INTERPRETING VICTORIA'S GOLD RUSHES

Jane Lennon

INTRODUCTION
This paper outlines the history of the gold rushes in the colony of Victoria, Australia. It then examines the physical evidence of this transformation which remains today and how this is interpreted. It concludes by suggesting new directions in the teaching and presentation of history.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Arrival
After the 1840's famines and revolutions in Europe, gold offered the only honest chance millions of people had of bettering themselves, of gaining independence, of providing for their old age and for their children. Immigrants poured into Victoria. In May 1853 sixty-nine ships arrived in the port of Melbourne from overseas plus schooners and ketches daily from other Australasian ports.1 New sailing ships on the Melbourne route were probably the fastest the world had known. Some sailed more than 400 sea miles in the space of twenty-four hours while running with the strong westerlies in that vast windy ocean between the Cape of Good Hope, Melbourne, and Cape Horn.

Population Characteristics
Between the census of 1851 and 1861, the population grew from 77,345 to 540,322, despite the fact that many people had come and gone.2 The characteristics of the migrants were as important as their numbers in terms of long-term effect. Victoria remained British ethnically, but the mixing of Irish, Scots, Welsh and English in new locations produced a more cosmopolitan society than in the Old World.

In Victoria in 1861, there were 10,000 Germans, 8,000 other Europeans, 2,500 Americans.3 Outnumbering all other foreigners were the Chinese - more than 42,000 in 1859 declined to 12,000 by 1874 as the most successful returned with their gold to Canton or went interstate to other gold rushes.4 In the latter 1850's they comprised about one-quarter of the digger population on many goldfields and became the centre of racial tension, thus beginning a long and sometimes tragic path to the White Australian Policy of 1901.5

The diggers were young (mostly males in their twenties), comparatively skilled and/or educated and tending towards non-conformity in religion. On the goldfields they formed enclaves, hence place names today like Little Cornwall, Tipperary Gully or Yankee Creek. Bendigo was the rallying-point for Germans and Ballarat the focus for Americans. Germans, who tended to settle permanently, had a long-term influence through their geological skill in the development of Bendigo's famous quartz mines.6 Other goldfield towns showed obvious national concentrations such as the Welsh at Maldon.

Gold Rush Patterns

The distribution of population depended on the time of discovery of the gold and the geology of the individual fields. The history of each goldfield fitted into a general sequence: a short alluvial crest with the turmoil of surface digging followed by a longer underground, company phase. More and better machinery became available from the original large centres where Schools of Mines trained geologists, managers, engine-drivers and other experts. Their early primacy gave places like Ballarat and Bendigo a continuing influence and ensured the supremacy of Victoria capital in gold-mining until the 1890's depression.7

Geological Influences

The geology of the goldfields largely determined the patterns because, even when found, deposits could still be difficult to exploit, thus requiring sophisticated financial and mechanical operations.

Surface alluvial deposits were the only sites where masses of diggers were found. Antoine Fauchery, the pioneer French photographer, captured this phase with his pictures of miners at Castlemaine in the 1850's. Similarly William Howitt described the congestion of diggers working along Spring Creek, Beechworth, as "thick as ants in an ant-hill".8 This first alluvial phase, however rich, was frantic and short-lived.

Deeper deposits, whether in quartz reefs or buried streams, required specialist financial, mining and sometimes metallurgical skills. Bendigo's reefs gave steady returns for decades, but a gap between alluvial and quartz phases on the field ensured that to exploit the quartz, outside capital had to be imported. This led to the ownership of mines by individual capitalists. In contrast the Ballarat field was buried as a result of the Tertiary lava flows that covered Victoria's Western District. Ballarat was, therefore, more complex geologically than Bendigo and had little surface gold. It was plagued by underground water, but experienced an unusual continuity of investment, mainly through local companies.9

The availability of water also affected the type and durability of mining activity. In places where there was a plentiful supply of stream water, hydraulic sluicing turned gold washing into a large-scale enterprise during the 1860's. Contoured races led the water to a holding tank or dam above the gold-working area. Using a hose and forcing nozzles the water was sprayed hard against
the workface and the resulting streams of pay-dirt were passed through a series of slightly titled channels with riffleboards across the bottom to trap the gold. A tail race then led the water back to the main stream. Hydraulic mining produced massive erosion of the river valleys, but was common in well-watered districts like Castlemaine. In drier areas like Rushworth, Heathcote and Bendigo, where sticky clays were dominant, a distinctly, Australian technique of "puddling" was used - gold bearing clays were mixed with water and scoured by harrows in the circular troughs of horse-driven puddling machines.

Alluvial miners soon realised that much gold remained locked up in the original rock matrix which was usually quartz. To recover that, it was necessary to drill and blast. From 1857 blasting powder was dispensed from government-controlled powder magazines on all the goldfields. Beechworth's stone magazine is a notable example.

Economic Development

Mining required labour, equipment and supplies on a scale far above the needs of the pastoral and agricultural sectors. The deeper workings of the 1860's absorbed an immense supply of time for head works, shafts and drives and as firewood to fuel boilers. Those boilers, together with engines, quartz-crushers, pumps, pipes and haulage gear (which also needed constant repair) provided work for many foundries and machine shops. Miners clothing and equipment, their food and housing needs, stimulated primary and secondary industry to an unprecedented degree. The lure of gold kept companies working on marginal claims and, the gains were mostly ploughed back into the local economy.

Ballarat and Bendigo together produced about 16 million ounces of gold between 1851 and 1870. Much of the profit was reinvested in small-scale ventures or in local hinterland development; for example, the Anderson Brothers accumulated capital from gold-mining then established timber mills in the Bullarook Forest, north-east of Ballarat then diversified into agriculture and flour-milling at Smeaton. Almost everywhere in Victoria after 1860, capitalists were dominant. Stock exchanges became as important as mining claims - Ballarat's "Corner" and Bendigo's "Beehive" being the most notable.

Inland areas were given natural protection from coastal, intercolonial and overseas competition because of the poor roads (impassable in winter) and lack of railways to Ballarat and Bendigo until 1862. Consequently, local farming, manufacturing and timber-getting were stimulated. Timber, hay, potatoes, grain and other foodstuffs had to be carted only a fraction of the distance from the coast. The manufacture of candle, soap, boots, harness, agricultural implements and many other items was similarly boosted. A metal fabricating industry grew from the need to keep mining machinery operating. Ballarat had two foundries in 1856. By 1861, there were ten, eight of them specialising in mining equipment. For smaller jobs large numbers of individual blacksmiths could be found. The 1871 census listed the number of male employees in the metal industry -798 at Ballarat, 487 at Castlemaine and 432 at Sandhurst (Bendigo) and the value of machinery in workshops - £267,000 at Ballarat compared with £47,575 at Bendigo.

The technological experience of Ballarat manufacturers gave them an advantage during the expansion of company mining elsewhere in Australia and, from 1862, the railway became the means by which their products were widely distributed.

The Victorian goldfields had peaked by 1860 and were shedding their surface glamour. Likewise, the number of miners probably reached a peak of about 140,000 in 1858. The 1850's is usually called the "golden era", and we often read that by the end of that decade gold was no longer vital. But the next decade was also golden and gold still dominated Victoria's exports, often by a huge margin over wool, and was not to lose its supremacy until about 1874. In 1860 the most productive Victorian mine, the Long Tunnel at Walhalla, had not yet been found, nor had the world's greatest deep-alluvial field; Spring Hill, just north of Creswick; nor had that wonderful 2,300 ounce nugget, the "Welcome Stranger".

Agricultural and Pastoral Development

The richest agricultural areas of the colony were close to Ballarat in the late 1850's and were prosperous throughout the 1860's, after which the opening up to wheatgrowing of the blacksoil plains of the Wimmera and then the red Mallee sands confirmed Ballarat as a manufacturing centre for farm machinery.

The area of cultivation in Victoria increased from 55,000 acres in 1854 to 419,000 acres in 1860. Most of the 10,000 new farmers must have been diggers.

In the development of agriculture the open plains were settled first, but then, in the wake of the timber millers, the heavier forest soils were opened up. In December 1860, the newspaper the Ballarat 'Star' described how completely fences, crops, homes and bluestone barns had changed the landscape around Spring Hill, Kingston, Newlyn and Smeaton. Four years earlier thick forest had stretched for miles.

The huge new local market for meat led to the doubling of Victoria's cattle population in the 1850's, and the breeding of horses, as 'engines' for whins, puddling machines, drays and coaches. As fodder production (hay and oats) increased, horses replaced bullocks in general transport. In the late 1860's when two hundred loads came into Ballarat daily from the Bullarook Forest, the timber industry there alone must have been using over one thousand horses.

Labour intensive activity in mining, building and the construction of roads and railways stimulated the production of food and the necessities of life. Because wages were high even the unskilled enjoyed a far better life.
standard of living than they would have expected in the Old World.

The Central Government's Role
Freed from Old World social constraints the work-hardened diggers and their associated storekeepers and carriers were annoyed by the system of central government administrative control. Before 1856, when a new constitution granted responsible government, representation was only available in a legislative council dominated but pre-gold merchants and pastoralists unsympathetic to the needs of the goldfields and biased against the rough manual labouring class. To defend their mercantile interests, they would not legislate for an export duty on gold, thus forcing the government to continue a revenue-raising licence tax on gold diggers against intense opposition.

This opposition spilled over into armed rebellion and bloodshed at the Eureka Stockade uprising on 3 December 1854 where 35 were killed. Explaining Eureka has been a great game for historians but "Eureka merely regained for the goldfields British civil liberties that three years of makeshift and often arbitrary rule had denied". However, it also generated a shock-wave that helped to achieve constitutional reforms, such as manhood suffrage and vote by secret ballot, that may have been blocked by upper house opposition. More democratic reforms followed such as land selection legislation and payment of members of parliament which enabled working class men to have a real voice.

Once the clash with authority was over, people were more prepared for a long-term commitment to their new communities and many institutions like churches, schools, hospitals, newspapers, mechanics institutes, libraries, and sporting clubs were founded on the goldfields and strengthened in Melbourne. Local government was introduced. The overall pattern was English but most of the people who took responsibility would have had no such opportunity in the Old World.

Despite this flowering of community life people expected the State through central government to participate in economic development. Serle quotes the commission on the civil service in 1859 as evidence of this:

The Government of this country is compelled to conduct the business of a great landowner - to survey, to lease, to sell its property, its town lots, its country lands, its pastures, and its mines; to construct and maintain roads and bridges, and other works of public utility; to form railways and electric telegraphs; to assist municipalities, road boards, mining boards, and charitable institutions; to establish and supervise light-houses, lunatic asylums, pounds, and cemeteries, and to do many other acts which in older countries possessing similar institutions are effected either through private enterprise or through local exertion.

State government intervention in railway construction, besides providing effective unemployment relief at a time when alluvial mining was declining in the late 1850's, led to fixed lines of communication and supply which set the pattern of town development and the cultural landscape we know to-day. The railways became the arteries and veins of Victoria.

Urbanisation
As the port for the main goldfields Melbourne contained 130,000 people in 1861, a university, railways, telegraphs, gasworks and the amenities of the age. Gold made Melbourne the largest city in Australia and for half a century it led Sydney and entrenched itself as the nation's financial capital. In 1871, when Mel-bourne had grown to 191,000 there were over 270,000 people on the goldfields of whom 146,000 were in towns of over 500. This was a powerful urban force balancing centralised metropolitan growth. Although there was a large drift to "Marvellous Mel-bourne", which grew enormously in the 1880's, the gold towns still held 144,000 in 1891.

The prominence of the gold towns, especially in the central highlands, can be understood today by their physical evidence - beautifully designed public buildings and botanic gardens, imposing mansions built by local capitalists, industrial structures like mills and breweries, workers housing often on areas of Crown Land which were available cheaply for housing under miners' rights and similar permissive occupancies.

The intensity of mining created instant townships. Some disappeared just as quickly and this romantic era of 'ghost towns' has been much celebrated in print and film. However, many towns moved from canvas to wooden structures then to brick and stone. Industrial development locally supported this growth. In Victoria in 1871 there were thirty-six towns with populations over 500 and with more than forty gold miners in the workforce; by comparison, in New South Wales there were only seven. Bate has referred to this as Victoria's "urban sprinkle" and this region of goldfields towns was almost as powerful socially and culturally as Melbourne. Ballarat labelled itself the "Golden City", in response to "Marvellous Melbourne" and claimed an almost heroic public spirit as the city of trees, the city of statues and pictures.

The gold towns were the core of an up-country urban experience that has differentiated Victoria from all other Australian communities. Coming early in the history of the new colony, the gold rushes seem to have generated in Victoria an institutional approach to society and the arts that had no parallel in other States.
Firstly, Aborigines who have occupied the land for at least forty thousand years patterned their settlement about the plains and river systems. Their landmarks, which are very subtle, provide evidence about the homes and food of past generations and their methods of travel and communication. Temporary huts of bark or boughs were typical; campsites were often located on rising sandy ground which was drier and provided an outlook; middens of shell or bone refuse indicate camp sites. Canoes were made along all rivers which were deep enough to warrant it, like to the Loddon flowing north from the goldfields, and the scarred trees, mostly river redgum from which the exterior bark was cut off, bear silent witness to this past.

Aborigines developed tracks for visiting neighbouring clans to barter diorite or greenstone for axe heads. Standing stones near Charlton close to a rock well and to possible food sources were probably erected as markers for travellers. A boomerang-shaped arrangement of stones near Carisbrook seems to have been built for permanent ceremonials.

The invasion of the land by white men broke the deep spiritual bonds which the thousands of generations of Aboriginal people had made on and with the land. Those remnants of tribal Aborigines who survived the massacres, diseases, manipulations and misunderstanding of the first years of European settlement were gathered into protectorates from 1840. The school at Frankinford is the only building remaining from the Loddon district reserve.

Explorers: Despite news from coastal explorers it was the reports of Major Thomas Mitchell, Surveyor General of New South Wales, on his return from exploring south of the Murray River in 1836 in verdant terrain he called "Australian Felix" that stimulated overland migration by sheepowners, the squatters into the lands of the central goldfields. Mitchell's returning route was known as "the Major's Line" because it was marked by the heavy wheels of his boat-carriage and became the route of the "overlanders". For decades the wheelruts remained and were used in recording local property boundaries. Several memorials mark its course beside today's well-used roads.

Squatters: In the 1840's the squatters occupied huge tracts of open grassland plains and thin savanna woodland under annual licences to depasture their flocks and herds. Their homesteads were primitive huts of log or bark with a shee-dip and a nearby cultivation or horse paddock fenced in with stout posts and rails. Shepherds cared for flocks of sheep during the day bringing them in to out-stations to be watched over by the watchman or hut-keeper at night. The isolation of the shepherds led them to search for something to do while their sheep were quietly grazing. Hence the discovery of gold by shepherds on the Mt Alexander (Ravenswood) run near the junctions of Golden Gully and Bendigo Creek in May 1849. This pattern was repeated on other squatting runs.

Travellers Tracks: Immigrant pastoralists were the most avid pathfinders across the Victorian landscape. All river crossings (and some road junctions and tough hills) came to be marked by an inn or at least a grog shanty where travellers could fortify themselves. Innkeepers near rivers usually provided a punt or crossing service for a fee.30

Roadmakers: In October 1862 a central Roads Board was established to supervise the formation of seven lines of main road, all of which still form part of Victoria's road system. Where local landowners were prepared to form a district road board which could collect rates on property, they were also granted a proportion of the central board's funds.

Until 1860 most of the Central Roads Board's funds were used to construct a road north to the Murray via the gold diggings at Mr Alexander, now Castlemaine. The present road through suburban Flemington and Moonee Ponds retains the original Mount Alexander name. Elsewhere it has become the Calder Highway with towns with self-explanatory names such as Diggers Rest, while in part its winding route such as the section through Chewton can be attributed to the original line meandering between diggings and buildings.

Surveyors: Between 1838 and 1850 almost half a million acres of Victorian land were sold under a complexity of vigorously debated land surveys and regulations. The aim was to encourage cropping especially in the "settled districts" along the coast.

Land ownership made a permanent imprint on the Victorian countryside initially in the shape of boundary fences. The land surveys which were a necessary prelude to sale were patterned according to the grid of true meridians and parallels which had been defined in the systematic geodetic survey of Victoria begun in September 1858. Before that, surveyors' boundaries between leaseholds and even land parishes were often natural features like creeks, hills or blazed trees linked by a ploughed furrow.

Diggers: Most of the goldfields were situated in wooded hills, ranges and valleys which previously had been lightly used or virtually ignored, and these quite finely balanced ecosystems were maintained by a vegetation which could not survive the amazing destruction wrought by the diggers.31 Howitt described the rapid environmental degradation:

Little more than a year ago, (1852) the whole of this valley on the Bendigo Creek, seven miles long by one and a half wide, was an unbroken wood! It is now perfectly bare of trees, and the whole of it riddled with holes of from ten to eighty feet deep - all one huge chaos of clay, gravel stones, and pipe-clay, thrown up out of the bowels of the earth! So much has been done on this one forest in one year; and not only so much, but a dozen other valleys as large... It is thus that one of those tremendous rushes which takes place wherever there is the least rumour of success anywhere, brings tens of thousands speedily together, like a flight of locusts, who tear up and leave the earth desert in a few weeks.32

In the peak year of puddling machines were used in Victoria, and at Bendigo alone, some 10,000 men and 5,000 horses worked 2,000 machines. Beautiful valleysides were literally stripped to the bedrock, their soils digested in the puddlers and the unwanted residue flushed downstream blocking all the natural watercourses.33 Some patches of hand-worked surface aluvial diggings remain today unaltered except for the tree regrowth over the hummocky topography. Wild Dog diggings near Dunolly is a good example.

Company Miners: Deep sinking, tunnelling and quartz mining had a major impact on the landscapes. Steam engines drove the stamp batteries which crushed the quartz ore as the first step in freeing the gold particles. They also pumped out the brackish water which seeped into the deeper shafts. Nearly 800 steam engines were at work in the mining districts at the end of 1863, and at the end of 1880, when the number of working miners was less than half the 1863 total there were still 1,030 engines in use.34

Most of the engines were Cornish horizontal or beam engines. Few remain intact although at Fryerstown, south of Chewton, part of a tall rubble stone engine-house with it round Cornish chimney still stands. If the mining engineers were Welsh, they built their chimneys square. At Ullina, near Smeaton, a brick pump engine-house with bluestone lintels stands in ruins beside the Berry No 1 mine shaft. Throughout the goldfields, brick footings of stamp batteries may still be seen. A few poppet heads, whose timber or steel frames supported the winding wheel of the hauling ropes and later steel cables remain but some have become lookouts like the fire tower on Mt Tarrengower overlooking Maldon.

Waterwheels powered some machinery wherever a reliable stream flow could be harnessed. More than 200 were still operating in 1880, mostly crushing and puddling hard alluvial clays. Nine were also working in quartz areas and the footings of the Garfield wheel twenty-two yards in diameter still stand near Chewton.35

Beside the stampers at mineheads grew mounting heaps of tailings which were to await reworking by chemical processes developed after 1880. Some of the mullock dug out of the shafts before the reefs where reached was later used to refill worked out mines. Some was used this century as railway track ballast or by shire engineers for crushing for road surfacing. Mullock heaps form distinctive landscape features in open country like the Berry Deep Leads, north of Creswick.

Farmers and Selectors: Mixed farming, which had previously been confined to the coastal districts, spread inland with the new gold communities of the 1850's. Nearly six million acres of the Victorian countryside

Historic Environment VII 1(1989) page 25
were sold under the Lands Acts of 1860, 1862 and 1865. This more than doubled the previous total of alienated land. Such land was intended to become farms of not more than 320 acres able to be worked by a single family. Surveyors squared off blocks in 257 declared agricultural areas, many in the gold districts. Minor provisions of the Selection Acts allowed some small farms based on twenty acre lots to be established in the vicinity of goldfields. Others were granted for "special occupations" to people prepared to establish bush stores, mills, punts or bridges.

Goldfields Commons were also established. Several were between 20,000 and 50,000 acres (at Inglewood, Castlemaine and Avoca), although the majority (about fifty) contained less than 10,000 acres. Miners, carriers, tradesmen and "other residents" living within five miles of a proclaimed Goldfields Common were entitled to take out an annual licence to depasture up to fifty head of stock. The commons acted as "safety valves" for farmers struggling to survive on undersized or exhausted holdings.36 Remnants of the Commons still survive as public open space near towns to-day.

There are vivid records of agricultural activity, for example Katherine McKell describes their farm at Bolwarrah near Ballan which supplied wheat, hay, oats, potatoes, butter, milk, cheese, steers, heifers, bacon pigs, porkers, eggs and fowls to the nearby goldfields markets while Joseph Jenkins in his Diary of a Welsh Swagman 1869 - 94 has many sharp observations of farming life in the central goldfields and the rapid exhaustion of the soil from overcropping.37

Approximately thirteen million acres of "alienated" land was in the hands of smallholders, many of whom would have been among the 36,366 people who listed themselves as farmers and market gardeners in the 1881 census. On that basis the average smallholding was about 360 acres. The manmade structures on these cleared holdings were generally ugly. Most country roads were lined by an untidy unit structure which is becoming rare: the post and rail fence. The simple rough-cut timber form of a proclaimed Goldfields Common were entitled to take out an annual licence to depasture up to fifty head of stock. The commons acted as "safety valves" for farmers struggling to survive on undersized or exhausted holdings.36 Remnants of the Commons still survive as public open space near towns to-day.

There are vivid records of agricultural activity, for example Katherine McKell describes their farm at Bolwarrah near Ballan which supplied wheat, hay, oats, potatoes, butter, milk, cheese, steers, heifers, bacon pigs, porkers, eggs and fowls to the nearby goldfields markets while Joseph Jenkins in his Diary of a Welsh Swagman 1869 - 94 has many sharp observations of farming life in the central goldfields and the rapid exhaustion of the soil from overcropping.37

Approximately thirteen million acres of "alienated" land was in the hands of smallholders, many of whom would have been among the 36,366 people who listed themselves as farmers and market gardeners in the 1881 census. On that basis the average smallholding was about 360 acres. The manmade structures on these cleared holdings were generally ugly. Most country roads were lined by an untidy structure which is becoming rare: the post and rail fence. The simple rough-cut timber formed a strong fence but it was too crudely made, too unimproved which dominated the view. The pioneering hut gave way to a commodious house built on the "homestead" or pre-emptive block and built of whatever local material, brick or bluestone, could be best handled by local craftsmen. Some of these in turn were replaced by elaborate Italianate mansions in the boom years of the 1880's. Many are now classified by the National Trust as worthy of preservation.

Timber Getters: Timber was need for both fuel and building. From early settlement days, the stringy bark forest close to Melbourne were plundered by woodcutters, who were required to take out licences costing five pounds a year, half the cost of a pastoral licence. As waves of diggers surged onto the goldfields the plunder of the surrounding forests became overwhelming in scale. After 1855, rough timber was in increasing demand for firewood was well as for mine props, shaft timbering and poppet legs, and for fences, huts and sheds. Sawyers' huts sprang up through the forests, then sawmills and tramways to supply them with logs. For example, the Anderson Mill at Barkstead was cutting 100,000 super feet of timber each week in the 1870's and logs were supplied via fourteen miles of horse-drawn tramway built between 1863 and 1866. Remnants of this remain 120 years later despite waves of bush-fires, re-growth, mining and further logging.39

The exhaustion of forest timber was a source of great concern, since 85,000 miners in 1865 were dependent on cheap firewood, mine props and shaft planking. Nearly 116,000 acres were therefore declared as state forests and timber reserves in 1867, but on only 8,500 acres was cutting banned entirely to allow regrowth. Most of the prohibited areas were in the You Yangs, and with seven other small reserves, they provided basic areas for experimental forest plantings after 1880. Timber reserves totalling 14,000 acres supplied the needs of eight mining districts, while cutting in 83,000 acres declared to be state forests was intended to be strictly monitored. However, the small number of forest inspectors could not hope to cover the controlled areas and a government report in 1874 could only deplore the rampant waste in forests.40 However, these forest reserves, despite past deprivations, remain to-day as islands of public conservation land in a sea of private farmland.

Transformation of the Goldfields

Landscape

The central Victorian landscape known to Aborigines for millennia was entered by European explorers, nibbled at by the squatters, tracked by travellers and roadmakers, marked off by surveyors and overrun by diggers who quickly overturned, cleared, then settled the land in towns or small farms.

Early observers noted that despite the native vegetation, the 'Australasian bush'... the English stamp and English character are on all their settlements. They are Englishhouses, English enclosures that you see: English farms, English gardens. English cattle and horse, English fows about the yards, English flowers and plants carefully cultivated. You see great bushes of furze, even by the rudest settler' cottages. There are hedges of sweet-briar around their gardens, bushes of holly... hawthorns and young oaks in the shrubberies. There are cowslips and oxslips now in flower in the gardens, but no primroses that I have seen. There are lots of snapdragons of various hues, roses and lilacs, looking very English. England reproduces herself in the new lands.41

Historic Environment VII 1 (1989)
Blainey summarises this landscape change:

We might call it devastation: they called it pioneering. We gained, all in all, far more that we lost by their labour, and so we cannot be too outspoken about the flora and fauna they endangered or extinguished. They had to win a living in an economic climate which was harsh. Their knowledge was meagre...43

Understanding this period of dramatic change is essential for understanding our cultural identity. The sequence of occupation left its physical imprints on the landscape and the new occupiers precipitated changes to Victorian society which were manifest in its technology, industry, transport, ethnicity, politics, architecture, cultural life and urbanisation. What we know to-day of this goldfields heritage differs from what actually happened not merely because evidence of past events has been lost, destroyed or altered, or because the task of sifting through it is unending, but because the changing present continually required new interpretations of what has taken place.

INTERPRETATION TO-DAY

Most Victorians are aware of their golden past but few are knowledgeable about the details. The Bicentennial celebrations of Australia's white settlement have led to both individual and community searches for genealogical roots and links with their settling ancestors. This is reflected in family clan reunions, community archival projects and "Back-to" celebrations often with re-enactments of historic events. This is often supported by building and site restoration, museum development and tourism promotion. All this activity at-temps to interpret the past. But what past? whose past?

Interpretation has been defined as an educational activity which aims to reveal meaning and relationships through the use of original objects by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media rather than simply to communicate factual information.44

How are the facts of our goldfield's history interpreted to the Victorian public? The most obvious means are through tourist products, through school curricula and through the relics remaining in the landscape.

TOURISM

A number of outdoor historical parks featuring re-creations of goldfields life and settings have been developed by separate, independent groups. The most successful, with over 440,000 visitors annually is Sovereign Hill at Ballarat. The presentation is in the form of re-creations of shops, businesses, buildings and equipment known to have existed in Ballarat during the 1850's and the exhibits are activated by appropriately costumed staff. Many of the 60 buildings have been re-constructed from plans connected with the survey of the line of road along Main Street and elevations taken from lithographs

of the area. The Mining Museum is an unexpected and memorable bonus to their visit. Drawn by the thunder-like noise of the quartz-crushing stampers, they suddenly find themselves in the pulsating, hissing world of steam-operated machinery. This re-creation allows them to understand three dimensionally the relics of such machinery lying in the bush.

Education and entertainment are the aims of Sovereign Hill's management and museum development and site presentation are intertwined. Sites such as Sovereign Hill are often used as film sets for television drama series like "Rush", for backdrops to documentaries or for settings for advertisements. Hence the mixed messages given to the public of gold ear history ranging from the historically authentic to vague, romanticised fiction.

There are other restored outdoor attractions like the Central Deborah Mine in Bendigo where visitors can go underground and are guided through the original workings. In addition there are approximately 50 "museums" listed in the region. They range from the oldest purpose-built art gallery in Australia (1890) at Ballarat, which contains original objects and paintings from the 1850's including the Eureka flag, to small historical society displays in former public buildings like now closed court-houses.

Tourism also uses historical symbols in its advertising and promotion for this region and this marketing technique of 'selling' history keeps people aware of their connections with the past. The Victorian Tourism Commission has financially sponsored some of this advertising such as 'Heritage Accommodation' - tourist accommodation in restored/adapted historic buildings in the central goldfields.

Education Australian history is now part of the school curriculum at all levels of education. Students are made familiar with the facts and there is an ever increasing stream of published histories and facsimiles of 1850's artworks and household objects. Some museums have education services and link their collections with the curricula. Sovereign Hill has two schools where modern classes can book in for a two-day re-enactment of 1850's educational methods and curricula. Smaller museums allow access to their archival records and photograph collections for students' local or community history projects.

Buildings The goldfields towns all retain a nucleus of historic buildings, both public and private, dating from the "golden days". These range from simple, two-roomed wooden miners' cottages to elaborately designed stone buildings or grand public buildings.

Many are listed on the State's Register of Historic Buildings which gives statutory protection for their conservation. The Minister for Planning and Environment and the relevant municipalities have actively maintained support to restore the wealth of gold rush era architecture. The Central Goldfields Restoration program to-
together with the Heritage Advisory Services provide funds and technical advice for building conservation at Bendigo, Maldon, Ballarat and Talbot-Clunes.

These towns and others have published leaflets or brochures to encourage visitors to walk, cycle or drive around their historic buildings and sites and this enhances both local pride in and tourist appreciation of the goldfields heritage. Although, as Tom Griffiths has pointed out of Beechworth, to many residents “restoration” has not meant the preservation of their past, but the violation of it. They are being dispossessed of the past they know and it is being replaced by an imported, imposed view of National Heritage.44

**Historic Areas**

The Land Conservation Council which determines the land use management classification of public lands has recommended a network of 22 Historic Areas and 45 Reserves totalling across rural Victoria. These areas were then reserved because the Government believes that a number of areas should be managed to protect representative examples of historical themes. A large number of gold-mining sites survive in Victoria and they illustrate examples of different mining techniques, ranging from small alluvial hand workings, both European and Chinese, to hydraulic sluicing fields and large deep lead and quartz reef mines. Many of these reserves contain on-site relics such as earthworks and water races, stamper battery footings, quartz burning kilns, mine shafts, mullock heaps and sometimes buildings.

They are managed by the Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands whose approach is one of minimal development through structural stabilisation, controlled access and provision of on-site interpretative signs where visitor numbers or site significance warrant this. Contemporary mining is permitted so long as significant historic relics and sites within the reserve are protected. However, the central issue is the control of change by modern mining methods in an historic mining landscape, for example alluvial goldfields were worked with hand tools and have evolved into a distinctive hummocky landscape pock-marked with shallow shafts, yet contemporary operations may require open cut methods using heavy machinery which virtually obliterates all surface features remaining from the historic period.

Visitors to historic mining sites are confronted with the evidence of the unquantifiable amount of human effort and manual labour that went into the search for gold. This is in sharp contrast to today’s means of making a livelihood.

The Historic Areas often form wooden backdrops or settings for historic towns such as Maldon, Steiglitz or Walhalla and interpretation of gold rush events requires use of both public and private sites. Sometimes brochures illustrate this but the least intrusive, although often most expensive method is by way of guided walks. Due to economic cutbacks, public land rangers trained in the history of their localities will have to be replaced by volunteer guides or commercial tour operators.

**New Directions**

Interpretation of the gold rush era has tended to focus on the heydays of the 1850’s yet the traces of that era that we see in the landscape to-day are not the same as the rapid environmental chaos that occurred then - 150 years later the landscape has mellowed and taken on a new cultural identity that awaits deciphering by the discerning tourist. How will this be done? How can the landscape speak for itself? How will visitors learn to read and decipher this landscape?

A new approach to teaching history is required. Historians have concentrated on the early years of settlement and on the processes of growth and progress but the experience of decline and its consequences has largely been ignored. There has been a concentration on the “oldest” or the “earliest” whereas multiple pasts coexist on site and it is equally as important to understand ongoing processes as well as having knowledge of the origins of a site. The real challenge of interpreting local history is to encourage study of the processes of change. This can be done by looking at the themes of goldfields history; for example, ethnicity in the population might be studied by looking at inscriptions on headstones in the cemeteries to see the place of origin of the deceased or by looking at names given to houses as displayed in lettering on their facades as in the “Truro” of Cornish miners’ cottages.

We need to know much more about the detailed making of the landscape before we can be very confident of its meaning in the past, present or future. Charles Fahey’s work on the changes wrought to the local landscape by the activities of the Anderson brothers at Smeaton shows how generalisations about gold rush generated agricultural development do not necessarily fit specific parishes. Priestley’s 320 acre average smallholdings were not evident in the Parish of Campbelltown in 1871 where 123 acre tenant farms were the norm and where one-third of farms were less than 50 acres. Consequently the landscape in that parish was much more minutely subdivided, patterned and changed. As well as this detailed meticulous local study of the past and the particular so well exemplified in the work of Hoskins, we need to pay special attention to the source and diffusion of ideas and elements in the creation of a very strong national component in local landscapes.

The skills of Hoskins do not require a thousand years of history to make their use in deciphering worthwhile. We need to see how crumbs, layers, slices and icing make up the total landscape ‘cake’. This can be done by studying the documentary evidence, then preparing routes through the goldfields landscape that link themes, for example, gold commissioners’ camps and their subsequent building evolution in the major towns, gold escort routes from the various camps, Chinese market gardens on the alluvial flats near towns, or tours through the agricultural areas in the steps of the Welsh swagman.
Ruskin railed against the self-conscious preservation efforts in England a century ago compared with the unbroken links between past and present on the European Continent. But the links are unbroken only so long as no one realises how unlike the past the present is. Conscious appreciation of the tangible past always sets in motion forces that alter it, even one as simple as the act of signposting a site. This transformation is potentially dangerous for it can falsify and destroy the real past. Yet it is also potentially beneficial for it frees us from conscious or unconscious dependence on myths about the past. For example, site X was not the source of instant riches and then abandoned, rather it was dug over constantly for ten years then its tailings dumps were re-worked seventy years later and to-day it appears as a wooded reserve.

Lowenthal has shown how every trace of the past is a testament not only to its initiators but to its inheritors, not only to the spirit of the past, but to the perspectives of the present. In interpreting the gold rushes in Victoria, we must see the continuity in landscape and society yet understand the processes of change and evolution. The history of the occupation and occupants of the Victorian goldfields is our inheritance and it is important for us to use our "seeing eyes" and look at the links with our multicultural and environmentally aware society of to-day.

REFERENCES

2. W. Bate, Victorian gold rushes, Melbourne, 1988, p.27.
5. Bate, op. cit., p.28.
7. Bate, op. cit., p.7
9. Bate, op. cit., p.11.
10. S. Priestley, The Victorians - Making their mark, Sydney, 1984, p.102
11. Bate, op. cit., p.8
13. Bate, Victorian gold rushes, p.18
15. Blainey, Our side of the country, pp.57-58.
17. Bate, Lucky city, pp.120-121.
18. Ibid., p.118.
20. Ibid.
23. Bate, Victorian gold rushes, p.52
24. Ibid., p.57.
25. Bate, Lucky city, p.250.
34. Priestley, op. cit., p.103.
38. Blainey, Our side of the country, p.127.
41. Howitt, op. cit, p.57.
42. Blainey, Our side of the country, p.128.