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"Mining the Reefs and Cays: Coral, Guano and Rock Phosphate Extraction in the Great Barrier Reef, Australia, 1844–1940"

Daley, Ben, and Peter Griggs

Daley, Ben and Peter Griggs. "Mining the Reefs and Cays: Coral, Guano and Rock Phosphate Extraction in the Great Barrier Reef, Australia, 1844–1940." *Environment and History* 12, no. 4 (Nov., 2006): 395–433. doi:10.3197/096734006779093686 . Scholarly attention has recently focused on the extent of the deterioration of the Great Barrier Reef and several authors have attempted to place that decline into historical context. Daley and Griggs present documentary and oral history evidence that the extent and severity of mining in the Great Barrier Reef has been hitherto neglected in environmental histories of the ecosystem. Extraction of phosphatic sandstone, guano, rock phosphate and coral from many islands, cays and coral reefs have resulted in extensive transformations of some habitats. In particular, Raine, Lady Elliot, Lady Musgrave, North West and Holbourne Islands experienced intensive mining for guano and rock phosphate, while more sustained guano mining took place at Upolu, Oyster and Michaelmas Cays prior to 1940. Coral mining—which has not previously been documented for the Great Barrier Reef—also occurred in at least twelve locations between 1900 and 1940 with the result that thousands of tons of coral were removed from some reefs and pulverised to produce agricultural and industrial lime. This account suggests that historical mining in the Great Barrier Reef has left impacts in the landscape of several islands and cays. Further scientific research and monitoring is required to elucidate the impacts of coral mining, although comparisons with coral mining sites elsewhere in the world suggest that it is reasonable to presume that the impacts of that activity were severe for parts of several reefs, including Snapper Island, Kings and Alexandra Reefs. All rights reserved. © 2006 The White Horse Press

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