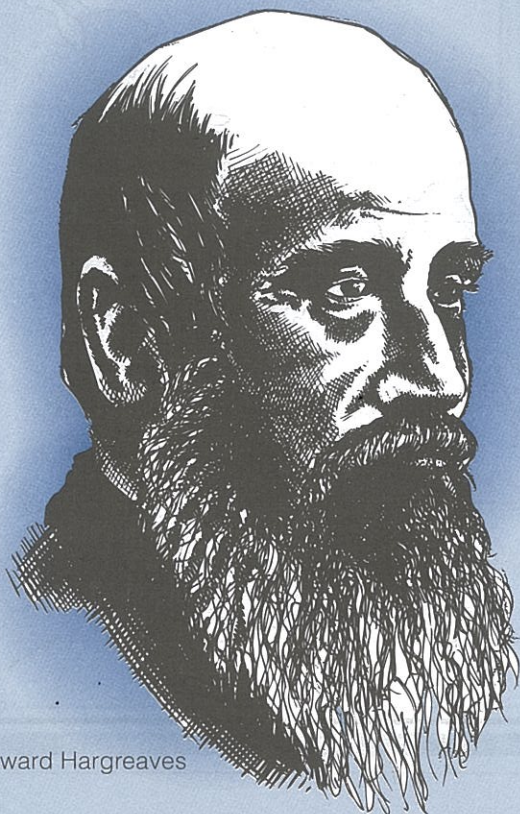


Australia Strikes Gold!

Lesson Focus: You will learn about the significant events of the Australian gold rush period.

Keywords: official, discouraged, surveyor, prospecting, terrain, suppressing



Edward Hargreaves

Gold was found in Australia well before the recognised gold rush commencement in 1851. As early as 1823 reports of gold finds filtered through to government officers. The first official record of gold discovered in Australia was by James McBrain near Bathurst in February 1823. Previous to this, in 1816, a convict who lived in the Bathurst area was punished for the possession of gold. It is thought that there were many gold finds, but they were kept secret. People kept their finds secret because, under British law at the time, any gold or silver found in the land belonged to the Crown. The government also chose to keep the information secret as the colony was still very new. They feared that a gold rush would create labour shortages and set back the development of the colony, which at that stage was only 400 000 people strong.

However, this approach backfired. When news of the Californian gold rush of 1849 reached Australia it created a rush to the American goldfields—exactly the problem the government had been trying to avoid by suppressing the news of local finds. The result was that many men did leave. However, many were discouraged by the government or their employers.

In a reversal of attitude, the Governor requested a surveyor be sent from England to locate Australian goldfields and confirm previous finds. At this time, a local farmer, Edward Hargreaves had

seized upon the chance to make his fortune and left for the Californian fields.

In California, Hargreaves spent a long twelve months prospecting with a group of companions without any great success. What Hargreaves did find was knowledge. During this time, he became convinced that the terrain and soil were similar to conditions he had seen in Australia and therefore there must be gold to be found at home. When he and his companions decided to go their own ways, Hargreaves headed straight for Australia.

On reaching Sydney, Hargreaves bought a horse and travelled to Bathurst, where he convinced John Lister to guide him to Lewis Ponds Creek. They arrived there on 12 February 1851 and washed six pans of gravel, finding traces of gold in five of them. Joined by William Tom, the three continued to prospect for gold, with a small amount of success. Hargreaves left for Sydney at this stage where he tried unsuccessfully to convince the government of his find. Meanwhile, his companions moved their search to a place later to become the town of Ophir. It was there they made their first significant find of gold (4 oz) and sent news of this to Hargreaves in Sydney. Against the wishes of his companions, Hargreaves announced the find at a special meeting and the Australian gold rush had begun.

Hargreaves went on to become a land commissioner and was richly rewarded for his find. William Tom and John Lister protested his reward and eventually were rewarded for their part in the discovery.

Other significant discoveries:

Who	Where	When
Count Strzelecki	Hartley (NSW)	1839
WB Clarke	Hartley (NSW)	1841
McGregor	Wellington (NSW)	1848
James Esmond	Clunes (Vic.)	1851
James Grant	Fingal (Tas.)	1852
FH Litchfield	Finniss River (NT)	1865
R Hann	Palmer River (Qld)	1872
Arthur Bayley	Coolgardie (WA)	1892

Use the text 'Australia Strikes Gold!' to answer these questions.

1. List the benefits of keeping any discovery of gold a secret from these points of view.

Individual	Government

2. Why do you think people were discouraged to leave for the American goldfields by the government or their employers?

3. What important knowledge did Hargreaves bring back to Australia?

4. 1 troy ounce (oz) equals 31 grams (g). Convert these gold measurements to grams.

(a) 4 ounces _____

(b) 12 ounces _____

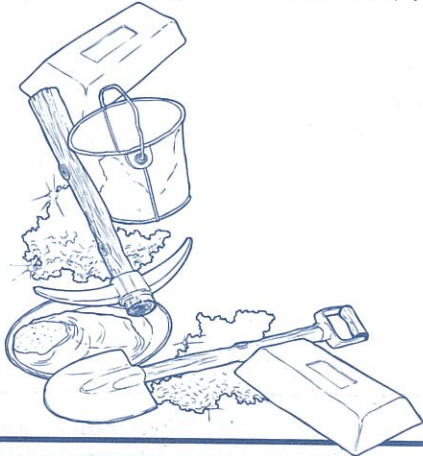
(c) 8 ounces _____

(d) 15 ounces _____

(e) 28 ounces _____

(f) 55 ounces _____

5. On the map of Australia, locate and mark the site of each significant find listed in the text and table on the previous page. Use an atlas to help you if necessary.



Topics for Discussion/Debate

- Hargreaves should not have been rewarded for the find near Ophir, as he was not with Lister and Tom at the time of the find.
- Did the gold or silver deposits really belong to the Crown, or did they belong to the Aboriginal people of the area?

Additional Activities

- As a class group, complete a time line of gold discovery in Australia, from the very first find through to the most recent finds recorded. Include maps to show each location.
- Select one of the miners mentioned on the previous page and complete a biography of his life.

Search Engine Keywords

Discoverers (by name); Australian goldfields (by name)