

The attraction of gold mining in Victoria for Aboriginal people

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Until recent times, an examination of mining history literature would suggest that Aboriginal people had very little to do with gold mining in Australia. However, that scenario has recently been modified in histories that demonstrate Aboriginal people were prominently involved on goldfields across mainland Australia.¹ In an attempt to further that observation, this article will examine the situation in Victoria and explain why Aboriginal people were attracted to the colony's goldfields. It sets out to explore the intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors such as new wealth, new sights, new sounds, and new alliances, which prompted Aboriginal people in Victoria to participate in 'gold society'. Conversely, it also studies how non-indigenous people in Victorian gold mining society perceived Aboriginal input into the race for gold, for they were fascinated by the otherness, or the exotica, of experiencing Victorian Aboriginal culture firsthand.

The dearth of interest in 'mining and Aboriginal people' becomes apparent upon consultation of select bibliographies. In Diane Barwick's expansive *A Select Bibliography of Aboriginal History and Social Change: Theses and Published Research to 1976*, there are only four titles which specifically address the subject of Aboriginal people and mining.² More recently Mel Davies (1997 & 2002)³ has compiled a bibliography of published works on mining in Australia, which reveals a burgeoning interest in the association between Aboriginal people and mining in northern Australia⁴ but no substantial historical research on the role of Aboriginal people and mining in southern Australia.⁵ This is surprising given that there is evidence in a number of regions⁶ that one of the economic initiatives that Aboriginal people did grasp was mining. Historian Stuart MacIntyre contends that mining was an economic sector where Aboriginal initiative was exhibited and gives several examples.⁷

According to historian Henry Reynolds, one of the reasons why histories on mining and Aboriginal people are not well represented in the literature may be that their influence and involvement in the mining industry was only significant on small and very isolated mining fields. This was unlike the pastoral or maritime economic sectors

where Aboriginal involvement was pivotal.⁸ Judging from micro studies of Aboriginal employment in the mining sector by a number of other historians, it would appear that Reynolds' largely dismissive view of Aboriginal involvement in mining may not stand up to close scrutiny, there being a body of evidence that clearly shows some important northern Australian fields could not have been explored or exploited without the use of Aboriginal labour and knowledge.⁹ Whether Reynolds' analysis can be substantiated for southern Australia has yet to be tested.

Clark and Cahir have identified a number of reasons to explain the attraction of the goldfields for Aboriginal people:

For one thing, the fields were on traditional lands, and they were keen to continue their association with their clan estates. Furthermore the goldfields offered commercial opportunities for trade and exchange. They were also exotic places where unusual people lived with strange possessions and animals.¹⁰

Henry Reynolds suggested that the attraction of gold mining towns, (predominately referring to northern Australian goldfields), was not merely for the exotica, but out of necessity.

The attraction of the towns was, then, real enough; but it was only half the story. Many family groups were driven in from the countryside by the violence of the frontier, the difficulty of finding enough to eat in their own country, or because they were literally forced off the land by the squatters and police.¹¹

To a very large degree Reynolds' summation is most certainly accurate about the pastoral period, but rarely in the Victorian historical records relating to the gold period are there references to Aboriginal people being explicitly forced away from the goldfields due to the violence of the frontier. In 1852-3 all Victorian Crown Land Commissioners and the Guardian of Aborigines, William Thomas, affirmed that inter-cultural frontier violence had all but ceased by 1853. Thomas confidently reported in January 1853: 'We may congratulate ourselves that the weapons of opposition between us and our sable fellows are laid aside ... We may safely state that loop holes in huts are no more needed.'¹² Occasionally it was argued by miners that Victorian Aboriginal people were fast disappearing as, 'The diggings have scared away the few that were left in these parts of Victoria [Ballarat]. The writer met a party of half a dozen at Ballarat, but nowhere else did he see them in the Colony.'¹³ However, the great majority of historical records from the gold period demonstrate that Nisbet's observations were not

the norm. Indeed, Antoine Fauchery, a miner also at Ballarat, noted that Victorian Aboriginal people were 'Divided into nomadic tribes [clans] made up of fifteen or twenty individuals, they are seen now in the bush, now in the towns, and still more frequently on the diggings, which they visit by preference.'¹⁴ The 'preference' that Fauchery and others spoke of was almost certainly in part due to being forced onto the goldfields by a lack of food resources caused by the catastrophic environmental destruction which gold mining brought. There is also substantial documentation which demonstrates that crippling devastation of the environment had been visited upon the landscape almost twenty years prior to the gold rush by hard hooved animals such as sheep. The environmental changes that occurred as a result of both alluvial and deep lead mining were profound. However devastating the gold mining was on the physical environment of Victoria it needs to be borne in mind that the gold period was the second wave. The first phase was the pastoral period, beginning effectively in 1835.¹⁵ This is an important point with dramatic implications for Aboriginal policy in the nineteenth century. The scenery that miners arriving in the 1850s viewed was not a pristine one, though they often portrayed it as so in their writings and artwork, seldom acknowledging that they were in fact party to the second wave of dispossession and catastrophic food resource depletion. The squatters noted the key social changes this effected, such as a hitherto unknown dependence upon non-indigenous people by Aboriginal people.¹⁶ To the miners, however, pastoralism and Western-styled agriculture were largely viewed as being benign, in regards to Aboriginal people, and indigenous flora and fauna. A common theme in miners' and other commentator's writings and pictorial works is that the squatter's hand had not spoiled the Australian bush, and that mining alone was the great despoiler of nature.¹⁷ This outlook resulted in an inability to understand that even in areas where mining had not adulterated the physical landscape the essential bio-mass had irrevocably been transformed, thus rendering Indigenous-styled agriculture and traditional lifestyles considerably compromised, particularly in some areas.¹⁸

The compounding of the already existing environmental degradation even by alluvial mining was profound. Alluvial gold mining historian Barry McGowan points out that even in its more primitive forms, mining 'affected the environment from the outset and was not as benign in its effects as present day landscapes might suggest.'¹⁹ Observers of the goldfields were aghast at how the gold diggers had transformed the bush into waste land. 'The diggers', William Howitt observed, 'seem to have two

especial propensities, those of firing guns and felling trees'. 'Every tree is felled', he remarked of the diggings, 'every feature of Nature is annihilated'.²⁰ Miners such as George Rowe vividly described the rapid dismantling of the bush around them in great rapidity.²¹ Moreover, Rowe explicitly linked the wanton rape of the forest with the 'withdrawal' of Aboriginal people:

It is very astounding how rapidly the trees disappear where the diggers take up their residence [...] behind our tent when we first put it up to the top of [a] hill half a mile off it was a forest [...] in a month it was all cut down and there was not a tree to interrupt the sight of the top of the hill[...] so destructive are the European race, the black man falls back in the bush and decreases[...] the animals become scarce.²²

It is incorrect however to maintain that Aboriginal people had no concept of mineral value or that 'for the miners, Aboriginal people were invisible, silent and nameless'.²³ There are certainly records of Aboriginal people describing their amazement at the manner in which the whites stampeded over each other in order to find gold. Goldfield writers such as J.S. Prout observed Aboriginal people (presumably Djadjawurrung) *in situ* at the Mt Alexander goldfield in 1852 but not their active participation in the search for gold. Nor did Prout, or any other goldfields writer yet located, note Aboriginal people identifying it as a precious metal that they utilized prior to the onset of the gold rush in 1851, but Prout's assumption that they had no prior knowledge of the metal's existence is not corroborated. Prout recorded in his artwork a scene of mild bewilderment:

The little group of aborigines at our right, carelessly looking on the busy scene before them, causes one to reflect on the singularity of the circumstance, that, although fond to an extreme of possessing as an ornament any glittering substance, the aborigines as far as we know, have never in their wanderings discovered the precious and most beautiful metal.²⁴

However correct Prout and others were in their considerations of Aboriginal people not having prior cultural or economic associations with gold it cannot be argued that digging shafts²⁵ or the excavation of precious stone and minerals *per se* was foreign to them, for quarrying for crystal, greenstone, sandstone, obsidian, kaolin, ochres and basalt was widespread across Aboriginal Victoria.²⁶ Long-time resident of Ballarat, William Little, wrote in his poetry of how northern Wathawurrung clans traded gold to shepherds prior to the gold rushes of 1851: 'When erst the shepherds saw the virgin

gold A lying shimmering on fair Nature's breast, And how the ignorant aborigines For trifles gave the precious ore away.'²⁷ Records also exist of extensive quarrying and commercial style transactions for quarried stone being carried out by Victorian Aboriginal people prior to and after British colonization. W.E. Stanbridge wrote that Temamet Javolich, a Djadjawurrung clan head, was

no less than commercial traveler for the sale of suitable stone for axeheads. His blood relationship with numerous tribes gave him access, and he visited the councils of the tribes arranging barter...his stone quarry was on the Charlotte Plains.²⁸

In late 1854, naturalist William Blandowski reported that the Woiwurrung quarries of over one hundred acres in a range of hills three miles east of Lancefield:

present an appearance somewhat similar to that of a deserted goldfield and convey a faithful idea of the great determination displayed by the aborigines prior to the intrusion of the white races.²⁹

One non-indigenous observer, when referring to the same Woiwurrung mining site erroneously contended that this quarry was the only place in Victoria in which the Aborigines had followed an industrial pursuit.³⁰

Other evidence that Aboriginal people practiced mining and at the very least had knowledge of gold's existence comes from a report in *Dickers Mining Journal* of 1864. This described how non-indigenous miners in Buninyong had unearthed an Aboriginal mining tool many hundreds of metres below the surface that was believed to be similar in all regards to mining tools used by Indigenous people in the Americas.³¹ Birch argues that whilst there is no evidence that Aboriginal people attached any great economic or spiritual significance to the heavy yellow metal, it is likely that Aboriginal people from the central Victoria 'must have stumbled over gold nuggets prior to European settlement.'³² Historian James Flett concurs with Birch and asserts that Victorian Aboriginal people generally knew about gold and that 'They dug it up amongst the yams on Yam Holes Hill – today a part of Beaufort town.'³³ There are instances of gold nuggets being found associated with old Aboriginal sites, well away from auriferous reefs. For example, the Watchem Nugget from near Maryborough (1904) and the Bunyip nugget from near Bridgewater, east of Bendigo, may both have been carried to their recorded place of discovery by Djadjawurrung people.³⁴ In the Avoca area it is

probable that the Djadjawurrung Aboriginal people generally knew of the existence of gold. Indeed in their language, the district's name of 'Kara Kara' signified gold.³⁵

A multitude of examples show that Aboriginal people succumbed to gold fever on the Victorian goldfields. As far as William Craig, a miner at the Mt Cole goldfields was concerned, the reasons for Aboriginal people being attracted to the goldfields were the same as for the non-indigenous miners, that is to get rich from finding gold and to 'knock it down' at an inn:

The new area was situated in the hunting grounds of the Mount Cole tribe of aborigines, who with a view of participating in the prosperity, but more especially in the hope of indulging in cheap liquor, shifted camp to our vicinity.³⁶

The attraction of newfound wealth was so great, he wrote, that a neighbouring clan who he observed was hostile to the resident clan shifted into the locality amongst the gold diggings.³⁷

A plethora of 'how to' books was spawned by the discovery of gold. Writers conveyed to prospective gold diggers the merits and pitfalls of various goldfields and what to take with them into the bush. Many goldfield promoters discussed the 'Native population' of Australia, and miners such as Charles Ferguson, mining at Linton (south of Ballarat) acknowledged the integral role that Wathawurrung people had played at times in miners' quests for gold.³⁸ Moreover, there are miners' accounts recorded in local histories which speak of Indigenous gold miners who struck out successfully on their own. One humorous account which reveals the envy displayed towards successful Aboriginal miners was recorded by Jonathan Moon in 1864:

Time and again a member of the tribe would drop in at a local bank to sell a parcel of gold. Knowing ones about town got to hear of this, and considerable manoeuvring went on to win over the confidence of the seller. The blacks maybe were on a "good thing" unknown to all others.

The day came when a certain slick townsman invited Jackie for a ride, and in gleeful anticipation the pair drove off into the country. The merry travellers lubricated at every pub on the way and finally arrived at Newstead. A couple more drinks, then the driver got down to business on Jackie who was thoroughly enjoying himself.

"You a very fine fellow Jackie." Jackie agreed with a wide grin. "You sell em plenty gold?" "Yes, Boss." "Now you tell me where you get the gold and I like you very much." Jackie unabashed and apparently not a bit stupid with liquor, immediately replied: "Boss, blackfellow no b_____ fool!"³⁹

Most stories, however, are generalised descriptions of anonymous Indigenous gold seekers. Typical of this record is an account of the diggings in the Evansford district (central Victoria). One digger noted the ‘natives learned the value of gold and they soon became searchers for the precious metal’.⁴⁰ In 1853, J.F. Hughes, a digger at Porcupine Flat (near Maldon), wrote that: ‘Among those gold-seekers might have been found representatives of nearly every phase of human society ... [including] the Aboriginal’.⁴¹ Similarly, William Howitt, writing of the would-be reformists on the Ballarat goldfields and their design for a ‘diggers flag’, thought that the ‘native blacks’ flag should also be represented, as ‘there were several’.⁴² Other miners such as William Tomlinson saw Aboriginal people setting off for the diggings from town centres like Geelong:

I yesterday saw five of the natives in town, they wore blankets over them like shawls. They had all sticks with them. They are perfectly black and very quiet they appear. I saw four of them starting for the diggings this afternoon.⁴³

It was not long after the initial discoveries of Victorian alluvial gold that reports of Aboriginal fossickers occurred with some frequency both in newspaper reports and published accounts of the diggings. There were many reports of Aboriginal people forming their own successful gold mining parties across Victoria, and also throughout the mainland states of Australia. The Native Police Corps, who were at first the only police force on the diggings and had prospected for gold at Daisy Hill themselves in 1849, were leaving the force because gold seeking was more attractive. So alluring were the diggings for Aboriginal people that Superintendent of the Native Police Corps, Henry Dana, wrote to Governor La Trobe informing him that he had the ‘greatest difficulty’ in May 1852 preventing the Aboriginal troopers from leaving, and also had trouble attracting new members due to the wealth that they could obtain either working for pastoralists or ‘frequenting the Gold Workings’.⁴⁴

Some surprise was often evinced that Aboriginal people would show commercial enterprise as it was felt that ‘the labor of digging and washing was not of a nature to suit their habits’ even though digging and washing were known to have been normal everyday food gathering activities for Victorian Aboriginal people.⁴⁵

There was a camp of blacks [presumably Djadjawurrung people] camped at Myer’s Flat [at Bendigo in 1852] they could be seen picking up gold from the red clay and heaps of mullock around the holes. Each one would get a few pennyweights and one called Peter (more civilized than the rest), who had been a

bullock driver on a station, could show a few good ounces of gold in a chamois – leather bag, with which he made a trip to Melbourne and imitating the example of a good many of his white brethren, got rid of it in a few days and returned to look for more.⁴⁶

At Castlemaine in 1862 similar observations were reported of a by now very savvy group of Djadjawurrung gold fossickers:

Aboriginal Fossickers – We noticed the other day a party of native men and women fossicking about the old holes in one of our gullies. Their keenness of sight enables them to detect particles of gold that would escape the observation of most Europeans.⁴⁷

Frequent serendipitous finds by Aboriginal people also occurred as this report in the *Argus* of 10 July 1860 attests:

Unconsidered Trifles. – On Wednesday morning, as two black “gins” were wending their way over some of the old workings near Kingower, the hawk-eyes of one of them discovered a shining particle among the debris on the top of one of the holes. On pursuing the investigation, a nice little trifle, in the shape of a seven ounce nugget, rewarded their care.⁴⁸

Other reports mention Aboriginal people fossicking for gold over an extended period of time. An inquest held into the death in March 1865 of Fanny Simpson, a Djadjawurrung woman, was told ‘The Loddon natives had been some time fossicking at Daisy Hill.’⁴⁹ At a later inquest into a Djadjawurrung woman called Eliza, at Maryborough in 1872, ‘Mary Jane (half caste)’ deposed:

I know deceased Eliza good many years and travel with her everywhere and camp out under the trees and bushes. Sometimes I get gold finding it on top of the Pipe clay. When hard up I beg.⁵⁰

This independent yet intermittent style of gold seeking would tend to suggest that Aborigines moved in and out of gold mining work at will, a practice that echoed to a large degree their urban work experience and their pastoral work experience. There is also an implicit acknowledgement in many reports that those traditional skills and knowledge that would be useful for alluvial gold mining such as the sharp powers of observation developed for a hunter/collector lifestyle were skills readily transferred to ‘specking’ for gold.

Clark and Cahir have noted that in Victoria, at least, there is abundant evidence that gold brought many economic opportunities that had not been available during the

squatting period and many Aboriginal people took advantage of these changed circumstances.⁵¹ Traveller James Bonwick described an encounter with a newly rich Djadjawurrung group, which exemplifies and confirms numerous similar accounts of their Indigenous roving and independent lifestyle.

Even the Aborigines are wealthy. I met a party of them at Bullock Ck well clothed, with a good supply of food, new cooking utensils and money in their pockets. One remarked with a becoming expression of dignity “me no poor blackfellow now, me plenty rich blackfellow”.⁵²

Other observers recorded a proliferation of independent gold mining by Aboriginal people on various goldfields. Some reported sizeable activity and emphasized Aboriginal searches for gold were of a sustained nature. During the winter of 1862, the aborigines of the Loddon [Djadjawurrung] were in the habit of visiting the township frequently and disposing of gold that evidently had come from some reef. They were asked to point out the source and they assented but led the messengers who went with them far away from the scene of their discovery. At length they were tracked by a couple of miners from Pegleg gully, who are reported to have found a large body of natives busy knocking out stone from a reef somewhere towards that known as Fentiman’s.⁵³

It is possible to identify in the historical sources a similar attraction for Aboriginal people on the goldfields of Victoria as was found in the excitement of the boxing ring where both individualistic endeavor and collective cultural values were exhibited by young Aboriginal men. Both experiences showed moments of excitement, indications of camaraderie among black and white participants, and the opportunity to gain materially.⁵⁴ The celebrated cosmopolitan nature of the gold diggings has been well documented in the historiography of gold, but rarely has the active Indigenous input been alluded to, or unpackaged by historians or writers. Yet, in the primary records the coming together of ‘different races’, including Aboriginal people in the search for gold was often commented upon. William McLachlan, in his deposition to the Goldfields Reward Board, acknowledged that when digging for gold in May 1853, a ‘blackfellow from Glenorchy’ had seen him fossicking at Pleasant Creek [near Stawell] and had then returned with a non-indigenous miner, ‘Dublin Jack’, who stated that he intended claiming the reward for finding the first gold.⁵⁵ Other miners too remarked on the mixed assemblages of mining parties, for example, J.F. Hughes who left for the gold diggings in 1853. He exclaimed:

Porcupine Flat had now rapidly developed into a gigantic rush of some 40,000 people. Among those busy gold-seekers might have been found representatives of nearly every phase of human society – from the Aboriginal, the ticket-of-leave man from the Derwent, the stockman from the Riverina to the enterprising merchant and the Oxford graduate.⁵⁶

This pall mall of human society was, according to some such as William Nawton, a miner on the central Victorian goldfields in September 1852, relatively free of discord: ‘You have of course every grade of character amongst the diggers – from the most courteous gentleman to the commonest black – but all seem to harmonize with each other.’⁵⁷ An anonymous writer at the Mt Alexander diggings in central Victoria echoed Nawton’s observation.

Where all have much the same aspect and association is necessary for work, while no guarantee of character can be obtained, groupings are formed, not of the most pleasant description to some of the parties. That of a gentleman, two convicts, a black native, and a Zomerzetzire boor, may be taken as a sample.⁵⁸

Some examples of teaming up with non-indigenous miners were more explicit.⁵⁹ Charles Read, a miner on the Turon goldfields of NSW affirmed that parties of Aboriginal and non-indigenous miners were a reality and at times long-standing ones: ‘An acquaintance of mine at the Turon had two natives who had been with him for several years’.⁶⁰

F. McKenzie Clarke recalled that members of the Native Police Corps were prospectors with him at Golden Gully (Bendigo). Clarke noted that McClelland, a drill instructor with the Corps ‘and the black boys obtained over two pounds weight of gold and this he greatly augmented during the two succeeding days. Then, greatly disgusted at the necessity that obliged him to resume his duties he entered into negotiations with our party to purchase his claim’.⁶¹

The rationale for having an Indigenous companion on a prospecting party was at times explicitly explained to newcomers by goldfield writers such as James Montagu Smith who believed Aboriginal people to be more adept at certain tasks than non-indigenous people:

We again tried the hole minus two of our hands; and Dick amongst the number showed the white feather, leaving us with only nine good men and true. We repaired the race and set two aborigines at work to cut bark for us, they being so much more ready at it than Europeans.⁶²

Short references in miners' diaries relating to the importance of meeting and even teaming up with or the invaluable nature of encountering Indigenous people are not uncommon. Thomas Blyth kept a diary on the goldfields of Bendigo and Ballarat in 1852 and he devoted two small fragments to his contact with Aboriginal people:

Proceeded about 3 miles and camped near a gentleman with two blacks ...
Crossed the Campaspe taking the horses and cart through the R[iver] and paying
a native with a canoe to cross our goods.⁶³

It is difficult at this late stage to extrapolate whether gold mining offered vestiges of rites of passage initiation, but certainly there were many shared arduous moments and bush mateship that were not at variance with core traditional Aboriginal values. It was often noted⁶⁴ in the squatting period how much Aboriginal people enjoyed the thrill, adventure and obvious sense of supremacy and importance they attained when guiding or otherwise sharing their corpus of bush knowledge. It is possible that Aboriginal people participating in collaborative mining ventures with whites viewed such opportunities as attractive for the same reasons Broome discerned in twentieth century Aboriginal boxers.

One factor not identified by Clark and Cahir in their bid to list reasons to explain the attraction of some goldfields, was identified by Robertson, a resident in the Piggoreet area (central Victoria), when he stated that the existing gold mining area overlaid an extant Indigenous (Wathawurrung) green-stone quarry. This was a highly valued area for the very reasons that it was esteemed by the non-indigenous gold miners. Moreover, the usage overlay was multiplied, as it was known to be an important camping, recreational and ceremonial area by the clans who also mined in the area.⁶⁵ This scenario may have been repeated on many sites across Victoria.⁶⁶

Antoine Fauchery commented on the general attraction of the goldfields for Aboriginal people, an observation echoed from many quarters.⁶⁷ For example, T.H. Puckle, the Commissioner of Crown Lands based in Hamilton, reported in 1857 that the chief places of resort for the Aboriginal people in his district included the Mt Ararat goldfields. William Huon of Wodonga informed the 1858 Select Committee that in his district, the 'tribes for the last few years have been in the habit of frequenting the various diggings and other townships'.⁶⁸ Andrew Porteous, Honorary Correspondent in the Ballarat District, reported in 1866 that 'The Mount Emu tribe still prefer to roam about in small bands, from station to station and the various goldfields'.⁶⁹ The exotic

pull of the goldfields and towns for Aboriginal people seems to have centered on horse races, fetes, galas, official openings,⁷⁰ dances, dress, bazaars, unusual animals and new technologies.⁷¹ John Hunter Kerr, a pastoralist on the goldfields of central Victoria, considered that ‘many of the natives were taken at various times to Melbourne and carried to the circus, theatres, or other places of amusement, which must have been as astounding as they were utterly novel to them’.⁷² Kerr and others witnessed the appropriation by Aboriginal people of ‘solitary articles’ from miners for their amusement and ‘vanity’⁷³ and also was privy to see their reactions on a number of occasions to the ‘extraordinary and unfamiliar’ such as photography⁷⁴ and the galvanic battery.

A galvanic battery was shown to a party of blacks, and one of them suffered himself to be experimented upon. He threw down the wires again however in a minute, with a shriek and a laugh which was re-echoed on all sides. Others looked at the mysterious box, but could not be persuaded to try its effects.⁷⁵

Kerr noted some comical instances of Aboriginal peoples’ fondness for exotic items to ‘adorn their persons with’ and noted their great sense of humour and delight in satirizing the non-indigenous peoples’ vanity and pompousness.

It used to be no uncommon thing to see some swarthy fellow donning a solitary article of clothing, in comical incongruity with his otherwise perfect nudity. A cravat, a hat, or a discarded crinoline, comprised in some instances the whole of the aboriginal toilet, but was nevertheless sported with great pride and exultation. A gentleman who was subject to frequent attacks of bronchitis one day missed his respirator, without he rarely travelled. After much ineffectual search, it was accidentally discovered in the possession of a black “lubra”, who had attached it to her head, and had endeavoured to arrange her dark greasy locks over it in imitation of the “chignons” worn by her white sisters.⁷⁶

Fauchery has recounted the encounter between, presumably, of a group of Wathawurrung people at the Ballarat diggings and a band of wandering musicians, which highlights the cultural exoticism of the goldfields.

It was I think, the first time music was heard on the diggings. An agreeable sensation for all, and particularly novel for the natives. Coloured men, women and children were laughing, foaming, twisting in a general fit of epilepsy. [Only one man] kept his dignity, and neglecting the varied ensemble of the orchestra, all his attention was fixed on the trombone ... it was this mechanism [of the trombone] above all that aroused the lively interest of the observer ...⁷⁷

The social etiquette of the non-indigenous mining towns was also an exotic experience for some Aboriginal people to be savored. Charles Fead, a non-indigenous miner, recounted meeting up with 'Metooka, King of the Omeo Blacks' near the diggings, who with great mirth

told me, in his own way, of the changes that had lately taken place in his little world – of the erection of a bakery, a restaurant, and a public house, and with a merry laugh, - what I already knew – that a number of white gin immigrants, candidates for domestic service, having arrived at Port Albert, a party of diggers and others had gone down and secured wives a few minutes or, at most, a few hours, after they had met them for the first time in their lives.⁷⁸

The spiritual beliefs of the non-indigenous miners were an exotic attraction for Aboriginal people too, evidenced by a report in the *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, which described the visit of a Gippsland-based clergyman who had arrived in Omeo to spread the gospel amongst the miners. Accepting the hospitality of a miner, the cleric became the centre of much attention, and amongst the miners who came to see the cleric was a 'group of aborigines from the Warrjabaree tribe [Wiradjuri?], both men and women, proudly wearing their birthday suits'.⁷⁹

The exoticism of the goldfields cut both ways. Aboriginal people moved quickly to acquire and see the wonderful contrivances and share in the plentiful goods that abounded on the diggings and in the townships. The insistent claims on miners, a frequent occurrence remarked upon by many writers and social commentators on the goldfields, so often construed as begging, was more likely an attempt by clans to obligate non-indigenous people to rightfully share their possessions with their clan folk.⁸⁰ This was a practice that Clark argues⁸¹ had been utilised by Aboriginal people in the pastoral period in an attempt to assimilate non-Indigenous people into their social organisation. There is evidence that a number of Aboriginal people on the Victorian goldfields suffered intermittent destitution, but an overwhelming body of evidence strongly points to the motive for Aboriginal people soliciting in this period to be one not primarily driven by poverty alone. Certainly there were occasional reports of Aboriginal people being hard up for food, clothing and shelter, but most of the evidence points to the fact that Aboriginal people were largely self sufficient, and when moments of poverty occurred, implored their white brethren for meaningful paid work and keep, rather than simply begging for food and money. A report in the *Grenville Advocate* and relayed in *The Argus* pointed out to its readers the unusual occurrence in Linton

(Victorian central highlands) of the local Wathawurrung clan who, having a hard winter, gained employment using their traditional skills for a local aboriculturalist.

The Mount Emu tribe of aboriginals must have been pretty hard pinched for food this winter as they were never before known to be so keen to get employment from Europeans as they have shown themselves this season at Linton. A gentleman of that town ... has engaged the tribe to carve him some light-wood uprights for an alcove, as the timber sheds the bark. It is intended that the carved designs will represent a serpentine coil, similar to that on the shields that the chiefs of the tribe use in times of warfare.⁸²

A poorly researched yet fundamental response by Aboriginal people in nineteenth century Victoria to the British colonisers was to incorporate non-indigenous people into their kinship networks and thus call to mind their right to resources that were being unjustly denied them by non-indigenous people (including miners). Many correspondents in the colonial period such as Foster Fyans, Police Magistrate at Geelong in the 1840s, had opportunities to observe closely the strict adherence Aboriginal people in Victoria paid to equality amongst themselves and to ritualised gift giving. Fyans, in a letter to the Colonial Secretary, attempted to explain that an incensed crowd of Wathawurrung clans people besieging Fyan's office was not imploring (begging) the Colonial government for food and blankets, they were *insisting* upon it as their right.⁸³ A number of pastoralists and public servants, also reported, even if in paternalistic fashion, that Aboriginal people informed them that by virtue of their ascribed familial ties, they had moral responsibilities to provide materially for their new 'country men and women'.⁸⁴

It is difficult to discern how much of this invoking of kinship ties, as described by miner Walter Bridges at Buninyong (central Victoria), had as much to do with opportunism and how much with the cultural rituals of sharing one's goods.

They saw a mob of native Blacks and Lubrias [lubras] and a mob of dogs with them come across the gully so my wife said to Mother what ever will we do now so Mother said we must stand our ground and face them for there is no get away So up they come yabbering good day Missie You my countary [country] woman now. My mother had to be spoksmen [spokeswoman] the Blacks said You gotum needle missie you gotum thread you Gotum tea you Gotum sugar you Gotum Bacca [tobacco]. So Mother had to say yes to get rid of them and had to give them all they asked for to get rid of them.⁸⁵

A number of miners reported relationships forming in spite of their prejudices towards Aboriginal people and recognised that some Aboriginal people were in dire

need of sustenance. Jewish miner, Abraham Abrahamsohn set up a 'bakery on a high hill 'in July 1853 (Bakery Hill?) on the 'Jurika [Eureka] mines near Pallrad [Ballarat]' and wrote: 'The negroid aborigines or Papua, visited me and begged for bread' and to a 'hungry, thin, already elderly Papu, I had several times given some of my scanty store of bread and meat and a drink from my bottle of whisky, so necessary in this swamp'. It appears that he was surprised by his own good will, adding, 'I had even given a chain of glass beads to his young wife. I did this from an unconscious liking for the black man'.⁸⁶ Some time later Abrahamsohn had reason to be thankful for his good works towards the 'elderly Papua' as he was visited in an urgent manner by the Aboriginal man and told to expect an attack.⁸⁷

Other accounts such as James Goonan's are suggestive of an inquisitive, relationship seeking behaviour, rather than a response driven from hunger. Goonan recalled: 'My mother's people lived in 1854, not far from (now) Yackadandah, and one of the black aboriginal tribe often came to beg a pinch of salt or a bit o' bread', and adding that 'they were fond of novelties'.⁸⁸ It is possible too that Aboriginal people were emulating the hordes of non-indigenous beggars euphemistically known as 'sundowners' or 'travellers' who depended on squatters and small land holder's bush hospitality for shelter and sustenance. J.H. Kerr, a pastoralist on the Loddon River, recalled that it was not unusual circa 1850 to receive 20 or 30 'guests' a night who were provided with the staple fare of tea, sugar, bread and beef.⁸⁹

J.C. Hamilton's experience of 'begging' in western Victoria would strongly suggest there was a duality to the behaviour, that is, Aboriginal people were practicing 'intelligent parasitism' because of real material needs, and at the same time reminding their white brothers and sisters of their time-honoured responsibilities to share equally. Hamilton recounted with great fondness a friendship spanning several decades, whereby an Aboriginal man only identified as 'Jacky' had adopted Hamilton, when he was a youth, into his family⁹⁰ and explained the varying greetings he received from Jacky.

Jacky became a shepherd for my father, and we were much together. In after years [during the gold rush] if Jacky met me at a township he would come to me with a beaming face, shake hands and say, "Where is my sixpence, Mr. Hamilton?" but if he met me in the bush his salutation was, "Halloa Jim."⁹¹

The emphasis in Hamilton's experience was clearly on reminding and maintaining kinship affinities, rather than an opportunist seizing onto an easy earner. The continuing incidence during the gold period of Aboriginal people 'claiming' tribute from non-

indigenous people of rank and position may suggest that they still viewed recompense for (and acknowledgement of) their land being usurped as integral, and that ‘gentlemen’ visitors to the goldfields were an opportunity to seek redress.⁹²

The exotic attractiveness of Aboriginal people to the new immigrant miners often centered on their corroborees, weapons, battles, apparel or lack of, physique, spiritual beliefs, artifacts and athletic prowess. Alexander Finlay, a gold miner on the Bendigo fields in September 1852 marvelled at their ingenuity with a boomerang and skill at ascending trees.⁹³ Many miners expressed incredulity at the feats which Aboriginal people could make their famed boomerang perform or the unerring accuracy of their spears.⁹⁴ Elizabeth Ramsay Laye wrote ‘The feats they perform with the boomerang are most astonishing ... This wonder must be seen to be believed’.⁹⁵ Edwin Price, a miner at the Ballarat fields was agog at their ability with their ‘long slender canes tipped with bone with which they can hit a penny piece 50 yards off and can drive them through a man’s body’, and also how their boomerangs move at ‘the speed of lightning, and if aimed true, hitting its victim with an irresistible force’.⁹⁶ George Wakefield, a surgeon on the Ballarat diggings, wrote to his parents of his captivation with the Aboriginal people at Ballarat (presumably Wathawurrung):

The population too would astonish a few, here we have representations of nearly all the nations on the face of the globe, not the least wonderful of which is the Aboriginal nation. I have frequently been present at their corroborees, and their skill in throwing the spear and boomerang is wonderful. I saw the boomerang thrown yesterday, it went completely out of sight and in about 5 minutes returned at the feet of the thrower.⁹⁷

Thomas Martin, a school child on the goldfields of Newstead in central Victoria in the 1850s, vividly recalled their hunting and fishing prowess, their eclectic fashion sense, enigmatic characters and bush foods.⁹⁸ Mention of striking adornments, also punctuated a number of goldfield records⁹⁹ such as the unusual sight witnessed by Eveleigh Johns in 1851 on an unidentified Victorian goldfield:

saw the other day at the wurlies a black woman ornamented in a manner that I never heard of before. She had kangaroo teeth driven into the flesh above the nails forming a complete set of claws.¹⁰⁰

Goldfields newspapers frequently reported on ‘native oddities’, with the mere presence of a clan in town being occasion for a report, as illustrated in this typical comment in the *Dunolly Express*: ‘The Aborigines have for the last few days been

arriving in this locality in considerable numbers. On Saturday and yesterday (Sunday) they were holding corroborees in South Dunolly'.¹⁰¹ Demonstrations of boomerang (and spear) throwing were also deemed sufficiently striking to warrant newspaper worthiness.¹⁰² Likewise, battles between Aboriginal groups attracted great interest.¹⁰³ The mere presence in town of Aboriginal people dressed in traditional possum skin robes attending a 'Fancy Bazaar' occasioned a report in the *Ballarat Times* in 1856. Various newspaper correspondents such as one in the *Mount Alexander Mail* frequently referred to certain Indigenous 'notables' as 'familiar figure[s] to the diggers'.¹⁰⁴ News articles reporting on corroborees being held on the goldfields music halls,¹⁰⁵ cricket ovals, Mechanics Institutes, hotels, theatres, racecourses, parks, gardens and streets were very common in gold mining town newspapers. An interesting example of this visitation occurred in the central Victorian town of Inglewood. In the town of Inglewood it was noted that a body of male and female natives had come down from the Murray River and had held a grand corroboree that had attracted many white visitors and local interest.¹⁰⁶

Exoticism was double-edged, that is to say it is apparent there was fascination and awe emanating from both non-indigenous and Aboriginal people about their respective cultures.¹⁰⁷ In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, newspapers occasionally¹⁰⁸ carried stories from 'Old timers' reminiscing about the golden days, often commenting on the colourfulness and exotic nature of Aborigines. A series of articles in the *Wedderburn Express* in 1888 on the history of the Wedderburn goldfields is typical of this treatment:

During the early days of Wedderburn we had frequent visits of aborigines from the Avoca, Loddon and Murray Rivers. It was no uncommon occurrence to see twenty or thirty in one party as late as 1855 or '56, and on one occasion I remember seeing fully three hundred collect on the Racecourse one Sunday where they had a genuine battle. There was not one killed on that occasion, although several got some nasty wounds, but on several other occasions one or more were killed in their drunken rows.¹⁰⁹

Aboriginal people were often invited or summoned to perform for notable visitors such as the Duke of Edinburgh, the Governor Sir George Bowen, or commemorative events such as the opening of railways or regattas to add an air of 'authenticity' and 'novelty'.¹¹⁰ A representative example of this reverse exoticism is evident in the aspirations by the Buninyong Council who in requesting the Governor to

insert Buninyong in the programme of places to be visited by His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh on his arrival in the Colony in 1867 urged:

as a plea for the privilege. That Buninyong is the oldest inland town in the Colony, and the site of the first discovery of gold in Victoria. They have also considered that a corroboree of the Aboriginals would be a novelty to his Royal Highness, and have made arrangements for a large gathering of the Natives for that purpose.¹¹¹

On occasions Aboriginal people were 'got up' for non-indigenous celebrations such as those marking the Geelong to Melbourne railway opening in September 1853. To mark the occasion a 'procession formed in the Market Square [Geelong] consisting of Mounted Troopers, Police, Soldiers, Railway Navvies, Aborigines, Odd fellows, Laborers, Schools, trades, etc ...'¹¹² Divergent opinions of the celebrated corroboree also abounded. Whilst large crowds of enthusiastic spectators thronged to watch corroborees on the goldfields, some such as Emily Skinner and Korzelinski were disparaging of such events.¹¹³

A humorous goldfields story narrated by Frank Shellard titled 'The Merry Wives of Omeo' is indicative of the curious exotica that abounded from both sides of the cultural divide:

The coloured ladies enjoyed it [the grand annual ball] amazingly, all the windows and doors were thrown open and the spaces were filled with black grinning faces. King Billy was in full dress, with a red night cap on his head and a red scarf around his neck, and a short white starched shirt on with his brass plate round his neck but he was dressed no further. His Queen had on her fancy costume but she did not create such a sensation as her consort. The chief feature of the ball was when the King and Queen gave a native dance in the ball room for they very much frightened their white sisters as they had never seen anything like it in their lives, the noise they made and their scantiness of their costumes with the absence of any shyness on the parts of the dancers in exposing their limbs fairly astounded their white sisters and as nobody could get out of the hall the poor young wives had to sit [it] out in terror of the blacks and it will never be forgotten by them.¹¹⁴

It is evident that the goldfields were places frequented by Aboriginal people and that the attraction of the goldfields for Aboriginal people was a dynamic that could not be said to be uniform from one goldfield to another. These perceptions are obviously interpreted through what are at times extremely ethnocentric lenses, but nevertheless they demonstrate that for Aboriginal people the goldfields proved to be places which intermittently delighted the pocket and the senses.

It has been noted by many goldfields historians that Victorian goldfields society was a tremendous crucible of eclectic communities, a global village, which transcended social and race barriers rarely seen before, and as such was a terrific potpourri of sensations that had to be experienced to be believed. This discussion has clearly shown that Aboriginal culture and lifestyles were an integral part of the goldfields' cultural experience for many miners, evidenced by miners' correspondence, artwork and newspaper reports of the day. Whilst the exoticism clearly applied both ways, it was the Aboriginal peoples' ability to skillfully find gold that naturally attracted the greatest excitement for both the finder and the observer.

Endnotes

¹ See various chapters in, Iain McCalman, Alexander Cook and Andrew Reeves (eds), *Gold: Forgotten Histories and Lost Objects of Australia*, CUP, Cambridge, 2001.

² See, D. Barwick, M. Mace and T. Stannage (eds), *Handbook for Aboriginal and Islander History*, Aboriginal History, Canberra, 1979.

³ Mel Davies (Compiler), *A Bibliography of Australian Mining History*, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, 1997; Mel Davies, *A Bibliography of the Mining History of Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea*, University of Western Australia, Crawley, 2002.

⁴ Christopher Anderson, 'Aborigines and Tin Mining in North Queensland: A case study in the anthropology of contact history', *Mankind*, 13, 6, April 1983, pp. 473-497; Sarah Holcombe, 'Indigenous organisations and mining in the Pilbara, Western Australia: lessons from a historical perspective', *Aboriginal History* 29, 2005, pp. 107-135; D. Hugo, *Mica mining in the Harts Range*, National Trust of Australia (NT), Alice Springs, 1993; L. Gibbs, 'Decolonising, Multiplicities and Mining in the Eastern Goldfields, Western Australia,' *Australian Geographical Studies* vol. 41, no. 1, 2003; J. Connell and R. Howitt, *Mining and Indigenous Peoples in Australasia*, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1991; D. Cousins and J. Nieuwenhuysen, *Aboriginals and the Mining Industry*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1994; R.A. Dixon, 'Aborigines as Purposive Actors or Passive Victims: An Account of the Argyle Events by Some of the Aboriginal Participants', R.A. Dixon and M.C. Dillon (eds), *Aborigines and Diamond Mining*, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, 1990; H. Reynolds, *With the White People: The Crucial Role of Aborigines in the Exploration and Development of Australia*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1990.

⁵ Robyne Bancroft's brief study of Aboriginal involvement in a northern New South Wales goldfield has been the most southern historical study the researcher has been able to locate. See R. Bancroft, 'Aboriginal Miners and the Solferino and Lionsville Goldfields of Northern New South Wales', in Kerry Cardell and Cliff Cumming (eds), *A World Turned Upside Down: Cultural Change on Australia's Goldfields 1851 - 2001*, ANU, Canberra, 2001, pp. 131-45.

⁶ H. Reynolds, *Black Pioneers*, Penguin, Ringwood, 2000, pp. 96-99; G. Blainey, *The Rush That Never Ended*, 5th ed., MUP, Melbourne, 2003, pp. 26, 162; M. Webb and A. Webb, *Golden Destiny: The Centenary History of Kalgoorlie-Boulder and the Eastern Goldfields of Western Australia*, Kalgoorlie-Boulder Shire, Kalgoorlie, 1993, pp. 188, 219, 227-8, 786; Bancroft, 'Aboriginal Miners and the Solferino and Lionsville Goldfields', pp. 131-47; N. Keesing (ed.), *History of the Australian Gold Rushes*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1967, pp. 39-44; Thomas Miles, 'The Discovery of Gold in Australia', *The Mining Magazine*, June, 1954, pp. 329-331; Phillip Playford, 'Discovery of the Kimberley Goldfield', *Royal W.A. Historical Society*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1985, pp. 76-106.

⁷ D. Borchardt (ed.), *Australia: A Historical Library*, Fairfax, Syme and Weldon, Sydney, 1987, p. 16.

⁸ Reynolds, *Black Pioneers*, pp. 96-7.

⁹ D. Elias, 'Jukurrpa - Golden Dreams,' in McCalman, Cook, Reeves, *Gold: Forgotten Histories*; Blainey, *The Rush That Never Ended*; R. Coningsby, *The Discovery of Gold*, William Milligan, London, 1895; Playford, 'Discovery of the Kimberley Goldfield'.

¹⁰ I. Clark and D. Cahir, 'Aboriginal People, Gold and Tourism: The Benefits of Inclusiveness for Goldfields Tourism in Regional Victoria', *Tourism Culture and Communication*, vol. 4, no. 3, December 2003, pp. 1-14.

¹¹ Reynolds, *With the White People*, p. 131.

¹² William Thomas, in Parker, *Aborigines: Return to Address*, Hugh McColl, Melbourne, 1854.

¹³ J. Nisbet, Articles, National Library of Australia (hereafter NLA), MS3588, Canberra.

¹⁴ A. Fauchery, *Letters from a Miner in Australia*, trans. A.R. Chisholm, Melbourne: Georgian House, 1965, p. 96.

¹⁵ A great number of non-indigenous people had at various times explored, visited, established camps and colonized specific locales of Victoria in the guise of convict settlements, whaling and sealing camps, military forts and pastoral runs prior to 1835 but the widespread occupation of what was then the Port Phillip District did not commence in earnest until June 1835. For further discussion see: D. Cahir, 'The Wathawurrung: Conciliation and Conflict,' unpublished Research Thesis, University of Ballarat, Ballarat, 2001.

¹⁶ Edward Stone Parker, Assistant Protector to the Aborigines reported, 16 March, 1839, that 'all the settlers whom I met with on the journey were of the opinion that the Aborigines were necessarily greatly distressed for food, owing to the destruction of the 'murnong', a tuberous-rooted plant formerly covering the plains of this country, but now entirely cropped off by the sheep and cattle. They expressed their earnest hope that the government would make suitable arrangements for supplying the Natives with food, as it was only under the pressure of hunger that they were disposed to meddle with flocks.' Cited in, M. Lacic and R. Wrench (eds), *Through Their Eyes; an Historical Record of Aboriginal People of Victoria as Documented by the Officials of the Port Phillip Protectorate 1839-1841*, Museum of Victoria, Melbourne, 1994, p. 82. A. Batey confirmed this by noting that 'On arriving in 1846 [Sunbury] and thereafter Myrnong digging was unknown to us, for the all sufficient reason that livestock seemingly had eaten out that form of vegetation'. See, A. Batey, *Reminiscences*, 1840-70, of settlement of Melbourne and the Sunbury district - Box 16 [2-3], Royal Historical Society of Victoria (hereafter RHSV) MS 000035, p. 91.

¹⁷ See, William Little, 'William Little of Ballarat: Some Writings', prepared by Frederick Shade, Eastside Printing, Rosanna, Vic., 2001, where he wrote of 'later comers in the ampler years – the youngest of the 'fifties – pitched their tents upon this virgin scene of native worth'.

¹⁸ In 1858 a Select Committee of the Legislative Council of Victoria was appointed to enquire into the present condition of the Aborigines and the best means of alleviating their absolute wants. A response by Daniel Bunce, from Geelong, to enquires made by the *SCLCV* included the recommendation that Wathawurrung people be occupied in their former habits, such as 'strip bark, dig for myrnong, burrow for porcupines and wombats'. It would appear that Bunce and presumably others were unaware that myrnong had become very rare in the Geelong district over fifteen years prior to the enquiry. Cited in Ian Clark, *Aboriginal Languages and Clans: An Historical Atlas of Western and Central Victoria*, Monash University, Melbourne, 1990, p. 299.

¹⁹ Cited in Barry McGowan, 'Mullock Heaps and Tailing Mounds', in McCalman, (ed.), *Gold: Forgotten Histories and Lost Objects of Australia*, Cambridge UP, 2001, p. 90.

²⁰ A.W. Howitt, *Land, Labour and Gold*. Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, London, 1855, repub. Lowden, Kilmore, 1972, pp. 176, 252.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 98, where Howitt wrote of the amazing propensity of the diggers to fell trees. Thomas Woolner, 'Woolner Diary', NLA, MS 2939, considered that the Mt Alexander diggings in 1852-3 was 'what one might suppose the earth would appear after the day of judgment has emptied all the graves'.

²² Rowe, Correspondence. See also J.S. Prout, *An Illustrated Handbook of the Voyage to Australia*, Peter Duff, London, p. 22, where this miner cum artist on the Victorian goldfields noted the depletion of traditional food sources, observing in 1852 that 'animals are becoming much more scarce than formerly'.

²³ S. Lawrence, *Dolly's Creek, Archaeology of a Victorian Goldfields Community*, Melbourne UP, Carlton, Vic. 2000, p. 52.

²⁴ Prout, *An Illustrated Handbook*, p. 26.

²⁵ In September 1854 three Aborigines assisted naturalist William Blandowski to obtain specimens of a number of fauna including a wombat. Blandowski recorded the traditional method of procurement involved digging shafts to a 'depth of twenty two feet'. Blandowski, *Personal Observations in the Central Parts of Victoria*, Goodhugh & Trembath, Melbourne, 1855, p. 19.

²⁶ Raddle quarries have been found by Geological Survey teams such as at Maryborough. See: J. Flett, *Dunolly: Story of an Old Gold Diggings*, Hawthorn Press, Melbourne, 1974, p. 8. Telopar or crystal was quarried in the Mallacoota area. See: Mallacoota and District Historical Society, *Mallacoota Memories*, Mallacoota Historical Society, Mallacoota, 1980, p. 11. F.R. Godfrey noted in May 1850 that 'The blacks

brought me a great quantity of the crystals found at Bonong [Bonang?] ... and use it for painting their faces at a corroboree'. Cited in, Fernihurst District History Committee, *Reflections from the Kinypaniel*, Author, Fernihurst, 1968, p. 12. Banfield noted the presence of kaolin quarries in the Ararat district. See, L. Banfield, *Like the Ark: The Story of Ararat*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1956, p. 18. A Polish miner on the goldfields of central Victoria wrote that 'Natives pay respect to talismans which consist of small, very clear crystals often found deep in the diggings'. S. Robe (ed.), Seweryn Korzelinski: *Memoirs of Gold-Digging in Australia*, UQP, St Lucia, 1979, p. 15.

²⁷ Little, *William Little of Ballarat*, p. 4.

²⁸ Quoted in Flett, *Dunolly: Story of an Old Gold Diggings*, p. 8; M.D.A McKay's: 'The rediscovery of Toolumbunner', in Antonio Sagona (ed.), *Bruising the Red Earth, Ochre mining and ritual in Aboriginal Tasmania*, Melbourne UP, Carlton, Vic., 1994, p. 3; Ian Jack, 'The local historian and the physical remains of mining', in P. Ashton (ed.), *Bridging the gap: national issues in local history*, RAHS, Sydney, 1989, pp. 58-64. Ethno-historian, Isabel McBryde, has written at length on exchange and trade in south eastern Australia and has identified several first hand sources which cite the pre-colonialist Aboriginal exchange rate for green stone axe heads, quarried from Mt William. See, I. McBryde, 'Exchange in South Eastern Australia: An Ethnohistorical Perspective', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1984, p. 142.

²⁹ W. Blandowski, 21 October 1854, cited in M. Tucker, *Kilmore on the Sydney Road*, Civic Centre, Kilmore, 1988. p. 21. A. Batey, a non-indigenous pastoral worker in the 1860s also described an Aboriginal stone quarry at Mt Camel. He had met an Aboriginal man from the Lachlan River district (500 km away) who identified a portion of an axe which had come from the distant quarry. W. Batey, *Reminiscences*, RHSV MS, Melbourne, p. 98, considered that this was proof that Aboriginal people possessed a 'commercial instinct'.

³⁰ Quoted by John Taylor in a letter 'The Aborigines of Victoria', *Kilmore Advertiser*, 2 June 1906, cited in Tucker, *Kilmore on the Sydney Road*, p. 21.

³¹ 'Ancient Mining Tools: Singular Discovery of a Stone Implement or Weapon at Ballarat', *Dickers Mining Record*, vol. 3, no. 7, 1864.

³² B. Birch, 'Gold in Australia', in *Johnny Greens Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1988, p. 3. Birch's supposition is certainly supported by anecdotal stories such as that provided by Forster who noted the local clan's immediate prior knowledge of where gold was to be found in great abundance. Also see: H. Forster, *Waranga*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1965, p. 19.

³³ J. Flett, *Maryborough*, Dominion Press, Blackburn, 1975, p. 1.

³⁴ It is equally probable that they were post contact sites.

³⁵ R.B. Smyth, *The Aborigines of Victoria*, VGPO, Melbourne, 1878, v. 2, cited in: Beavis, *Avoca - the Early Years*, M. & B. Beavis, Warrnambool, c.1986, p. 11.

³⁶ W. Craig, *My Adventures on the Australian Goldfields*, London, 1903, pp. 276-7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ C. Ferguson, *Experiences of a Forty-Niner in Australia and New Zealand*, Gaston Renard, Melbourne, 1979.

³⁹ A.J. Williams, *A Concise History of Maldon and the Tarrangower Diggings*, Tarrangower Times, Maldon, 1987, p. 69.

⁴⁰ Unknown, Evansford History, NLA MS7033, Folder 8, Canberra.

⁴¹ J.F. Hughes in *Castlemaine Association of Pioneers and Old Residents, Records of the Castlemaine Pioneers*, Rigby, Melbourne, 1972, p. 4.

⁴² Quoted in Keesing, *History of the Australian Gold Rushes*, p. 210.

⁴³ W. Tomlinson, Diary, State Library of Victoria (hereafter SLV), MS12183, 7 December, 1852.

⁴⁴ C. Stone, 'Researching Native Police Records at PROV', *Proactive*, June 2005.

⁴⁵ For examples see: I. Clark (ed.), *The Journals of George A. Robinson, January 1839-September 1840*, Heritage Matters, Melbourne, 1998. I. Clark (ed.), *The Journals of George Augustus Robinson, October 1840 - 31 August 1841*, Heritage Matters, Melbourne, 1998.

⁴⁶ Clarke in F. Cusack (ed.), *Early Days on Bendigo*, Queensberry Hill Press, Melbourne, 1979, p. 39.

⁴⁷ Anonymous, 'Aboriginal Fossickers,' *Mount Alexander Mail*, 21 March 1862.

⁴⁸ Anonymous, 'Unconsidered Trifles', *Argus*, 10 July 1860.

⁴⁹ Inquest cited in I. Clark, *Aboriginal Languages and Clans: An Historical Atlas of Western and Central Victoria*, Monash University, Melbourne, 1990, p. 149.

⁵⁰ S.C. Fahey, Inquest Deposition Files, Public Records Office Victoria, VPRS 24, Unit 283, item 232, Melbourne.

⁵¹ Clark and Cahir, 'Aboriginal People, Gold and Tourism', pp. 123-36.

⁵² J. Bonwick, *Notes of a Gold Digger and Gold Digger's Guide*, Connebee, Melbourne, 1852.

- ⁵³ J.A. Patterson, *The Gold Fields of Victoria in 1862*, Robertson, Melbourne, 1862, pp. 116-7. Also see Craig, *My Adventures on the Australian Goldfields*; G. Rowe, Correspondence, NLA, MS3116.
- ⁵⁴ R. Broome, 'Professional Aboriginal Boxers in Eastern Australia 1930-1979,' *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 4, no. 1, 1980, pp. 202-20.
- ⁵⁵ Dublin Jack was reported to have 'lived with the blacks for six years and had two sons from the union'. See, C.E. Sayers, *Shepherd's Gold*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1966, pp. 2-4.
- ⁵⁶ J.F. Hughes in Castlemaine Association of Pioneers and Old Residents, *Records of the Castlemaine Pioneers*, p. 4.
- ⁵⁷ W.C. Newton, Diary, SLV MS 10251, Melbourne.
- ⁵⁸ Religious Tract Society, *Australia: Its Scenery, Natural History, Resources and Settlements with a Glance at Its Goldfields*, Religious Tract Society, London, c.1854, p. 29.
- ⁵⁹ The Religious Tract Society, *Australia and Its Settlement*, Religious Tract Society, London, 1853, p. 7.
- ⁶⁰ R. Read, *What I Heard, Saw and Did at the Australian Goldfields*, Boone, London, 1853, p. 253.
- ⁶¹ Cusack, *Early Days on Bendigo*, p. 13.
- ⁶² Peter Cuffley (ed.), *Send the Boy to Sea: The Memoirs of a Sailor on the Goldfields by James Montagu Smith*, Five Mile Press, Melbourne, 2001, p. 72.
- ⁶³ T. Blyth, Diary, NLA MS 2310, Canberra.
- ⁶⁴ For examples see, Clark, *The Journals of George A Robinson*, p. 242; Clark, *The Journals of George Augustus Robinson* pp. 362-7.
- ⁶⁵ W. Robertson, *History of Piggoreet and Golden Lake*, Jim Crow Press, Daylesford, 1998, p. 12.
- ⁶⁶ Ray Willis and Cliff Latter unearthed an Aboriginal work site in the 1960s whilst widening the Lal Lal Road near Yendon that may have been in same location as gold mining operations. See, R Willis, *Aboriginal Archaeology of the Yendon-Lal Lal Area*, Buninyong Historical Society, Buninyong, 1989, p. 1. Historian James Flett also has noted the presence of Aboriginal 'raddle' quarries in the vicinity of gold mines, see, Flett, *Dunolly, Story of an Old Gold Diggings*, p. 8.
- ⁶⁷ Unusual people such as an Englishman afflicted with elephantiasis, causing his feet to be over eighteen inches in length was disconcerting for Aboriginal people near Tallarook, and would presumably have caused great curiosity. A. Le Souef, 'Personal Recollections of Early Victoria', South Australian Museum, Adelaide. Andrew Porteous and other correspondents in the 1859 Select Committee on the Condition of Aborigines reported their great attraction to 'frequenting the goldfields'. See, *Victorian Government, Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Aborigines; Together with the Proceedings of Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendices*, John Ferres, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1859.
- ⁶⁸ Quoted in Clark and Cahir, 'Aboriginal People, Gold and Tourism', p. 5.
- ⁶⁹ I.D. Clark, *The Northern Wathawurrung and Andrew Porteous, 1860-1877* unpublished, University of Ballarat, Ballarat, 2001, p. 9.
- ⁷⁰ William Tomlinson reported that at the opening of the Geelong-Melbourne railway, the procession consisted of 'Mounted troopers, police, soldiers, railway navvies, Aborigines ...'. See, W. Tomlinson, Diary, SLV, MS 12183, Melbourne, 20 September 1853.
- ⁷¹ Charles Fead, a miner on the Buchan diggings noted that at the first local race meeting just a few miles from the diggings was Meteoka, a Kurnai, who had been 'holding horses all day and was proud of it; his honest cheery voice could be heard during the races urging on his favourites. See, G. Fead, 'Notes of an Unsettled Life,' *Gippsland Heritage Journal*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1994, p. 35. Likewise, a Djabwurrung woman, 'Lady Sutherland', was known to frequent the Chute races during the mining period, see, Unknown, *Riponshire Advocate*, 3 January 1885. In 1881 the 'Aboriginal King of Lal Lal was present' at the Lal Lal races, see 'Lal Lal Falls Races,' *Ballarat Star*, 3 January 1881.
- ⁷² M. Hancock (ed.), *Glimpses of Life in Victoria by a Resident*, MUP, Melbourne, 1996, p. 151.
- ⁷³ Fead noted that Aboriginal people were 'not without vanity and one might occasionally be seen strutting about in a swallow tailed coat or a tall black hat, without another stitch of clothing of any kind. The women too were not a little proud when they could display a parasol and dress improver or, later on, a crinoline for their sole attire. They were fond of looking glasses, bits of finery and scented hair oil.' See: Fead, 'Notes of an Unsettled Life', p. 27.
- ⁷⁴ A.B. Pierce recounted a humorous tale of the novelty that accompanied the first experience Aboriginal people had of cameras in the Serpentine River area in 1863. See, M.A. Leatherbee (ed.), *Knocking About: Being Some Adventures of Augustus Baker Pierce in Australia*, Shoe String Press, Wangaratta, 1984, pp. 33-5.
- ⁷⁵ Hancock, *Glimpses of Life in Victoria by a Resident*, p. 150.
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Fauchery, *Letters from a Miner in Australia*, p. 98. Further example of the exoticism of non-indigenous music for Aboriginal people was also noted by A.B. Pierce: They were much interested in Everest's violin and listened to his playing with great pleasure, never having seen or heard such an instrument before. They would approach him with curiosity and examine it carefully, remarking, 'Takem box, waddy rub him back, makim noise all same him possum', see, *Leatherbee, Knocking About*, p. 63. Also see M. Ragless (ed.), *Oliver's Diary: An 'Andkerchief of Eirth*, Investigator Press, Hawthorndene, 1986, p. 17.

⁷⁸ Fead, 'Notes of an Unsettled Life', p. 34.

⁷⁹ Unknown, *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, 8 October 1857.

⁸⁰ Miner Antoine Fauchery wrote at length about a Wathawurrung man and his three wives who 'skilfully defeated me in a relentless and obstinate battle that went on for not less that two hours'. Fauchery was maddened and confounded by their stubborn begging for some food and wondered 'Had I undergone some magnetic influence?' See: Fauchery, *Letters from a Miner in Australia*, pp. 96-8. Christiakov, a Russian 'arm chair' writer plagiarised Fauchery's story of the beggar, and thus reinforced the stereotype of the 'obstinacy of a savage', see, *M. Chistiakov, Tales from a Journey through Australia*, St Petersburg, 1874. See also T. Pierson, Diaries, MS 11646, SLV, Melbourne; R. Tame, *Reminiscences of Melbourne and Gold Diggings*, SLV, MS8964.

⁸¹ I. Clark, *'That's My Country Belonging to Me'. Aboriginal Land Tenure and Dispossession in Nineteenth Century Western Victoria*, Heritage Matters, Melbourne, 2003, pp. 191-2.

⁸² 'The Aborigines,' *Argus*, 28 April 1863, p. 7, report from *Grenville Advocate*, Correspondent.

⁸³ Foster Fyans to Colonial Secretary, 7 March 1839, in M Cannon (ed.), *Aborigines of Port Phillip 1835-1839*, VGPO, Melbourne, 1982, p. 199.

⁸⁴ G.A. Robinson noted visiting many pastoral stations where Aboriginal people were present who recognised non-indigenous people as resuscitated clans-people and subsequently entered into customary reciprocal arrangements with them. See, Clark, *That's My Country Belonging to Me*, p. 187. Colin Campbell, in T. Bride (ed.), *Letters from Victorian Pioneers*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1898, commented upon this phenomenon in the 1850s.

⁸⁵ W. Bridges, *The Travels of Walter Bridges, Travelogue*, unreferenced manuscript, Ballarat municipal library, Ballarat, c.1850s.

⁸⁶ M. Kellerman, 'Interesting Account of the Travels of Abraham Abrahamsohn,' *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal*, vol. 7, 1974, pp. 478-94.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 498.

⁸⁸ M. Ronan (ed.), *Early Dederang 1854-1956 from the Notebook of Micheal James Goonan Macron*, Melbourne, 2004, p. 10.

⁸⁹ Hancock, *Glimpses of Life in Victoria by a Resident*, p. 164. For further discussion of this phenomenon see: I. Clark and D. Cahir, 'The Comfort of Strangers: Hospitality on the Victorian Goldfields, 1850-60,' unpublished (2006).

⁹⁰ Hamilton had been identified as a *ngamadidj* or a resuscitated Aboriginal clans-man and thus is a vital clue to what is transpiring. For further discussion see: I. Clark, 'Understanding the Enemy - Ngmmadidj or Foreign Invader? Aboriginal Perceptions of Europeans in 19th Century Western Victoria', *Department of Management Working Paper Series*, Working paper 73/98, 1998.

⁹¹ J.C. Hamilton, *Pioneering Days in Western Victoria*, Shire of Kowree, Kowree, c.1912.

⁹² Many examples exist of Aboriginal people declaring their title to a suite of civil rights. Equinehup, a Djadjawurrung man, formally petitioned colonial authorities (Railway Commissioners) expressing his claim to original land title. 'Maldon 28th July 1887', cited in W. Evans (ed.), *Diary of a Welsh Swagman, 1869-1898*, Macmillan, South Melbourne, 1977, p. 156. In 1876, Dicky, a Wathawurrung elder at Lal Lal, near Ballarat complained to some miners that they had 'robbed him of Lal Lal which was his inheritance, and collected several shillings compensation. 'Lal Lal', *Ballarat Star*, specific date unknown, 1876. In April 1879, 'King Tommy', a Djadjawurrung, came to Baringup to meet the Governor, Sir George Bowen to speak of the old days, and was subsequently given money, see: Flett, *Dunolly: Story of an Old Gold Diggings*, p. 3.

⁹³ A. Finlay, *The Journal of Alexander Finlay at the Victorian Gold Diggings*, St Marks Press, Sydney, 1992, p. 36.

⁹⁴ Pierson, Diaries. Also see: J. Graham (ed.), *Observations and Experiences During 25 Years of Bush Life in Australia*, Book Society, London, 1863, p. 134; F. Journet, *L'Australie: Description Du Pays*, Rothschild, Paris, 1885, p. 336. The same sentiments were expressed in: E. Middleton, *A Description of the Life and Times in Victoria in the 1860's by a Young Colonist, Reminiscences*, Private Collection, Melbourne, p. 49.

⁹⁵ E. Ramsay-Laye, *Social Life and Manners in Australia*, Longman and Green, London, 1861, p. 60.

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- ⁹⁶ E. Price, Letters, NLA MS 4826, Canberra. J.D. Mereweather, *Diary of a Working Clergyman in Australia, 1850-3*, London, 1859, pp. 156-7, reported that a 'black speared a platypus as it was swimming in the river close to where I was. It requires great cunning and dexterity to do this'.
- ⁹⁷ G. Wakefield, Letters, NLA MS684, 1 May 1856, Canberra.
- ⁹⁸ T. Martin, *Early History of Newstead District, Reminiscences*, SLV MS 41074, Melbourne.
- ⁹⁹ C. Brout, *Guide for Emigrants to the Australian Gold Mines*, Unknown, Paris, 1861, pp. 18-21.
- ¹⁰⁰ R. Johns, Papers, SLV Ms 10075, Melbourne.
- ¹⁰¹ Flett, *Dunolly: Story of an Old Gold Diggings*, p. 6.
- ¹⁰² 'Lal Lal Falls Races', *Ballarat Star*, date unknown.
- ¹⁰³ A battle between rival clans was reported in the *Wedderburn Express*, cited in F. Cusack (ed.), *The History of the Wedderburn Goldfields*, Queensberry Hill Press, Carlton, 1981, pp. 18-19.
- ¹⁰⁴ Anonymous, 'Mysterious Murder,' *Mount Alexander Mail*, 4 July 1862.
- ¹⁰⁵ J. Flett, *Maryborough*, Dominion Press, Blackburn, 1975, p. 4, noted Corroborees were held in the music halls at the gold rush towns of Lamplough and Scandinavian Rush (today's Talbot).
- ¹⁰⁶ A. Nixon, *Inglewood Gold*. Greensborough, Sundowner Press, 1982, p. 37.
- ¹⁰⁷ M. McGivern, *Big Camp Wahgunyah: History of the Rutherglen District*, Spectrum, Melbourne, 1983. p. 126.
- ¹⁰⁸ G. Roulston, *Reminiscences of History of Early Dandenong*, Dandenong Journal, Dandenong, 1984.
- ¹⁰⁹ Cusack, *The History of the Wedderburn Goldfields*.
- ¹¹⁰ Historian James Flett posits that at the opening of the railway at Dunolly 'King Tommy', a Djadjawurrung elder, served as a 'symbol' as he appeared with a banner on a long pole and danced in front of the engine. See Flett, *Dunolly: Story of an Old Gold Diggings*, p. 8.
- ¹¹¹ E. Netell, Town Clerks Correspondence, Letters, Letters From the Town Clerk, Buninyong, 1869.
- ¹¹² W. Tomlinson, Diary, 20 September 1853, MS 12183, SLV, Melbourne.
- ¹¹³ E. Duyker (ed.), *A Woman on the Goldfields: Recollections of Emily Skinner, 1854-1878*, MUP, Carlton, 1995, p. 45; S. Robe (ed.), *Seweryn Korzelinski: Memoirs of Gold-Digging in Australia*, p. 122.
- ¹¹⁴ F. Shellard, Reminiscences of an Old Digger, NLA MS 1890, Canberra.