

The gold rushes - 1

Of all the events that shaped Australia's history, the gold rushes were the most significant. Until gold was discovered, Australia was a penal settlement, a place to which convicts were sent from Britain. They were organised and controlled by the soldiers who had accompanied them. They had been joined by a number of free settlers, keen to escape the poverty in their home countries, to own land and to make new lives for themselves. By the time of the gold rushes, freed convicts were a growing group in the colonies. At that time, convict labour was essential for continued development. Convicts constructed buildings, roads and bridges and helped to establish and run farms and pastoral properties.

But ... the gold rushes changed everything!

Gold was first found by some convicts in 1815 near Bathurst in New South Wales and by James McBrien in 1823. These discoveries and others in Cox's River in NSW and Bendigo in Victoria were kept quiet because the authorities feared the news could cause a convict uprising and encourage much-needed workers to leave their jobs. All that changed in 1851 when Edward Hargraves, a gold prospector who'd returned from the Californian gold rush, announced in the *Sydney Herald* newspaper that he'd found gold at Bathurst. Within one month 1000 men had left their jobs, rushed across the Blue Mountains and were in Bathurst searching for gold.

As other gold finds were announced, gold fever spread and businesses had to offer to treble their workers' wages in order to keep them. This mass exodus became such a serious problem in the Victorian colony that a Gold Discovery Committee was formed and a reward offered to anyone who discovered gold within 200 miles of Melbourne. It didn't take long before gold was found nearby in Bendigo, by two women, Mrs Farrell and Mrs Kennedy, and a new gold rush began. Melbourne soon became the major boomtown. Men came streaming in from the other colonies and from overseas countries including, Britain, Germany, Italy, France, the USA and China and in ten years the population almost tripled. All these people meant that convicts were no longer needed.



Colonial life was totally changed by the wealth from gold and by the increased population. New towns and businesses appeared, transport facilities such as roads and railways were constructed and a telegraph was built to improve communication. But this new wealth also attracted outlaws, known as bushrangers, who attacked and robbed people and coaches.

Miners had to pay a lot of money for their mining licences and believed they were treated unfairly in many ways. They wanted the right to have more say and to vote. This led to a rebellion, known as the Eureka Stockade uprising in which 22 diggers were killed. Most were arrested, but not convicted. Later, their demands were met and political changes were made. Their leader became the member of parliament for Bendigo. The miners' sense of mateship and their defiance of authority is still remembered today when Australian soldiers are called 'diggers'.

There was strong resentment towards the 38 000 Chinese who worked so hard on the goldfields and most of them were eventually returned home. This later led to the adoption for many years of what was known as the 'White Australia Policy'.

AC
The impact of a significant development or event on a colony; for example, frontier conflict, the gold rushes, the Eureka Stockade, internal exploration, the advent of rail, the expansion of farming, drought (AGHHK095)

THE IMPACT OF MAJOR EVENTS

The gold rushes - 2

1. Read the gold rushes events listed below and number them in the order in which they occurred. You will need to refer to the text on the previous page and to think carefully about when these things happened.

• Edward Hargraves returned to Australia from California.

• Gold and other valuables made coaches a target for bushrangers.

• A Gold Discovery Committee was formed in Victoria.

• Gold was found by convicts in 1815.

• Chinese workers were sent home.

• The Sydney Herald reported gold had been found in Bathurst, NSW.

• Miners' licences were introduced in Victoria.

• Political changes were made as a result of the Eureka rebellion.

2. Convicts who found the first gold in Australia in 1815 were flogged and ordered not to tell anyone about the gold. One reason this was done was so other convicts wouldn't hear about it, escape and go rushing off to find some and become rich.

(a) Do you think flogging the convicts was a wise decision? Yes No

(b) Give reasons to support your opinion.

3. Write two questions you would like to ask a miner to find out something about life in the goldfields during the gold rushes.

• _____

• _____



Another gold discovery was kept quiet in 1844 because when Governor Gipps was shown gold discovered near Lithgow he said, 'Put it away Mr Clarke, or we shall all have our throats cut'.

4C
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The gold rushes - 3

The miners were very angry and thought burning their licences and arming themselves was justified. The soldiers and police, on the other hand, believed the miners were guilty of an armed rebellion and deserved to be punished.

1. (a) Use the chart below to write arguments for both points of view. Read the information in the text on page 35 and research to find out more.

| The miners were right because ... | The authorities were right because ... |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| | |

THE IMPACT OF MAJOR EVENTS



ACHHK095

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2. During the gold rushes there was a lot of gold being transported around the country and there were also some wealthy travellers. This made robbery a very attractive business for many bushrangers.

(a) Explain why you think these thieves were called 'bushrangers'.

(b) Research a famous bushranger and prepare a time line of events in his life.



In 1852, only one year after Hargraves discovered gold at the place he named Ophir, 370 000 immigrants had arrived in Australia and in two years during Victoria's gold rush its population grew from 77 000 to 540 000. Between 1851 and 1871, Australia's total population more than trebled.