

## **Lesson 7: Resource Sheet 1**

### **Australia's 'Big' towns**

Many of Australia's country towns are known for the 'Big Things' found along the roadways linking them to the rest of the country. Giant models of everything from peanuts to lobsters have been built to promote what locals think is special about their town or region. 'Big Things' are found in every state and territory of Australia

#### **Origins of 'Big Things'**

'Big Things' originated in the United States of America as far back as the 1920's. As the car-based culture grew with more people going on road trips, oversized objects were built along roadsides to gain people's attention, encourage them to stop and spend money.

The first 'big' thing built in an Australian country town was the Big Banana at Coffs Harbour in 1964. A local producer, John Landy, who had a fruit stall on the Pacific Highway, wanted something that passing traffic would notice, stop, and buy his bananas. Having heard of the Big Pineapple in Hawaii, he struck on the idea of the big banana. It was an immediate hit and over the last fifty years the Big Banana has grown into one of the Coffs Coast's most important tourist attractions.

#### **'Big Things' have become important feature of rural Australia**

Following the success of the Big Banana, there were many imitators and all manner of oversized produce sprung up in eastern Australia, from the Big Mango in Bowen, Queensland, to the Big Potato in Robertson, NSW, the Big Trout in Adaminaby (NSW), the Big Wine Cask in Buronga (Victoria), and the Big Crocodile in Humpty Doo (NT).

#### **Changes in small towns**

Country towns developed across Australia to serve the needs of farmers and graziers and make possible the transport primary products to markets. However, in recent decades, many of these towns have been losing businesses, services and population. Many now struggle to survive. At the same time, tourism has boomed across Australia and this has been seen as a way of supporting rural communities.

The Australian Government has provided funding for the construction of tourist attractions in rural areas. Most of the 'Big Things' were built in the 1970's and 1980's to celebrate what a region was known for. The goal was to encourage travellers to break their journey's thereby boosting local economies. 'Big Things', can therefore, be seen as a response to the changing fortunes of such communities.

#### **'Big Things' and petrol stations**

During the 1980's, the Mokany Brothers embarked on building a 'Big Thing' empire based on petrol stations. The Big Merino at Goulburn was the first of their ventures. It was followed by the Big Prawn at Ballina and the Big Oyster at Taree. The Big Merino is a fifteen-metre high concrete structure weighing 96 tonnes. The ram is known as *Rambo* by locals. When the Hume Highway bypassed Goulburn, the Big Merino was moved to its present site at a

service centre on the new freeway.

### **Celebration of all things big**

Australia is a big country and it is now home to more than 150 Big Things. Many aspects of local significance now stand tall on highways running through Australian towns. These include the Big Golden Gumboot in Tully (Queensland) and the Golden Guitar in Tamworth (NSW).

With such long distances and hours of travel between towns, these big roadside attractions are a welcomed distraction for travellers, who might otherwise hardly notice the towns they are driving through. Quite apart from the tourist revenue generated, the Big Things have become a quirky part of Australian culture. Many have appeared on postage stamps and in films. They are now recognised as works of folk art. Some, including the Sunshine Coast's Big Pineapple, have been heritage listed.

*Wikipedia has a list of 'Big Things' organized by state and territory.*