

Gold Finds around Australia

Lesson Focus: You will learn about the significant gold finds in each State and Territory of Australia.

Keywords: period, productive, valuable, prospectors, region, foundation

The years 1851 to 1900 saw an exciting period of growth and development in Australia as goldfields mushroomed around Australia. While the first discoveries were in New South Wales (1851), Victorian goldfields soon developed and proved to be extremely productive also in 1851. Smaller finds occurred in Queensland in 1861, Tasmania in 1852 and 1862 saw significant fields developed in Western Australia.

NORTHERN TERRITORY

The first payable gold found in the Northern Territory was discovered by GC McLachlan in 1871, approximately 200 km south-east of Darwin. The area became known as Pine Creek and reached its peak in 1894, with 800 miners working the area. Several other finds were discovered around the central areas of the Northern Territory. The biggest problem was a lack of water for the men. Eight men died of thirst and the government decided to sink wells to encourage more people to the area.



WESTERN AUSTRALIA

After the valuable gold finds in the eastern States, the Western Australian government offered a reward in 1862 to those who could find gold. Traces of gold had been identified by surveyors and small finds had been made in the Pilbara and Murchison areas. In 1892, the more substantial find at Coolgardie started the State's biggest gold rush. The find by Arthur Bayley and William Ford was significant and what started as an alluvial field turned into a large gold reef named 'Bayley's Reward'.

In the following year, Patrick (Paddy) Hannan made a find at Kalgoorlie which was to become one of the richest goldfields in the world (the Golden Mile). Further goldfields in the region followed, some of which are still actively mined using much more sophisticated methods.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

William Chapman first discovered gold south-east of Adelaide in 1852. He received a £500 reward from the government for the first gold found in South Australia. Ten thousand prospectors flocked to the area and soon excavated all the alluvial gold.

The next major gold find was near the Barossa Valley in 1868, when Job Harris and his party discovered gold at Spikes Gully.

The last major gold discovery was north-east of Adelaide at Teetuiipa. Alluvial gold deposits were found by Thomas Brady and Thomas Smith in 1886. They received a £1 000 government reward for their find.

QUEENSLAND

In 1858, a small find was located at the Fitzroy River in north Queensland. The field was short-lived and many diggers returned south with little or no reward.

Gympie on the Mary River was the first major goldfield in Queensland. James Nash discovered gold there in 1867. Within a very short time, approximately 16 000 men were working in Gympie to find their fortune. The alluvial gold soon ran out and larger mining companies moved in with heavy machinery to mine the deeper reefs. A similar story occurred at Charters Towers in 1872.

The most famous of all was the rush to Palmer River after J Mulligan found gold in 1873. Being closer to Hong Kong, it attracted many Chinese prospectors. By the end of the 1880s, all the gold was mined and the town became a ghost town.



NEW SOUTH WALES

After the find of Lister and Toms at Ophir, prospectors flooded into New South Wales searching for their fortune. Other finds were made but these were soon to be overshadowed.

In February 1860, diggers headed for the Snowy River, to Kiandra near Mount Kosciuszko. Within six months of the news of gold, 15 000 diggers had moved to the area to seek their fortune. It was a very difficult area to reach, as there were no roads and supplies had to be brought in by packhorse. Winter was harsh and many diggers left the fields and headed to Lambing Flat in 1861.

Cobar was probably the most productive goldfield in New South Wales. Gold was mined there from 1887 using the water mining method.

VICTORIA

Ballarat and Bendigo were to become some of the greatest goldfields in Australia's history—with Ballarat fields being recognised as the richest alluvial goldfield in the world. These finds led to massive population growth and the opening of new fields at Bendigo. The rush occurred between the years of 1851 and 1860, after which the diggers left in search of other fields in other States. It is this 10-year period that saw massive growth in Australia's population and was the foundation of many Australian traditions, language and culture. It was also a period when Australia was guilty of the persecution and poor treatment of Aboriginal people who held ownership of the goldfields. This ownership was never recognised and Aboriginal people were treated no better than slaves.

TASMANIA

The goldfields of Tasmania have never attracted the large numbers of prospectors that were instantly attracted to other finds.

In 1852, James Grant discovered alluvial gold at The Nook. This discovery attracted 500 miners and was the location of Tasmania's first reef mine. The most productive mine in Tasmania was at Lisle, discovered by the Bessell brothers in 1878. Within one year, 2 500 miners worked the mines.

Beaconsfield became the main mining centre when William Dally found a quartz reef in 1877. In a short space of time, 53 mining companies began operating in the area. This made Beaconsfield the third largest town in Tasmania.

Use the information to answer these questions.

1. Shade the areas on each map (previous pages) where gold was found. You may need the help of an atlas.
2. Complete the time line using keywords and brief facts.

Timeline of Gold Discovery in Australia:

- 1850—1855
- 1855—1860
- 1860—1865
- 1870—1875
- 1865—1870
- 1875—1880
- 1880—1885
- 1885—1890
- 1885—1895
- 1890—1895
- 1895—1900

3. Explain why some goldfields were short-lived, while others are still being mined today.

4. Explain the differences between 'alluvial' mining and 'deep reef' mining.

	Alluvial	Deep Reef
Manpower		
Equipment		
Amount of Gold		

5. In your opinion, which areas would have been the biggest challenge for the gold diggers? Explain your answer.

Use reference material to complete the activities below.

6. Select one goldfield in your State. Research to complete the table below.

Name of goldfield
Location
Size
Amount of gold mined
Total worth
Equipment used
Number of working miners
When discovered
Who discovered the field
When was mining ceased

Topics for Discussion/Debate

It was also a period when Australia was guilty of the persecution and poor treatment of Aboriginal people who held ownership of the goldfields. This ownership was never recognised and Aboriginal people were treated no better than slaves. Discuss.

Additional Activities

By the end of the 1880s, all the gold was mined and the town became a ghost town. This was a regular occurrence. Develop a plan, on your own or with a partner, to prevent towns becoming ghost towns once people have taken all they can from the land. How could you encourage people to stay? Should the land be regenerated and used in another way?

Search Engine Keywords

gold finds in Australia; Australian gold rushes; goldfields (by name); discoverers (by name)