

STEIGLITZ MINING DIVISION

DATE

HISTORY:

1851:

Early gold discoveries

The division's first gold discoveries were along the Moorabool River, near Morrison's Station; at Dolly's Creek; and in the vicinity of Steiglitz. Made as early 1851, these discoveries, and others, did not lead to anything as the gold was not recovered in payable quantities.

1855:

Gold rushes to the area did not take place until late 1855 after Hooley and Davis discovered a rich reef at Steiglitz.¹ Gold from this reef, when assayed at Geelong, went 72 ounces to the ton.² The assay results saw Steiglitz rushed and there were soon 200 miners on the field.³ During the next four years, the bulk of Steiglitz's reefs (over forty) were discovered: the more important being the New Chum, Boxing, Portuguese, Yankee Smith, Sailors, Ironbark, Hanover, Victoria, Gibraltar, Tam-O-Shanter and New Years. The working of the reefs at Steiglitz turned the place into the division's most important, though relatively small in comparison to other Victorian fields, quartz mining centre. Alluvial mining at Steiglitz, on the other hand, did not develop into anything of note, though there was some sluicing, puddling and paddocking carried out at places like Sutherlands Creek and Yankee Gully.

late 1850's:

Development of alluvial field

The discovery of the Steiglitz's reefs led to the successful working of the shallow alluvial deposits on the Moorabool River (Morrison's Diggings) and Dolly's Creek.

⁴ It was not, however, until gold was extracted from much older geological deposits (known as cemented leads) that mining flourished on the two fields. By 1858, miners at Morrison's were tunnelling under the basalt along western bank of the Moorabool and by the following year had also discovered a cemented lead at Dolly's Creek, that run from Campbell's to Brown's Hill. The auriferous gravels extracted by the miners were treated by sluice boxes and puddling machines.

Expansion of alluvial mining

Towards the end of the 1850s other alluvial goldfields were opened in the northern portion of the division. The first of the new fields were the Mt Doran or Tea-Tree diggings: by 1859, shallow alluvial and cemented gravel deposits were being worked at the head of Tea-Tree Creek.⁵

early 1860's:

The Stony Rises Diggings were opened in 1862 with a small rush, which later saw the whole of a flat next to the Geelong-Ballarat road being occupied and worked. As the sinkings were through basalt, it was anticipated, but never proven, that a deep lead existed in the area.⁶ After a brief period of alluvial mining at Stony Rises, the discovery of two auriferous reefs in 1863⁷ saw the focus of mining switch to quartz. Several companies - including the Royal George, Royal Charlie, Prince of Wales, Australasian Gold Mining, Stony Rises, Yorkey's Reef and Rose & Thistle - were formed.

1 Steiglitz: a history of a mining town, undated, p.5
2 Flett, The History of Gold Discovery in Victoria, 1979, p.385
3 Steiglitz: a history of a mining town, undated, p.5
4 Flett, The History of Gold Discovery in Victoria, 1979, p.372
5 Flett, The History of Gold Discovery in Victoria, 1979, p.374
6 Mining Surveyors' Reports, October 1863
7 Mining Surveyors' Reports, June 1863

The Prince of Wales and Australasian Gold Mining companies took out large leases, which covered the whole of the old diggings and intended to operate on the old workings with both crushing and puddling machinery⁸. Both worked with little success, and the latter company went onto to search, unsuccessfully, for a deep lead. After this, quartz mining became the business conducted on the field: both the Royal George and Royal Charlie had erected crushing batteries by 1865.⁹

In 1864, the Woodbourne Creek field was opened, gold being discovered in Munroe's Gully (tributary of Reeds or Woodbourne Creek, south-west of Meredith). In the following year, gold was obtained from along Woodbourne Creek itself, and also Cargarie Creek.¹⁰

Dominance of sluicing and Chinese miners

The richness of cemented leads at Morrison's and Dolly's Creek, and the topography of the northern part of the division, determined that sluicing would be the most prevalent and important branch of alluvial mining. By the mid 1860s, this industry was monopolised by Chinese miners, which was probably a reflection of how difficult and unrewarding the mining was. In May 1860, the Dolly's Creek Diggings were described by the mining registrar as a 'poor man's field'¹¹, that is, only suited to being worked by individual, or small parties of, miners and only capable of rewarding efforts with good wages. By the early 1860s the Chinese miners on Dolly's creek, who were still mainly working the auriferous deposits that covered the hills, such as Hooleys, Browns and Campbell's, to a depth of four feet.¹² The majority of the auriferous material was being treated in sluice boxes, though there were five puddlings on the field. Being a very dry area, the miners at Dolly's Creek were reliant on water supplied by a twelve-mile water race, which came from a source above the Lal Lal Falls.¹³ This race had been constructed by the Moorabool Waterworks Company (also referred to as Lal Lal Waterworks Company) and was later extended south to the Morrison's and Tea-Tree Diggings. According to the registrar the water from the Lal Lal race enabled the Chinese to 'turn over with profit every portion of the ground about Dolly's Creek containing the most minute particles of gold'.¹⁴ Morrison's and Tea-Tree diggings also had a very intensive sluicing industry, involving shaft sinking, tunnelling and the treatment of material in sluice boxes and puddlers. Initially only rich deposits on the west side of Moorabool River, and up Tea-Tree Creek, were worked, but in 1864, two rushes - Evan's and Wallace's - opened up extensive deposits along the east bank of the Moorabool. By 1863, the Lal Lal water race had been extended to Morrisons and the mining registrar felt that it enabled miners to wash with profit about 50% more material than previously treated.¹⁵

8 Mining Surveyors' Reports, March 1864
9 Mining Surveyors' Reports, September 1865
10 Flett, *The History of Gold Discovery in Victoria*, 1979, p.373
11 Mining Surveyors' Reports, May 1860
12 Mining Surveyors' Reports, October 1860
13 Mining Surveyors' Reports, December 1860
14 Mining Surveyors' Reports, October 1863
15 Mining Surveyors' Reports, October 1863

mid 1860's:

By 1866, alluvial mining on both the Dolly's Creek and Morrison's fields, was declining. The miners had by this time treated most of the easily won auriferous material. Attempting to arrest the decline on the latter field, two companies - Golden Rivers and Borhonerghurk - embarked on ambitious new mining ventures. The former sunk a shaft (beyond 400 feet) and extended numerous drives in order to discover the continuation of the rich Ballarat deep leads; and the latter, installed the division's largest crushing plant, a 70hp steam engine and 28-head of stamps to crush cement deposits.¹⁶ In June 1866, the registrar reported that the failure of the crushing works had caused a severe mining depression in the area, eg. Dolly's Creek was virtually deserted with the exception of one small party of Chinese miners.¹⁷

mid 1870's:

Alluvial mining revival

With a general decline in quartz mining in the mid 1870s, alluvial mining revived.¹⁸ The focus of the work was Dolly's Creek and Morrisons¹⁹ where miners again relied on the water from the Lal Lal race. By this time the race appears to have been taken over by the government.²⁰ In June 1879, the registrar was of the view that Dolly's Creek was on the verge of another golden era because a cement-lie deposit, overlooked in the past, had been proven to be gold bearing, going as much as 2_ ounces to the ton.²¹ Sluicing and pumping ventures were formed to work the deposit, eg. David Morrisons Water Scheme in 1879²² and the Happy Dinah Company erected a 5-head battery in 1883.²³

SOURCES:

Flett, J. *The History of Gold Discovery in Victoria*, Poppet Head Press, Melbourne, 1976.
Mining Surveyors' Reports.

16 Mining Surveyors' Reports, June 1865
17 Mining Surveyors' Reports, June 1866
18 Mining Surveyors' Reports, June 1874
19 Mining Surveyors' Reports, June 1876
20 Mining Surveyors' Reports, June 1881
21 Mining Surveyors' Reports, June 1879
22 Mining Surveyors' Reports, June 1881
23 Mining Surveyors' Reports, June 1883