

Sovereign Hill Education Goldfields Quotes

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[Gold in the grass-roots - William Howitt](#) (mp3 file)

“Yet out of the very roots of the grass we shake gold. We can see the particles shining as we open pieces of the grass roots, ...”

(William Howitt *Land, Labour and Gold; or Two Years in Victoria* Longmans, London, 1855 quoted in Nancy Keesing (ed) *History of the Australian Gold Rushes by those who were there*. Angus and Robertson, Melbourne 1981 edition. pp 48 and 49)

[Tragedy in Peg Leg Gully - C Rudston Read](#) (mp3 file)

“Four brothers were digging in Peg Leg Gully, endeavouring to bottom a hole again that had been filled up during the floods ... One of the banks slightly giving way, they endeavoured to keep it up (when too late) with shores, branches of trees etc. Whilst in the act of doing this, the younger brother, who was down in the pit, stuck fast ...finding he could not extricate himself, his brothers immediately rendered their assistance; this was to no avail, and immediately they called for help.

In less than a minute many arrived with ropes, buckets, bailers, shovels scoops &c. and set to work endeavouring to clear away the stuff, and some sailors dropping down got him slung, when every one that could get hold, tried to pull him out, he was at the same time having his arms around his elder brother’s neck ... but it was of no avail, the stuff slowly filled in upon him, and as it rose the poor brother was compelled to let him go to save his own life, and the unfortunate lad was smothered.”

(C Rudston Read, *What I Heard, Saw and Did at the Australian Goldfields* T.&W. Boone, London, 1853 as quoted in Nancy Keesing (ed) *History of the Australian Gold Rushes by those who were there*. Angus and Robertson, Melbourne 1981 edition. P 102)

[Strange and Pathetic Cases – William Howitt](#) (mp3 file)

“In fact, he appeared on the very verge of consumption (a disease of the lungs), and said he had been a year and a half in the colony; that he had been to all the diggings, both in Sydney and Victoria, but everywhere with the same absolute want of luck; that everywhere he had been pursued by dysentery, or some other exhausting complaint ...he had no means of carrying his tent and tools away.”

(William Howitt *Land, Labour and Gold; or Two Years in Victoria* Longmans, London, 1855 quoted in Nancy Keesing (ed) *History of the Australian Gold Rushes by those who were there*. Angus and Robertson, Melbourne 1981 edition. P 58)

[Flies! – William Howitt](#) (mp3 file)

“The little black-devil fly all day attacked our eyes, nose and mouth: and great blowflies in thousands blew our blankets, rugs and everything woollen, all over with their maggots, which were at once dried upon by the sun. They covered spaces of a foot square at once with them, all adhering by a sort of gluiness.”

(William Howitt *Land, Labour and Gold; or Two Years in Victoria* Longmans, London, 1855 quoted in Nancy Keesing (ed) *History of the Australian Gold Rushes by those who were there*. Angus and Robertson, Melbourne 1981 edition. P 110)

[The Women of Bendigo – William Howitt](#) (mp3 file)

“The women of Bendigo are much more neatly dressed than you would expect ... There is no lack of handsome mantillas, polkas, smart bonnets, and parasols. ... Yet, in a morning, you may often see these ladies – and very often, too, smart young girls, not more than fifteen-hanging out their wash, busy at their cooking, or chopping wood with great axes, which they seem not to swing, but which rather swing them, as they cut splinters from the stumps which ornament this digger landscape ...

As to girls marrying here-the great temptation- that is soon accomplished.- for I hear lots of diggers get married almost every time they go down to Melbourne to spend their gold. A lot of the vilest scoundrels are assembled here from the four winds of heaven. Nobody knows them; much less whether they have left wives behind them in their own country.”

(William Howitt *Land, Labour and Gold; or Two Years in Victoria* Longmans, London, 1855 quoted in Nancy Keesing (ed) *History of the Australian Gold Rushes by those who were there*. Angus and Robertson, Melbourne 1981 edition. P 129)

[The Amiable Female – Mrs Clacy](#) (mp3 file)

“Whilst her husband was at work farther down the gully, she kept a sort of sly-grog shop, and passed the day selling and drinking spirits, swearing, and smoking a short tobacco-pipe at the door of her tent. She was a most repulsive looking object. A dirty, gaudy-coloured dress hung unfastened about her shoulders, coarse black hair unbrushed, uncombed, dangled about her face, over which her evil habits had spread a genuine bacchanalian glow, whilst in a loud masculine voice she uttered the most awful words that ever disgraced the mouth of man – ten thousand times more awful when proceeding from a woman’s lips”

(Mrs Charles (Ellen) Clacy, *A lady’s Visit to the Gold Diggings of Australia in 1852 – 53* Hurst & Blackett, London, 1853 as quoted in Nancy Keesing (ed) *History of the Australian Gold Rushes by those who were there*. Angus and Robertson, Melbourne 1981 edition. P 134)

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[Survey of Bendigo - James Bonwick](#) (mp3 file)

"We live in canvas homes, or huts of bark and logs...Our furniture is of simple character. A box, a block of wood, or a bit of paling across a pail, serves as a table ... We have those who indulge in plates, knives and forks but ... the washing of plates and cleaning of knives and forks require an application of cleanliness most foreign to the ... diggings. Besides, chops can be picked out of the frying pan, placed on a lump of bread, and cut with a clasp knife that has done good service in fossicking during the day"

... "And yet, in spite of the weather, exposure, dust, mud, filth, flies and fleas, the diggings have such attractions that even the unlucky must come back for another trial. The wild, free and independent life appears the great charm. They have no masters. They go where they please and work when they will."

(James Bonwick, *Notes of a Gold Digger and Gold Digger's Guide*, E. Connebee, Melbourne, 1852 as quoted in Nancy Keesing (ed) *History of the Australian Gold Rushes by those who were there*. Angus and Robertson, Melbourne 1981 edition. P 157 &159)

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[Never shall I forget that scene - Ellen Clacy](#) (mp3 file)

"Never shall I forget that scene, it well repaid a journey even of sixteen thousand miles. The trees had been all cut down; it looked like a sandy plain, or one vast unbroken succession of countless gravel pits."

(Ellen Clacy, *A Lady's Visit to the Gold-Diggings of Australia in 1852-3*, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne, 1963 (first published 1853))

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[Night at the diggings – Ellen Clacy](#) (mp3 file)

"Night at the diggings is the characteristic time; murder here - murder there - revolvers cracking - blunderbusses (big firearms) bombing - rifles going off - balls whistling - one man groaning with a broken leg - another shouting because he couldn't find his way to his hole, and a third equally vociferous (loud) because he has tumbled into one - this man swearing - another praying - a party of bacchanals (drunks) chanting various ditties to different time and tune, or rather minus both."

(Ellen Clacy, *A Lady's Visit to the Gold-Diggings of Australia in 1852- 3*, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne, 1963 (first published 1853))

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[The Commissioner's Report - John Richard Hardy, first Gold Commissioner in New South Wales Camp, June 1851](#) (mp3 file)

"...I am happy to say that I have not experienced the slightest trouble or annoyance from any person here; they refer all their disputes to me without attempting to settle them by violence, and submit to my decision without murmur. I have not sworn in any special constables; it is perfectly unnecessary, for everything goes on in as orderly and quiet a manner as in the quietest English town. There is no drinking or rioting going on."

(John Richard Harding, *Further Papers Relative to The Discovery of Gold in Australia*, Parliamentary Papers, Great Britain and Ireland, H.M. Stationery Office, 1852 as quoted in Nancy Keesing (ed) *History of the Australian Gold Rushes by those who were there*. Angus and Robertson, Melbourne 1981 edition. P 26 & 27)

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[What Men! – William Howitt](#) (mp3 file)

"What men! and what costumes! Huge burly fellows with broad, battered straw or cabbage-tree hats, huge beards, loose blue shirts, and trowsers (sic) yellow with clay and earth, many of them showing that they had already been digging in Sydney, where there is so much gold, but according to fame, not so abundant or so pure as in this colony; almost every man had a gun, or pistols in his belt, and a huge dog, half hound half mastiff, led by a chain. Each had his bundle, containing his sacking to sleep upon, his blanket and such slight change of linen as these diggers carry. They had, besides, their spades and picks tied together; and thus they marched up the country, bearing with them all they want, and lying out under the trees."

(William Howitt, *Land, Labour, and Gold: or Two Years in Victoria With Visits to Sydney and Van Diemon's Land*, Longmans, London, 1855)

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[A crisis has arrived – William Howitt](#) (mp3 file)

"Hermsprong ...was appointed to the post of Inspector of Police on one of the chief diggings...Nothing was so frequent in the newspapers and police reports as the exploits of Hermsprong, in discovering, fining and burning down the tents of sly grogsellers. ...

A poor Irishwoman was left a widow with several children, the youngest of which was only a few days old. Hermsprong had discovered that this poor woman sold grog. He appeared before her tent ... and, ill as she was, summoned her out. When he charged her with the sale of grog, she did not deny it, but said that her husband being killed in an accident, her countrymen had advised her, as her only means of support for herself and her little children, to sell grog, promising to give her their custom; and the poor woman said, piteously, "What, your honour, was I to do?"

Without replying to her remark, Hermsprong turned to the police with him, and said, "Fire that tent!"

The poor woman shrieked out, “For God’s sake, sir, spare my tent! Spare my children!” The children were all at that moment in the tent; the infant of a few days old fast asleep. The police ... refused to a man to execute this diabolical order. Swearing at them ... Hermsprong leapt from his horse, stalked up to a fire burning before the tent, seized a burning brand, and fired the tent with his own hand.

The poor woman uttering a frantic cry, rushed into the tent, snatched up her baby, and, followed by her other children, came out and stood shrieking and tearing her hair like a maniac, while her tent, and all she had in the world, consumed before her eyes. ...

For two years [Hermsprong] was permitted to continue his savage and corrupt career ... He was dismissed; and he retired with these memorable words – his official salary be it remembered was 400 per year – “I don’t mind being turned out; for in these two years I have cleared 15,000!””

(William Howitt Land, *Labour and Gold; or Two Years in Victoria* Longmans, London, 1855 quoted in Nancy Keesing (ed) *History of the Australian Gold Rushes by those who were there*. Angus and Robertson, Melbourne 1981 edition. P209)

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[Chinese for Creswick – William Howitt](#) (mp3 file)

Ballarat May, 1854

“Here were ten or a dozen of these Chinamen, all apparently of recent arrival. They were chiefly dressed in loose blue blouses, or shirts, with a belt round the waist, short, wide blue trousers and light boots. On their heads they had those flat straw hats ... They were in fact more like umbrellas, with the Chinamen for handles, than anything else.

... One man had at the end of his pole a working cradle, and at the other end a puddling tub. This must have weighed at least a hundredweight.”

(William Howitt Land, *Labour and Gold; or Two Years in Victoria* Longmans, London, 1855 quoted in Nancy Keesing (ed) *History of the Australian Gold Rushes by those who were there*. Angus and Robertson, Melbourne 1981 edition. P122)

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[They are a great Nuisance – Charles James Kenworthy](#) (mp3 file)

Q. 1364. “There are a great number of Chinamen here now are there not?”

A – Yes; and they are a great nuisance on the diggings, and the Government ought to take some steps, if not their removal, at all events to prevent their increase; they are a great nuisance; they spoil al, the water on the Gold Fields, and will merely work upon the surface.” ...

Q.1366. “Is there any other disadvantage connected with them?”

A- They are a great set of thieves.”

(From evidence presented by Charles James Kenworthy, American, Ballarat, on 23 December, 1854 to the Goldfields Commission of Enquiry. Reprinted in I.F McLaren, *The Chinese in Victoria: Official Reports and Documents* Red Rooster Press, Ascot Vale, 1985)

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[Inferior Races – Henry Melville](#) (mp3 file)

Q. 3102”Are there any others but Chinese of the Inferior races?”

A – I do not think that any but the Chinese would be complained of by the diggers. We have American blacks, and I have seen two or three Lascars; but the principal are Chinese.”

(From evidence presented by Henry Melville, a publican (formerly a storekeeper) Castlemaine on 30 December, 1854 to the Goldfields Commission of Enquiry. Reprinted in

I.F McLaren, *The Chinese in Victoria: Official Reports and Documents* Red Rooster Press, Ascot Vale, 1985)

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[Condition of the Aborigines – W. Thomas, Guardian of Aborigines, Melbourne District, 1852](#) (mp3 file)

“... The present condition of the aborigines have (sic) no way improved but lamentably deteriorated. The discovery of gold has greatly affected their moral condition...

...They are now brought to an awful and dangerous state of degradation, so that the speedy extinction of the Melbourne and Moorabool tribes are inevitable.”

(W. Thomas, *Further Papers relative to the Discovery of Gold in Australia* (Parliamentary Papers, Great Britain and Ireland, H.M. Stationary Office, 1853) quoted in Nancy Keesing (ed) *History of the Australian Gold Rushes by those who were there*. Angus and Robertson, Melbourne 1981 edition. P116)

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[A statement to the Colonists of Victoria – Peter Lalor](#) (mp3 file)

“...the people were dissatisfied with the laws, because they excluded them from the possession of land, from being represented in the Legislative Council, and imposed on them an odious poll tax. The diggers were subjected to the most unheard of insults and cruelties in the collection of this tax, being in many instances chained to logs if they could not produce their licences...”

(Peter Lalor, *Letter to the Colonists of Victoria*, The Argus, 10 April 1855, as reprinted in Bob O’Brien, *Massacre at Eureka, The Untold Story*, Brown Prior Anderson, Burwood, 1992)

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[The Eureka Oath – Ballarat Times Report](#) (mp3 file)

“Some five hundred diggers advanced in real sober earnestness, the captains of each division making the military salute due to Lalor, who knelt down, the head uncovered, and with right hand pointing to the standard exclaimed in firm measured tone, “We swear by the Southern Cross to stand truly by each other and defend our rights and liberties”. A universal well-rounded “Amen” was the determined reply. Five hundred right hands stretched towards our flag.”

Ballarat Times as quoted in in Bob O’Brien, *Massacre at Eureka, The Untold Story*, Brown Prior Anderson, Burwood, 1992, p78)