

Beginning of the Gold Rush

Level 6

For many years, Edward Hargraves was credited as being the first person to discover gold in Australia. However, there were several reports of gold having been found years before Hargraves' discovery.

The government believed the discovery of gold had the potential to disrupt the colonies. Authorities feared 'gold fever' would lead to an uprising among the convicts if it were discovered that gold could be found close by. They were also concerned that settlers would abandon their towns to try their luck on the goldfields. For these reasons, reports of gold discoveries were discouraged and kept quiet by the government.

In 1848, William Tipple Smith became the first to find payable gold in Australia when he found gold on the western slopes of the Blue Mountains in New South Wales. Smith approached the government, offering to disclose the location of his discovery in return for 500 pounds. The government ignored Smith's request and his discovery was kept a secret.

The discovery of gold in California, America in 1848, resulted in thousands of settlers leaving the colonies. To counter this, the government changed its position, and Charles FitzRoy, the New South Wales Governor, offered a reward for the discovery of payable amounts of gold.

William Smith became aware of this change in the government's position. He approached the government again regarding his discovery from the year before and requested the reward. The government, however, refused, claiming that Smith had actually brought the gold over from California.

Edward Hammond Hargraves heard the rumours of the discovery of gold near the Blue Mountains and assembled a team to help him search. His team included John Lister, James Tom and William Tom. In 1851, William Tom and John Lister discovered small nuggets of gold. Hargraves used these nuggets to claim the government's reward, failing to mention the help of Lister and the Tom brothers.

Word of the discovery travelled quickly, and Australia's first gold rush was born. The prospect of striking gold attracted people from all over the world and the population of the colonies quickly began to grow. Miners were given the nickname 'diggers'. Diggers worked long hours in difficult and often dangerous condition to try their luck in the goldfields.

The discovery of gold in 1951 began the first of a series of gold rushes in Australia. Soon after, gold was discovered in a number of other regions. While some struck it rich on the goldfields, most diggers returned ragged, starving and empty handed.



Questions

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1. What caused many settlers to leave the colonies for America?

2. Who did Edward Hargraves enlist for help finding gold?

3. What does the word 'prospect' mean? (2nd last paragraph)

4. Why did the government want the reports of gold kept quiet?

5. What was the name given to workers on the goldfields?

6. Authorities worried about 'gold fever'. What is meant by 'gold fever'?

7. Which statements are correct? Write 'True' or 'False' next to each.

- William Smith found gold in California. _____
- Edward Hargraves cheated his team out of the reward. _____
- The government's plan to stop settlers leaving worked. _____
- Most diggers had a positive experience on the goldfields. _____
- Smith's discovery caused Australia's population to grow. _____

8. After initially wanting to keep gold discoveries quiet, why do you think the government began offering a reward for the discovery of gold?

Answers

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1. What caused many settlers to leave the colonies for America?

The discovery of gold in California in 1848 caused many settlers to leave for America.

2. Who did Edward Hargraves enlist for help finding gold?

Edward Hargraves enlisted the help of John Lister, James Tom and William Tom.

3. What does the word 'prospect' mean? (2nd last paragraph)

'Prospect' means the change, or likelihood of something happening.

4. Why did the government want the reports of gold kept quiet?

The government was concerned about a convict uprising and also a mass of settlers leaving towns without workers.

5. What was the name given to workers on the goldfields?

Workers on the goldfields were called diggers.

6. Authorities worried about 'gold fever'. What is meant by 'gold fever'?

Gold fever is the greed and excitement caused by the discovery of gold.

7. Which statements are correct? Write 'True' or 'False' next to each.

- William Smith found gold in California. **False**
- Edward Hargraves cheated his team out of the reward. **True**
- The government's plan to stop settlers leaving worked. **True**
- Most diggers had a positive experience on the goldfields. **False**
- Smith's discovery caused Australia's population to grow. **False**

8. After initially wanting to keep gold discoveries quiet, why do you think the government began offering a reward for the discovery of gold?

The government began losing thousands of settlers and they were worried about losing even more. They encouraged the discovery of gold in the colonies to try and stop people leaving.

