

Gold Mining at the Cumberland Goldfields

This area is 12 kms east of Marysville and is near Cambarville. Donovan's, Bear and Walsh's creeks are all tributaries of the Cumberland Creek which starts on the slopes of Lake Mountain not far away and heads south to the Yarra River.

There was much gold mining going on at and around Donovan's Creek in the **late 1860s**. A group of miners from Cumberland, England headed up the Cumberland Creek from its junction with the Yarra searching for gold.

Alexandra Times, 2 June 1868

DONOVAN'S CREEK.

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

May 28, 1868.

To redeem my promise to you I send the following advice relative to Donovan's Creek. I arrived here on Tuesday last from Alexandra, and I confess I was as much pleased as surprised at the prospects I saw in the stone piled in the Prospecting claim. There is a tidy machine in process of erection, the property of Messrs Hogan and McDougall who, you may count, view the locality as it deserves. The evil of leasing large extents of ground has found its way hither, and many a hard-working man is thereby debarred from holding a claim on this line.

Three miles farther down the creek, at the junction of Bear's Creek with it, is another lease on which also are to be found good prospects in a well-defined and large reef. In Bear's Creek there is a party of miners who seem content with their fortune. It would not be wise for any poor man to rush here, unless he first supplied himself with the necessaries to last six or seven weeks, as the place is at present a wilderness of scrub, much resembling the fastness of the B. B. Creek in its early days, and the abovementioned space of time would lapse before he had any return for his labor.

Five miles down Walsh's Creek, of which Donovan's Creek is a tributary, I came upon a party of six miners, whose cheerful and contented looks induced the belief that they were reaping the rich reward to which

their perseverance and industry entitle them. For fourteen months have they been "doing it on the quiet," and enjoying much comfort. I was loudly welcomed, and treated with a digger's hospitality. The ceaseless laughter of Bill Farrell and party as their merry laugh rang through the scrub, convinced me at once of their nationality. During my stay with them I learned that my belief was not erroneously formed as to their success.

Farther down about 600 yards I fell in with another party who, too, are doing well. There are no others at work in the creek, although there is room for thousands. The creek is very long and empties into the Yarra. I have no doubt there will be a good rush hither, but I should not recommend one before winter is over. The nearest house of accommodation is Perry's on the Yarra track, who will direct miners to Donovan's Creek from his very door.

The Argus, 14 Oct 1869

The Golden Bower Gold-mining Company (Registered), Donovan's Creek.-An extraordinary meeting of the company was held on Wednesday, at the office Queen Insurance building, Queen-street, Mr. Hogarth in the chair. It was resolved that the capital should be increased by the issue of 1,200 new shares of £5 each, with £3 10s, each paid up, such shares to be allotted to the shareholders of the A 1 Gold-mining Company, Donovan's Creek, in consideration of their transferring their lease, and paying the company besides the sum of £800.

Stuart Waghorn in his 'Yarra Track' talk to MDHS, late 1990s:

"Most miners were self-reliant, and able to turn their hands to any occupation as need arose. Many did timber cutting and paling splitting to eke out a living in the forest. They were able to build and maintain well-built log cabins with a bark roof. These would certainly need to be weatherproof and with a large fireplace for cooking and winter warmth.

There would not be much time for entertainment. As well as goldmining or timber splitting these men needed to collect and cut their firewood, and do their own cooking, washing and mending. Perhaps now and again a group of them would get together for a yarn around the fire, or if one had a harmonica or Squeeze Box, a night of singing might ensue."

The following article describes the Donovan's Creek mining area in 1881.

Illustrated Australian, Jan 1881

Extracts from

A HOLIDAY RAMBLE ON THE YARRA TRACK.

[By J. W. Curtis.]

My journey to the outlying, mining settlements of Donovan's and Walch's (sic) Creeks was accomplished in this wise. My halting place for the night had been arranged for at a German settler's, named Köhler, a solitary hotel about sixteen miles from everywhere, and on one of the most bumpy roads I ever travelled.

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.....he announces that, to-morrow being Sunday, he intends to take a holiday and pack some stores down to the diggings at Donovan's and Walch's Creek.

The following morning at grey daylight we prepare to take our departure. The horse is loaded with an enormous bulk of miscellaneous articles, carefully tied in bags, an operation which takes some time, as the goods to be transported are peculiarly incongruous in shape and quality. During the final tightening up of straps and girths we are joined by a fine muscular fellow, with a handsome face and heavy moustache; and though clad only in worn moleskin trousers and tattered red shirt, the air and manner of a captain of dragoons. We make a start and plunge into a muddy track, overgrown with dripping ferns that lead down to the side of the range.

Our downward track is through many a charming vista, of matured foliage arboreal grottos of strange plants and mossy stems, whose dark recesses teem with beautiful vegetable parasites that flourish in the damp and stillness of their gloomy shades. The living timber was not particularly large, but some of the fallen trees were real forest giants. After a toilsome journey of some three hours we reach the nearest mining settlement. The first intimation we have of its propinquity is blundering on a little compact hut, about 10 feet square, built with heavy logs and roofed with bark, on which a large black cat of most comfortable and well-fed appearance sits watching our approach. The creature turns, and twists and tries

to rub her back on all kinds of impossible places against the chimney in delighted recognition of the old packer, but of human occupation there is no evidence. A floundering and splashing in the creek below is soon followed by the appearance of a grey, sinewy man in his nether garments only, still employed in polishing his stony-looking skull and tanned shoulders with a rough towel. He has been taking his Sunday swim, a process he informs me he has never missed for five and fifty years. He is the oldest inhabitant and most prosperous miner on the diggings; and his abode, although not big enough to give his favourite cat the traditional swing, is well furnished with all materials necessary to the comfort of both the inner and outer man. His weather-beaten face glows with geniality as he offers me the miner's compliment, tea and salt beef but a yet more glittering twinkle beams in his eye when the old packer, producing a bottle of brandy with the observation that 'tis his little daughter's birthday, asks us to drink her health all round. This sacrificial rite completed, and sundry stores delivered, we resume our journey to the next habitation. This was occupied by two young fellows, new arrivals at the creek, but evidently experienced bushmen. Their hut, built of split logs and with tent roof, is large and comfortable; its bunks, table, door and fastenings, shelves and sundry little interior fittings, all wrought by the ready axe in most workmanlike style. The before mentioned compliments are exchanged, our entertainers supplementing the inevitable tea and beef by producing a cake, a real masculine cake, with plenty of plums and currants and toothsome flavourings in it, and completely filling the large camp oven in which it had been cooked, so rejoicing in a diameter of two feet and a depth of one.

Two or three more huts, with their solitary inhabitants, are visited, their wants supplied, and we then start over, the Big Hill for the other mining settlement.

We do not spend much time in admiring the prospect, but commence the descent towards Walch's Creek. . . .

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In late 1890s William Edward Chester was involved in the discovery of the Golden Secret gold vein which became part of the Golden Bower Mine at Chesterville near Donovans Creek, on the Cumberland goldfield which he mined with George Locke until the late 1930s. Andrew Kirwan had a mine nearby.



George Locke, Andrew Kirwan and William Chester at the Golden Bower mine site¹

The Age, 2 Feb 1898

Mining on the Yarra track - An important discovery has been made near Walker's Hotel, on the Yarra Track, by two prospectors, Chester and Locke, who have opened up a new reef, averaging from 3 to 9 inches wide, running for 300 feet, carrying gold well throughout - some of the specimens being studded with it. The ground in the vicinity has been taken up and is being prospected. The Golden Bower, about two miles south of this find, and apparently on the same line of reef, is taking out stone for a trial crushing. Stockman's Reward struck the reef in the lower, tunnel, and are driving on the lode. The stone shows gold on breaking.

Bendigo Advertiser, 24 May 1898

A RICH DISCOVERY. Our Melbourne correspondent writes :—Two prospectors and miners named—Wm. Chester and George Locke called on the Minister of Mines yesterday and showed him a nice cake of gold weighing 122oz., the result of a recent crushing from six tons of stone from a reef which they found on the

Yarra track, 70 miles from Melbourne and about 15 miles from Marysville. They had been induced to start a claim three months ago by the rich specimens in the locality. They had gone to a depth of 36ft. and the reef was from 3in. to 9in. thick and looks promising. A lease is being issued to Messrs. Chester and Locke, and several parties are in the locality. The discovery is one of the results of the track cutting, which the Minister says will be continued.

The Age, 5 May 1906

HEALESVILLE.— A quantity of new machinery has been installed at the Golden Bower mine, Marysville consisting of a pump and a Pelton wheel for driving the pump, Seven hundred feet of pipes have been laid to carry water to the mine.

The Ballarat Star, 23 July 1906

WARBURTON.

At Donovan's Creek Messrs Sheehan and Kerwan have struck a reef in the Golden Bower at 80 feet. The lode averages 18 inches in width. From 17 tons got 17 oz 10

dwt gold. The lode is apparently a continuation of the Star reef. The party are arranging for increased crushing power.

The Golden Secret, Chesterville, has been secured by a Melbourne syndicate, and work will be resumed on it at once.

Alexandra & Yea Standard, 17 Jul 1908

The Golden Bower claim is looking well and work will soon be in full swing, when the shaft, now being sunk, is finished. There is a likelihood of the Golden Secret starting very shortly where good gold has been obtained.

The Advocate, 28 Nov 1908

AUNT PATSY M.F.B. FUND FOR DESTITUTE CHILDREN.
ST. JOSEPH'S HOME, SURREY HILLS

Collected by Walter Chester, Golden Bower mine, Marysville, £1. November 1908.

Alexandra & Yea Standard, 3 Jan 1913

The syndicate prospecting the Golden Bower mine, Marysville, struck, after short 50 feet of driving, payable stone at the 75 feet level, the stone going strongly underfoot and overhead, which should

greatly enhance the value of the mine, as this is all virgin ground.

Weekly Times, 21 Feb 1914

HERMIT'S END IN TAIL RACE Though he was an old-age pensioner and had lived the life of a hermit for some years, James Fahie, whose dead body was found in a disused tail race near the Golden Bower mine, was well known in the Healesville district. At one time he held the position of inspector in the roads and bridges branch of the Public Works Department, and many of the most important works on the Healesville-Woods Point road were carried out under his supervision. Fahie had been working old ground and preparing to sluice it. Apparently he had slipped and fallen about eight feet into the tail race. An inquiry was held by Mr J. R. Crooke, J.P., who found that Fahie was accidentally kill.

The Argus, 30 July 1938

SALE OF GOLDEN BOWER MINE A gold-mining lease situated at Donovan's Creek 17 miles from Marysville, together with machinery and plant will be offered at auction by Messrs J W Styles and Son at their rooms 340 Collins street on Tuesday. The lease which covers 90 acres is known as the Golden Bower.

William Edward Chester's daughter Alma Kathleen Barry nee Chester in her memories of her childhood in the Marysville area remembers:

When we left our Yarra Track home, the mining interest was sold to the German Mr Slav². In 1939³ my parents returned to the mine, taking out the last gold to come from the mine which had once given us our living.

Healesville Guardian, 7 Nov 1942

COPPER FROM A GOLD MINE. John Edward Weatherland, miner, Sandringham, was charged with having, at Marysville about 10/8/42, stolen a quantity of copper wire and a washing copper, valued at £120, belonging to William Forbes Wilson, contractor, Main street, Warburton.

Wilson said he owned the Golden Bower gold mine, Marysville, which he inspected sometime in 1940, and found everything in order. As a result of something he heard, he re-visited the mine on 28/8/42, and found that 19 cwt. of bare copper cable, 4 cwt. of covered wire, a 12-gallon washing copper and four battery plates, valued in all at about £240, were missing. No one was authorised to remove them.

Replying to accused, witness admitted no work had been done there since the bush fires in January, 1939, and the site had become overgrown with scrub, some of the cables being brought down by the fires. Witness knew of an antimony mine known as Jumbo at Bears Creek, south of the Golden Bower, and knew, too, that

the track from the Golden Bower to the main road was in bad condition.

Answering the police, Wilson said he had had previous dealings over the mine with accused.

Detective W. B. Shiels, Camberwell, deposed that, with Detective Lamont, he interviewed accused at 21 Spring street, Sandringham, telling him they were enquiring regarding copper wire stolen from the Golden Bower mine, and believed he could help them. Accused denied knowing anything about it. He admitted knowing the mine, however, and being camped nearby at about the time the wire disappeared. His son was with him, and they were working the antimony mine. When told the police believed he took the property, he asked how his son would stand in the matter, because the son knew he took it, and knew he had been interested in the Golden Bower. He told his son he had a right to take the goods. The son had not shared in the proceeds, receiving only petrol expenses for the trip. Accused admitted selling the property to a firm in Brunswick, and made a signed statement.

Accused pleaded guilty, with a reservation as to the amount of property stolen, and the charge as affecting this was amended to £25, to which accused agreed,

and consented to the case being dealt with by the court instead of going before a jury.

¹ From 'Highway to Heaven', Kenealy, Mary, 2006, self-published.

² Mr Slav has not been identified.

³ The newspaper reports the sale of the Golden Bower Mine in 1938.