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TRANSITION TO STEEL

PRELIMINARY PRE-WAR MEASURES

BY a singular stroke of fortune for the Commonwealth during the war years, The Broken Hill Proprietary had established the Newcastle iron and steel works, the necessary ore coming from the mountains of Iron Knob and Iron Monarch, 33½ miles inland from the tiny port of Hummock Hill, on the western shore of Spencer's Gulf, in South Australia.

Rising black above red sandy plains covered with myall, mulga and salt bush, the Monarch and the Knob suggested resemblance to the Broken Hill itself. Metallic indications, which were known last century to the station hands of Coruma and Middleback, became significant in the light of the wealth of Broken Hill. In the hope of silver, a syndicate was formed and shafts were sunk at the base of the Monarch. Samples of ore were shipped to England for assay. Results disclosed iron but no silver. Disgusted, the syndicate disbanded and allowed their leases to lapse.

Seeking ironstone flux for the Port Pirie smelters, The B.H.P. acquired from the South Australian Government a lease of 360 acres over Monarch and Knob. The ironstone was used regularly for the smelters. By 1911 a total of 600,000 tons had been consumed. Experimentally, in 1907, a quantity of ore was smelted at Port Pirie and cast into pigs, five tons weight of them, which were sold at £5 per ton and pronounced of excellent quality. Three years later, H. L. Y. Brown, Government Geologist of South Australia, reported that at the Iron Knob and Iron Monarch a vast quantity of iron and manganic iron ore was in sight. This he placed at 21,000,000 tons. Its magnitude and importance, he added, had, so far, been unequalled in Australia.

INVESTIGATING POSSIBILITIES

The abundance of the iron ore and its high grade influenced the directorate, John Darling then being chairman, to the decision of sending Delprat to Europe and America to confer with the greatest known experts upon the practicability of establishing iron and steel works, to be supplied with ore from Iron Monarch and Iron Knob. At a half-yearly meeting of shareholders (5/8/1911) it was announced that the general manager was to acquire the latest information abroad and, if necessary, secure the services of experts for the development of industries kindred to the Company's resources. In February, 1912, the chairman reported that the general manager had visited the U.S.A., and was then in Europe collecting the information indicated. Probably, he stated, he would bring an expert with him, as, in view of the ironstone deposits which they held and the fact that the Commonwealth's requirements of steel rails would be very large for the next few years, the Board had thought proper to make complete investigations with the thought of extending the Company's operations.

Mr. Delprat visited iron and steel works in America, England, Germany and Sweden. In America he engaged Mr. David Baker, consulting engineer of Philadelphia, to visit Australia and advise the Company. The choice proved a very happy one. On his return to Australia, the general manager reported strongly in favour of the projected enterprise.



MR. G. D. DELPRAT,
General Manager 1899 to 1921.