

‘Another Broken Hill’: The Mount Deddick Silver-Lead Field

By JIM ENEVER

As an editorial article in the *Australian Mining Standard* of 18 November 1897 reported, the recently discovered Mount Deddick silver-lead field in far East Gippsland, Victoria,

...appears to contain a great number of lodes carrying lead, silver, gold, and copper of a richness fully equal to, if not surpassing, Broken Hill, and free from the objectionable zinc.¹

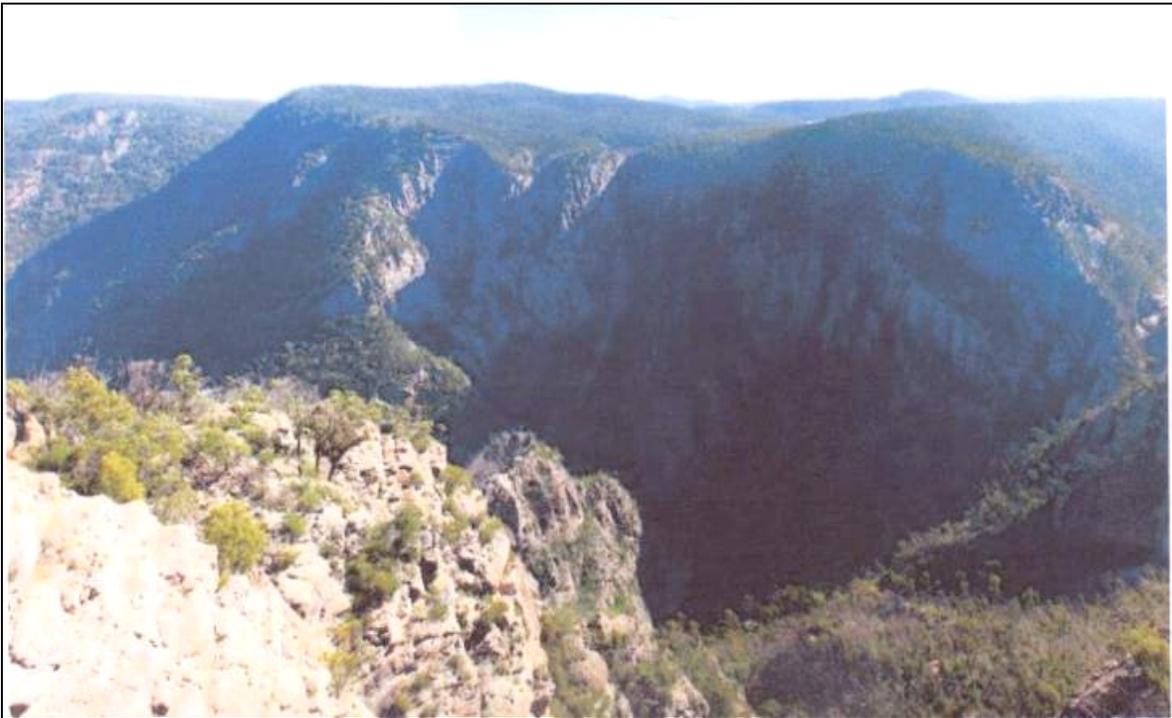
From its discovery in 1896, the Mount Deddick mineral field stimulated much excitement in an otherwise almost exclusively gold focused Victorian mining industry. Situated in the remote Snowy River area near to the New South Wales border, the discovery had been late coming due to the extreme difficulty of access (Figures 1, 2). When it came, however, the discovery coincided with a period of resurgence of mining investment in Victoria, guaranteeing that this new mining field would attract attention from promoters and investors alike.

The boom in quartz mining of the 1860s and 1870s produced a culture of speculation in mining shares in Victoria. By the 1880s this culture was being focused primarily on booms occurring outside of Victoria. Most excitement on the Stock Exchange of Melbourne during the 1880s was provided by the phenomenal wealth of the Broken Hill silver mines. In the first few years of the 1890s Victoria suffered a severe depression. £50,000,000 was wiped off the value of stocks that had fueled the booms of previous years.² From 1894 the situation began to improve. The Melbourne stock market was buoyed by the spectacular success of Mount Lyell, and there was an air of optimism emerging among investors.

On the home front, gold production in Victoria began to increase from 1894, reversing a downward trend that had set in from the time of the original gold rush years and providing a cushion against the disastrous loss of income that had occurred as a result of the economic downturn of the early 1890s.³ This lift in gold production resulted from a

combination of the enhanced activity of individual prospectors galvanised into action by the tough years of the early 1890s, as well as increased investment in mining companies. While limited availability of risk capital proved an obstacle to the development of Victorian mines in the early years of the recovery, by 1896 the problem was beginning to be overcome. Local capital was becoming available and English capital had begun to filter into Victorian mining, partly as a flow-on from the English investment in Western Australian gold mining, and partly as a result of the Victorian Government's measures to promote Victorian mineral prospects in the UK.⁴ The promulgation of the *Mining Development Act* by the Victorian Government in 1896, by which various activities undertaken by mining companies could be subsidised and critical infrastructure provided by government, was aimed at further stimulating interest in mining activities within Victoria.⁵ By 1896 the ingredients were there for an investment boom in Victorian mining. All that was needed were the right types of properties. The relatively large extent of the Mount Deddick field (Figure 3) compared to all other new properties exploited at this time in Victoria made it the inevitable focus of mining investors and promoters.

Figure 1: *Typical topography in area.*

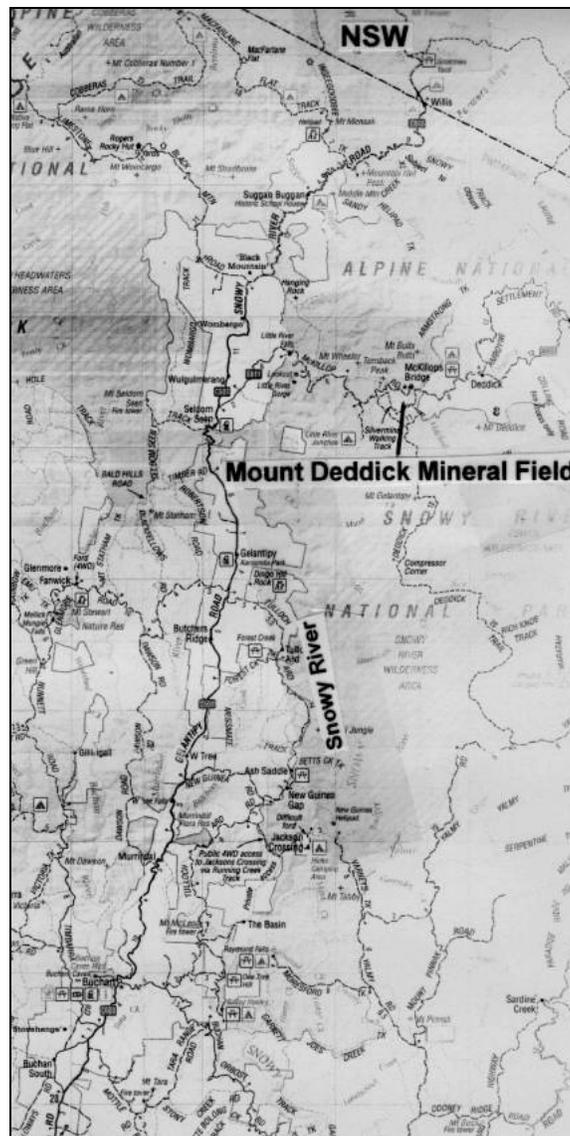


Source: Author's photograph.

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Of the mining companies added to the list of the Stock Exchange of Melbourne during the latter years of the 1890s, about 20 per cent to 30 per cent were formed to exploit properties outside of Victoria, notably at Mount Lyell in Tasmania and Chillagoe in Queensland. Of the remainder, around 95 per cent based their existence on gold mining within Victoria, leaving only around five per cent of new listed companies operating for other than gold in Victoria.⁶ In this latter category, the various companies formed to operate the Mount Deddick field accounted for approximately half of the total non-gold mining companies floated to work in Victoria during this period.⁷

Figure 2: Location Map

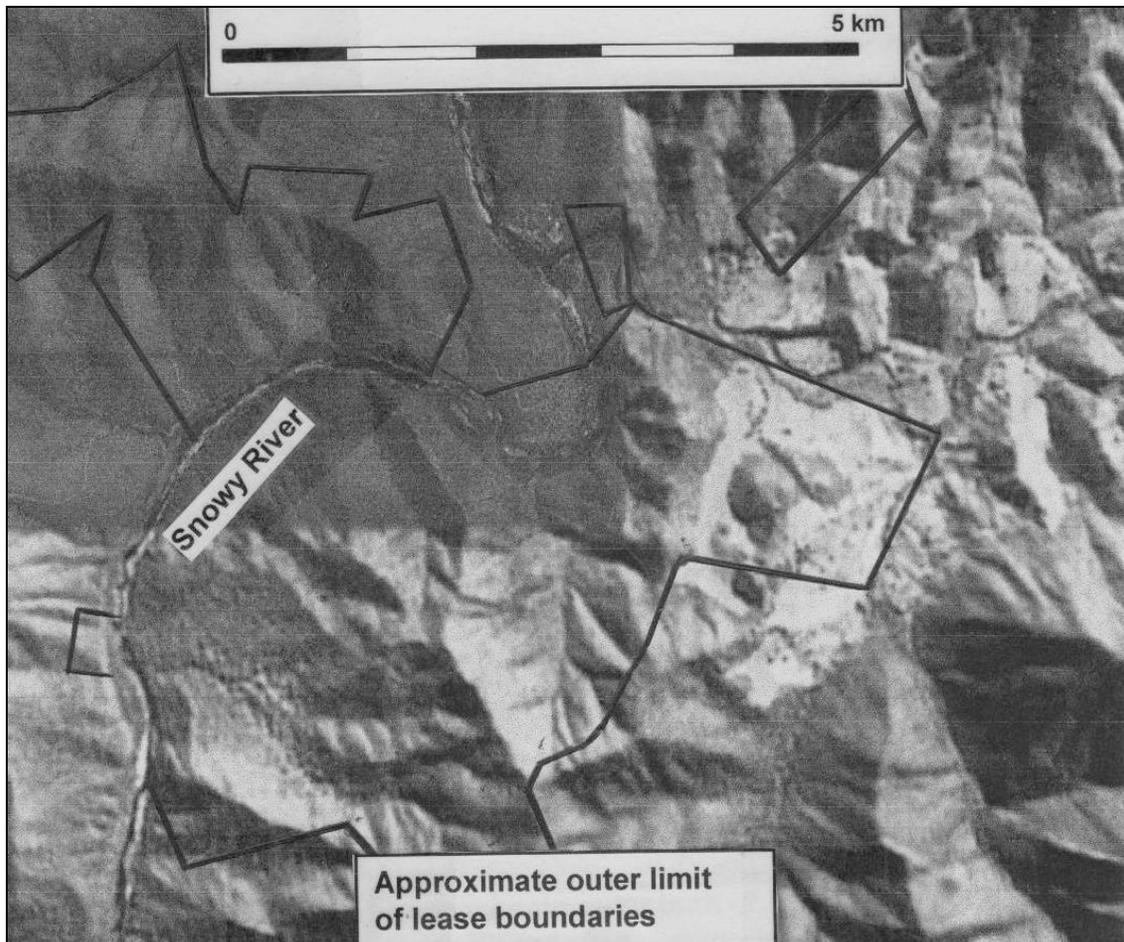


Source: Vicmap.

Discovery and geological interpretation

The earliest record of base metal mineralisation in the Mount Deddick area appears in an 1872 report by Alfred Howitt, a pioneering naturalist and local mine warden.⁸ An excerpt from the guide to the Victorian Exhibition of 1872 describes a sample of silver-lead ore being provided by Howitt from a location ‘near the junction of Dedduck and Snowy Rivers’. The sample was found to contain 18 ounces,⁹ five pennyweights and 20 grains of silver per ton.¹⁰ Occasional anecdotal accounts appeared in the local press from this time on, trumpeting the mineral wealth of the Snowy River region and making unsubstantiated claims about early attempts to work the silver-lead loads in the Deddick area. On 20th June 1896, the *Snowy River Mail* carried an application for a mining lease to be located one mile south of the Snowy River Ferry (Turnback Ferry), adjacent to the river.¹¹

Figure 3: *Approximate extent of area under lease at Mount Deddick, circa 1898.*



Source: Victorian Mines Department lease plans. Base photo from Google Earth

The application was lodged by Hyalmar Peterson on behalf of the Melbourne based Jingalalla Prospecting Association, and was for a term of 15 years to mine silver, copper and gold. In a retrospective account of the events leading up to this application, the *Australian Mining Standard* described Peterson, the syndicate's professional prospector, bringing back to Melbourne samples of ore assaying 71 per cent to 76 per cent lead, and 24 to 26 ounces of silver per ton, in addition to small quantities of gold and copper.¹² The value of the ore was established by tests conducted in South Australia as £11 to £12 per ton. It was these initial promising results that were to lead to the rapid development of the Mount Deddick field.

Earnest Lidgey of the Victorian Geological Survey gave the first account of the geology of the Mount Deddick mineral field in November 1896. His report describes a multitude of generally thin, near vertical, metalliferous veins occurring in a granite mass, with galena being the most common mineral. At the time of Lidgey's visit a number of leases were being prospected, most notably by the Mount Deddick Silver-Lead Mining Co., covering a total area of about one square mile. The veins being explored varied from a few inches to a few feet in width, and in some cases had been traced over a considerable length. In Lidgey's view, 'The field is yet in a purely prospecting stage. The deepest hole is 8 feet, whilst the average depth is only 2 feet. Nothing yet discovered can be considered payable'.¹³

In May 1898, the *Australian Mining Standard* published the text of a more comprehensive geological survey completed by government geologist, James Stirling.¹⁴ In this report details of the various lodes being explored by a number of companies were given, based on an increasing number of exposures in surface excavations and tunnels. This more detailed work did not materially change the fundamental understanding arrived at by Lidgey, except to reinforce the capricious nature of the ore bodies. By this time the area of interest had increased to about 24 square miles, with indications being discovered from the level of the river up to an altitude of around 1,500 feet above the river. The likelihood of the ore bodies persisting to depth was speculated upon by Stirling. He was encouraged enough to offer the opinion that;

Although the veins of galena are small, they are sufficiently numerous to lend hope to the view that further developments, now being carried on in the cross-cutting

operations through the spurs which radiate from Mount Foster [Figure 4], may reveal larger masses of galena.

In 1899, in a follow-up report based on a comprehensive survey conducted by his assistant, W.H. Ferguson, Stirling had this to say;

Realising fully the importance of the responsibility imposed upon me in giving a definite expression of opinion as to the economic value of the field, I must confess that the work done up to the present, while it demonstrates the widespread extent of the galena lodes and impregnations, and also while the results of the survey indicate the possible downward continuity of the galena bearing lodes and impregnations etc. to greater depths, yet the commercial value of the field is, in the language of the Scotchjurists, "Not proven". That a considerable amount of utterly useless prospecting work has been done in different parts of the field is clearly manifested, and a much better system of intelligent prospecting will have to be inaugurated before a final answer can be given to the question as to the ultimate probability of successful mining enterprise. There is nothing in the geological conditions to preclude the possibility of larger bodies of ore being met with at either the higher or lower levels of the area.¹⁵

By 1907 the understanding of the geology was still not sufficiently advanced to offer a more definitive opinion.¹⁶ The nature of the ore bodies at depth was, even then, ten years after discovery, still an unknown factor critical to the eventual prospects for establishment of a viable enterprise.

The development of the Mount Deddick Silver-Lead Field

Despite the at best equivocal understanding of the geological environment, development of the field surged ahead during 1896, 1897 and 1898, driven by forces other than an objective view of the true value of the ore occurrences. From the outset, the cascade of companies formed to progressively exploit the enlarging area of auriferous territory was dominated by an overlapping group of promoters from the Melbourne financial establishment, particularly the Stock Exchange.

The Mount Deddick Silver-Lead Mining Company NL was the first company to be formed. Application for registration of the company was made on the 12th August 1896, shortly after Peterson had brought his samples back to Melbourne.¹⁷ By the time of Lidgley's report in November 1896, the Mount Deddick Silver-Lead Mining Company's lease had been explored by seven openings, proving continuity of the main lode over the

length of the lease and indications of galena elsewhere on the property.¹⁸ The early promising results obtained by the Mount Deddick Company provided the catalyst for a rapid escalation of the level of activity.

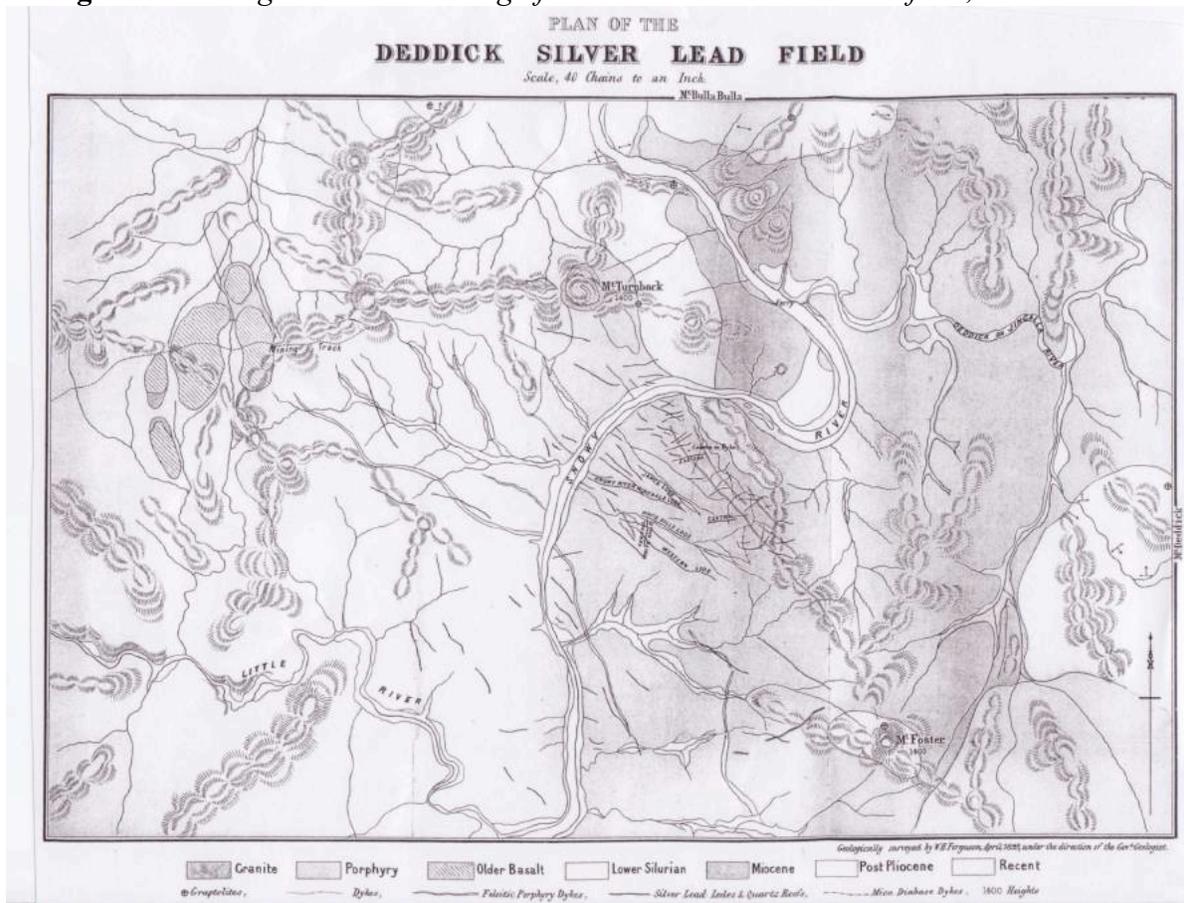
From October 1896 a number of other companies were floated to take up leases adjacent to the Mount Deddick Company's lease. The Snowy River Mineral Company NL and the Black Hills Silver Mining Company NL were registered in October 1896, followed by North Black Hills Silver-Lead Mining Company NL in July 1897, White Hills Mount Deddick Mining Company NL in August 1897, South Mount Deddick Silver-Lead Mining Company NL in August 1897, Jingalalla Silver and Lead Mining Company NL in August 1897, Central Mount Deddick Silver Lead Company NL in September 1897, North Mount Deddick Silver-Lead Mining Company NL in October 1897 and Mount Deddick United Silver-Lead Mining Company NL in February 1898.¹⁹ With the exception of South Mount Deddick and the Jingalalla Silver and Lead Mining Company, all the other companies shared common directors and managers.

The local press carried accounts of progress being made by the various companies throughout 1897 and 1898, generally describing prospects as promising.²⁰ Similar sentiments are contained in a single extant annual report of the Snowy River Mineral Company presented in October 1897.²¹ In November 1897, the *Australian Mining Standard* carried its article predicting that Mount Deddick would become another Broken Hill. Throughout 1898, follow-up articles in the same journal continued to play up the promising nature of the field.²² In August 1898, the manager of the North Mount Deddick mine was reported as believing that with the amount of ore already exposed on the Company's lease, and with a concentrating plant installed, the Company would be in a position to treat from 500 to 600 tons of crude ore weekly and could employ 100 men. In the same article the need for a railway to the field was stressed. In the opinion of the manager, if such a railway connection were made, the field would 'pay well and employ up to 600 or 700 men'.²³

By 1898 the promoters of the field had begun to focus their attentions on the need for vastly improved access to the area. With the rudimentary track access available over the remote and rugged terrain during 1896 and 1897, transport of materials into and ore out from the field was costing around £11 per ton, leaving no margin based on the estimated value of the ore at £11 to £12 per ton.²⁴ From April 1898, the promoters concentrated their

efforts on convincing the Victorian Government to send a delegation to the field, with a view to obtaining government support for improved road access or, preferably, a railway connection.²⁵ A ministerial visit duly took place in May 1898, with much fanfare in the press.²⁶ The delegation, consisting of the Ministers for Mines and Railways along with their staff, the local MLA, government geologist and engineer, several representatives of the various mining companies at Mount Deddick (under the banner of the Mount Deddick Progressive League) and the press, travelled over the established track via Buchan and Gelantipy (Figure 2) to spend several days on the field. An account of the visit in the *Australian Mining Standard* suggested that there was a common view as to the promising nature of the field, and the need for a rail connection of some sort to the port at Cunningham (now Lakes Entrance) at an estimated cost of £100,000.²⁷

Figure 4: Geological understanding of the mount Deddick mineral field, circa 1898.



Source: J. Stirling, 'Further Report on Geological Survey of Mount Deddick Silver Lead Field', Victorian Mines Dept., Monthly Progress Report 1-5, Victorian Government Printer, Melbourne, 1899.

Following the visit, the Mount Deddick Progressive League, under the chairmanship of Melbourne stock-broker Tomas Luxton, continued to lobby government in Melbourne, while local meetings were held to consolidate mining and agricultural interests behind construction of a railway. Subsequently, a public meeting was held in Melbourne by the Progressive League in September 1898 to garner support for a deputation to the Minister for Railways,²⁸ but despite the best efforts of the promoters, in November 1898, the government announced that it would not go ahead with a rail link using public money.²⁹ As an alternative it was suggested that funds available under the *Mining Development Act* (1896) for track cutting and road construction, together with local Shire funds, could be used to improve the existing track from Gelantipy. The Shire, however, decided fairly quickly that it would not commit funds to the project. The budget for the Mining Development Fund for 1898/99, under the category of track cutting and road construction, included minimal expenditure for Gippsland (£212), despite pleas to concentrate the funds available on access to Mount Deddick.³⁰ Some upgrading of the original track was completed by the end of 1899.³¹ Despite this, access was still shown as via a 'Mining Track' by Stirling in 1899 (Figure 4).³²

The failure to secure government support for the railway link saw a slowing down in activities on the field. In his follow-up report on the field published in 1899, Stirling declared:

In accordance with instructions, I have made a further inspection of the Mount Deddick silver lead field, with a view to note any recent developments in the area. There is very little to add to my previous report [1898], except some important developments on the area held by the North Deddick companies, especially in relation to the "Begelhole" lode.³³

At this point in its history, after expenditure of a considerable amount of money in an attempt to prove-up the various lodes by adits, shafts and surface excavations, the Mount Deddick mineral field appeared to be fast becoming a lost cause. Despite all the optimism that had been displayed and the efforts of the promoters, by the end of 1898 only about 50 men were reported to be working in the area, and the total amount of ore that had been transported out of the field as recorded by the Department of Mines was 20 tons (although total production was likely to have been greater).³⁴ Most of the companies had become

dormant, selling off plant in some instances. In the eyes of those trying to promote Mount Deddick at this time, absence of suitable access became the focus for the lack of success, despite the obvious fact that the ore bodies had by no means proved to be of real value.

Activities continued at a low level throughout 1899, 1900, 1901 and 1902. The annual reports of the Department of Mines during these years do not record any activity at Mount Deddick, and no production of silver-lead ore. Sporadic reports in the local press indicate that some activity did in fact continue and that a small amount of high grade ore was shipped out.³⁵ At the half yearly meeting of the Mount Deddick Silver Lead Co. held in March 1902, it was reported that the decision had been made to suspend activities due to the prevailing low prices for silver and lead.³⁶ In July 1904, the *Snowy River Mail* carried a simple statement that 'No work has been done at Mount Deddick or Gelantipy during 1903'.³⁷ No further reports appeared in the local press after this. In 1906, E.J. Dunn, Director of the Geological Survey, visited the field and commented on activities. In his report it is not clear whether he is referring to work that was currently going on, or was purely historical.³⁸ In his opinion, the field still needed more work to fully explore its commercial potential, based on the premise that if the potential could be proved to exist, a proper means of access would invariably follow.

The investment perspective

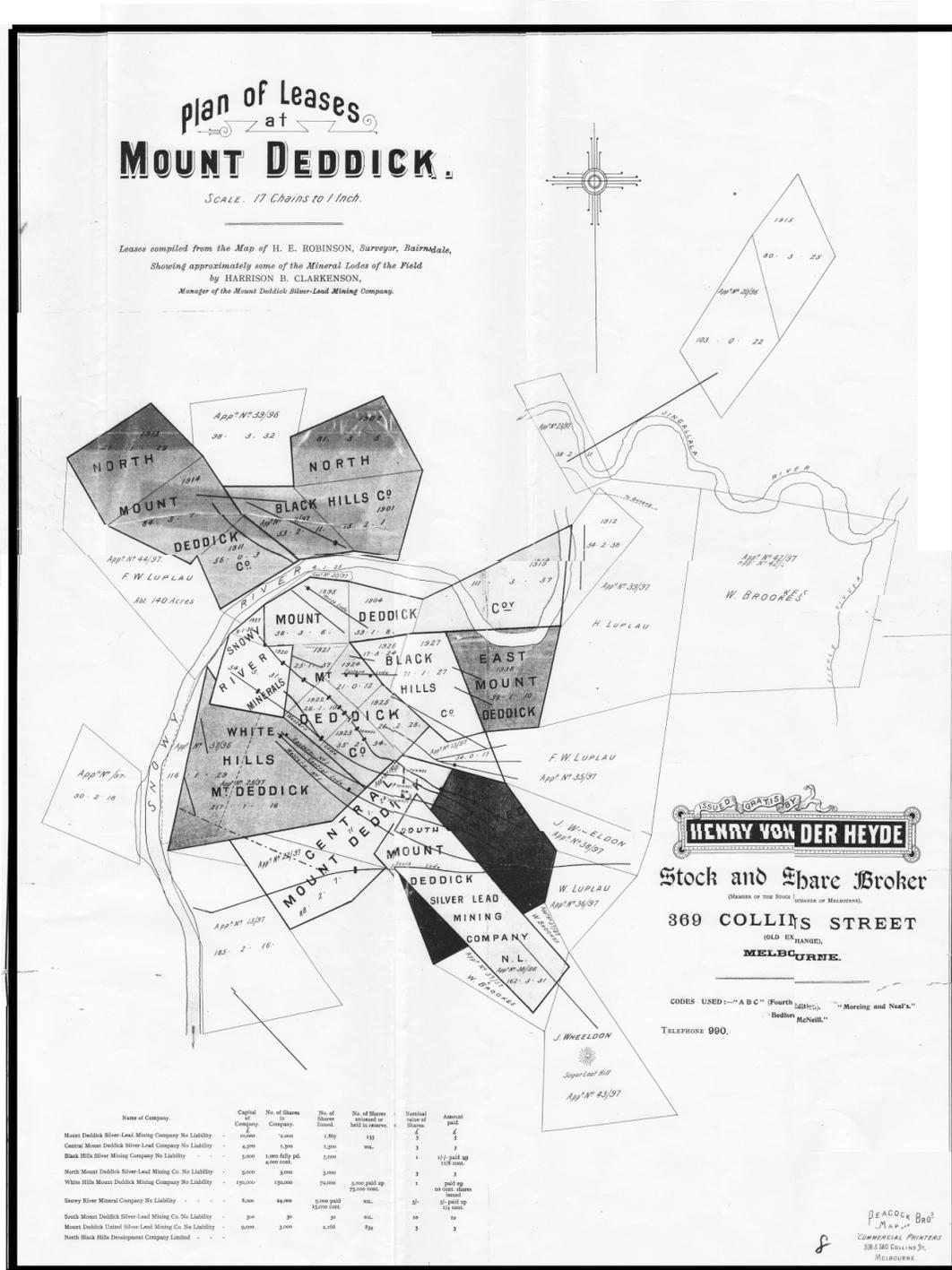
From the outset of its development, the Mount Deddick mineral field displayed many of the characteristics of a field that was being promoted toward boom status. Several members of the Melbourne Stock Exchange became directly involved in the various operating companies, most notably John Gard. Promoters such as Gard were not above spruiking the virtues of the new field. In November 1896, an article in the *Snowy River Mail* described a visit to the field during September-October by Gard and a fellow director of the Mount Deddick Company, Charles Quin.³⁹ In an extract from their report on the visit to the shareholders of the company, they offered the opinion that:

The various places opened out warrant us in confirming that they [the miners on the spot] have proved beyond doubt the existence of a great silver field, and also that the property held by your company will prove of great value.

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The language used in the report is in stark contrast to the more cautious view offered by Lidgely at around the same time.

Figure 5: Plan of leases at Mount Deddick, circa 1898.



Source: State Library of Victoria, Manuscripts Collection, 822.52 GBD 1898.

Apart from the direct involvement of members of the Exchange in the operating companies, other prominent members of the Exchange became involved in promotion of mining companies. Several stock broking firms participated in floats of the various companies where extravagant claims were commonly made. Vendors carried equity was a recurring issue that investors needed to grapple with. One broker, Henry Von der Heyde, produced a consolidated plan of the leases with accompanying information on the leaseholders (Figure 5), presumably as a marketing tool. In many respects, the way in which promotion of the field evolved mirrored the history of other boom fields of the time, with satellite properties being offered surrounding the original lease. This style of promotion could only occur in fields that were perceived to have significant extent. Mount Lyell had recently been a classic example of this pattern of promotion.⁴⁰

The Melbourne financial press's view of developments is reflected in a series of entries in *Melbourne Punch* over the period concerned. Commenting on the original discovery in July 1896, *Punch* was enthusiastic about the prospects.⁴¹ A comment in September 1896 was equally effusive as company formation got underway.⁴² By November 1897, after a year's activity, the tone had begun to change. In its edition of 18 November 1897, *Punch* declared:

Dealers in Mount Deddick district scrip will require to exercise great caution, and especially so in handling the "offshoots" which have been placed on the market. The reports from the district are most conflicting.

Similar sentiment is evident in a December 1897 entry;

Contrary reports continually to hand from Mount Deddick mines, Snowy River. Some experts would make you pledge the historical shirt to be in the swim, others give you a slap as if an iceberg struck you. *Punch*, after careful enquiry, still advises as before: Go slowly in handling these scrip, and if a fair profit comes along, take it.

By January 6, 1898, *Punch* was advising that 'scrippers must be prepared to hold on for a considerable time before any return of moment can be expected from Mount Deddick'. Later in the same month the situation had deteriorated to the point where *Punch* reported that 'Mount Deddick scrip [was] dead in the water'.⁴³ Reports in March 1898 describe 'scripholders' anxiously awaiting the results on ore parcels sent for testing.⁴⁴ Further reports in April and May of 1898 were even more pessimistic, reflecting the

growing realisation that lack of access was an overwhelming issue, and that 'with two or three exceptions, the district can only show at present some surface blows and a few lodes of very low grade ore'.⁴⁵ By June 1898, *Punch* put the lid on the coffin when it claimed that 'the Mount Deddick district is in a state of quietude. ... Scippers will have either to lock up their paper for better times or part at a sacrifice'.⁴⁶

The flow of events illustrated by the *Punch* articles is reflected in the Stock Exchange share trading summaries of the time. From the outset, trading in Mount Deddick shares appears to have occurred, with anecdotal evidence of shares being valued at a substantial premium over face value.⁴⁷ No evidence of official trading is, however, recorded in the stock market summaries until December 1897. The first appearance of any Mount Deddick shares was in that month, when 2,000 shares were listed at a fully paid up value of £5.⁴⁸ By February 1898, the shares were listed at £10 and in March 1898 at £8.⁴⁹ By May 1898, shares with a fully paid up face value of £3 were listed at seven shillings. After falling to a listed value of one shilling and nine-pence in August 1898, Mount Deddick shares for ever disappeared from the official listings.⁵⁰

None of the Mount Deddick companies were recorded as ever producing a dividend to shareholders, rather, the pattern was for a series of calls on the unpaid up value of shares, followed inevitably by auctions of defaulted shares. Most of the companies increased their capital by issuing new shares from time to time.

The Deddick railway

English investment had not been a feature of Mount Deddick during the period from 1896 to 1898, but some time in 1899 an English syndicate proposed to the Victorian Cabinet that it construct a private railway from Cunningham (Lakes Entrance) to the Mount Deddick mineral field in return for a land grant along the route and rights to operate the Mount Deddick leases. The make up of the syndicate and the exact timing of their approach to government remains a mystery, but in mid 1899 the Government Geologist, James Stirling, was asked to give his opinion regarding the proposal and he reported his view in August of that year.⁵¹ Stirling felt the proposal had merit in principal, provided that the conditions required by the Railways Department with regard to the standard of construction and rates to be charged for freight were met. At this point in time approximately 2,300 acres of

ground was under lease at Mount Deddick, and by Stirling's estimate an additional 2,800 acres of prospective country might be available for further exploration within the bounds of the field. In his opinion, the potential extent of the field was sufficient to warrant construction of the rail link. Stirling was not, however, in favour of the proposed route along the valley of the Snowy River, rather he strongly suggested that the route should be via Buchan, Gelantipy, Seldom Seen and the Wulgulmerang Plateau, more or less the same as the existing track of the time and the eventual alignment of the modern road (Figure 2). He felt that this route would maximise the potential to open up rich agricultural country and service other mining areas along the way.

The existence of the proposal was not made public during 1899, apparently because the plan lacked certainty.⁵² In late 1899, however, evidence was being taken by a government enquiry into the up-grading of the port facilities at Lakes Entrance, during which the prospects for a rail connection to Mount Deddick and the relative advantages of alternate routes came under discussion.⁵³ Eventually, after a change of government, a public announcement was made in January 1900 that a proposal had been put to the government.⁵⁴ Throughout early 1900, persons with interest in the railway being constructed anxiously awaited the results of negotiations between the representative of the syndicate, Mr Sheldon, and the government.⁵⁵ Finally, in May 1900, it was announced that the syndicate's proposal had been accepted in principle by the government.⁵⁶ An article in the *NSW Railway Budget* dated June 1900 set out the terms to apply;

The Victorian Cabinet has approved of a proposal made some weeks ago by an English syndicate to construct a narrow gauge railway from the Lakes Entrance to the Mount Deddick mining field, East Gippsland, a distance of 94 miles. It is estimated that the line will cost £300,000, and is to be completed within two and a half years. ... The Government is to give the syndicate a strip of land two chains wide for the whole distance for the track of the railway. ... The Government is to have the option at the end of 10 years of purchasing the railway ... The syndicate is to deposit £10,000 within three months of the signing of the provisional agreement ... In consideration of building and working the railway, which will materially help to open up East Gippsland, the syndicate is to get 50 years mineral lease of 1000 acres of land at Mount Deddick, on condition that it expends £25,000 within 10 years in developing the ground, and a similar sum within the next 10 years⁵⁷

As the government prepared the necessary legislation to bring before parliament, public debate emerged in the press regarding the merits and drawbacks of the proposed scheme. The potential conflict that a privately owned railway might pose to the established principle in Victoria of government control over railways was raised.⁵⁸ As might be expected, mining interests thought the proposal almost too good to be true, offering the prospect of opening up vast tracts of valuable auriferous terrain at no obvious risk to the government or to unwary investors, given that the syndicate was bringing its own capital to the table.⁵⁹ The local press, however, carried strong argument against the proposal, citing concern that the construction of a private narrow gauge railway would inevitably act against the prospects of extending the main trunk rail line from Bairnsdale through to the NSW border and on to Bombala, the site then favoured for the new Federal capital. In the view of local political interests along the proposed route of the main line extension, the Mount Deddick railway was a device to attract English capital to open up a marginal mining field.⁶⁰ As the debate raged, the *Australian Mining Standard* warned against adoption of the cynical view of the proposal currently gaining ground that would have Victoria 'cut off its nose to spite its face'.⁶¹

Despite such warnings, however, the agreement became lost in the workings of government. No legislation was ever introduced into parliament to ratify the agreement. The deposit of £10,000 required from the syndicate under the terms of the agreement was apparently not paid at the time, and negotiations lapsed until early 1902 and yet another change of government. An article in the *Tambo and Orbost Times* in April 1902 described the then status of negotiations between cabinet and the syndicate, and suggested that the syndicate was at that time prepared to provide a £10,000 deposit as required, but was asking for several changes to the original draft agreement revolving around the terms for a government buy-back of the railway, and the gauge to be used.⁶² By May 1902, the syndicate and the new government appeared to have finally reached a firm understanding to proceed with the project, only to see the government renege on the deal and declare that it would not ratify the agreement.⁶³ Despite some rearguard activity, this effectively ended any prospects of a railway line being constructed to Mount Deddick.

The saga of the Mount Deddick railway is interesting in the context of English capital investment in the Victorian mining industry during the late 1890s and early twentieth

century. After a lengthy period during which Victoria was seen as an undesirable target for investment, English capital began to trickle into Victoria toward the end of the 1890s, against the tide of often vitriolic criticism in the English mining press of the unscrupulous behaviour of Victorian mining promoters toward English investors and inappropriate mining regulations administered by an incompetent Mines Department.⁶⁴ Lack of security of lease tenure was seen as a major impediment.⁶⁵ When English capital did start to flow, it was almost exclusively aimed at gold mining properties, with a bias against investment in Gippsland. A passage in *The Mining Journal, Railway and Commercial Gazette* in October 1899 succinctly summarises the Journal's view with regard to English involvement in mining in Gippsland at the time:

Outside of the Walhalla and Omeo districts, with the exception of the Beehive mine at Bullumwaal, and one or two claims at Deptford, Gippsland has not yet revealed a lode in size or depth warranting the operations of an English company. I can name dozens of failures of English syndicates and companies in Eastern Gippsland.⁶⁶

Despite this negative view, the journal was still optimistic of the prospects of discovery of a metalliferous lode of significance in the remote hill country of Gippsland. One must assume that in the opinion of the journal, Mount Deddick did not represent such a prospect, given that there does not appear to be any reference to Mount Deddick in the pages of the journal during this period. Against this background, and the lack of certainty surrounding the true value of the ore bodies, the gamble taken by the syndicate putting forward the railway proposal, and its persistence, was remarkable.

One possible explanation for the initiative shown by the syndicate may lie in the person of the mining representatives selected to represent Victoria's interests in the UK at the critical time. In May 1898, Ernest Lidgely was installed in London as the first such representative.⁶⁷ In an interview with *The Mining Journal, Railway and Commercial Gazette*, Lidgely was at pains to stress that his role would be to provide appropriate information on various mining districts in Victoria, not to promote particular properties.⁶⁸ It is not clear what Lidgely did in fact do while in London, but given that the period of his sojourn in the UK corresponded with the emergence of the proposal by the syndicate to construct the railway, and given his previous connection with Mount Deddick, it is not hard to imagine that he may have had some input into the evolution of the proposal. In April

1900 it was announced that James Stirling would take over the post in London, and that it would be a more pro-active role than previously.⁶⁹ In an interview with *The Mining Journal, Railway and Commercial Gazette*, Stirling made it clear that he would be providing information to interested parties on opportunities in relation to commodities such as coal, silver, lead, antimony and bismuth in addition to gold.⁷⁰ Once again, the timing of Stirling's appointment and his previous involvement with Mount Deddick, including a visit as late as March 1899 and his review of the railway proposal in July/August 1899, suggests the possibility of his input to the continued progress of the proposal.

What really lay behind the railway proposal is open to speculation, but one can assume that the chequered history of negotiations would not have done anything to quell the concerns of English mining investors toward investment in Victoria. An article in *The Mining Journal, Railway and Commercial Gazette* of October 1903 summed up the situation thus;

The chief cause at the root of the unpopularity of Victorian mining with the London capitalists is the class legislation, and the deliberately hostile attitude assumed by the administration toward the capitalists.⁷¹

This was not a happy time for Anglo-Victorian relations from a mining perspective.

Conclusion

The short but meteoric history of the Mount Deddick mineral field represents a quintessential example of the Australian penchant for mining bubbles at the end of the nineteenth century.⁷² All of the hallmarks of a bubble were there. It is not clear what sort of a windfall might have accrued to the promoters, but to the investors at large, it undoubtedly left a significant hole in their collective pockets. The essence of a mining bubble of the time is summed up by a correspondent to the *Australian Financial Gazette and Insurance Chronicle* in July 1896. Referring to investment in Western Australian gold mines, the respondent stated:

There is between 80 and 100 million sterling invested in shares in W.A. gold mines: the present output is a little over a million a year, and if we allow a maximum profit of £250,000 on this sum it will take, at the present rate of production, from 320 to 400 years before present share holders could get their money back ... Query, when will the bubble burst?⁷³

In the case of Western Australian gold mines, many investors did in fact benefit from handsome returns. In other instances, including Mount Deddick, investors would have to wait more than the aforementioned 400 years to recoup their investments. Since 1905, the Mount Deddick area has been looked at by a number of explorers, but to date, no significant further production has occurred.⁷⁴ In reality, Mount Deddick has turned out not to be ‘another Broken Hill’, but just another Australian mining bubble.

Endnotes

¹ *Australian Mining Standard*, 18 November 1897.

² J. Smith (ed.), *The Cyclopaedia of Victoria*, The Cyclopaedia Company, Melbourne, 1903, p. 407.

³ W.A. Sinclair, *Economic Recovery in Victoria, 1894-1899*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1956, p. 71.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁵ *Mining Development Act* 1896, Victorian Government Printer, Melbourne, 1896.

⁶ Data taken from the Records of the Stock Exchange of Melbourne provided by ASX.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Annual Report of the Victorian Mines Department, Victorian Government Printer, Melbourne, 1872.

⁹ Units used in this paper are: 1 (long) ton = 1.01605 tonnes; 1 foot = 0.3048 m; 1 mile = 1.609 km; 1 acre = 0.4047 hectares; 1 square mile = 259 hectares; 1 troy oz = 20 dwt = 31.10348 g; 1 dwt = 1.555 g.

¹⁰ R. Brough Smythe, *Mining and Mineral Statistics of Victoria*, published for Victorian Exhibition, 1872, Victorian Government Printer, Melbourne, 1872.

¹¹ *Snowy River Mail*, 20 June 1896.

¹² *Australian Mining Standard*, 18 November 1897.

¹³ E. Lidgey, ‘Notes on the discovery of silver-lead ore near Mount Deddick on the Snowy River’, Geological Survey of Victoria, Unpublished Report, 1896/1891, Melbourne, 1896.

¹⁴ *Australian Mining Standard*, 26 May 1898.

¹⁵ J. Stirling, ‘Further Report on Geological Survey of Mount Deddick Silver Lead Field’, Victorian Mines Department, Monthly Progress Report 1-5, Victorian Government Printer, Melbourne, 1899.

¹⁶ E.J. Dunn, ‘Mt Deddick and Accommodation Creek, East Gippsland’, Geological Survey of Victoria, Record no. 3, Victorian Government Printer, Melbourne, 1907.

¹⁷ *Victorian Government Gazette*, August 1896, Victorian Government Printer, Melbourne, 1896.

¹⁸ Lidgey, ‘Notes on the discovery of silver-lead ore near Mount Deddick’.

¹⁹ *Australian Joint Stock Company Year Book*, 1896, 1897, 1898.

²⁰ See for example, *Tambo and Orbost Times*, 17 April 1897, 19 February 1898, 5 March 1898, 26 March 1898.

²¹ Annual Report of the Snowy River Mineral Company NL, Rae and Munn, Melbourne, 1897.

²² See for example, *Australian Mining Standard*, 5 May 1898.

²³ *Ibid.*, 12 August 1898.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Tambo and Orbost Times*, 16 April 1898.

²⁶ For example, see *ibid.*, 7 May 1898.

²⁷ *Australian Mining Standard*, 12 May 1898.

²⁸ *Tambo and Orbost Times*, 19 September 1898.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ See article by Sir John McIntyre in *Tambo and Orbost Times*, 27 August 1898.

³¹ Annual Report of the Victorian Mines Department, Victorian Government Printer, Melbourne, 1899.

³² Stirling, ‘Further Report on Geological Survey’.

- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ Annual report of the Victorian Mines Department, Victorian Government Printer, Melbourne, 1898.
- ³⁵ See for example, *Tambo and Orbost Times*, 14 August 1901 and 9 October, 1901.
- ³⁶ *Snowy River Mail*, 5 April 1902.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 30 July 1904.
- ³⁸ Dunn, 'Mt Deddick and Accommodation Creek'.
- ³⁹ *Snowy River Mail*, 14 November 1896.
- ⁴⁰ See for example, Plan of the Mount Lyell Mines, Tasmania, Supplement to 'Stock Exchange Intelligence', J.B. Were and Sons, Melbourne.
- ⁴¹ *Melbourne Punch*, 30 July 1896.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 17 September 1896.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 20 January 1898
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 3 March and 10 March 1898.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 14 April and 5 May 1898.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 16 June 1898.
- ⁴⁷ For example, the claim in the *Snowy River Mail*, 1 August 1896, that shares in the Mount Deddick Company were at a premium of 400 per cent.
- ⁴⁸ *Australian Stock Exchange Intelligence*, J.B. Were and Son, 7 December 1897.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 10 February and 10 March 1898.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 10 August 1898.
- ⁵¹ J. Stirling, re 'Proposed Railway Cunningham to Mount Deddick', Geological Survey of Victoria, Unpublished Report 1906/255, Melbourne, 1906.
- ⁵² *The Age*, 11 January 1900.
- ⁵³ Evidence to the Enquiry into Gippsland Lakes Entrance Conversion and Protection Works, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways, Victorian Parliamentary Papers, Victorian Government Printer, Melbourne, 1900.
- ⁵⁴ *The Age*, 10 January 1900.
- ⁵⁵ See for example, *Snowy River Mail*, 24 March 1900.
- ⁵⁶ *The Age*, 19 May 1900.
- ⁵⁷ *NSW Railway Budget*, August 1900.
- ⁵⁸ *The Age*, 11 January 1900.
- ⁵⁹ *Bendigo Independent*, 19 May 1900.
- ⁶⁰ *Snowy River Mail*, 30 June 1900.
- ⁶¹ *Australian Mining Standard*, 14 July 1900.
- ⁶² *Tambo and Orbost Times*, 23 April 1902.
- ⁶³ *Snowy River Mail*, 26 July 1902.
- ⁶⁴ See for example articles under heading Mining in Victoria/Victorian Notes in *The Mining Journal, Railway and Commercial Gazette*, 5 March 1898, 5 August 1899, 12 August 1899, 19 August 1899.
- ⁶⁵ See for example, quotation credited to London Chamber of Mines in *Australian Mining Standard*, 25 January 1900.
- ⁶⁶ *The Mining Journal, Railway and Commercial Gazette*, 7 October 1899.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 7 May 1898.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁹ *Australian Mining Standard*, 12 April 1900.
- ⁷⁰ Supplement to *The Mining Journal, Railway and Commercial Gazette*, 9 June 1900.
- ⁷¹ *The Mining Journal, Railway and Commercial Gazette*, 24 October 1903.
- ⁷² G. Blainey, *The Rush That Never Ended, A History of Australian Mining*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1963.
- ⁷³ *Australian Financial Gazette and Insurance Chronicle*, 8 July 1896.
- ⁷⁴ G.W. Cochrane, *Copper, Lead, Zinc and Barium Deposits of Victoria*, Geological Survey of Victoria, Bulletin no. 61, Melbourne, 1982.