

# Life on the goldfields

Life on the goldfields was hard. Buying food and equipment, and travelling to the goldfields were difficult. Living conditions were poor.

## Buying supplies

Hundreds of prospectors wanted to buy everyday supplies, such as flour, picks, shovels and tents, to take to the goldfields. These things became expensive and hard to find.

## Travelling to the goldfields

People often travelled to the goldfields on foot, with their belongings and supplies in wheelbarrows or tied to their backs. Some people drowned while crossing rivers. Only a few people could afford to ride horses or travel in coaches.

## Living conditions

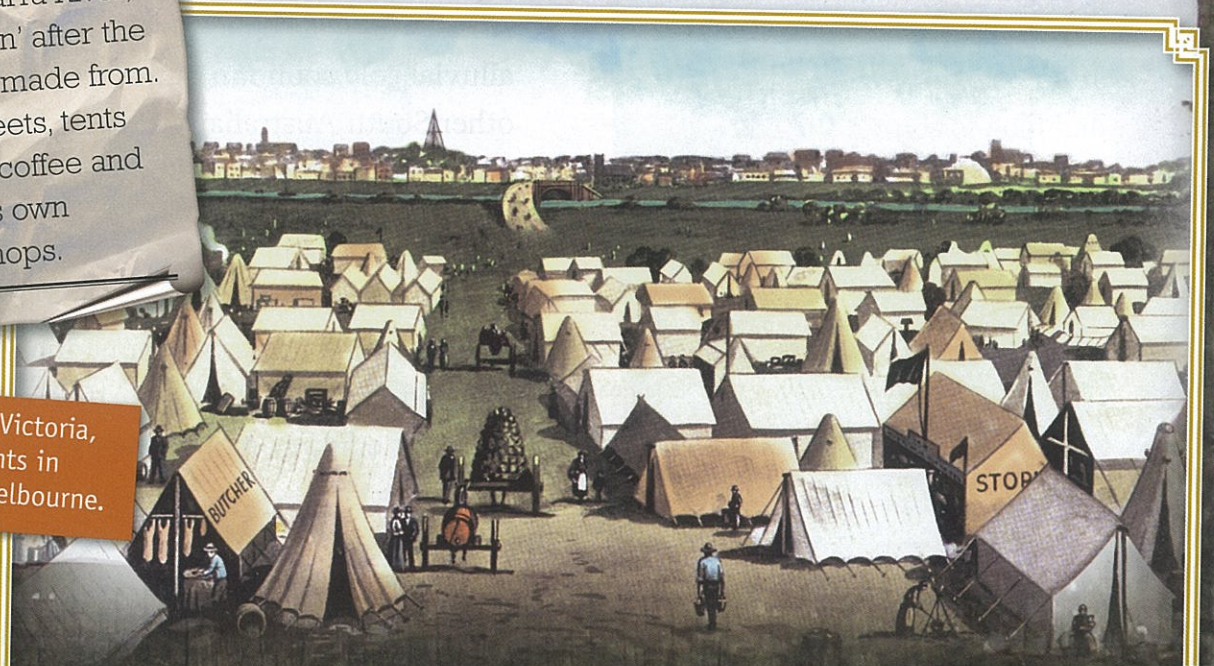
Living conditions on the goldfields were harsh. When people first arrived they put up tents. Later they built huts, usually from bark and wood. Fresh water and food, and medical help were hard to find. The lack of proper drains or toilets caused outbreaks of disease. There were few families and men outnumbered women four to one. There was also a lot of crime.

### GOLD NEWS

In Melbourne, thousands of people arrived to look for gold. They lived in a tent city on the south side of the Yarra River, called 'Canvas Town' after the material tents were made from.

It had its own streets, tents selling 'sly grog', coffee and food, and its own barbers' shops.

During the gold rush in Victoria, many people lived in tents in Canvas Town in South Melbourne.

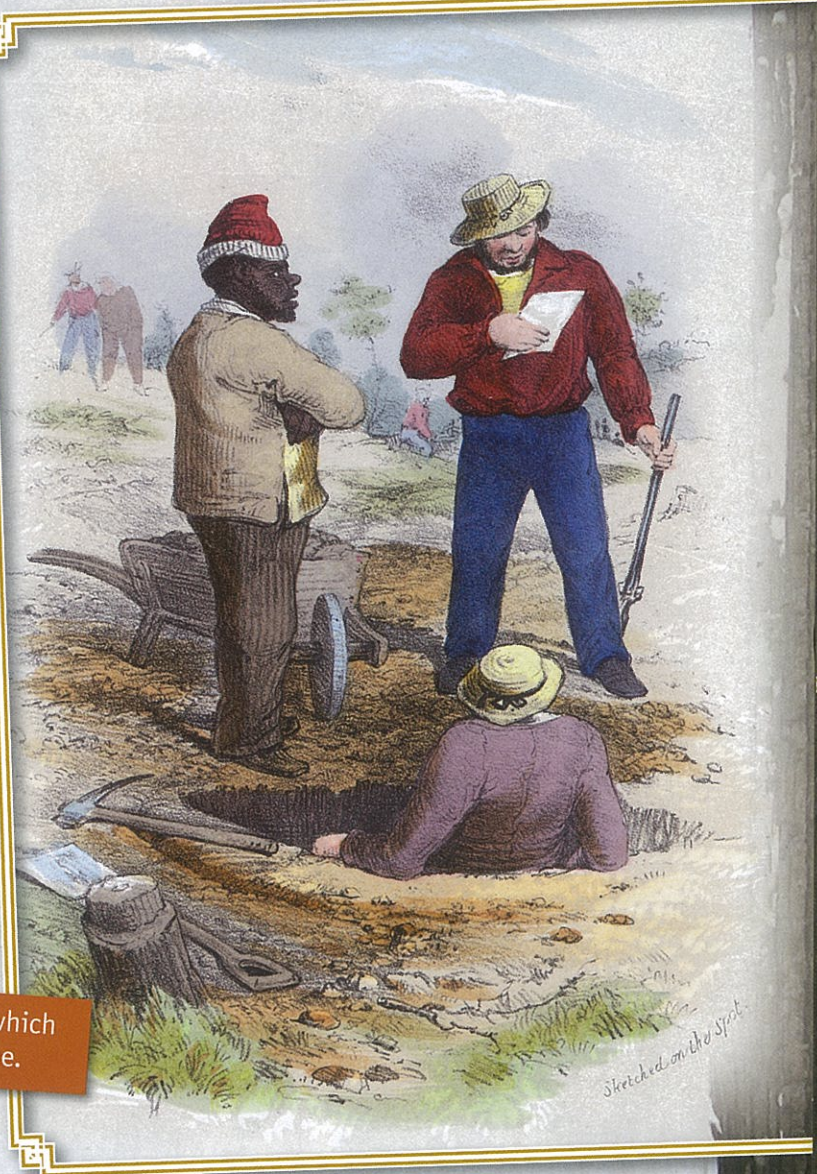


## Hard work

Finding gold was hard, dirty and dangerous work. Miners worked six days a week. They did not have to work on Sundays, but often had to mend or wash their clothes and equipment then. About 80 per cent of miners made very little money. Many eventually returned to larger towns or cities to find other work.

## Gold licences

Miners had to pay a fee for a gold licence that allowed them to dig, even if they did not find any gold. This cost 30 shillings (about \$150) a month. Police often conducted 'licence hunts'. They came to inspect licences and sometimes treated miners very roughly if they did not have one.



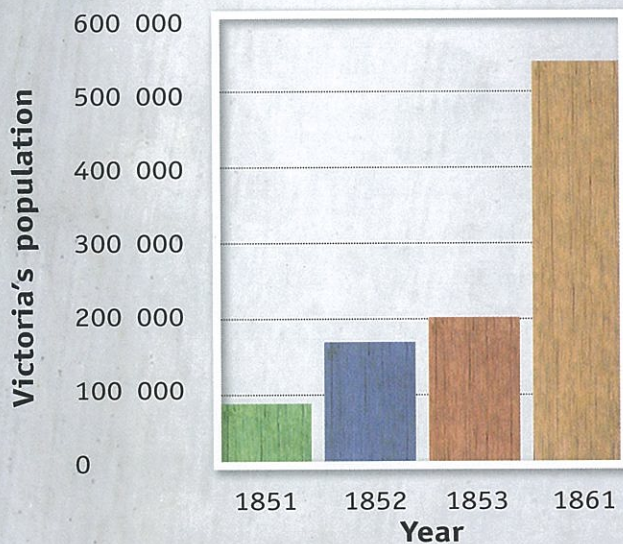
Gold miners had to carry a gold licence, which could be checked by the police at any time.

## Striking it rich

Some miners on the goldfields were lucky and struck it rich. They bought fancy clothes, and expensive horses and carriages. The owners of hotels and shops often became very rich too. The goldfields were mostly a long way from cities and towns, so hotel and shop owners could charge high prices, and their customers on the goldfields had no choice but to pay them.

# People on the goldfields

After gold was discovered in 1851, thousands of people came to Australia from places such as Europe, China and the United States of America. In ten years, the population of New South Wales had doubled. In Victoria, the population increased by more than five times.



The population of Victoria grew dramatically during the gold rushes.

## Indigenous Australians

Indigenous Australians lived in areas where gold was found. Goldfields were set up in places where they had once hunted and gathered food and water. Some Indigenous Australians moved further inland, away from the goldfields. Others tried to fit into the European way of life.

Some Indigenous men worked with Europeans as the first police on the goldfields. They were called the Native Police Corps. Many were excellent horse riders and trackers. Unfortunately, many people resented their powers. Many Native Police also found their duties unpleasant. They did not enjoy checking gold licences or guarding prisoners. After 1853, Indigenous men were used as trackers, but not as police.

Some Indigenous men were employed as Native Police during the gold rushes.

Chinese miners often searched for gold in the dirt that European miners had thrown away.



## Chinese on the goldfields

After the English and Irish, the biggest national group on the goldfields was the Chinese. Most came from southern China, hoping to get rich before going back home. They worked hard, but were disliked by many other miners.

Many Europeans were afraid the Chinese would find a lot of gold, and that there would not be enough left for Europeans. Some European miners tried to drive the Chinese away using violence. The police and other sympathetic miners tried to help the Chinese, but riots broke out. In Victoria, the government appointed an official to look after Chinese miners. In Western Australia, a Protector of Chinese was appointed.

By 1854, laws were put in place to make it harder for the Chinese to come to Victoria. Chinese immigrants were charged 10 pounds (about \$1000) each to land. They also had to buy a Residence Ticket. No other group had to pay these fees. The government hoped this would discourage Chinese immigration and restore peace on the goldfields. However, many Chinese miners landed in Robe, South Australia, which did not charge Chinese immigrants at that time. Then they walked to the Victorian goldfields.

### GOLD NEWS

At Ararat in Victoria in 1854, 60 Chinese gold claims were 'jumped', or taken over, by European miners. The miners knew that the Chinese did not have Residence Tickets, which would have protected them.

# Glossary

<b>alluvial gold</b>	gold found in gravel, sand, mud and other material left by running water
<b>claim</b>	a piece of government land that a miner has the right to mine
<b>colony</b>	a settlement in a new land that is still controlled by the place the settlers came from
<b>convicts</b>	people transported to British colonies as punishment for crimes
<b>depression</b>	a period when people spend less money on goods and services, so businesses do not make as much money and many people lose their jobs
<b>drives</b>	horizontal tunnels in a mine
<b>free settlers</b>	people who were not convicts who came to live in a new land
<b>gold commissioner</b>	a government official responsible for giving out and checking gold licences, settling disputes and maintaining order on a goldfield
<b>gold escorts</b>	groups of armed guards who protected gold that was being transported from the goldfields
<b>gold licences</b>	licences giving miners permission to dig for gold
<b>gold ore</b>	a rocky mineral called quartz containing gold
<b>leads</b>	underground layers in old riverbeds containing gold
<b>parliament</b>	a group of people elected to represent voters in making laws
<b>payable gold</b>	gold that can be sold for more money than it cost to find
<b>pounds</b>	units of money formerly used in Australia; one pound bought the same as about \$100 today
<b>prospectors</b>	people who look for gold or other precious minerals
<b>quartz-reefs</b>	concentrated areas of a rocky mineral called quartz lying underground and containing gold; also called seams or veins
<b>shaft</b>	a sloping passageway or tunnel leading into a mine
<b>squatters</b>	people who ran farms on government land, initially without permission, but who were later given permission to stay
<b>telegraph lines</b>	a system of wires and circuits used for sending messages or electrical signals over great distances