

# The gold rushes

The gold rushes were a milestone in Australia's history. They marked the end of Australia's convict era, and helped to create the conditions that led to Australia becoming a separate nation in 1901.

## The lure of gold

Gold is one of the world's most precious metals. To most people it represents wealth and prosperity. When a gold discovery is made, many people feel the urge to travel to the goldfield and try to find their fortune. This is called a gold rush. In the mid-1800s, there were two major gold rushes. One started in California, in the United States of America, in 1848. The other began in Australia in 1851.

## A prison no more

The time from 1788 to 1851 saw many changes in Australia. Huge tracts of land were transformed from bushland to farmland: Control of the land passed from the Aboriginal nations to European farmers and British colonial governments.

By 1851, Europeans no longer saw Australia as a prison for British criminals. Europeans had been born in Australia, and others had settled there to make new lives.

Although the colonies still saw themselves as belonging to Britain, a feeling was developing that Australia was an exciting new land, where future generations could build successful lives.

The colonies looked for new industries to support and guarantee their futures. The gold rushes provided that opportunity, especially for New South Wales and Victoria. They made Australia a wealthy place, and provided money that was invested in other industries. The gold rushes also resulted in a population boom, which increased the amount of goods that had to be produced.



Gold is still regarded as representing wealth, and is used as a form of money. Its beauty also makes it highly prized for jewellery.

MILESTONES IN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY



The gold rushes created the conditions for Australia to become a separate nation, in 1901.

## Towards nationhood

Perhaps the most important result of the gold rushes was that it hastened the move towards Australia becoming a nation. At that time, few European people wanted Australia to be free of British control, but the gold rushes provided two things that made this possible later on. First, it gave two of the colonies – New South Wales and Victoria – great wealth. Secondly, it brought a sudden influx of people. Most of them stayed after the gold rushes to work and live. This increased the amount of goods that had to be produced, creating jobs and making many businesses successful. Nationhood was achieved at Federation, in January 1901.

## A precious metal

For thousands of years, gold has been valued by many civilisations. At first it was valued for its use as decoration and jewellery. Gold is a soft metal so it is easily shaped, and it does not tarnish with age. About 4000 years ago, it was first used to represent the value of other items. The first coins, made from a mixture of gold and silver called electrum, were made in Turkey about 2600 years ago.

