

# Manners shows why there is never a dull moment in the domestic mining sector

The first time I saw well known Western Australian mining identity and author Ron Manners speak in public was during late 2002 at a shindig commemorating the 50th anniversary of the late Lang Hancock's discovery of iron ore in WA's Pilbara.

Manners – who shared a special friendship with the prospecting legend – had prepared what he later called some “impromptu comments” that were intended for “a dinner party of 10 people or so”.

When he fronted up at the venue (Hancock's old family home in the Perth suburb of Nedlands), however, he discovered his audience was made up of some 700 guests who had gathered for what was, in essence, a quite formal (albeit not too austere) occasion to celebrate the late Hancock's life.

At the time it was (and today still remains) one of the best mining-related speeches I'd ever witnessed – a perfectly concocted and insightful narrative about a pioneering thinker whose legacy had contributed so much to Australia's ongoing prosperity.

Happily, a transcript of this impromptu delivery is included in Manners' latest book *Heroic Misadventures*, a tome which is aptly subtitled *Australia: Four Decades – Full Circle* as it recalls, among other things, the author's attempted forays into the peculiar underbelly of Australian politics during the past 40 years.

## High praise

Just as apt, perhaps, was the fact this work was officially launched late last year by Hancock's daughter Gina Rinehart, who described the prospector-cum-miner-cum-writer as a “valued friend” whose vision was “clear thinking and his causes well chosen”.

The book, Rinehart explained, offered a unique insight into the life of an exceptional man.

“*Heroic Misadventures* covers many important matters – including that too many people take Australia's wealth and security for granted,” she noted.

“This book tells, amongst much else, how that wealth was produced and some of the extraordinary men who produced

it in the face of not only one of the harshest natural environments on the planet, but also in the face of often destructive government policies.

“It provides alarming insight into how government interference has reduced our national prosperity.

“This is something that Ron not only understands – it is a truth he has worked to bring to the minds of others.”

The book, Manners later explained, started out as being a summary of “my many disasters” over four decades since the famous WA Poseidon nickel boom which began in the late 1960s, but essentially ended up as a story about “the remarkable people who I have been so fortunate in travelling this particular 40 years with”.

“I just can't help thinking how lucky I've been,” he said.

“In comparing the disasters that had befallen Australia, it's made me feel better because I thought I was the only guy things weren't going well for.

“Australia has had some remarkable disasters and I've sub titled the book *Australia: Four Decades – Full Circle* because, in many ways, I feel we may be back in the 1970s.

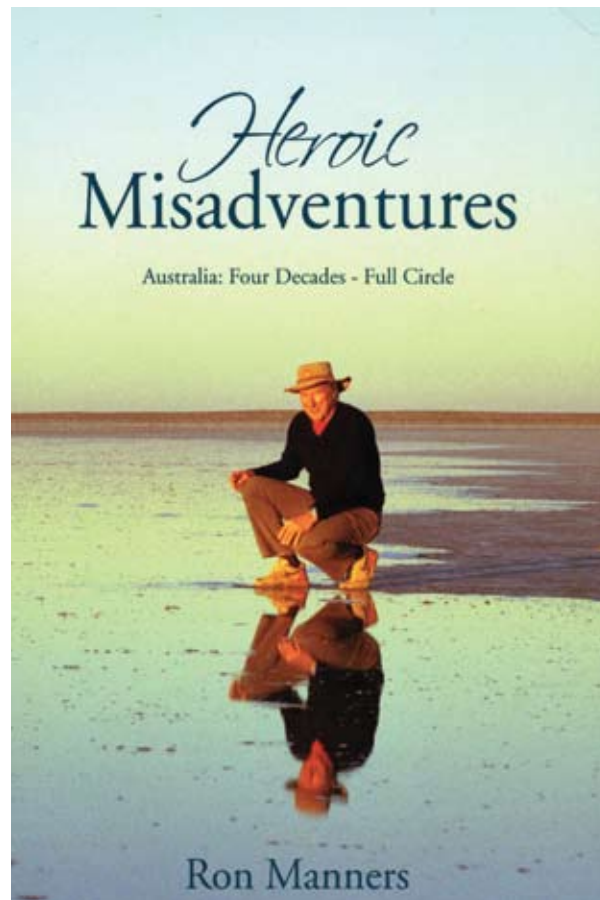
“At the beginning, in 1970, the ASX index was 408. Ten years later, what was the ASX index? 408!

“So 10 years later the ASX index has shown there has really been no net worth increase over this period.”

It's an interesting observation – one which highlights the leveling effect a boom and bust culture can have on an industry's long term development.

## Psyche tapped

But of course – and not surprisingly given Manners' overall penchant for history, poetry and trivia – *Heroic*



The book is, in essence, a rip roaring read (with a cover photo by Gavin Bunning).

*Misadventures* is full of interesting observations, ranging from the virtues of leadership, the sometimes cloak-and-dagger world of the mining game, the need for a free market, the deleterious effects of extreme environmental activism, the global financial crisis as well as the various attempts which have been made to implement sensible political and legislative reform.

And, judging by the book, his opinions have remained pretty consistent throughout his life.

“In the wake of this financial crisis, the choice before us is really quite simple,” Manners explained during the Sir Arvi Parbo oration at 2009's Association of Mining and Exploration Companies (AMEC) Incorporated mining congress in WA.

“We can either continue this splurge of debt-driven madness in the hope that the bubble will re-inflate and we can get a few more good years out of it, enabling



Gina Rinehart with Rio Tinto Ltd boss Sam Walsh at Hope Downs in WA.

us to retire and leave the mess to future generations, or we can use thoughtful economic analysis to identify specific problems in the financial markets and resolve them with a simple and targeted legislative framework.

“It is perhaps time to restore the



Ron Manners at the book launch.

primacy of market discipline – backed up, if necessary, by specific legislation targeted at well-understood weaknesses.

“This will preclude governments of various flavours pursuing their popularity-based programs.”

**Individual thinker**

Interestingly, back in 2002 at the above-mentioned Hancock celebration, Manners made some personal observations about the late great man which, in all honesty, could probably have been applied to himself.

“He clearly understood the principles of capital and labour, the resultant

wealth creation that can come from fusing them together and how, without getting that right first, all the ‘redistributionists’ of the world are simply ‘pissing in the wind’,” he said.

“But most of all Lang was himself.

“He could do that – he could be himself – whereas most of us couldn’t be.

“Whether you are from Rio Tinto, the Labor party or the Liberal Party, you can’t be yourself.

“I think this individualism used to drive them nuts with absolute, sheer envy.”

If anything, *Heroic Misadventures* – with its 40 year collection of news clippings, speeches and reflective commentary – shows the restless mind of one of the Australian mining sector’s greatest individual thinkers at work.

*The book can be ordered online from [www.HeroicMisadventures.com](http://www.HeroicMisadventures.com).*

**Comment by Mark Fraser**

