

Inquiry Questions

- **What can the history of Victoria's gold rushes teach us about our present and possible future?**
- **Whose history is it?**
- **How has innovation/technology improved our way of living?**

Photographer's (Map 25)

Photography was invented in the late 1830s and was popular the world over by the 1850s, but many of the chemicals used in the process to capture real life were extremely dangerous. As a result, many early photographers didn't live long lives. The first cameras used a plate of glass covered in light-sensitive chemicals – essentially a negative – which would capture the desired image ready to be printed on paper. Mercury was used to make the glass negative. Today the World Health Organisation deems mercury one of the top ten most dangerous chemicals to human health. It can melt skin, and if it gets inside your body it can impact your nervous, digestive, and immune systems. A small dose can make someone act erratically while a large dose is deadly. Cyanide, sulphuric acid, and the fumes of iodine and chlorine were typically used or produced in the process of making photographs and presented more deadly risks to early photographers.

Q. Why do you think photographers were willing to risk death for their trade? A. Photography was extremely fashionable throughout the 19th century, and made for a very profitable business – people didn't tend to live long back then; approximately 40 was the average life expectancy, while today in Australia it's about 80.

Engine House (Map 42)

This Boiler House produces steam by burning wood to heat the water inside a long, cylindrical tank known as a boiler. The steam it generates is moved through the white pipes above and delivered to steam engines in this part of the living museum; this area tells the story of the late gold rush and how mining functioned once steam power (in addition to that of human and horse) started being used to extract and process Ballarat's gold. While a warm place to work in winter, these could be deadly workplaces if the boiler's temperature was not kept just right by its skilled attendants. If a boiler gets too hot or cold too quickly, the thick iron it is made from can crack, and before long, this will lead to a bomb-like explosion. An explosion at the top of the hill could mean anyone or anything nearby would be blown into a million tiny pieces. These powerful boilers and the engines attached to them radically changed the way humans lived, worked, and produced things, but the energy they contained could be deadly on a large scale. Ask the boiler attendant if you can have a look inside one of the working boilers.

Q. Compared to the past, what fuel is most commonly used today to power our lives? A. Wood was used during the gold rushes because Ballarat was surrounded by forests (and we didn't have easy access to coal). Today, we mostly dig up and burn coal which comes from pre-dinosaur forests that are now buried deep underground. Burning wood and coal creates CO₂ emissions.

Yarrowee Soap & Candle Works (Map 44)

Before electric lighting became popular in the late 19th century, households and businesses used candles to illuminate spaces. Oil lamps were expensive and dirty, and while gas lighting had been installed in some places in Ballarat by the mid-1850s, it was expensive and explosively dangerous! Candles (and many soaps) were typically made using animal fat – namely sheep in this part of the world – which is known as "tallow". This smelly but cheap substance was heated and either poured into moulds (for low-quality, homemade candles) or had wicks repeatedly dipped into it until the layers built up to make a candle of the desired width. We no longer use tallow at Sovereign Hill, you can see why perfumes were added to the best quality candles – no one wants to smell rotting fat when you light a candle! As a tallow-based candle works had a reputation for smelling terrible, they were usually found on the outskirts of town. However, as underground mines needed thousands of candles every week, fortunes could be made through this trade on a goldfield like Ballarat. Candles used in mines were usually stained a murky green with grass during production so miners wouldn't steal them; you could get arrested if such candles were found in your home!

Q. Do you know of any household items that are made out of different ingredients today? A. Shellac (an insect secretion) and cochineal/carmine (ground-up beetle) come from insects and are used in some lollies. Gelatin (boiled-down cow hoofs and horns) is often found in jelly, jams, yoghurt, ice creams and lollies. Castoreum (beaver anal gland juice) is used in expensive lolly and cake flavouring.

Undertakers (Above Map 44)

An undertaker is a person who prepares the bodies of people who have passed away and builds coffins. Miners during the time of the gold rush in Ballarat died frequently from cave-ins, flooding, and broken bones, while women on the diggings were more likely to die in childbirth, or from infections relating to burns experienced while cooking. Young children died in large numbers from infectious diseases they caught from drinking dirty water, while everyone was at risk of dying of pneumonia, tuberculosis, and poverty-induced starvation. As the existence of germs was not known about until 1859, and families tended to be much larger than ours today, it was common for families to have children die. This is why you see a child's coffin in this exhibit. Being buried properly was very important to Christians (the dominant religion in 19th century Victoria) at this time, so people saved money their entire lives for this final event or paid for funeral insurance; the cost of funerals started at about \$5,000 in today's money but many people spent much more than this.

Q. Can you see a graveyard? Why not? A. They were built at least 1 mile from town to stop diseases from spreading or water sources from getting polluted.

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.