

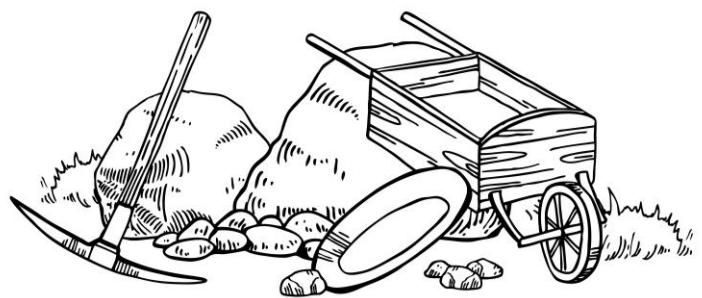
# The Beginning of Gold Rushes in Australia

In February 1851, a man named Edward Hargraves found gold near Bathurst, New South Wales. This event sparked a series of gold rushes in Australia which went on to have a significant effect on the Australian colonies. Hargraves was long credited as being the first European to discover gold in Australia. However, traces of gold had been found prior to Hargraves' discovery.

In 1841, small particles of gold were discovered in the Blue Mountains, New South Wales. The governor at the time, Governor George Gipps, believed the discovery of gold had the potential to disrupt the colony. 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. This would spell trouble for the young colony. For these reasons, the discovery of gold in the Blue Mountains was hushed by the government, as were the discoveries of other potential goldfields.

In 1848, William Tipple Smith became the first to find payable gold in Australia. 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.

In the same year, gold was discovered in California, America. This discovery saw thousands of settlers make the long journey to seek their fortune on the American goldfields. The departure of workers meant the colony faced labour shortages and an economic downturn.



This ultimately led to a change in the government's position. Governor of New South Wales, Charles FitzRoy, believed that the discovery of gold in local areas would help stop the flow of workers leaving the colony. The government enlisted the services of geologist Samuel Stutchbury. His job was to conduct a geological survey and to confirm gold finds in the area. The government also offered a reward for the discovery of payable amounts of gold in the colony.

William Smith became aware of this change in the government's position. He approached the government with 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 had returned from an unsuccessful trip to the Californian goldfields. He had heard the rumours of the discovery of gold on the western slopes of the Blue Mountains. Hargraves assembled a team to help him search. His team included John Lister, James Tom and William Tom. William Tom and John Lister discovered small nuggets of gold. Hargraves bought these nuggets off Tom and Lister and used them to claim the reward of 10,000 pounds from the government.

Hargraves named the area 'Ophir', which refers to a location rich in gold. Word of the discovery travelled quickly, and Australia's first gold rush was born. The prospect of striking gold attracted excited people from all over the world. Miners were given the nickname 'diggers'. Diggers worked long hours in difficult and sometimes dangerous condition to try their luck in the goldfields.

The discovery of gold in 1851 began the first of a series of gold rushes in Australia. Soon after, gold was discovered in a number of other regions, including Victoria, where even more gold was to be found. While some struck it rich on the goldfields, most diggers returned ragged, starving and empty handed.

