

## Q

## Quarry



**06** | IQA NEW BLOOD  
National Executive  
Officer, Greg Bondar



**20** | TOP CUT  
Latest mobile  
screening gear



**45** | PROFILE  
Index Group's  
Ross Maclean

## Vale: Ross Maclean

The August 2004 issue of Quarry featured a story of the life of Ross Maclean, the founder of the Index Group of companies based in Queensland. Like a few special others in our quarry industry, Ross started with nothing other than a determination to build a prosperous future for his wife and family after an unfortunate business relationship did not live up to promises made to him.

Ross's business philosophy was devastatingly simple.

It was not to confine oneself to any particular aspect of industry, but to pursue opportunities whenever there was a chance to make a good return.

There are not many men who can claim to have bought a complete uranium producing plant and then almost sell it to an overseas country. That deal fell through, so the plant was broken up and disposed of quite profitably to many other purchasers.

Ross's introduction to the quarry industry was almost by chance. But it opened yet another door for him and Index to become involved in the sale and manufacture of screens, crushers and quarry plants.

When I interviewed Ross for the Institute Heritage Series, I found he was already badly afflicted with Motor Neuron Disease, a dreadful ailment which leaves the brain normal and active and aware of all that is happening, but progressively cutting off signals to the rest of the muscles in the body.

Ross Maclean found merciful relief from this world on 23 February 2005.

Our industry and indeed our community



will be the poorer for his passing. Ross has a history of philanthropy, commencing from early days when he found he had sufficient funds to help his local rugby club win premierships.

More recently, he has founded the Ross Maclean Fellowship in conjunction with the University of Queensland, to support Motor Neuron research.

Our industry can ill afford to lose the likes of Ross Maclean. I only had a few hours with Ross as he related his life story, but realised I was in the presence of a very special person.

Our sincere sympathy goes out to his family.

By Doug Prosser



# How Ross Maclean built the Index Group

The Brisbane-based Index Group of Companies' buy, sell, trade or manufacture a huge range of products for which there is a market and a profit to be made. Doug Prosser interviewed the founder, Ross Maclean.



In an era where most large companies are becoming increasingly specialised in their activities by contracting to what they identify as core business, it was somewhat of a delightful surprise to find a company, which throughout its life, has deliberately taken the opposite tack.

If you are seeking an ocean-going barge, a tug, tower crane, crushing and screening plant, all sorts of electricals, or a mobile plant (the list is endless) - talk to Index.

To formulate such a company policy and, more particularly, to successfully implement it, requires a special person. Meet Ross Maclean.

Born on 14 July, 1924 in Mackay, Ross's early education was fragmented because of a near fatal condition of osteomyelitis. At the tender age of five, this resulted in a massive hip operation, which left him with one leg shorter than the other. The resultant limp, in typical Aussie fashion, earned him the nickname of "Hoppy" around many auction sites in later life.

It was during those formative years Ross believes he learnt one of life's more important lessons: "never give up".

In his final two years of schooling he boarded at Toowoomba Grammar, and then in 1941 Ross entered the workforce as an engineering cadet with the Toowoomba foundry company, Southern Cross, a firm well-known for its pumps, diesel engines and the ubiquitous Southern Cross windmill, once so common around Australia.

Ross said he had really "wanted to go to senior school and onto university, but my parents had a bit of a financial problem with all my sickness. I must have bled them dry and they got to the stage when they couldn't afford to keep me in school."

During his time with the foundry which had 1200 employees, Ross is proud of the fact he developed a lead/tin alloy diesel engine bearing liner, which increased bearing life five-fold.

Ross married in 1948, and has two sons, Craig and Jeff.

After moving to Brisbane, Ross renewed his interest in chemicals and in 1949 joined a water treatment company.

He started at the company with a verbal understanding that he would ultimately acquire an equity in the then small business. The company prospered, and Ross designed demineralising plants to produce water to a distilled quality from hard water.

However, after 14 years, during which time he had reinvested all his available money back into the business, Ross realised that because of its success, the proprietor was never going to relinquish ownership. He left penniless, despite the owner's protests.

**"I knew as much about shipbuilding as you'd fit on the back of a very small postage stamp."**

Ross learned a bitter lesson from that experience, and his advice is to never get involved in a propriety company unless you have the majority holding.

The family moved to Sydney where Ross joined Richardson Holdings, which made amongst other things, Borthwick Cranes and Richardson Drills. However, after three years and following the death of his father, in 1966 Ross returned to Brisbane to join Bundeng, a Bundaberg foundry company with operations throughout Queensland.

After being successful in that business Ross decided to "have a go on my own." Faced with the constant problem of no money, he made the rounds of the banks and finally was able to raise two thousand pounds.

Using his knowledge of water filtration, Ross won tenders for two, pool filtration contracts. As the purchasers wanted to pay for the projects before the end of June, with one project incomplete but paid for, Ross finished the contracts

without having to touch the bank money.

The really independent part of Ross's career started at about this time. In Sydney, he had met Arthur Esgate whose company was Transport and Industrial Index Brokers. This business was based on issuing a regular booklet, listing various industrial products for sale. Esgate suggested they cooperate as separate businesses with Ross taking care of Queensland. Ross opted to call his new company Index. Operating out of a 2 x 2 metre office at home, complete with a telephone, which fortunately kept ringing as business built up. Incidentally, today Index still issues a regular 40-page Index catalogue of major components available for sale, a foundation stone of the business.

Part of Esgate's business was brokering smallish tugs and barges, but he was having problems with availability and deliveries so Ross decided to "have a go" at the marine operation.

"I knew as much about shipbuilding as you'd fit on the back of a very small postage stamp." He jumped in the deep end with an order from New Guinea for a landing barge and a dumb barge, including design and delivery.

As the equipment was to leave the country, permission had to be obtained from the Commonwealth, mainly for seagoing safety. At first they refused. "So I jumped and danced and screamed and bellowed. They finally got sick of me and basically said OK!!" The dumb barge was in two halves, and required bolting and welding together when it arrived in New Guinea.

One of the owner's sons was throwing the barge bolts up on the deck. Unfortunately, one struck Ross on the head causing him to think "the sky had fallen in". The father, with great presence of mind, handed Ross a red bandana saying "use this, it won't show the blood."

Index subsequently received many repeat orders for small ships. Many were for export throughout the Pacific Islands, a salt operation in Western Australia and several



## Cont. from page 45

for BHP. At one stage, Index was building four vessels a year.

During one spell in New Guinea, a potential customer rang regarding a three-stage mobile crushing plant listed in the Index catalogue.

Ross said his wife Daphne took the call and although not having been involved with that part of the business, promptly closed the sale. As the plant was moved regularly around Australia, this brought Index repeat work.

Ross said Daphne reminds him regularly that she sold that plant. This led to the Index Group becoming more involved with the quarry industry. The Group obtained an agency from Keith Neiderer in New Zealand to sell his crushing plants, but soon the Index sales outgrew the equipment supplies.

So as with the marine work, Ross decided to go into manufacturing crushing and screening plants, which was to become a major part of the business. This led to 10 or 12 million dollar contracts all around Australia, including a large three-stage plant for Mt. Isa Mines. In addition, there were many smaller jobs for shire councils. Crushers were bought from many sources, including China, Russia and Korea.

Servicing the rapidly-expanding business required fast, independent transport. First, it was a single engine Cessna 182. However, the first time the engine spluttered with ice on the carburettor, a twin-engine plane was the obvious next step, and finally a six-seater pressurised 340A Cessna.

The list of other Index projects is endless, and includes owning an 8' x 7' grinding mill for processing zircon. A trip to Tasmania to view a small sand plant, led to buying and operating it for the last 12 years. The plant produces special sand used for crystal, optical and LCD glass manufacture.



Equipment was often barged to PNG

How many men would have the courage to bid for, and buy, a complete uranium plant which occupied 10 acres and comprised all types of mills and concentrators and the like.

That was Narbalek in the Northern Territory. Ross almost sold it complete to the Middle East, but eventually the plant was broken up and sold piecemeal.

Index is a keen supporter of the Institute of Quarrying, with one of its senior staff members, Peter Mayo, a national councillor representing associates.

Then came a time in life, after working many 36-hour days and, above all, never giving up, Ross found time to enjoy interests away from Index Engineering.

Although his father was on the Queensland Rugby League Board of Control and a company manager of the 1952 Kangaroos, Ross had little time for sport.

However, he did ferry his boys around school and then representative matches. One son, Jeff, did quite well, and this led to increased interest in the Souths Rugby Union Club, in Brisbane.

Once again, Ross became involved and decided to help revamp the clubhouse. He then "bought" them a good coach, which helped the team to win two premierships over four years.

Naturally, Index became and, still is, the club's major sponsor. Index was the first company to sponsor club rugby in Australia, and to have its name on a team's jumper.



However, officials banned the practice in the late 1970s but since reinstated it.

Ross' grand passion, however, is racehorses. An acquaintance, who was a horse owner, suffered financial troubles and to help out, Ross bought three from him, one of which turned out to be a winner. Ross was hooked forever, and he still loves the thrill of watching horses he has bred and do well in the races.

But, as so often happens, after a lifetime of knock-backs, endless hard work and risk-taking to build a very successful group of companies, fate has dealt Ross and his family a cruel blow.

Ross is now stricken with Motor Neuron Disease, a malady which means Ross's brilliant, active mind is trapped inside a body that increasingly refuses to accept his instructions.

Yet, at the end of our interview, I asked Ross that given the opportunity, would he change any of his life? He replied, "No, because sometimes things that appear to be adverse at the time, turn out to be what's needed in the long run. When one door closes, another one opens. No, I don't think so." I can only wish for the same strength and courage in a similar situation.

*If you have story about Australia's quarry heritage please contact Doug Prosser on phone (02) 4261 1342. The University of Queensland has started a Ross Maclean Fellowship to support research into Motor Neurone Disease. Visit: [www.indexgroup.com.au/fellowship.asp](http://www.indexgroup.com.au/fellowship.asp)*

## ADVERTISERS' INDEX

AMEIA	27	Joest	19
Affordable Recruitment	39	Komatsu	48
Atlas Weighing	32	KRC	33
Case	16	Liebherr Australia	9
Caterpillar Australia	1, 2	Lincom Pacific	31
CME	5	Loadrite Weighing	29
Crushing Equipment	18	Lockers	36
Eagle Iron Works	26	Metso Minerals	10
Eastcoast Contracting	33	Sandvik	21
EPG	32	Schenck Australia	42
Flowserve	25	Screenmasters	23
Henkel Australia	35	Transmin	13
Hydro Equipment	12	Westcon Holdings	17

## WHAT'S COMING UP IN QUARRY

**SEPTEMBER:** Drilling and blasting

**OCTOBER:** Bumper annual conference issue