



The Diggings

Down in the Hole

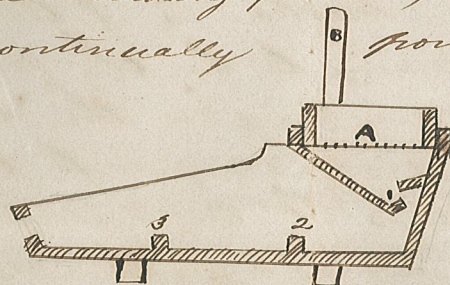
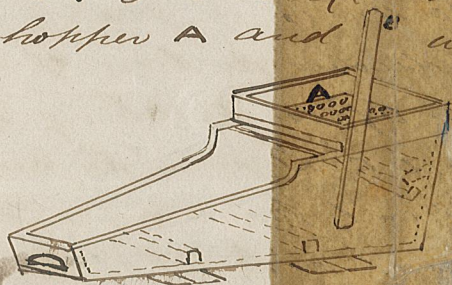
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Designed & drawn by Wm Strutt.

The profession of Gold Digging from the beginning to the end appears to necessarily involve a great change in the habits of men of whatever pursuit or calling the first proceeding is to adopt the costume which in itself is peculiar, the chief characteristic being the Blue Rough shirt and the part-colored check "Kemper" and belt. The journey up to the Diggings a distance from Melbourne of about 90 miles is justly considered by many to be the most arduous portion of the Pursuit - On arriving on the Diggings after pitching camp the first proceeding is to take out a "License" for which each man pays £5. a month, the next proceeding is to make enquiries about the every direction as to what is considered the best paying localities, and having chosen a spot

or spots to mark out your claim (8 feet square for each
 man) this done the party presumed to consist of four
 (the favorite number), allot the work amongst them
 one acts as Tent-keeper and Cook, another drives the
 horse and cart and the other two digging the two first
 generally managing to perform the operation of washing the
 soil

The two Diggers then commence sinking the holes
 (varying from 10x5 to 14ft diameter) and (if they cannot from
 former experience or by watching the result of the labours
 of those near them ascertain the value of the soil dug
 out) examine each strata depth by washing a portion
 of it with a large tin dish, and this process is repeated
 untill they arrive at a vein or stratum of soil which by
 the test of the tin dish yields sufficient to justify the
 carting away of a load of it (unless it yields an ounce
 to the load it is not considered worth carting), the yield
 by washing varies from an ounce to 1 1/2 lb or even more
 but the most general yield, is from two to five ounces - the
 soil being carted from the hole (in summer the distance
 is sometimes as much as 6 miles) to the nearest water
 it is deposited in a heap near the "Cradle" ready for
 washing if of a clayey nature it is first put into a
 large tub called the "Puddling Tub" and in that mixed
 and thoroughly soaked with water till all the lumps
 are soft, the water occasionally carefully thrown off
 and fresh added untill nearly all the clayey and earthy
 matter is carried away leaving nothing but sand
 gravel and some of the more obstinate clay this residue is
 then passed through the cradle of which I here give a
 sketch. The soil (now become muddy gravel) is put into
 the hopper A and water continually poured onto it



by one man while the other man by means of the handle
B "rocks the cradle" the motion causes all the smaller
particles of the gravel and sand and the sand to pass
through the sieve of the hopper and they are carried by the
rush of the water over the sloped board below the sieve
(shewn by the section) and into the bottom of the cradle
and thence out at the foot or toe of same the Gold from its
great weight is arrested by the fillet 1 or if it passes that
by the next fillet 2 on the bottom of the cradle it is very
seldom that any of the precious metal is carried further but
if it is, it is stopped by No. 3.

If the cradle is well constructed at least two thirds of the
quantity of Gold in the soil is retained by the ledge at the
foot of the sloped board this is taken off and deposited in
a pannikin, and the soil left in the bottom of the cradle
chiefly small stones and sand is taken out and put in a
tin dish and continually washed untill nothing is left but
the gold, the sand and stones being by a peculiar "revolving"
motion of the dish made to roll out while the Gold from its
density is retained.

Those parties however who are very lucky get large
quantities of Gold without any of the above described tedious
process - on coming to the "vein" as it is called that is to say
the Gold bearing stratum, they commence examining it
by carefully removing it piecemeal with the assistance of a knife
untill they can procure some pieces of Gold this once found
is carefully followed picking out all that is visible and
laying aside (for washing) the soil from which it is taken
on or removing this stratum on the bed rock under it
(sometimes slate on edge, sometimes blue clay, & sometimes
sandstone) there are often found small cavities of various
sizes like hollows worn by a current of water called pockets
by the diggers these are filled generally with a bluish purple
clay (varied sometimes by other soils) and these pockets are
often literally studded with nuggets of gold from the size
of a pin head to that of a bean with occasionally by
rare good luck a monster nugget of pounds weight, in other

Places the particles of gold are distributed to a depth of a few inches in the bed rock. Sometimes in almost equal quantity on its surface, while a few yards or even a few feet away in another hole the un lucky digger will find not a speck to gladden his eyes - it happened to the party I was with that we dug a hole 18 x 5 feet and 18 feet deep and after washing and carefully examining all soil that gave any appearance of containing Gold we only collected 1 1/2 ounces while a party in a hole next to us separated only by a division of earth of 18 inches took out in 3 days 37 pounds weight and amongst it one lump of 14 lbs weight this as may be easily imagined is a severe trial for the patience of those who have laboured equally hard as their successful neighbours

This is another method of seeking the gold - in particular localities it is found on the surface or at a depth of not more than 18 inches and in this description of work the labour is not so great and the profit nearly as good the soil yielding sometimes as rich "washing stuff" as that obtained by sinking holes but from the business it is much sought for and as soon as a piece of ground is discovered to be rich at its surface it is in a few hours cut up in every direction and quickly exhausted.

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