

Chapter 2

The Gold Coast: a snapshot

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We know the city's boundaries as they are today (they have changed dramatically over time) and that is all we need to answer the question: what is the size of the city? The city's boundaries today are shown in Plate 3. As noted previously, the Gold Coast was a lot smaller in a geographical sense a couple of generations ago. When it was known as the 'South Coast' (or simply 'the Coast'), its northern boundary was at Lands End, north of Labrador. Coolangatta to Lands End established the south–north limits. Beenleigh in Logan City was considered the half-way mark¹ between Brisbane and the Gold Coast. Just south of Beenleigh is the tiny town of Yatala, famous for its meat pies (the food of choice for Australians at sporting events or when travelling by car). Many a traveller to the Gold Coast stopped at Yatala to purchase the famous pies. Today the northern boundary of the Gold Coast stretches to Yatala and Beenleigh, home of one of the largest breweries in Australia. If the Gold Coast manufactures anything on a large scale it is beer.

The western boundary has also changed as the Queensland government amalgamated local government areas, called 'shires' if rural, otherwise 'cities'. These political boundaries do not always make sense from a citizen's perspective. Community of interest or economic geography determines how local residents, both urban and rural, define and think about localities. This applies to the Gold Coast as much as anywhere else. This we need to explore.

The southern hinterland, from the old town of Nerang along the Nerang River as it meanders into Numinbah Valley, between Springbrook on the east and Beechmont on the west, has always been considered part of the Gold Coast, although this area was for a long time in a separate shire. Follow the Beechmont road south-west into the Lamington Plateau and you will come to a long-established eco-tourist venture, Binna Burra Lodge. Travel via Canungra on to the plateau and you will find O'Reilly's Guesthouse. Today these rainforest retreats are placed outside the Gold Coast boundaries. The tourist literature suggests otherwise, local people think otherwise.

The farming land in both the Tallebudgera and Currumbin valleys was, in the past, thought of as part of the Gold Coast. What was not the Gold Coast was the extensive area north, north-west and north-east of Southport. The extensive Southern Moreton Bay Islands were not considered part of the city. The sugarcane growing area around Jacobs Well has been added, as has the sugar mill from which Beenleigh Rum is a by-product.² Further east, South Stradbroke Island and several uninhabited mangrove-covered islands of southern Moreton Bay are now officially part of the Gold Coast. In the north-west, the east of Tamborine Mountain is included but the rest of the mountain is in another shire. Who are we to argue with those who draw up political boundaries?