

# GRAPEVINE CUTTINGS (December 2001)

By Rob Upson

## MARK TWAIN on the GOLDFIELDS

In 1895, Samuel Langhorne Clemens began a worldwide lecture tour that included parts of Australia. We know him better under the pseudonym of **Mark Twain**.

Samuel Clemens was born in 1835 in the state of Missouri and brought up near the Mississippi river that provided many scenes for his later books. He became a pilot on this river for four years and his pseudonym was taken, in 1863, from the river men's cry indicating that the water was two fathoms deep.

In 1867 he journeyed through Europe and the Holy Land and wrote of his experiences in *The Innocents Abroad*, which established his fame as a writer.

Encouraged by friends to recount his childhood memories of life on the rivers he wrote *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). A European walking tour was recorded in *A Tramp Abroad*, published in 1880.

As mentioned, in 1895 he went on a round the world lecture tour focussing primarily on India, Australia and South Africa. These experiences were recounted in *Following the Equator* (1897). His first port of call in Australia was Sydney. From there he moved on to Wagga Wagga and Melbourne with visits to the mining towns of Stawell, Ballarat and Bendigo. From Hobart he went to New Zealand and then returning to Melbourne went on to spend Christmas and the New Year in Adelaide. He then journeyed on to Ceylon, India and finally South Africa.

His visit to Bendigo is recorded as follows :- *On the rail again – bound for Bendigo. From Diary October 23 – ‘Got up at six, left at 7.30; soon reached Castlemaine, one of the rich goldfields of the early days; waited several hours for a train; left at 3.40 and reached Bendigo in an hour..... It has actually taken nine hours to come from Ballarat to Bendigo. We could have saved seven by walking. However there was no hurry.’ Bendigo was another of the rich strikes of the early days. It does a great quartz-mining business, now – that business which, more than any other that I know of, teaches patience and requires grit and a steady nerve. The town is full of towering chimney stacks and hoisting-works and looks like a petroleum city. Speaking of patience: for example, one of the local companies went steadily on with its deep borings and searchings without show of gold or a penny of reward for eleven years – then struck it and became suddenly rich. The eleven years’ work had cost \$55,000 and the first gold found was a grain the size of a pin’s head. It is kept under locks and bars, as a precious thing, and is reverently shown to the visitor..... Bendigo has turned out even more gold than Ballarat. The two together have produced \$650,000,000 worth – which is half as much as California has produced.*

Mark Twain was invited to the Town Hall to hear complimentary speeches and to respond to them – given a tour of the city and shown its notable features – visited several mines and the hospital. He then journeyed on to Maryborough where he was reputed to have remarked “Maryborough is a railway station with a town attached.” If you have been there, then you may have to agree that the station is indeed a remarkable edifice, alas, no longer witness to the large amount of railway traffic of the past.

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