

Inquiry Questions

- **What can the history of Victoria's gold rushes teach us about our present and possible future?**
- **Whose history is it?**
- **What can we learn from First Nations people?**

Mia Mia (Opposite Map 6)

One of the challenges of lots of people quickly flooding gold areas was maintaining law and order, including checking for gold licences. The first police force on the Ballarat diggings were the Native Police, and they would have lived in a Mia Mia. This Mia Mia is based on a sketch by the famous gold rush artist William Strutt. The Native Police Force weren't drawn from the local area but from the other side of Melbourne – the lands of the Boonwurrung and the Wurundjeri. They were not paid well and had far more loyalty to their leader, Captain Dana, than the Colonial Government. After Dana's death the Native Police Force quickly dissolved by January 1853. Many Victorian Aboriginal people knew about gold and where to find it, but it held no value in their community. With a new developing economy, many turned their hands to guiding miners to gold in exchange for money.

Q. Why do you think gold wasn't of value to the Wadawurrung people? A. It wasn't useful to them. Gold is far too soft to make anything useful, it can't be eaten or keep you warm. It wasn't a source of currency for the Wadawurrung people. Brush tail possum skins on the other hand, were of immense value, because of their warmth.

Q. If the people working as Native Police weren't from this area, what problems could arise? A. Wadawurrung people spoke a different language to the Boonwurrung and Wurundjeri people, making communication difficult. European people did not understand the richness of Aboriginal cultures and the fact that there are so many different languages spoken by different groups all over Australia.

Corroboree Poster (Map Normandy Street Noticeboard Behind Map 30)

The Wadawurrung people are the traditional custodians of the land in the Ballarat region. Wadawurrung people relied on the land to produce food - like kangaroos, murnong (yam daisies) and grain for making flour. By the time gold rush in Ballarat began in 1851, the land in the Port Phillip District (now Victoria) had been significantly impacted by European sheep farming practices making, Wadawurrung food sources scarce. From 1851 Ballarat was turned inside out in the search for gold, with little thought to the long-term environmental consequences. Wadawurrung people still attempted to maintain their traditional customs, however with their main food sources destroyed, they had to find ways other of participating in the new colonial economy. Corroborees are traditional ceremonies performed by Aboriginal people. Many Europeans were interested by Aboriginal cultural practices and Wadawurrung people soon realised Europeans would pay to be entertained by performances of traditional Corroborees. This assisted the Wadawurrung people in earning money. Any Corroborees for non-Aboriginal audiences were altered to protect traditional cultural practices.

Q. Why do you think this Corroboree was performed by full moon? A. Electricity hadn't been invented yet, so the full moon provided enough light for people to see the performance.

Grocers (Map 28)

The four smoked eels in the left-hand corner of the Grocer's tell the story of how the Wadawurrung people supplied miners with native foods in the 1850s. The Wadawurrung had sophisticated systems to farm and trap eels to sell. This was an established aquaculture system and worked sustainably with the land and eel population. Smoking an eel preserves the meat before refrigeration became widely available. You can buy smoked meats from the supermarket today. Eel has been an important source of protein in Australia for tens of thousands of years, and preserving it meant it could be traded hundreds of kilometres inland. This is another example of how Wadawurrung people found ways of participating in the new colonial economy as a result of their food sources being destroyed.

Q. There is another food source displayed in the window that the Wadawurrung people supplied. What do you think it is?

A. Emu eggs. Emus roamed freely around this area, especially near Mount Warrenheip.

Weapon Display – Mechanics Institute (Map Near 39)

At this time period, we had a number of what we call "gentleman collectors". These men collected all sorts of things including shells, rocks, animals, and even artefacts and human remains. Instead of purchasing or trading, this practice sometimes saw them stealing from burial grounds and not keeping a record of what they took or where from. Weapons and tools were traded or stolen by collectors to make displays like this one. A lot of these stolen items ended up all over the world in museums, as they were seen as being 'exotic'. This was incredibly disrespectful to Aboriginal people and cultures, but because of the lack of recording of where these things were taken from, it was and is incredibly difficult to return them to their traditional owners. The belongings on display today were made by the Wadawurrung community and gifted to Sovereign Hill in 2015 so that we could teach this challenging part of our past for future understanding, and so it is never repeated.

Q. What Wadawurrung belongings can you see above the fireplace? A. There is a boomerang and a spear.

Q. What could these artefacts tell us about how Wadawurrung people used them?

Q. How can communities be more culturally aware and informed?

SOVEREIGN HILL LEARNING



VISIT THE PRECINCTS

THE DIGGINGS

1851 - 1854: Daily life in a tent city, including housing, mining, business, law and order as gold seekers searched for a better life. **Why was gold so valuable, and how did it change peoples lives?**

SPEEDWELL STREET

1856 - 1861: Aligned to Main Street, highlighting the change in living conditions, business and technology that improved daily life. **How do we measure change? Were we more sustainable in the past?**

MAIN STREET

1855 - 1861: Ballarat as a town with the building of permanent structures and amenities to service the needs and wants of the community, economically and socially. **How did the gold rush shape modern Australia?**

STEAM, MINING INDUSTRY

1861 - 1914: Showcasing technology and innovation that contributed to the rapid development of Ballarat and the broader region. **How does technology shape and change lives?**

CHINESE VILLAGE

1857 - 1860: The cultural and social living conditions of Chinese immigrants within the larger narrative of the gold rush, exploring their struggles and successes. **Why do people risk everything in search for a better life?**

WADAWURRUNG CULTURAL

First Nations artists share their reflections of culture, history, and heritage. **What creates a sense of belonging and connection to the place you call home?**

VISITOR SERVICES

- Information
- Food & Drink
- Toilets
- All Gender Toilets
- First Aid Kit
- Beware of Horses
- Suggested Stroller & Wheelchair Route
- Emergency Evacuation Point
- Accessible Toilet
- Parenting Room
- Water Tap
- Post Office
- Gift Shop
- Ramps

SCAN THE QR CODE FOR OUR INTERACTIVE MAP



We acknowledge the First Nations of the land upon which Sovereign Hill and Narmbool sit, the Wadawurrung, and their ongoing connection to this land and pay respect to their culture and their Elders past, present and future.