

Life on the Diggings Tour

Inquiry Questions

- **Were we more sustainable in the past?**
- **Were the good old days really that good?**
- **Were people more resilient in the 1850s than they are now?**

Panning for gold (MAP 12)

At the start of the Ballarat gold rush, alluvial gold was found and extracted from the sand and gravel located in and around the river and creek beds, or just below the surface in shallow mines. This was the first stage of gold mining in Ballarat. The diggings shows what life would have been like during the early years of the gold rush, when alluvial mining was at its peak, between 1851 and 1854. Miners used pans, shovels, and cradles in their search for gold. There was a huge impact on the environment because rivers and creeks were diverted, dammed, and dredged for gold. Trees were cut down to make way for miners' tents and access to the best mining areas, wood was also needed as fuel for fires. Shallow mines began to cover the landscape, with dirt and clay from underground covering healthy topsoil.

Q. How did alluvial mining impact the environment? (Ask students to look around and see what most things are made out of). A. Many trees were cut down to be used for structures and to make room for mining. Waterways became polluted and were no longer clean, and the healthy topsoil was covered in dirt and clay from underground.

Q. Do you think this type of mining would have been easy or difficult? A. Alluvial mining was accessible to most people. It was easier to find gold in the earlier days of the gold rush, the alluvial gold started to run out gold fields life became more difficult for people.

Tents (Various locations at the Diggings MAP 12)

Gold seekers who made their way to the Ballarat gold diggings usually set up a canvas tent as a home whilst they searched for gold. A tent provided a simple shelter – canvas thrown across a timber frame, pegged to the ground, and with a dirt floor. The tents were cold in winter, hot and stuffy in summer, and unpleasant when it rained. There are many reports of men going to bed in damp blankets, with rain dripping from the roof of their tents and being very cold. It was mostly men that came to look for gold at the start of the gold rushes. The tents are just one room with very little furniture, miners would sleep in a basic hammock-style bed. These tents would hold everything a man would have owned when he came to the goldfields. He would most likely store them in a storage trunk that could contain possessions, some of value, possibly photographs, and letters from home or treasured keepsakes. The men would have a fire outside of their tent for cooking and would eat around the campfire.

Q. Why would miners live in a tent when they came to goldfields? A. Tents were inexpensive and easy to set up. Also, if the miners didn't find gold, they could easily pack up and move to a new place to mine.

Q. Have a look in the tents. What do you think it was like to live in a tent during summer or winter? A. The tents would have been stifling hot in summer, with no way to ensure mosquitoes and other insects/animals were kept out. In winter it would have been very cold and wet. The floors of the tents are just dirt, so they would have become muddy when it rained.

Puddling Machine (Bottom of the creek MAP 12)

The puddling machine was an important piece of machinery on the diggings. It was designed to break up hard lumps of clay that had been dug up from creeks and rivers that could contain gold. A circular trough was dug into the ground and lined with wood or bark. It was then filled with clay and water. A horse circled the trough and dragged a harrow through the clay mixture, breaking up the lumps and turning it into a runny sludge because gold is heavy, when it was released from the clay it would sink to the bottom. The watery clay could then be drained off from the top, and what was left at the bottom of the trough would be removed and the miners would use a pan or cradle to collect the gold.

Q. Do you think that every miner had a puddling machine? A. Only those with enough money to buy a horse (prices for a horse started at around 20 pounds, equivalent to \$20,000 today). Some men might have worked together to be able to afford a horse.

Q. How did the use of puddling machines impact the environment? A. Once the clay from the bottom of creeks and small rivers was put through the puddling machines, it was discarded, which ruined the rich topsoil.

Waterloo Store (Map 14)

Businesses like the Waterloo Store would have been one of the only places on the goldfields where people could buy the things that they needed. Store owners often set their prices quite high, because the miners did not have anywhere else to shop. This type of store would sell all types of goods, from flour and sugar to mining equipment. As long as there was still gold to be found, the stores would have customers and they could easily make just as much money as those who found gold, with significantly less danger and hard work involved.

Q. How do you think that shops like this could make just as much money as people finding gold? A. Because there weren't many shops, there wasn't much competition for the cheapest prices. This means that the store owners could make their goods as expensive as they liked, and people would pay that much because it was the only place they could buy things.

Q. Pretend that you have just arrived at the goldfields. Can you find what you would need to be able to cook dinner and eat it in this store? A. There are pots and pans, as well as plates and cups.

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.