

THE GOLD MINING VILLAGE:

THE MAIN STREET

The typical gold mining town, as you see here in Lachlan Vintage Village, developed out of necessity. It started with miners who came with the first rush when gold was discovered. Then the Hawkers arrived and set up their little humpies. They were probably men who tried mining, but found there was more gold in selling provisions and implements to the miners. These humpies sprang up one at a time, some of them with grand facades on bark backs and bark roofs. Some speculators only bothered with business houses. You would find the undertaker in his tent which was very primitive, as they had to come quickly because of the high population that flowed to the gold fields. Then of course there were the ones who spent a bit more time and did a better job with their store; hoping to give the impression of a grander looking store, but around the back it was bark and slab. Slowly as things improved they would remove some of the bark and put on slabs or properly sawn timber to dress them up. The gold mining lasted for several years and as they were too busy making money, there was no time to make improvements, life was too hectic. The gold miner would come in, buy a pair of new boots, put his new boots on out the front and leave his old boots lying in the street. Little things like this make it quite interesting if you study old photographs on gold mining. If you look for these finer details in the pictures you will discover lots of living history in these little snapshots.

MEDICAL HALL (CIRCA 1860)

This building is a simple store, typical of the rural regions. It has a bark roof, and a weatherboard lining on the main part to try and make it look businesslike. It even has a bark extension on it, which is the peculiar anomaly that happened in this period, of improvisation, running out of sawn timber, so "right oh, there's a tree over there, let's whack some bark on the extension". That is literally what happened.

Doctors in those days were few and hard to find, especially in the gold fields. Consequently apothecary's established themselves and prescribed the current available cures. The proprietor was either a dentist or a doctor, even a partly qualified person dispensing pills, lotions, ointments and so on. Like modern chemist shops today the enterprising proprietor of those days would stock what he could as well to make a living.

O'MEALLY'S INN (SHANTY) PUB

This bark and slab hut was used as a GROC SHOP in the Weddin Mountains near Grenfell. It was owned by Paddy O'Meally who at the age of 65 married and later had 10 children. One of these children was Johnny O'Meally who was a member of Ben Hall's bushranging gang. Johnny O'Meally was shot by the owner of Goimbla (Mr Campbell) a property about 32 miles from Forbes. Wine, ale or spirits were served from the tethering posts outside the pub. Drinks were then carried inside.

The gold being encased by rock in most cases depends on the elements to make it free, these elements could be hot then cold weather causing the rock to break. Over millions of years this eventually gives us sand to be carried by down pours of rain. With the sand travels the gold until its own weight deposits it, so that chemical decay, moving water etc. gives us alluvial gold. In other countries the word Placer is used instead of alluvial. Reef gold occurs often in true veins of gold in this field. These veins would be found in Quartz reefs or the strong Andesite Lodes. Both Quartz and Andesite are so much harder that they have stayed in position weathering the elements that have eroded most other rocks.

The water level at about twelve feet in this district would hardly have much to do with the richness or indication of gold deposits but it is related to the large Andesite Lode or Dyke. This Andesite acts as an outlet for stored volumes of water that look for a break in the earth's crust.

Water and other complexities hinder development of known areas but high gold prices and modern prospecting and present methods will one day see developments on this field.

Local methods of Mining and Mine Equipment

When first found the gold attracted a cosmopolitan crew, among whom many were sailors, the evidence before you being the sheave blocks with their ropes; the method the sailor knew how to use to raise the gold bearing rock from underground. Most commonly the Windlass was used by other miners until their shaft got too deep when they used a horse to pull the shaft rope over the Whip Pole. When the rock or wash was drawn to the surface it was carted in a horse dray or sheelbarrow to where it was to be washed, perhaps in a Cradle or a Sluice box. Each miner had ideas on the best method of gold recovery.

For the ease of emptying the buckets hauled out of the shaft, the miners build a pig sty logging called a Brace on which they often set up their Windlass. When the shaft became too deep to get good air circulation they set up a Windsel (Wind Sail) which attracted a breeze to the miner working below. The Brace was another way to keep the flood waters out of the shaft. When a miner found payable gold the Gold Commissioners ruled that he must fly a red flag.

A Horse Whim was often used to help in the treatment of the Gold wash such as a Puddling Machine. Again it was a common method of hauling ore or wash out of the deeper mines. Miners liked to congregate to dish-wash their samples but when the actual gold winning Sluice Box was set up they were secretive, as they were when using the Cradle.

In dry far out areas where water use is restricted, miners often used Dry Blowing systems. Essentially they were bellows that blew off the rubbish and left the gold in dry riffles as the Blower was agitated.

Early miners felt persecuted and objected to most laws. They had to present a Miners' Right on request, and this bone of contention lasted until 1974 when Miners' Rights were abolished and what appears a harsher method implemented. Today a miner usually takes up a mining claim on twenty years lease. When his lease is granted he is obliged to work to the extent of...