

Craig L. Stegman and Therese M. Stegman, *Lodes of Gold: A Pictorial History of Mining in the Cobar Goldfield*, Peak Gold Mines Pty Ltd, Cobar, 2002, iv + 181 pp.

Published in 2002, *Lodes of Gold* was a labour of love. Through text, maps, mining-related illustrations and beautifully reproduced photographs, this large format (300mm X 430mm), imposing hardback book tells the story of gold mining within the western NSW area of Cobar up to 2002. Because copper and other minerals were also significant to Cobar town's continued existence since the 1870s, the book necessarily covers the history of the influence of both base metals and gold on the waxing and waning fortunes of the local mining industry.

The photos provide a strong visual representation of the evolution of Cobar mining, ore processing and refining described in vivid detail by the authors. Photographs of miners before and during their underground shifts describe more clearly than words the tough, dangerous and uncomfortable world of mining for workers before the rise of increased mechanisation in the latter half of the twentieth century. A few photos also show all-too-brief glimpses of women, families and local events, such as an 8-hour day procession. Some of the images, including those which showcase various headframes and chimney stacks, may easily have been removed to avoid repetition, but for the most part, the photographs and their reproduction are a major highlight of this publication.

The text is largely confined to discussing the boom-bust cycle of company mining, mine operations and the technical aspects of industrial development on the field. The exploration of such themes as the impact of rising and declining world metal prices, government support (or inaction), the role of infrastructure, and employer-employee relations is done well. In a number of places, however, there is a tendency to use overly long extracts from government, company and newspaper reports to narrate parts of the story. More judicious editing would have reduced the amount of irrelevant material in the quotations, and provided context. Further, the small font size of the quotations makes them difficult to read.

Arguably the most entertaining long quotation comes from the unpublished memoirs of John Grover OBE, who describes the four months he spent working in Cobar mines as a young university graduate in 1947-48. He shares vivid insights into the camaraderie between miners, working with old-timers for whom mining was in 'their blood', and the primitive living conditions in a boarding house: 'Sheets were changed every two or three weeks. Some looked hopelessly reddish because the town water supply was bright red ... Tap water might have been full of red dust and mud, but at least it was water ... and we ignored the taste.' More personal reminiscences of Cobar by former and current residents may have given the book more colour, and helped the reader understand the impact of changing working conditions on the culture of miners and their families.

However, the authors, illustrators, editors and other members of the team who produced this book are to be commended for creating a lasting record of Cobar mining history from its humble origins to the increasingly complex and technical corporate undertaking that it became in the late twentieth century.

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