

CAROLE RILEY

Title

Following the Gold - How the various gold rushes influenced our families

Summary

People came in droves when gold was discovered in a succession of sites across Australia and New Zealand to try to make their fortunes, either directly by searching for gold or by running business, shops and hotels to cater to the gold diggers. Come with us on a journey around the goldfields and learn how to find your ancestors there.

Abstract

A succession of gold discoveries in the colonies brought immigrants desperate to try their luck and set themselves up for life. The California Gold Rush in the late 1840s was followed by discoveries in New South Wales and then Victoria, and young men came in their droves to try their luck, buying a passage on any available ship. Ships' crews deserted, leaving ships unable to leave port. Teachers, lawyers, policemen, farmers – all were tempted by the lure of gold to leave their jobs and their families and make their fortunes. As the promise of riches gave way to the disappointment of failure, many went home, or started businesses to serve the gold diggers. Others moved on to the next discoveries – Queensland, Western Australia, and New Zealand.

Life on the goldfields was difficult at first, and certainly no place for women. Where the gold supply proved reliable towns sprang up, with the churches and government offices that family historians rely on for records. As the surface gold was exhausted the mines moved underground, requiring investment in industrial equipment, and miners either stayed to work as employees or moved on to the next new find. Successful goldfields such as Ballarat and Bendigo turned into major towns with grand buildings for banks and hotels, whereas smaller finds were eventually abandoned, leaving historical sites such as Gulgong and Beechworth.

This session will show you how to tell if your ancestor was caught up in a gold rush, as a miner or business-owner, and how to find the associated records.

Audience

Beginner to Intermediate