

Background Sheet 9 (Stage 3 Gold! unit)

Timeline 4: The Gold Rush 1823-96

1823

First official reports of the finding of gold in Australia by J McBrien. The information was suppressed.

1839

Geologists P E Strzelecki and Rev W B Clarke find gold near Hartley.

1840

Transportation of convicts to NSW ceased.

1848

Gold discovered in California (announced in December 1848).

1849

Californian gold rush. A great many Australians sailed for California.

1849

Governor Fitzroy approached the Colonial Office, advocating a policy for the exploitation of mineral resources. He requested a geologist, which led to the appointment of Samuel Stutchbury. This gave approval for the mining of mineral resources.

1851

Edward Hargraves returned from California and washed gold at Summer Hill Creek, Ophir. Although he showed little skill in discovering new fields, he received recognition and financial rewards. The early rush to the NSW fields led to a serious decline in the population in Victoria, so a reward was offered for the discovery of gold in that region. Several claimants came forward, and by the end

of 1851 the incredibly rich Ballarat and Bendigo fields were in production. Licence fees of 30/- a month were imposed.

1852

Prospectors started arriving from overseas. Approximately 100 000 arrived in 1852. Ships' crews deserted. Women were left while their husbands went in search of gold. Australia's population went from 404 276 to 1 097 305 between 1850 and 1860. Small gold deposits were discovered in New Zealand.

1853

The licence fee in NSW was reduced to 10/- a month after near riots at Turon. Victoria followed suit a few months later.

1854

Discontent with the licensing system and lack of political rights came to a head in the Eureka Stockade. An inquiry followed.

1855

In Victoria, the licence was replaced with the 'Miner's Right', costing 1/- per annum and carrying the right to vote. An export duty of 2s 6d per ounce was placed on gold instead.

1857

NSW adopted similar changes in licensing and voting to Victoria.

1858

Gold discovered in British Columbia (25 000 prospectors).

1858

A small deposit of gold was discovered north of Fitzroy River in north Queensland. The few acres were soon exhausted by the arrivals. 5000-6000 footsore and penniless diggers had to be helped to return to Victoria or to the inland NSW goldfields.

1860

An influx of Chinese miners meant that by 1860 one fifth of all adult men in Victoria were Chinese.

1860-1861

Lambing Flat riots, in which whites attacked Chinese miners.

1861

Workable gold discovered in New Zealand. Between 1861 and 1863, 64 000 people travelled to Otago from Australia, while only 8600 arrived from Britain.

1864

Gold discovered at Coolgardie, WA.

1867

A valuable gold field discovered in Gympie, Queensland.

1886

Valuable deposits of very deep gold discovered on the Rand, South Africa. It took money and machinery to extract this gold.

1893

Gold discovered at Kalgoorlie, WA.

1896

Gold discovered in Alaska.

The first goldfields were alluvial or surface goldfields, where the gold could be washed or winnowed from the soil. The life of these goldfields was short. In Victoria in 1852, it was estimated that the value of gold found by diggers was an average of 324 oz per head. By 1856 it had fallen to 103 oz and it further declined to 78 oz in 1865. In Victoria in 1856, there were 115 000 prospectors (or alluvial diggers.) By 1865, the number had declined to 80 000. Of the Australians who went to the goldfields, many had hoped to gain a stake to establish a farm or a business. Many found employment with the mining companies, operating quartz-crushing machines or working on steam power generation. Others returned home or moved to other fields in Australia, New Zealand or America.

Sources:

Crowley, F A, Documentary History of Australia, Vol 2: Colonial Australia 1841-1874, Nelson, 1980.