

Sovereign Hill Education

Quotes from the Goldfields

Quotes from **History of the Australian Gold Rushes by those who were there**. Nancy Keesing (ed), Angus and Robertson, Melbourne 1981 edition

The Commissioner's Report

John Richard Hardy, first Gold Commissioner in New South Wales Camp, June 1851

... 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."

Gold was found in Ballarat

William H. Hall, 1851 pp 46-47

"Well Tom," said I. "What luck have you had?"
"Good luck, sir; I have earned as much in ten days as I should have done by harder work in two years."
"What quantity have you got, Tom?"
"About eight pounds, sir" ...
I left this man at the diggings; and, at the time of my departure, he had acquired upwards of £2,000 (Note There are 16 ounces to a pound. Gold was worth around £3.00 per ounce at the time.)

Gold was found in Ballarat

William H. Hall, 1851 pp 48-49

"The hole was 32 feet (10 metres) deep, and well shored up ... On reaching the bottom, I found the man fossicking with a trowel, knife, and shear blade ... I superintended his operations for about an hour, and during that time he obtained 1 lb (pound) 11 oz (ounces) of pure gold by fossicking."

Strange and Pathetic Cases

William Howitt, p 58

"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."

Gold in the grass-roots

William Howitt p 98

"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, ..."

Tragedy in Peg Leg Gully

C. Rudston Read p 102

"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."

Flies!

William Howitt p 110

"The little black-devil fly all day attacked our eyes, nose and mouth: and great blowflies in thousands blew our blankets, rugs and everything woolen, 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."

Chinese for Creswick

William Howitt 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.”

The Women of Bendigo

William Howitt

“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.”

‘The amiable female’

From ‘A Lady’s visit to the gold Diggings of Australia in 1852-53

Mrs Charles (Ellen) Clacy, p 62-63

“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.”

Survey of Bendigo, early 1850s

James Bonwick

“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 sapling 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.”

Survey of Bendigo, early 1850s

James Bonwick

“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.”

More Quotes

For more primary source quotes, go to **Golden Literature; Quotes from the Goldfields** in the Primary section of our Research Notes.

