

AUSTRALIAN MINING HISTORY

Mining in Australia probably started with the arrival of Aborigines some 40 000 years ago when they fossicked for stones suitable for tools and weapons, and dug for ochre which they used for decorative use.

"Modern" Australian mining followed the arrival of European settlers on the eastern seaboard in 1788, with the quarrying and shaping of Hawkesbury sandstone for early buildings at Sydney Cove.

The first discovery of coal was made by escaped convicts in the Newcastle area in 1791. Over the next few years coal was reported at many other centres to the north and south of Sydney.

The coal industry began in 1798 when ship owners gathered surface coal at Newcastle and brought it to Sydney for sale. Export of Newcastle coal began in 1799 with a shipment to India.

Traces of metallic minerals, particularly gold, were found in the early part of the 19th century, mainly by shepherds and convicts. However, there was no concerted effort towards mining because an archaic English law demanded that all gold and silver remained the property of the Crown.

In fact, Britain did not encourage people in the young colony to explore for minerals. The colony was first and foremost a penal settlement, and most of its inhabitants in the early years were preoccupied with learning how to feed themselves.

Lead was the first metal mined in Australia from the Glen Osmond hills on the outskirts of Adelaide in 1841. This was followed by the commencement of copper mining at Kapunda in the same general area in 1842. Copper was also discovered at Burra Burra (SA) in 1845.

When many Australians migrated to the United States in 1849 following reports of rich gold discoveries in California, the New South Wales Government realised that if the wave of migration was to be reversed, it needed to provide incentives for Australians to find gold in their own country. Accordingly, rewards were offered for the discovery of "payable" gold.

In April 1851 the first reported discovery of payable gold was made by John Lister and William Tom at the junction of Lewis Ponds and Summer Hill Creeks, Ophir.



ΔThe Kapunda copper mine in South Australia. Found in 1845 it was Australia's first successful metal mine.

Edward Hargraves, an associate of Lister and Tom, took their gold to the Colonial Secretary and then claimed the reward which included 5 000 Pounds to Hargraves; and 500 Pounds each to Lister, Tom and the Rev. W.B. Clarke.

However, recently-discovered evidence in letters addressed to William Tipple Smith from the Government acknowledged the existence of gold at Ophir in 1848.

A Chronology of Australian Mining

Other significant dates since then relating to the history of minerals in Australia include:

1848 - Discovery of lead in the bed of the Murchison River, WA.

1851 - Discovery of gold at Clunes, Castlemaine and Ballarat which began the Victorian goldrushes.

1852 - Payable gold discovered at the Nook, near Fingal, and at Nine Mile Springs (Tasmania). Gold also discovered at Gulgong (NSW) and at Beechworth, Daylesford and Ovens River (Vic).

1853 - Riots on Ballarat goldfields (Vic). Storming of the Eureka Stockade on 3rd December.

1857 - Brown coal discovered at Lal Lal in Victoria. Gold discovered at Adelong (NSW).

1858 - Australia's population reaches one million. Gold discovered at Avoca (Vic) and Canoona (Qld).

1859 - Copper recognised in the Cobar area of New South Wales.

1860 - Copper discoveries at Wallaroo and Moonta (South Australia). Gold discovered at Young (Lambing Flat in NSW).

1862 - Gold discovered at Forbes (NSW). Also a copper-rich lode found at Clermont (Qld).

1863 - Gold discovered at Walhalla (Vic) and and Warwick (Qld).

1864 - Coal discovered in Greta-Cessnock-Maitland field (NSW);

principal Australian source of gas coal. Blair Athol coal field (Qld) found; seam is 90 ft. thick.

1866 - Gold discovered at Rockhampton (Qld).

1867 - Gold discovered at Gympie (Qld).

1868 - Gold discovered at Ravenswood (Qld).

1869 - Record gold nugget "Welcome Stranger" (2 284 oz) found near Dunolly (Vic).

1870 - Gold discovered at Birdwood (SA) and copper at Cobar (NSW).

1871 - Discovery of tin at Mt Bischoff (Tas) and Inverell (NSW).

1872 - Payable gold discovered in Pine Creek area (Northern Territory). Other significant gold discoveries made at Stawell (Vic), Charters Towers and Ravenswood (Qld) and Lefroy (Tas). Tin found near Inverell (NSW) and rich deposits of tin found near Warwick (Qld).

1873 - Gold discovered at Palmer River (Qld).

1874 - Brown coal deposits found in the Latrobe Valley (Vic).

1875 - Tin found at Mt Heemskirk (Tas).

1876 - Gold discovered at Hodgkinson (Qld).

1877 - Australia's population reaches two million. Gold discovered at Beaconsfield (Tas).

1879 - Copper and tin discovered in Herberton mineral field (Qld).

1881 - Gold discovered at Nebo (Qld).

1882 - Lead, zinc, copper orebody at Captain's Flat (NSW) first worked. Gold nugget found between Roebourne and Cossack (WA). Gold found at Charters Towers and Mount Morgan (Qld).

1883 - Lead, silver, zinc discovered at Broken Hill (NSW). Collie coalfield found in WA (commercial mining began in 1898).

1885 - Opening of Broken Hill Proprietary silver mines. Gold found at Hall's Creek in the Kimberley district of WA. Silver-lead discovered at Mt Zeehan (Tas).

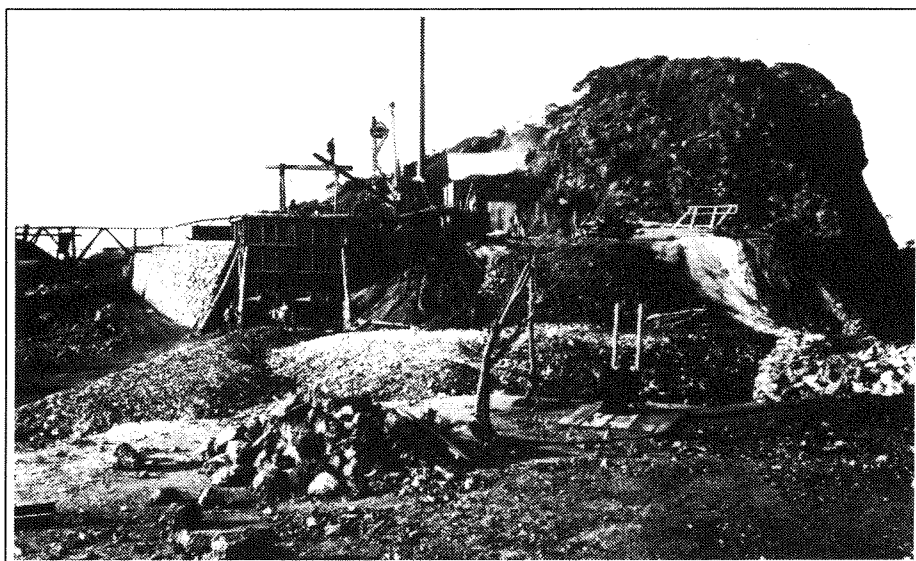
1886 - Gold and copper discovered at Mt Lyell (Tas). Also gold found at Croydon (Qld) and Teetulpa (SA).

1887 - Gold discovered at Southern Cross (WA).

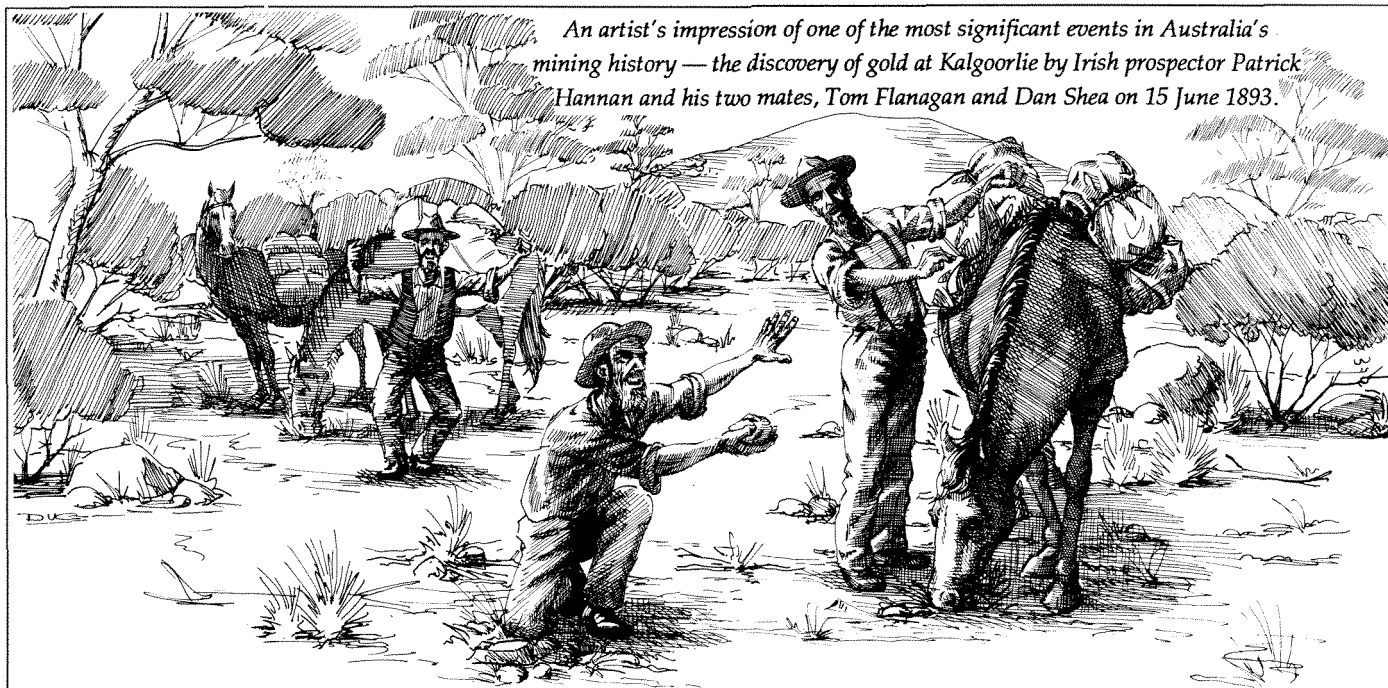
1888 - Tin found at Greenbushes (WA). Black coal found at Leigh Creek (SA). Lead ore produced on west coast of Tasmania. Gold found at Pilbara Creek (WA).

1889 - Australia's population reaches three million. First mining of brown coal in Victoria. Gold discovered in Ashburton River (WA).

1890 - Tin discovered at Renison Bell (Tas).



Δ Jamieson's Shaft, one of the original mining areas at Broken Hill in the 1880s. Lead, copper and zinc won from the area helped develop Australia's biggest single company — BHP.



An artist's impression of one of the most significant events in Australia's mining history — the discovery of gold at Kalgoorlie by Irish prospector Patrick Hannan and his two mates, Tom Flanagan and Dan Shea on 15 June 1893.

1891 - First discovery of gold at Nannine in the Murchison district (WA).

1892 - Gold discovered at Coolgardie (WA), also in areas now known as the Dundas and Mt Margaret goldfields. First bore sunk in Coorong area (SA) in search for oil.

1893 - Gold discovered at Kalgoorlie. Gold also found at Wyalong (NSW) and silver at Mt Lyell (Tas).

1893-94 - Copper, lead and zinc discovered at Rosebery (Tas).

1896 - Gold discovered at Arltunga (NT).

1897 - Gold discovered at Peak Hill, north of Meekatharra (WA).

1899 - A total of 17 separate goldfields and another four mining districts established throughout WA.

1900 - Iron ore from Middleback Ranges (SA) mined by BHP to provide flux for lead smelting at Port Pirie. Natural gas encountered in water bore at Roma (Qld). Gold discovered at Phillips River (Ravensthorpe, WA), The Granites and at Tanami (NT).

1904 - Scheelite deposit found on King Island (Tas).

1905 - Australia's population reaches four million.

1906 - Natural gas reticulated in Roma (Qld). Uranium discovered at Radium Hill (SA).

1915 - Opening of BHP's steelworks at Newcastle.

1918 - Australia's population reaches five million.

1923 - Lead-zinc orebody discovered at Mt Isa (Qld).

1924 - Oil and gas produced from well at Lake Bunga in eastern Gippsland, near Lakes Entrance (Vic).

1925 - Australia's population reaches six million.

1926 - Aberfoyle tin and wolfram deposits located in Tasmania.

1927 - Copper found at Mount Isa (Qld).

1931 - Mount Isa Mines Ltd. began mining operations.

1932 - Gold discovered at Tennant Creek (NT).

1934 - First commercial development of mineral sands deposits at Byron Bay (NSW).

1937 - First large-scale mining of black coal by open cut methods in Australia at Blair Athol (Qld).

1939 - Australia's population reaches seven million.

1943 - Large-scale production of zircon-rutile concentrate from Queensland. Large-scale production of asbestos at Wittenoom Gorge (WA).

1944 - Extensive open cut mining at Leigh Creek coal started.

1948 - Wundowie (WA) charcoal iron and steel industry began production.

1949 - Australia's population reaches eight million. Uranium discovered at Rum Jungle (NT).

1950 - Bauxite discovered at Gove (NT).

1951 - First shipment of iron ore from Yampi Sound (WA) to Port Kembla steelworks in NSW.

1952 - Important high-grade uranium deposits delineated at Rum Jungle (NT) and at Radium Hill (SA).

1953 - Flow of oil discovered in WAPET's Rough Range No.1 well at Exmouth Gulf (WA) provided stimulus for continuing search in ensuing years.

1954 - Rum Jungle uranium plant opened. Uranium discovered at Mary Kathleen (Qld).

1955 - Australia's population reaches nine million. Discovery of "HYC" silver-lead-zinc deposit at McArthur River (NT). First alumina and aluminium produced at Bell Bay (Tas). Consolidated Zinc geologist discovered Weipa (Qld) bauxite deposits.

1956 - Full-scale mineral sand mining began at Capel (WA).

1959 - Australia's population reaches ten million. In December the Commonwealth Government announced relaxation of the embargo on iron ore exports that had been in force since 1938. Major finds of iron ore

in the Pilbara (WA) were announced over the next few years. First coal exports from the Bowen Basin (Qld). Mt Whaleback (WA) iron ore deposit pegged; production began 1969.

1961 - Flow of oil in Moonie No.1 about 80km from Tara (Qld). Australia's first commercial oilfield by Union-Kern-AOG group on a field around this well.

1962 - First production of bauxite from Weipa (Qld) deposits. Iron ore deposit identified at Mt Tom Price (WA). Manganese discovered on Groote Eylandt (NT).

1963 - Mining of Darling Range (WA) bauxite commenced.

1964-65 - Many significant oil and gas strikes made throughout the country including the discovery of gas and oil in Bass Strait (Vic).

1965 - Discovery of Mitchell Plateau (WA) bauxite deposits.

1966 - Discovery of nickel at Kambalda (WA) and phosphate at Duchess (Qld). Iron ore mining began at Mt Tom Price and Mt Goldsworthy (WA), which meant first iron ore exports from WA.

1967 - Discovery of Mt Weld (WA) carbonatite containing rare earths and phosphate. Discovery of Woodcutters (NT) lead-zinc prospect. Start to mining of Savage River (Tas) iron ore deposit.

1969 - Discovery of nickel at Mt Windarra (WA) and start of Poseidon boom. Discovery of Woodlawn (NSW) base metal deposit.

1970 - Australia's population reaches 12.7 million. Discovery of Eneabba (WA) mineral sand deposits.

1970-71 - Commencement of systematic exploration of Lennard Shelf (WA) leading to discovery of high grade lead-zinc ore at Pillara in 1978 and Cadjebut in 1984.

1970-73 - Ranger, Nabarlek and Jabiluka (NT) uranium deposits found.

1971 - Discovery of Agnew (WA) nickel deposit, Telfer (WA) gold deposit, the start to iron ore production at Robe River (WA) and the discovery of the Yeelirrie (WA) uranium deposit.

1971-72 - Discovery of North West Shelf (WA) natural gas fields.

1972 - Discovery of Golden Grove (WA) copper-zinc deposit.

1973 - Discovery of Elura (NSW) zinc-lead deposit.

1974 - Discovery of Que River (Tas) zinc-lead-silver deposit.

1975 - Discovery of Roxby Downs (SA) copper-uranium deposit.

1976 - Discovery of Teutonic Bore (WA) copper-zinc deposit.

1978 - Copper discovered at Benambra (Vic).

1979 - Natural gas discovered at Port Campbell (Vic). Discovery of diamonds in Kimberley region of WA. Discovery of Granny Smith (WA) gold deposit. Discovery of Scuddles (WA) copper-zinc orebody which went into production in 1990.

1980 - Australia's population reaches 14.7 million. Gold discovered at Boddington (WA) and Wedderburn (Vic).

1983 - Hellyer (Tas) base metal deposit discovered.

1985 - Discovery of Kintyre (WA) uranium deposit. Discovery of Kunwarara (Qld) magnesite deposit.

1985-1989 - Many old gold mines in WA revived as open-cut operations.

1986 - Discovery of gold at Kidston (Qld).

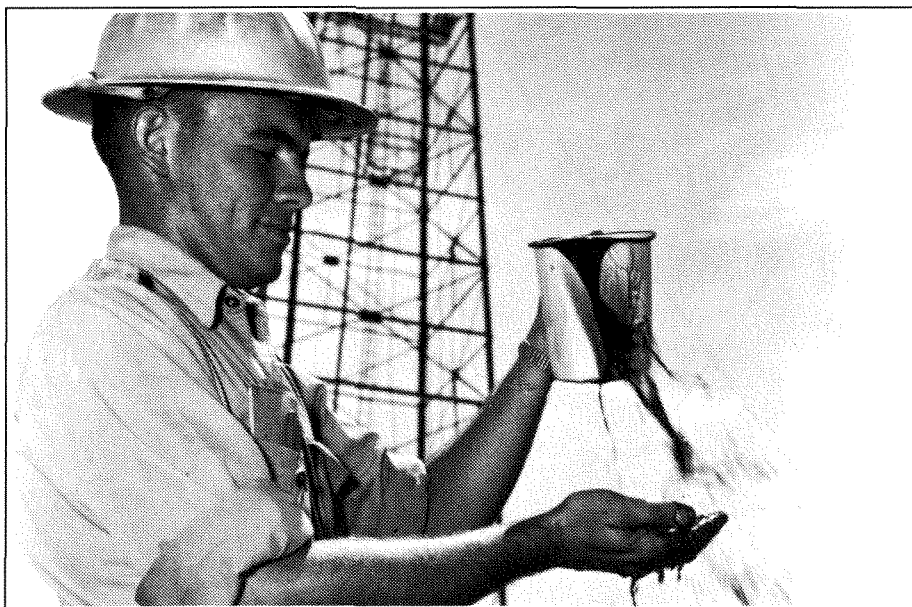
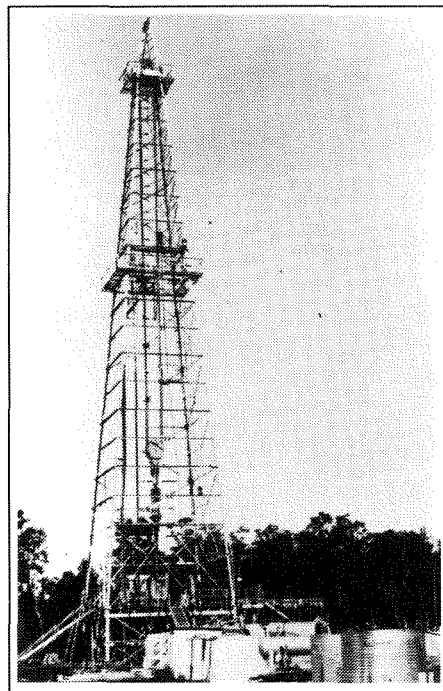
1986 - Mt Leyshon (Qld) gold deposit re-opened.

1987 - First production from Cadjebut (WA) lead-zinc deposit.

1989 - Discovery of gold at Plutonic Bore (WA).

1990 - Australia's population reaches 17.2 million.

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Δ 1961 was an historic year for the Australian oil industry. It marked the flow of oil at the Moonie No. 1 well at Tara in Queensland. It was Australia's first commercial oilfield.