

# The gold rushes

The gold rushes from 1851 until the early 1900s were very important to Australia's history. Up to that time, Indigenous Australians occupied most of the country, although some had already been pushed off their lands. In 1788, the first settlers from Europe, mostly English and Irish, arrived and established new towns along the coast.

## The first rushes

In 1851, a group of **prospectors**, led by a man called Edward Hargraves, found gold near Bathurst in New South Wales. Within days of the announcement of this discovery, a gold rush started. In the next few months, gold was found near Ballarat and Bendigo in Victoria, starting another rush. People came from all over Australia and overseas, facing enormous hardships and danger to search for their fortunes.

## Australia changed forever

The gold rushes changed Australia forever. Towns and farms sprang up across the country that had not been there before. These towns were joined by roads, railways and **telegraph lines** to serve the new settlers.

By the end of the gold rushes in the early 1900s, goldminers had forced the government to change laws about who could vote, be a member of **parliament** or come to live in Australia. People began to think of themselves as Australians, with their own ways of doing things.

Australia was changed forever.

Many hopeful diggers travelled to the Australian goldfields during the gold rushes.

# Life on the goldfields

Life on the goldfields could be exciting, but could also be difficult, dangerous and uncomfortable, so few women or children lived on the goldfields at first. To reach the goldfields, diggers walked or rode long distances over rough tracks, because proper roads had not been built. Diggers had to make their own shelters when they arrived. Most lived in tents or bark huts. Houses, hotels and shops of timber, stone or brick were built on the bigger goldfields when people began to settle there.

## Daily needs

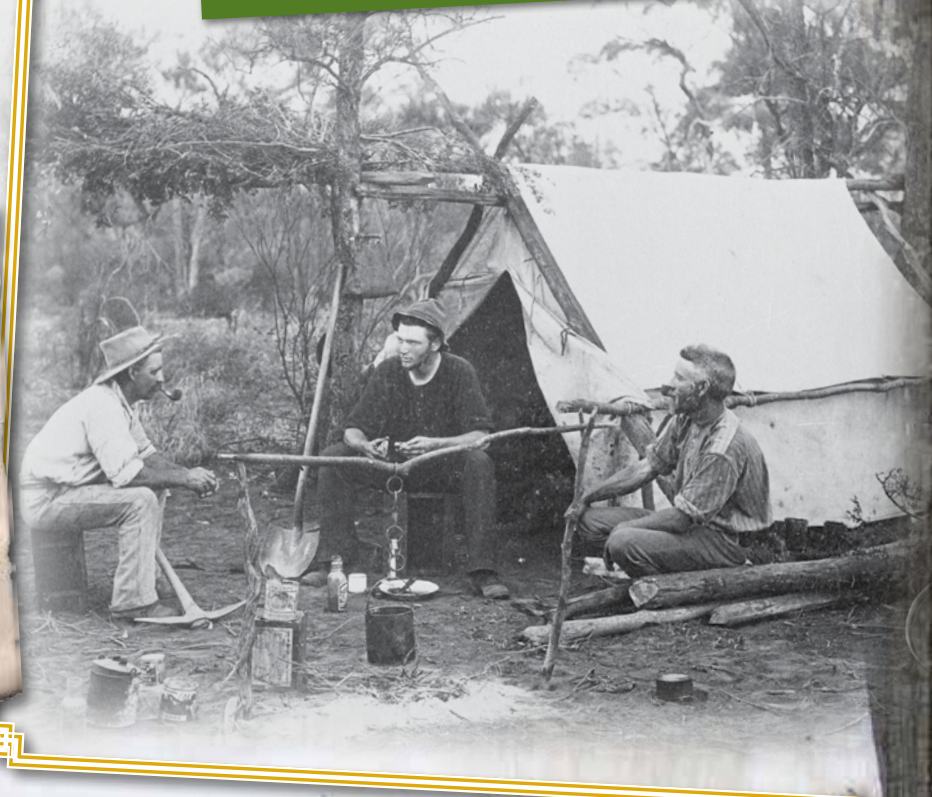
It was difficult for people to meet their daily needs on the goldfields. They had to carry most of their supplies to the goldfields with them. Few shops existed at first, and it was hard to get fresh food and water. Cooking, keeping clean and warm, and getting letters and newspapers were difficult tasks.

When diggers were sick or had accidents, family or friends often provided the only medical treatment.

### GOLD NEWS

Fresh meat was not always available on the goldfields, but most miners were suspicious of tinned meat. They were not sure what was inside. In some places it became known as 'tinned dog'.

Diggers on the goldfields often lived in tents and cooked their food over a camp fire.





# Travelling to the goldfields

People travelled to the goldfields in many different ways. Many walked from nearby towns. If people could afford it, they rode horses, came by horse-drawn cart, or by coach. Others came by ship from places such as Britain, the United States of America and China.

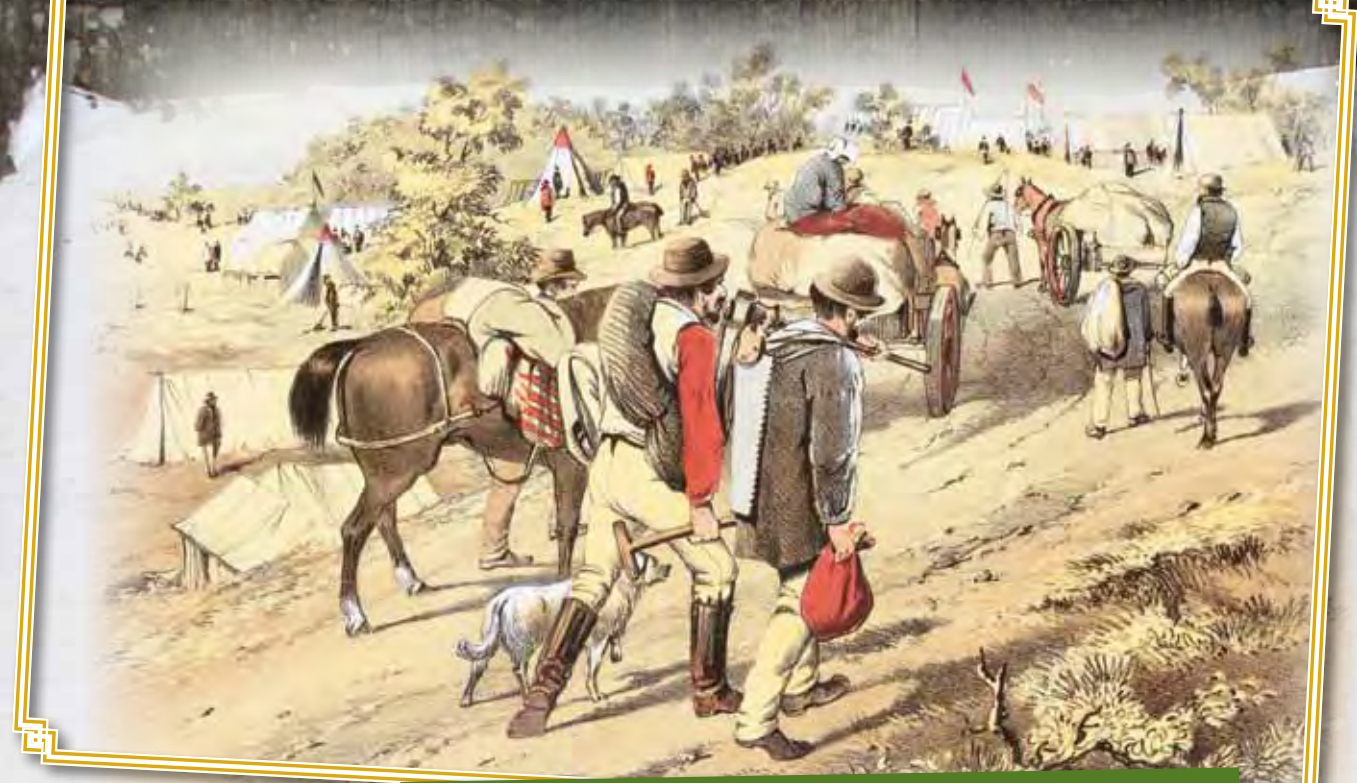
## GOLD NEWS

In 1854, an American called Freeman Cobb began the first coach service to the Victorian goldfields. It ran from Melbourne to Castlemaine and Bendigo. Cobb and Co was a successful company that carried mail and passengers, and operated a **gold escort service**. The company still exists.

## Sailing

Journeys in early sailing ships were long and uncomfortable. Passengers were crammed into small wooden bunks below deck, and ate together at a long table in the cabin. The food was very basic, and fresh fruit and vegetables were rare. In stormy weather, passengers could be shut down below deck for days with no fresh air. Diseases caused by poor food and not being able to wash properly were common. People sometimes arrived in Sydney or Melbourne too weak and sick to set off for the goldfields.

Ships bound for Australia were often crowded and uncomfortable, especially if passengers were shut below deck.



Some diggers walked to the goldfields and carried their belongings, while others rode or carried their belongings on pack-horses.

## Walking

Walking from cities or towns was the most common method of reaching the diggings. Sometimes diggers walked hundreds of kilometres. It could be hot and dust was stirred up by passing horses and carts. It could also be freezing cold. When it rained, people struggled through mud, sometimes up to their knees. Miners often brought a waterproof coat and trousers, **canvas** for a tent, a pick, a shovel and a panning dish. Some miners brought these supplies in wooden wheelbarrows, but many carried their belongings over their shoulders, in a sack, or in a roll carried across the shoulders called a swag.

## Riding

Riding to the diggings was easier than walking, but it was expensive to buy a horse, a cart or a coach ticket. Horses could lose a shoe and often there were no **blacksmiths** to replace horseshoes along the way. Horses could also get stuck in the mud. Thieves or bushrangers sometimes stole horses.

Coach passengers were jammed in and sat on hard wooden benches. Some passengers sat outside the coach on cheaper seats, which were exposed to the weather. Bushrangers sometimes held up coaches and passengers were robbed. Coaches also risked losing wheels on rough, rocky tracks. On boggy or steep stretches of road, passengers sometimes had to get out and push the coach.



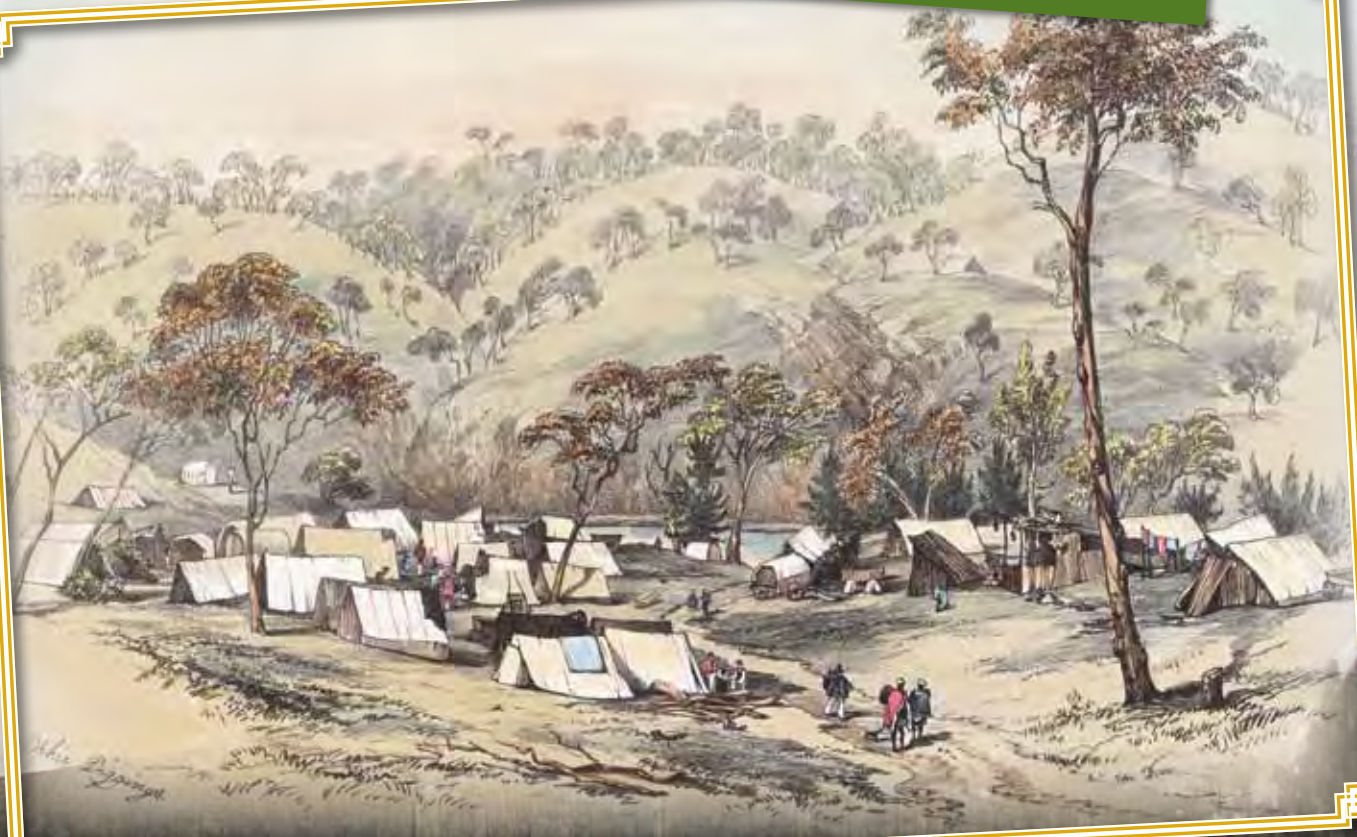
# Finding shelter

When diggers reached the goldfields, their first job was to find some sort of shelter. Many diggers made rough tents from the canvas they had brought with them. If they stayed at the diggings for a while, diggers often built more comfortable tents or bark huts. Some diggers who decided to stay for a long time, or had brought their families with them, built more solid huts. These were made from wooden slabs, **wattle and daub** or mud bricks.

## Tents

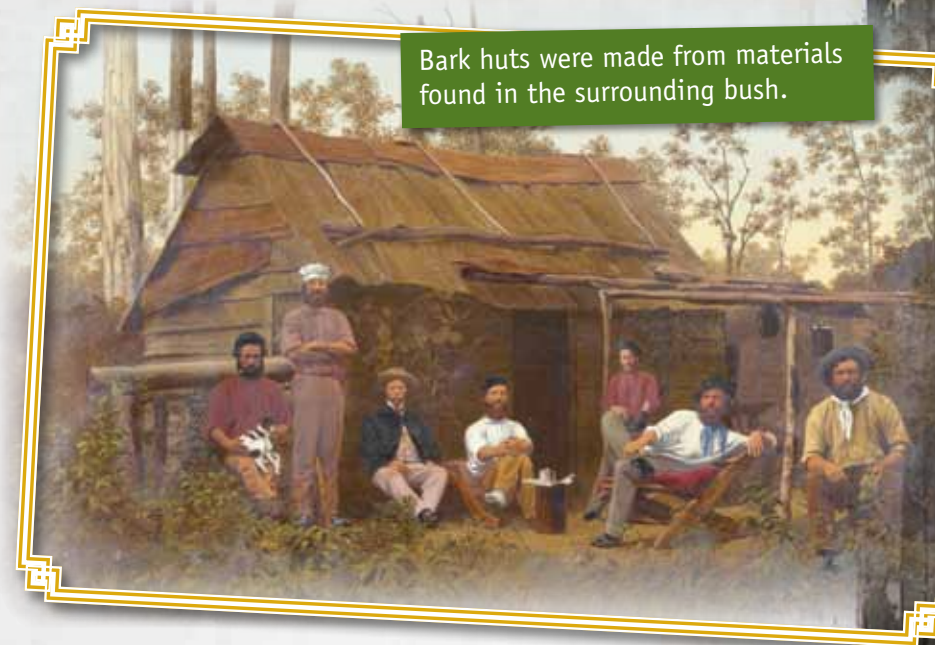
The most basic tents consisted of a piece of canvas draped over a tree branch. They provided some shelter from the weather, a place to sleep and somewhere to store belongings. Tents could be made more comfortable by building a wooden floor and a stone fireplace at one end. This provided warmth and kept everything dry, but was uncomfortable in the middle of summer and did not provide enough warmth in winter. Goldfields tents were not very secure. Belongings could be stolen from tents and snakes and insects could get in.

Many miners lived in small, rough tents on the goldfields.



## Bark huts

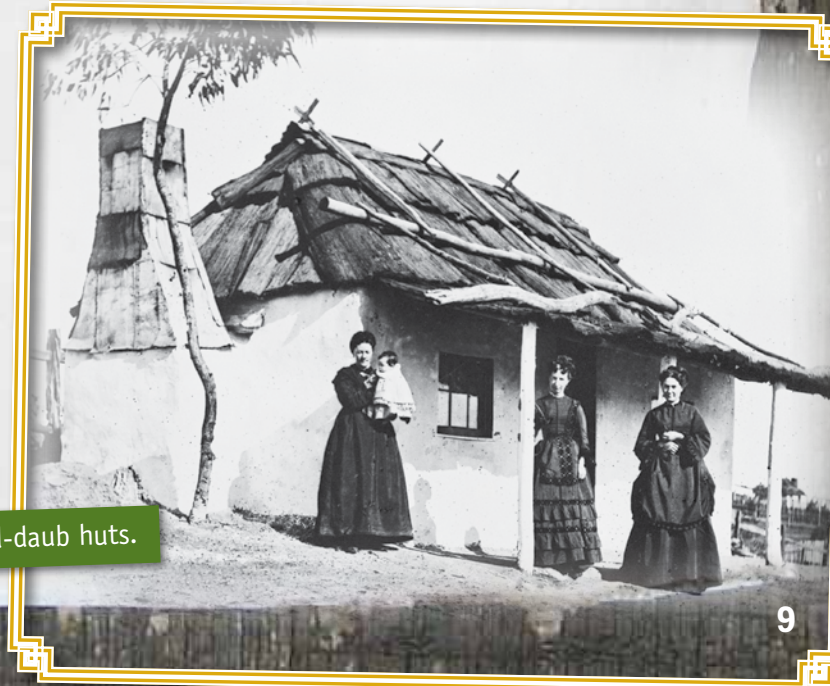
Bark huts were more comfortable than tents. They were made by flattening out large sheets of bark from trees such as ironbarks. The sheets of bark were then nailed to a framework of tree branches. Bark huts could be made quite easily and quickly. Some diggers added a wooden floor and lined the inside walls with canvas. This helped to keep out dust and insects. There was no glass for windows, but wooden shutters could be fitted to provide some protection from the weather. Most huts contained only one or two rooms.



Bark huts were made from materials found in the surrounding bush.

## More solid huts

Some miners made more solid huts, particularly if they had their families with them. These huts were often made from wattle and daub. Wattle-and-daub huts were made by weaving small branches and twigs into a framework, like a giant basket. Clay was spread, or daubed, over the framework to make it weatherproof. The sheets of wattle and daub made the walls. Wooden slabs or mud bricks could also be used to make hut walls. A roof of bark sheets or shingles was then added.



Families on the goldfields often lived in wattle-and-daub huts.