The map of Australia's north and of its more remote fastnesses is changing: where a few short years ago there were just empty spaces, today there are the marks of the cartographer boldly indicating places like Weipa, Mt Goldsworthy and Kambalda. The reason is the dramatic minerals boom getting under way in this country, and also the projects designed to develop water resources for expansion of agriculture and beef pastures. Iron, nickel, manganese, bauxite ... a sense of excitement seems to surround the very sound of the words today as spectacular, multi-million dollar projects, undreamed of a little while back, are on the move in that vast sweep of Australia's north and the north-west.

Now new modern mining towns are springing up, whole new railways are being driven through semi-desert, ports have been gouged out and modern new wharves built. Great ore ships call at remote points of the vast coast from Japan and other countries. Giant freight trains hauling loads up to 20,000 tons of ore thunder across undeveloped lands. Future projections talk of the establishment of major new industrial complexes. Truly, that former 'slumbering giant' the North is on the move.

The scope of this tremendous upsurge in development was underlined recently by an official visit by the Prime Minister, Mr Gorton, the Minister for National Development, Mr Fairbairn, and party. This round-Australia fact-finding and familiarisation tour earlier this month enabled the Prime Minister to inspect a large number of projects at first hand. He returned greatly impressed. Starting from Sydney the Prime Minister's aircraft flew to Gladstone (Central Queensland) and then visited the following places: Emerald, Mt Isa, Weipa, Groote Eylandt, Gove, Melville Island, Darwin, the Ord scheme, Port Hedland, Dampier, Mt. Tom Price, Kalgoorlie, Kambalda, and then return to Canberra.

The route followed took in more than one-third of the main high-grade bauxite deposits in the world and mountains of iron ore totalling more than 15,000 million tons. It covered iron ore projects on which organisations are spending or committed to investing more than $600 million. The developments will increase Australia's export earnings, about 70% of which still come from sales of rural products. In the last financial year, earnings from mineral exports totalled about $485 million. It is estimated that next financial year it is likely to rise to more than $650 million and then climb to around $1000 million by the early 1970's. By about 1975, exports of iron ore alone should be more than $250 million a year, representing about 30% of all exports...
earnings from mineral exports.

At Gladstone the party inspected the new modern wharf facilities taking 50,000 ton ships and handling coal, pyrites, grain, bauxite, and alumina.

The Commonwealth, under the Coal Loading Works Agreement (Queensland) Act 1962 provided $400,000 towards the total estimated cost of improvements to coal loading facilities at the port. Of this aid, half was by way of grant and half by way of loan.

New life has been injected into Gladstone by the establishment of the Alumina Plant, operated by Queensland Alumina Limited, an international consortium of four partners. The plant, which cost about $115 million, produces alumina from Weipa bauxite. Output capacity which began at 600,000 long tons of alumina a year, is being expanded to 900,000 tons.

The visitors inspected the big coal deposits in the Central Queensland region where production is under way in five separate areas, and new ones are expected to come into production soon. Utah Construction and Mining Co. Ltd., which has a special coal lease in the Blackwater district, has built a railway spur, begun an open-cut mine and commenced exporting coking coal to Japanese steel interests. Utah has announced it will develop the Goonyella field, which includes a township for 500, and a new 120 mile rail spur costing $33 million.

The party saw the brisalow land development scheme, in which 12 million acres have been cleared of dense scrub to open up new lands for beef cattle and sorghum. The Commonwealth has made available $23 million in loans to the Queensland Government for building of roads and property development.

Work on the network of beef roads in Queensland stemmed from a decision in 1961 when the Commonwealth made available finance to the Queensland Government for construction of about 1000 miles of these roads. A new seven year program announced in 1967 provides for work to be undertaken on roads totalling about 1500 miles as well as completing the 1000 miles of the original program. Total Commonwealth aid on this project: more than $51 million in grants, more than $8½ million in loans.
There was the Emerald Irrigation Project to see, providing for a water storage with a 6300 square-mile catchment area on the Nogoa River. The Commonwealth agreed to supply funds with a maximum of $20 million as a non-repayable grant under the National Water Resources Development Program for this project.

The party called at Mt. Isa where Mt Isa Mines Ltd began an expansion program in 1956 which by 1967 had cost $130 million and increased ore-treatment capacity to 16,000 tons a day. The Commonwealth has been involved here also, providing advances totalling $34.5 million to be repaid by Queensland over 20 years - for re-construction of the Mt. Isa-Townsville rail line.

At Weipa was seen the exciting development of this rich bauxite field where reserves are estimated to be at least 2000 million tons. The Queensland Government in 1957 granted a lease to Comalco Industries Pty. Ltd., jointly owned by Kaiser Aluminium and Chemical Corporation of the U.S.A. (50%) and Consinc Riotinto of Australia (50%). At Weipa there is a port where none existed a few years ago. There's a growing township. The company plans to lift production of bauxite to more than 4.2 million tons in 1969, about half of which will be for treatment in Australian plants and the rest overseas.

The aircraft flew over the prawn-rich Gulf of Carpentaria to Groote Eylandt on the gulf's western side where the Prime Minister inspected development of Australia's largest known deposits of manganese ore. In this project B.H.P. had invested $13-14 million, including spending on the plant and township to the end of 1967.

The aircraft then made a short hop to the Gove Peninsula, where the big bauxite-alumina project is operated by Nabalco, jointly owned by a consortium of Australian companies and Alusuisse, a large European aluminium producer. The proposal requires Nabalco to establish a 500,000 tons a year alumina plant by December 31, 1971.

From Darwin, the next hop was to Kununurra, the administrative and commercial centre of the Ord Irrigation Project. Here 31 farms, mainly growing cotton, are irrigated from the diversion dam built as Stage One, and to which the Commonwealth contributed more than $12 million. The Commonwealth will contribute $48 million (comprising a non-repayable grant of $21 million for the construction of the dam and an interest-bearing loan for the irrigation works) for construction of the main dam and the development of a further 150,000 acres.
Mr Gorton's party also inspected Kimberley Research Station, a joint Commonwealth-State research centre where experiments are going on into crop prospects and beef cattle raising. In the W.A. beef roads scheme, Commonwealth grants between 1961 and 1967 totalled $17.9 million for about 1300 miles of roads.

From the Ord, the party flew across the great shoulder of the vast North-West to Port Hedland, one of the two outlets for the tremendous Pilbara iron ore deposits. Using or intending to use Port Hedland are five mining companies, including Goldsworthy Mining Pty. Ltd and Mt Newman Mining Ltd...

The Goldsworthy mine is 70 miles to the east, where the two main ore bodies contain between 40 and 50 million tons of direct-shipping ore. The company's commitments to the Western Australian Government include the spending of not less than $40 million on mining, transportation and wharf facilities to enable shipment at the rate of one million tons a year, and there are further long-term commitments. The company has big ore contracts with Japan, totalling more than $258 million.

The Mt. Newman lease, 250 miles south of Port Hedland, has a major ore body with reported inferred reserves of more than 1000 million tons of high-grade ore — which makes it one of the largest single deposits of this ore in the world. The company's agreement with the Western Australian Government calls for the minimum expenditure of $156 million, firstly for export of ore, then upgrading of ore before export, and finally for steel-making. The company is committed to submitting a scheme for secondary processing by 1979, and a proposal by 1992 for the establishment of an $80 million integrated iron and steel industry, capable ultimately of producing one million tons of steel a year. The company has a 265 mile railway line under construction between the major ore body at Mt. Whaleback and Port Hedland: estimated cost $40-50 million. Trains of up to 135 freight cars, carrying 12,000 tons of ore loaded in less than one hour, will operate on the line.

The Mt. Newman consortium has an initial 15 year contract with Japanese steel-making mills for the supply of more than 100 million tons of iron ore.

The next leg of the journey, to Dampier, opened the way for a visit to Mt Tom Price, Hamersley Iron Pty. Ltd.'s 'mountain of iron ore'.
Owners are Conzinc Riotinto of Australia Pty. Ltd (54%) and Kaiser Steel Corporation (U.S.) 36%, and a direct Australian shareholding of 10%. Hamersley holds estimated reserves of some 3000 million tons in the area, with Mt Tom Price the main ore body containing an estimated 500 million tons of high grade ore, ranking with Whaleback as one of the richest single deposits of its type.

The fourth stage of a series of future commitments entered into with the Western Australian Government by the company is for the submission of plans, within 20 years of commencing exports of ore, for an integrated iron and steel industry, requiring investment of at least $80 million. The Hamersley pellet plant, commissioned in March this year to produce two million tons of pellets annually, is the largest single unit of its kind in the world. The ore is carried from Mt Tom Price in trains which carry up to 20,000 tons a journey over a 182 mile rail link to Dampier, the shipment port which will provide access for carriers up to 100,000 tons taking the ore to Japan.

The Prime Minister and his party then left on the long flight over a vast stretch of Western Australia to Kalgoorlie, the gold city. About 30 miles south of Kalgoorlie is Kambalda, site of new nickel ore and sulphide discoveries. Western Mining Corporation has signed direct contracts with Japanese buyers for delivery of 40,000 tons of nickel concentrates over a ten year period valued at $68 million, as well as other contracts. This year the company signed an agreement with the Western Australian Government to erect a nickel refinery at Kwinana, with an annual capacity of at least 15,000 tons, and scheduled to begin production in 1970. A new town is to be built costing $5 million and with an estimated population of 2500 by before the end of 1970.

On his return to Canberra, the Prime Minister was asked in Parliament to take 'effective measures to reverse the trend towards foreign control of our assets...'.

He replied, 'On the recent tour ... it was very pleasant to see the number of developments which were entirely Australian-owned, such as the Western Mining Corporation Ltd. development and the number of other developments which were either 50% or 60% Australian-owned; though there were some where one would have liked to have seen more Australian ownership ... much more.