

WORD OF THE MONTH

FEB 2013

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AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

stubloon

– *noun*: a brass token with an exchange value of one stubby of beer.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

After the Second World War, the cattle industries of Northern Australia were growing. Transporting cattle from inaccessible regions to markets far away in the south meant days of driving on rough roads, and this took a toll on cattle condition and welfare. To address the problem government funding was provided to build 'beef roads' to link producers with major centres. Beginning in 1960, and continuing through into the 1970s, a massive road construction program was undertaken in some of the remotest parts of outback Australia.

Road-building is thirsty work. Over the years of construction thousands of workers lived in remote camps in the Northern Territory with few facilities. Social clubs ran canteens for the men, but liquor licensing laws meant that these canteens could not sell alcohol and thus a system of exchanging tickets and tokens for beer was used to get around the problem. Project clerk Peter Snel later recounted the genesis of a new kind of token, the **stubloon**:

'No money could actually change hands at the camp under the liquor ordinance', recalls Peter, 'so at the beginning I tried introducing beer tickets and a variety of tokens. But these ideas weren't satisfactory, so I had a long discussion with the regional engineer, Don Darben, about an alternate currency based on the value of one stubby of beer. The result was the **stubloon**, a word derived from the old Spanish coin the doubloon and, naturally, the good old Australian stubby.' (*Australasian Post*, 27 October 1983)

Blending *stubby*, 'a small bottle of beer', and *doubloon*, 'a Spanish gold coin', to form **stubloon** is a well-established method of creating a new word. Another term for this kind of word generation is 'portmanteau word', first coined by Lewis Carroll in *Through the Looking Glass* (1871). A portmanteau is a suitcase; like a portmanteau, a blended word has, as Carroll says, 'two meanings packed into one word'. (*Brunch* is another example – a blend of *breakfast* and *lunch*.)

In 1970 when the idea of a brass token for the Northern Territory communities was raised, a competition was held to design it. The winning design featured on one side the word STUBLOON superimposed over the numeral '1', and on the other side was an image of a stubby bottle and the date 1970 in the centre, with the words NORTHERN TERRITORY BEEF ROADS around the circumference. The token was slightly larger than a twenty-cent piece. The first **stubloons** were manufactured in Adelaide, and between 1970 and 1973 some 4000 were produced.

Immediately on its introduction, the **stubloon** revolutionised social trade at the road camps. Men cashed their pay cheques for the coins, which were pegged in value to the cost of a stubby of beer... In no time at all, the stubloon was the only currency of any consequence in the road camps. It was even accepted by many pubs in the Territory by cunning barmen who willingly gave away a 28-cent stubby for a coin

continued ...

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they could sell to a tourist for as much as \$1.50. (*Australasian Post*, 27 October 1983)

A truck-driver of the period remembers that it was common for workers 'to ask for a number of **Stubloon** tokens to form part of their pay-packet each week', and that they would 'take these to their drinking hole and stack them on the bar to pay for their drinks during the night' (D.R. Barrie, *Brass for Beer*, 2012).

The road camps closed with the completion of the Beef Roads Program. With the closure of the camps **stubloons** were no longer needed, although a number of similar tokens, called 'The Territory **Stubloon**', were issued as tourist souvenirs in 1982 by the Darwin Tourist Promotion Association. Today the original **stubloons** are a collector's item and can sometimes be found for sale online. They are significant relics of life in the Northern Territory during a period of economic expansion and opportunity.

Stubloon will be included in the second edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*.