

Richard Mazzucchelli, *Fossicking Afar*, Footprints Publishing, 2022, Paperback, 203 pp. plus photos and family tree. Available from the author for \$20.00 plus \$7.00 (in Aus.) postage, contact mazzrich@bigpond.net.au (ISBN 978-0-6451627-7-6)

F*ossicking Afar* is the story of a young immigrant from an impoverished village in southern Switzerland who finds love in Victoria, gold in New Zealand and fulfilment in the eastern goldfields of Western Australia. The book is described by the author as a creative non-fiction story, based on the life of his great-grandfather Joseph (Giuseppe) Mazzucchelli. The author has creatively included infilling material to flesh out the non-fiction narrative. Some of the infillings are speculative in terms of their application to Joseph, however they are well researched and factual, and give the reader a valuable indication of the historical context and the issues of the time.

The story begins in Poschiavo in the Italian speaking area of Switzerland where Joseph becomes interested in geology while working on the mountainous land farmed by his family. He learns of the goldrush to Australia and vows to travel there, particularly after his older brother Matteo emigrates to Victoria. In November 1859 aged 17, Joseph achieves his goal. Arriving in Melbourne, he soon heads for the goldfields to join his brother. On the way he finds work alluvial mining at Ballarat and as a new chum, experiences some setbacks, but quickly learns the art of prospecting. After two months he resumes his journey to Pleasant Creek, near Stawell, where his brother is working as an underground miner and part-time prospector. Having arrived after the peak of alluvial mining, Joseph takes up a similar career. While in Stawell he meets and falls in love with Ellen, but is surprised to find that she is only 13. To give the couple time to mature and to try his luck at a new rush, Joseph decides to go to the recently discovered goldfields in Otago, New Zealand. After crossing the alps to the west coast with partner Ed Clegsworth, he finds a good gold prospect and makes a modest 'pile', sufficient to allow him to return to Stawell where he again takes up prospecting and work as a winder driver. After three years Joseph and Ellen marry. The couple build a hotel, then unsuccessfully try farming near Glenorchy northwest of Stawell. Returning to Stawell, Joseph again takes work as an engine driver. In 1898, Joseph and Ellen join their children in Coolgardie at a new El Dorado and there are new opportunities for the family, as well as a prospecting adventure.

The above bare-bones outline does not do the book justice. It is packed with interesting and engaging detail of personal relationships, as well as the economic and social history of the time. The author has clearly visited most, if not all, of the sites of his great-grandfather's life story and their natural features are vividly described in the book.

Many books have been written about emigrants to the great Australian gold rushes. This book takes a particularly personal and insightful look at the life and achievements of an ordinary individual who significantly improved his life circumstances and achieved fulfilment, if not great fame and fortune, through emigrating to Australia.

Fossicking Afar is a wonderful little book. I highly recommend it for an enjoyable and informative read.

Ken McQueen