

It's the third most valuable metal on the planet, it ignited a case of gold fever amongst colonial Australians, and this shimmering substance transformed Australian society forever. This is your Squiz Kids Shortcut to The Australian Gold Rush—the podcast where we dive into the who, what, when, where, why and how of the big news stories. I'm Christie Kijurina.

And I'm Bryce Corbett.

Bryce, you're a little bit more jangly than usual today.

I'm glad you noticed Christie, I thought I'd bring my bling along.

Those chains sound hefty! Are we talking real gold, or are they from a dressup box?

Ah, Christie, revealing that would be giving away too many secrets. Let's just say, if they were real, they might just be relics from a time when Australia was gripped by gold mania.

Imagine strolling along a creek, sifting through the water, and striking it rich with enough gold to buy a fancy carriage—or at least a really sturdy wagon

It's a prospectors life for me -- so today, the call of gold beckons us to find out WHEN the Australian Gold Rush took place, WHO joined the hunt for gold, and WHAT lasting effects the Gold Rush had on the nation of Australia. So, fellow explorers, grab your maps and your gold pans, because here we go!

Listen carefully - there's a Squiz at the end!

WHEN

Bryce, even though we've probably all seen something made of gold, like maybe a ring or a necklace, it's actually quite rare. Say you were a supervillian and wanted to melt down all of the world's gold to fund your supervillian lifestyle, experts estimate that all the gold ever mined would only fill three Olympic-sized swimming pools.

Whoa, Christie! Only three? I was picturing mountains of gold! No wonder everyone's gaga over it.

I know, right! And, even though Australia is not a big country population wise, we're sitting on a gold mine - literally. About one-fifth of all the gold on Earth is under our feet.

Wow, that's incredible! So Christie, when did Australia's Gold Rush actually begin?

That's a great question Bryce! Undoubtedly, Australian Aboriginal peoples knew about gold for many thousands of years because some of it was just lying around on the surface. But, as far as we know they didn't place a whole lot of value on it, not until Europeans started arriving.

Yep, Christie, and there were whispers of gold as early as 1788. But early leaders put a lid on the gold gossip, fearing that the convicts (who were quite the rowdy bunch) might go on a murderous gold-fueled rampage. When a geologist (that's someone who studies rocks) showed Governor Gipps his gold find in 1841, Gipps was heard to respond "put it away Mr Clarke or we shall all have our throats cut".

Then, when California, on the west coast of the United States, experienced its own gold rush, people from all across the world, including Australia, 'rushed' there, hoping to make their fortunes as gold brought huge wealth to America.

Up till then, in Australia, any gold found technically belonged to the queen - Victoria. But seeing the potential, New South Wales and Victoria started dangling rewards for anyone who could find gold. People set out immediately in the hope of making a lucky strike.

And then, drumroll please... on May 22, 1851, Edward Hargraves, fresh from the Californian gold fields, found gold at Ophir, near Orange in NSW. He only found five little flecks, but it was enough to get everyone's gold-digging gears a grindin'!

Only five flecks? Sounds more like a gold trickle than a rush! But, that was the spark that lit the bonfire, the rush was just starting. So who joined the gold frenzy?

WHO

Who joined the gold rush? More like who didn't! Men from all across Australia, Europe, Asia and America dropped what they were doing and headed for South Eastern Australia!

At that time, Australia's wool industry, its largest, was becoming less profitable. So, shearers, sheep handlers, and farmers swapped their sheep for shovels. Blacksmiths, shopkeepers, and bankers traded their day jobs for the chance to strike it rich in the goldfields.

And strike it rich they did—at least at first. Much of the gold discovered was alluvial, meaning all you needed was a pan or sieve, and voila, you grabbed some gold from a creek or a dried up river bed!

But, this surface supply was soon exhausted and miners had to dig to get that golden prize.

Chinese migrants, who had come to seek their fortunes, were very good at this more intense type of mining as they were excellent at teamwork. But, not everyone was cheering for them. Their success stirred up a storm of jealousy and unfairness among some of the other miners, leading to tension and sometimes, sadly, fights.

At first, the goldfields looked like a tent city from a wild adventure story. But soon, real towns sprang up, as women and children joined the quest, turning the hunt for gold into a family affair.

With people travelling from all across the world, within ten years, the population of the colonies had tripled! Yet, for every lucky prospector, there were many who didn't strike it rich, and still had to pay hefty government fees for mining licenses. That's a bit like buying a treasure map that leads to a grocery list!

Wow, I guess there were some people who weren't too happy with that. This gold rush is a mixed bag of fortune and flop. So Christie, what lasting effects did this gold frenzy leave on Australia?

WHAT

As you can probably guess Bryce, all this wealth transformed lives and shaped our nation! Australia saw a boom in infrastructure. Governments rolled up their sleeves and got to work—building roads, laying down rail lines, and even setting up libraries and theatres.

And in those bustling mining towns, dreams were built on more than just gold. Folks opened up all sorts of shops—hairdressers, shoe stores, general stores, you name it! Different forms of transport like steamers and stage coaches flourished.

But, it wasn't all shiny and bright for everyone. Despite some Aboriginal people benefiting from the gold rush, many faced tougher times. Their lands were overtaken as camping and hunting sites were destroyed and the pristine waterways they relied on were muddied and polluted.

And remember those pesky mining licences, Christie? They stirred up quite the storm! In 1854, fed up with the system, thousands of miners at the Eureka goldfield in Ballarat said "enough!" They burnt their licences and built a stockade, which is like a big wooden fence, standing their ground in a bold fight for miner's rights.

And what a fight it was! Although it led to tragic losses, the rebellion sparked change. Miners gained the right to vote and settle down on their own slice of land, and those steep licence fees were slashed!

Over the next decades, the gold mining centres moved to the Northern Territory and Western Australia. WA is still digging up the shiny stuff and is one of the world's top gold producers to this day.

These days, gold mining is a whole different ball game. Most mining is done by big companies with enormous equipment, in deep pits or underground. But, there are still modern-day prospectors out there with the pans, sieves and metal detectors living the dream. And yep, finders keepers still applies, as long as you've got your mining licence handy.

So, there you have it, folks. The Australia Gold Rush, not just about striking it rich; it's about the journey and the mark it left on our nation. So, who's ready to hunt for gold? Remember, there's gold in them thar hills!

THE S'QUIZ

"This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening...

1. What is the name of the place where gold was first officially discovered in Australia? (Ophir, near Orange, in NSW)"

2 One group of miners were particularly good at working cooperatively to mine for gold. Which country were they from? (China)

3 What was the name of the goldfield where a stockade was built in a fight for miners' rights? (Eureka)

That's all we have time for today. Thanks for joining us as we explored the who, what, how, where, when, and why of the Australian Gold Rush. Teachers, there are a whole heap of excellent classroom resources related to this topic on the Squiz Kids website and there's a link to them in the episode notes.

Now get out there, and have a most excellent day!

Over and out.