

# Gold-Washing Cradle

The conditions on goldfields could be dangerous, the labour was backbreaking, and the harsh reality was that a digger's toil often yielded no gold. While finding gold was largely down to largely luck and chance, diggers used different tools to help increase their odds. Tools had to be cheap and lightweight as diggers often worked multiple mining claims during a year. From the humble shovel to the trusty pan, diggers' tools played a vital role in their everyday lives.

## The Gold Cradle

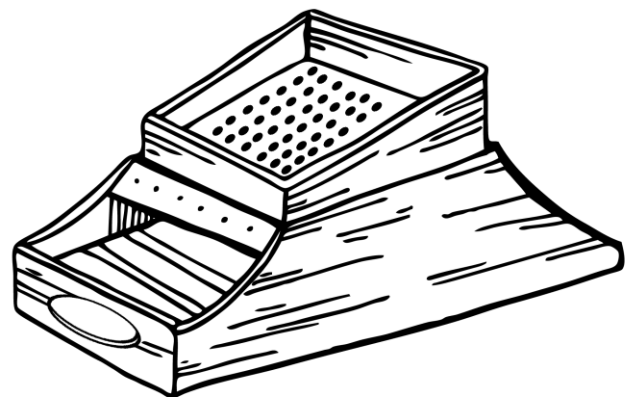
One device used by diggers to mine alluvial gold was the 'gold-washing cradle'. The cradle was a simple but effective device that helped miners find and extract gold from the soil. Diggers discovered that the device could allow them to process larger quantities of material.

At the top of the cradle was a shallow wooden box with a metal sieve or mesh at the bottom. The sieve kept larger rocks and gravel inside the box while allowing water and sand (and hopefully small pieces of gold!) to flow through to the area below. On the floor of the cradle were small wooden strips or ridges, called riffles. These riffles were designed to trap heavier gold particles as the water washed away the lighter materials.

## Operating a Cradle

The digger would first fill the cradle with soil and gravel from the riverbed. This dirt was called 'paydirt' because it was the dirt that might contain gold. Water would then be poured through the top of the box and the digger would gently rock the cradle back and forth. As the water washed away the dirt, the heavier gold particles would sink to the bottom and be caught in the riffles of the cradle. After rocking the cradle for a while, the digger would stop and carefully remove the leftover materials from the box. If they were lucky, they would discover small flakes or nuggets of gold in the bottom of the cradle.

The gold cradle had a significant impact on gold mining in Australia during the gold rush era, simplifying a laborious process and making it possible for diggers to search through a larger quantity of rock and soil compared to a simple gold pan.



# Gold-Washing Cradle

Read the text 'Gold-Washing Cradle' and answer the questions below.

1. What does the word 'toil' mean? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Why was it important that tools used on the goldfields be portable?  
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\_\_\_\_\_

3. Which word from the second paragraph means 'remove'? \_\_\_\_\_

4. What did the digger do after water was poured into the cradle?  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Explain the purpose of the riffles on the cradle. \_\_\_\_\_  
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6. The cradle was sometimes operated by three diggers at once working as a team. Explain how you think the diggers worked. What did each do?  
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\_\_\_\_\_

7. Explain how the gold washing cradle was a significant invention.  
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8. List similarities and differences between the gold cradle and the mining pan.  
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