

Hey History Episode 4 Gold Fever

Axel Clark: [00:00:01] Hey History! Hey History! Is a podcast all about Australian history where the kids ask the questions. I'm your host, Axel Clark. In each episode of Hey History, we'll hear stories and answer your questions. Questions like...

Kids: [00:00:19] What's the gold rush?

Kids: [00:00:21] What was life like then? What kind of food would you have?

Kids: [00:00:24] Did Aboriginal people mine gold too? How did Australia change with people coming from everywhere?

Axel Clark: [00:00:30] And at Hey History, we don't just stop when we get an answer because...

Axel Clark: [00:00:37] How do we know what really happened? And is there another side to the story?

Axel Clark: [00:00:44] In this episode, we'll go camping on the goldfields of Ballarat with thousands of other people. It's all about the gold rush. You can listen to this episode straight through or stop halfway if you'd like. I'll tell you when we've reached halfway.

Kids: [00:00:58] Hey History!

Axel Clark: [00:01:00] Let's go! In the Hey History podcast, the kids ask the questions and I'm a kid, so I've got a question for you. Have you ever been camping in a campground or a school camp with lots of people? How was it?

Kids: [00:01:20] It's really fun. The only downside to that is when it's raining. When I went camping with my family, we all wanted to start a gigantic tent, and it was. And it was so squishy. And when we walked in, we all got sand in it. So when we went to sleep, there was all sand. I'd rather just sleep in the car. Camping is really, really cool, but, um, sometimes it could be really bad. I feel like allergic to mosquitoes. Or if you're not really, um, an outside person.

Axel Clark: [00:02:04] Yeah, you are outside a fair bit when you go camping. And the reason I asked you about camping is that camping was big in the gold rush. Like, really big. And thinking about camping today might help you imagine what it was like back then. You know what else can help us imagine life in the gold rush. A visit to the classrooms of Preshil Primary School and Westbourne Grammar School in Melbourne.

Kids: [00:02:34] We're on Wurundjeri Country. We're on Bunnerong Land. Hello from Victoria.

Axel Clark: [00:02:42] A lot of Gold Rush history happened in Victoria. What can you guys tell us about the gold rushes?

Kids: [00:02:48] There were two very famous gold rushes. One was in America and the other one was in Australia. People came from everywhere, all around the globe because gold was worth a lot of money, since it was a very rare material. Some got really rich, some went flat broke. There were probably a few hot spots where there was lots of gold, and I think people would argue about the places where they were mining, since some places were definitely have more gold than others. It was multicultural, but not in the way that Australia is now. A lot of cultures and religions weren't accepted in the goldfields. There was discriminations and not everyone used to get along.

Axel Clark: [00:03:28] These were all really great points about the Gold Rush.

Kids: [00:03:32] Hey, I've got a question! Who first found the gold?

Newspaper seller: [00:03:37] Extra, extra. Read all about it. Gold found in Australia February 1851.

Newspaper seller: [00:03:47] First official gold discovery near Bathurst, Colony of New South Wales. June 1851 gold found in central Victoria. Thousands flocked to strike it rich and find their fortune. Gold fever hits Australia. Gold. The rush is on.

Axel Clark: [00:04:10] Newspapers all over the world said that in Victoria, gold was really easy to find. So everyone got 'gold fever'. But they weren't sick with a fever in bed. Gold fever means they were super excited at the idea of becoming instantly rich. And getting rich wasn't always about buying fancy things or having a giant house. Most

people back then didn't have much and gold was a chance to change their lives. Would you leave home and go across the world to find gold? Would you get 'gold fever'?

Kids: [00:04:47] Yes, I would if I would go across the world and go see new places. Plus I'll be rich and I can buy lots and lots of meals. I would probably like not go because I don't want the chance to, like, not get any money. It's a little bit of adventure. I could be super rich and be fantastic, I would. It's because if you get too rich, you'll forget about your family. I would, but but I would use the money to bring my family to the place I'm going away to.

Axel Clark: [00:05:22] Melbourne was the closest city to the goldfields in Victoria. Let's go back in time to Melbourne in the 1850s. Here's historian Fred Cahir.

Fred Cahir: [00:05:37] Arriving from Europe or the Americas and arriving at what was then called Port Phillip. It would have been an extraordinary attack on your senses and a weird collection of languages...

Fred Cahir: [00:05:58] Songs and dance. Many people getting drunk. Miners came from all across the world, from every nation, including Maori, indigenous people from New Zealand and American indigenous people, Russians, Jamaicans. Everybody wanted to come to the gold fields of Victoria.

Tom Clark, singing: [00:06:23] When first I left Old Ireland Shore, the yarns that we were told.

Of how the folks in Australia could pick up lumps of gold, how gold dust lay in all the streets.

Fred Cahir: [00:06:38] And there were no roads. Very few people could afford to buy a horse, so just thousands of people just walking along tracks towards this town called Ballarat.

Tom Clark, singing: [00:06:49] Black billy in my hand. I'll travel the bushes of Australia like a true born Irish man.

We made our way into Geelong, then north to Ballarat.

Axel Clark: [00:07:02] Let's go to Ballarat.

Axel Clark: [00:07:04] It's an hour and a half in a car from Melbourne. Lucky we brought snacks! And we're actually following the same tracks that people walked along to the goldfields. It's quick for us only an hour and a half, but back then it took people three days to walk there. These dirt tracks were soon packed with people all going to one place the goldfields. The main places with gold were in Central Victoria near Bendigo and Ballarat.

Fred Cahir: [00:07:45] They knew they were entering Ballarat. When they would hear the sound of these gold dishes, sifting sand and trying to find gold.

Axel Clark: [00:07:55] Wow. The sounds of the gold rushes.

Fred Cahir: [00:07:58] The sound of these mining dishes, apparently could be heard from ten miles away. That's how many there were.

Axel Clark: [00:08:04] You could hear gold pans from ten miles. That's 16km away. Talk about noise pollution! These mining dishes or gold pans that Fred is talking about, making all that noise look a bit like a pizza pan. A big round metal pan.

Kids: [00:08:26] It sounds weird, but like you could imagine how old it is and how much time it's gone through. Like maybe even all the gold it's picked up. It would be really cool if you could just see from the pans perspective and just see what's happened over time.

Axel Clark: [00:08:41] It would be cool. So what did happen over time? Let's go back before the gold rush, before colonisation, the Ballarat goldfields are on Wada Wurrung Country. Country that's been lived on and cared for for thousands of years by Wada Wurrung people. The first colonisers came to central Victoria in the 1830s to farm sheep. Wada Wurrung people resisted the takeover of their land and there was guerilla warfare for many years. And then 20 years later, everything changed again.

Tom Clark, singing: [00:09:19] We made our way into Geelong, then north to Ballarat.

Fred Cahir: [00:09:25] When Ballarat in the 1850s, when the gold rush commenced, would have been a very beautiful spot. There were creeks and rivers, flat areas with hills with just the occasional trees on them, a very picturesque and beautiful place. Very

quickly the the gold seekers turned what was a beautiful place into a very horrible, smelly place to live. The goldfields very quickly turned into a big mess essentially.

Axel Clark: [00:09:59] It's hard to imagine how hectic it was. Every week for over a year, 6000 men, women and children turned up to the Ballarat goldfields, all needing to find somewhere to live, food to eat, somewhere to poo and wee, and somewhere to start panning or digging for gold.

Fred Cahir: [00:10:25] One miner wrote in his memoirs that every tree was cut down, nature was destroyed. The gold miners had no toilets. Everything was just poured into the creeks and the rivers. So they quickly became polluted and people being very, very sick.

Axel Clark: [00:10:46] No toilets, no showers and no bookings for your tent. You just turn up and find a spot where you can if you can. Next to the other thousands and thousands of tents.

Kids: [00:10:58] Question time. What kind of food would you have? Would it taste bad? Would it taste good?

Andrew Pearce: [00:11:04] Food would be what you could get your hands on.

Axel Clark: [00:11:07] This is Andrew Pearce from Sovereign Hill, a museum in Ballarat where history comes to life.

Andrew Pearce: [00:11:15] It wouldn't be fresh fruit and vegetables, at least not for most people. You'd be eating native animals. Parrot pie and laughing jackass pie, which is going to be kookaburra and wallabies and kangaroos.

Kids: [00:11:30] The reason it's funny is because they said 'jack ass' pie.

Andrew Pearce: [00:11:35] Main kind of food is tea, flour, sugar, and particularly mutton. Bringing the sheep in height of summer. We're talking 30 degrees plus and meats just hanging in the open.

Axel Clark: [00:11:48] Have you seen what happens when you leave food in your lunchbox for a bit too long? Like ham, for example? It's not pretty, is it?

Andrew Pearce: [00:11:59] We can look at diary entries talking about the sound of flies. I can't hear who's talking next to me. It's that loud. I wake up, they're all over my face. The blanket is covered in maggots. There's one quote around. At least a foot by foot, covered in maggots on this blanket.

Axel Clark: [00:12:18] You're waking up with maggots on your blanket. You know what maggots are right there, baby flies and look like creepy, wriggling little worms. Ew!

Kids: [00:12:28] Yuck.

Axel Clark: [00:12:31] Would you stay? How would you go in the camping trip that never ended? Okay, we've reached halfway through the episode. If you'd like to pause now, you can. Hey, if you listen to the first half of this episode and then took a break, let's catch up on what's happened so far.

[00:12:54] Hey History! We visited Westbourne Grammar and Preshil Primary School in Melbourne and asked them what they knew about the Gold Rush. Gold fever hit Victoria in 1851. The chance for people to get rich and have more control over their lives. Thousands of men, women and kids from all over the world arrived each week at the gold fields of Ballarat on Wada Wurrung Country. The sound of gold pans could be heard miles away. And what? Our own country got wrecked pretty fast. The miners cut down the trees, dug up the ground, pooped in the rivers and killed kookaburras for pies. Okay. All caught up. Let's go.

Kids: [00:13:46] Hey, I'd like to know that Aboriginal people mined gold too?

Axel Clark: [00:13:50] Yeah. Great question. So Aboriginal people all over Australia, going back thousands and thousands of years, lived with gold on their land in the colonisation of Australia. This gold rock suddenly became worth something.

Fred Cahir: [00:14:05] The first discovery of gold in Victoria is believed to be by a Dja Dja Wurrung boy, who was picking up stones to throw at birds for hunting purposes, and discovered that he was actually handling a gold nugget. We don't have any evidence of

Aboriginal people associating gold as a valuable metal prior to the colonists arriving, but once gold became precious, then Aboriginal people valued it as well. Very quickly, Aboriginal people incorporated gold into their creation stories.

Axel Clark: [00:14:40] And like everyone else, some got gold fever.

Fred Cahir: [00:14:44] Aboriginal people very quickly who came from other parts of Australia, if they didn't find gold themselves, quickly found themselves employed by miners, both men and women, for tracking horses and stripping bark and making possum skin rugs, and being posties and ferrying them across rivers in their bark canoes. Gold villages were very boring places until Aboriginal people were putting on corroboree performances to entertain. First type of tourism here on the goldfields was by Aboriginal people. There was a lot of interaction, both positive and negative, between the miners and Aboriginal people. Some of it that was negative due largely to miners not understanding cultural issues such as digging mining on Aboriginal cremation sites or sacred sites.

Axel Clark: [00:15:40] What, you mean the gold miners just dug up Aboriginal sacred sites? There were hardly any rules about protecting the environment or these places back then.

Fred Cahir: [00:15:52] Other interactions were very positive in terms of the miners were not taking over Aboriginal lands. They were staying for short periods of time. They usually paid Aboriginal people very well.

Axel Clark: [00:16:10] So we know there were people from all over the world on the gold fields, but did they all get along? And sometimes in that rush for gold, there were fights over money. And who mined where. People started to get suspicious of each other and treat each other differently.

Kids: [00:16:31] Hey, can I ask something? How bad was the discrimination? Like, was it just bad or was it absolutely terrible?

Axel Clark: [00:16:39] Interesting question. Some groups of people copped this suspicion and discrimination more than others. Meet Gabriel Wang. Her grandfather was a miner from China.

Gabrielle Wang: [00:16:54] My great grandfather's anglicised Chinese name was Chen Ah Kew. He came from a village and apparently the villagers. And this is what often happened in those days. They would pull their money and they would invest in a young person, you know, who was brave and adventurous. And they invested in my great grandfather, who was 18, sent him to Australia to dig for gold, we think probably around 1853.

Axel Clark: [00:17:26] Can you imagine your whole family and community saves up all their money to buy you a ticket on a ship to the goldfields? They're hoping that you will find gold. Yeah. No pressure at all. Cool.

Gabrielle Wang: [00:17:44] He must have found gold because he became quite successful later on. So people who were sent to Australia where they sent the money back. So it was like an investment for the village. Chinese worked together a lot like that.

Axel Clark: [00:17:58] The Chinese miners often worked in organised groups of 30 to 100 men. Working together in big groups meant they often found gold.

Gabrielle Wang: [00:18:07] And I think that's a lot of the reason why the Western gold miners really hated the Chinese, because the Chinese would work the old diggings that the Western miners had given up and they'd work together, whereas Western miners basically worked alone, singly. Yeah, a lot of racial prejudice in those days.

Axel Clark: [00:18:31] And not only that, the government was punishing them, making them pay more with special taxes just for Chinese miners. So we had thousands and thousands of people looking for gold. We had tents everywhere. We had cultures getting on and also not getting on. Is this a recipe for disaster?

Axel Clark: [00:19:00] On the morning of the 3rd of December, 1854, miners woke up to the sound of gunshots and shouting. So many gunshots at a mining site on the Ballarat goldfields called the Eureka Diggings. It's all happening on one side, over 100 miners, men and women behind a big fence. On the other side, almost 300 police and soldiers attack them. The miners fight back. And in 15 minutes, it's over. All the miners have lost. At least 22 miners, including one woman and five police, died. This battle is

called the Eureka Stockade. Over 100 miners are arrested. 13 miners went to court in Melbourne, but they were all released and the people of Victoria supported the miners and what they believed in.

Kids: [00:20:17] Hey, can I ask something? Why were the police and the miners fighting in the first place? And what were the miners fighting for?

Axel Clark: [00:20:27] Good question. Sarah Van der Wouw is from the Eureka Centre and she knows all about the Eureka Stockade.

Sarah Van der Wouw: [00:20:35] The government had a really big problem during the gold rush, because the population swelled so quickly that there weren't the resources to actually care for and protect that population on the goldfields, and the government had to pay for the infrastructure that didn't exist.

Axel Clark: [00:20:51] In the early part of the gold rush. There weren't any government services like public toilets, clean water, roads and a whole lot more people were coming to Australia so quickly that the government just couldn't keep up.

Sarah Van der Wouw: [00:21:04] And so they came up with a licence fee, a miner's licence, and you had to buy a miner's licence when you came to Ballarat and when you came to work on the goldfields. Now, if you're living in a tent and you're not actually making any money, you're not finding gold. After a couple of years of that, it's going to become really difficult to keep paying that money. Hmm.

Axel Clark: [00:21:28] But every miner paid the same licence fee. It didn't matter how much gold they found or didn't find. Do you think that's fair? And then things got a whole lot worse.

Sarah Van der Wouw: [00:21:44] The police were out doing licence hunts quite frequently and asking miners to show their licences, and tensions were building on the goldfields. And there were 10,000 miners on the Ballarat goldfields that would come to meetings and protest the fee.

Axel Clark: [00:22:00] 10,000 miners. Those huge protests kept happening. The miners wanted the mining licence fee stopped and other things like the right to vote. But the

Victorian government ignored the miners, so the miners decided their next protest would be even bigger.

Sarah Van der Wouw: [00:22:22] They came down to Eureka and they built the stockade. And the stockade had been built to keep the soldiers out, to stop them from coming and doing licence hunts. And three days later the soldiers decided they wanted in and they attacked the stockade. This legacy of Eureka really began on those Ballarat goldfields in 1854.

Axel Clark: [00:22:49] The miners lost the battle at the Eureka Stockade, but there was change. Within a year, the government got rid of the gold license and miners got more rights like the right to vote, but not all the miners. The new rights didn't go to Chinese or First Nations miners. So while the Eureka Stockade is a key event in democracy and rights in Australia, not everyone got the benefits. But before we finish this episode, we've got to ask...

Kids: [00:23:28] What's the evidence? How do we really know?

Sarah Van der Wouw: [00:23:34] So many different accounts. A lot that's written in newspaper articles at the time. All of the correspondence between the goldfield commissioners who were on the goldfields, the police officers, the governor of Victoria. Lots and lots of journals that we still have. One of the miners wrote a book. It was published in 1855. So Raphael Carbone's book, and that's online. You can read it online as well, but a lot of it at the end as well. Is is word of mouth is sort of this really fantastic oral history that's been passed down.

Axel Clark: [00:24:05] And of course, we can know about gold rush history from the objects that survived, like the actual gold pants that miners used. So the Gold rush is an example of multicultural Australia, where people came together from all over the world with new skills and new ideas. Where miners, police and the government clashed. Where people came together to fight for their rights. And where people copped racism and discrimination. So what would Australia be like if there wasn't a gold rush?

Kids: [00:24:47] Australia is a very multicultural society and without that gold rush, it wouldn't have opened all these other cultures. We might not be as we are quite a rich country, safe, healthy. This Australia wouldn't be Australia without the gold rushes.

Axel Clark: [00:25:05] One thing's for sure it changed Australia forever. And that's one of the reasons why we still talk about it today. You've been listening to hey history! Check out our learning materials for this episode. Designed and road tested by a primary school educator. They're on our website with lots of other resources. Go to. Hey, History.net. Hey, have you heard about other episodes of Hey History? You can listen to them in any order. There's the oldest classroom, first meeting in Kamay botany Bay and convict kids. And a bonus episode for your teacher. How to talk with kids about Australian history.

[00:25:54] Hey History is made on Gadigal Country by Anna Clark, Clare Wright, Jane Curtis and Britta Jorgenson. It's endorsed by the History Teachers Association of New South Wales. And your host is me, Axel Clark.

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