

Reading Comprehension — Life on the Goldfields

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Life on the Goldfields

When gold was discovered in Australia in 1851, the news spread like wildfire. Within months, tens of thousands of people had abandoned their jobs and homes and rushed to the goldfields, all dreaming of striking it rich. But life on the diggings was far harder than most had imagined.

The goldfields were crowded, muddy and noisy. Miners, known as diggers, lived in flimsy tents that did little to keep out the cold nights or the summer heat. They came not just from Australia and Britain, but from China, America and across Europe, so many languages could be heard at once.

The work was backbreaking. Diggers spent long days bent over, digging deep holes and washing buckets of mud and gravel in the hope of finding tiny flecks of gold. Most found very little. For every person who struck it lucky, thousands worked hard and went home with empty pockets.

There were other troubles too. Food was expensive, clean water was scarce, and disease spread easily in the crowded camps. The diggers also had to pay for an expensive licence just to dig, which many felt was deeply unfair — anger that would later boil over at the Eureka Stockade.

Yet the gold rush changed Australia forever. It brought people from all over the world, built new towns almost overnight, and helped shape the diverse nation Australia would become.

Questions

1. In what year was gold discovered in Australia? (1 mark)
2. What were the miners known as? (1 mark)
3. Name two countries people came from. (2 marks)
4. Find and copy a word in paragraph 3 meaning "extremely hard and tiring." (1 mark)
5. Why does the writer say life was "far harder than most had imagined"? (2 marks)
6. Why did many diggers think the licence was unfair? (2 marks)
7. How did the gold rush "change Australia forever"? (2 marks)
8. Summarise what daily life was like on the goldfields. (3 marks)

Answer Key / Mark Scheme

1. 1851.
2. Diggers.
3. Any two: Australia, Britain, China, America, countries in Europe.
4. "backbreaking."

- 5.** Crowded, muddy camps; flimsy tents; hard work for little reward; expensive food; scarce water; disease.
- 6.** They had to pay an expensive fee just to dig, even though most found little gold.
- 7.** It brought people from around the world, built new towns quickly, and helped shape a diverse nation.
- 8.** Hard and uncomfortable: crowded muddy camps, flimsy tents, backbreaking digging for little gold, costly food, scarce water and disease.