

Andrew Kirwan mining - Wolfram & Gold at Cumberland River

This letter, dated 9 July 1981, was sent to the Marysville & District Historical Society by L K M Elmore, Box 227, Hastings Vic 3915 after the 2009 Fires.

The gold retort and miner's pick which I would like to present to Marysville Historical Society belonged originally to Andrew J V Kirwan who, with his brothers, lived in Marysville and spent much of their time in the Cumberland Valley.

Like so many bushmen of their day they were extremely versatile and capable, being at different times contractors, paling-splitters and miners.

They located and worked the Wolfram Mine at Wilkes Creek, upstream from Anderson and Rowe's sawmill.

They located and worked a mines at Cumberland Creek near the "Golden Bower". The Golden Bower mine was re-established by William Chester who married their sister, Maria Catherine Kirwan.

In 1906 Andrew, located a claim nearby that he registered as "Kirwan's Reward". It was described as "gossany lode", or decomposed pyrites, associated with a massive porphyry dyke which ran for some miles parallel to the lode. Up to 4 feet wide in places, but narrowing to about 6 inches in others, values varied from about 1/2oz gold per ton at the widest to 4oz at its narrowest. Unfortunately the gold was very fine, and chemicals in the ore "sickened" the mercury amalgam plate usually used for quartz ores. As a result only about 4 dwt of gold per ton of ore could be saved. This was quite unpayable at that time and Mr Kirwan had lost his brothers and his strength was failing.

When in 1934 Mr Kirwan offered my father, my brother and me a share in this mine, paling huts had been built, a battery and engine (which proved unreliable), and two shafts sunk to about 35 feet, but there seemed no way to make the mine payable without considerable expenditure. But we did install a new engine, and later built on-site, a small cyanide plant to treat the tailings, which the Mine Department said contained about 1/2oz of gold per ton. The first trial of this plant recovered approximately another 8 dwt of gold, making a total of 12 dwt per ton saved.

Because the 20 acre lease had a labour employment requirement of 6 men, with which we were not in a position to comply, we accepted an offer from a Mr Henderson, who owned a gold leaf factory in Sydney, and other enterprises. I understand Mr Henderson worked this mine until the 1939 bushfire burnt out the plant and equipment - the miners only escaping down the Yarra Track at the last moment.

I remember using the retort to drive off the mercury from the amalgam which resulted from crushing this difficult ore, and later melting it down in a small hand forge, a couple of small slugs of gold, which seemed, in view of a cold winter's work under difficult conditions, a meagre return. Later while working at Anderson & Rowe's sawmill in 1939, I lost most of my possessions. It was about that time that I bought the retort and some camping gear from Mr Kirwan, but did not venture into mining again.

Signed L K M Elmore.