

INQUIRY INTO TOURISM IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

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New South Wales the forgotten Gold State

New South Wales is the birth place of gold discovery in Australia. Edward Hargreaves became a legend in his own time and Lewis Ponds Creek, Ophir was written into our history books.

It was John Lister and the Tom Brothers, Henry and James who led Edward Hargreaves to Lewis Ponds Creek. They all played a pivotal part in locating and extracting the first significant parcel of gold in Australia on the 12 February 1851. The parcel of gold particles and nuggets weighed in excess of four ounces and was enough to excite journalists at Bathurst and the rest of the world. The "Australia's rush that never ended" had begun!

Edward Hargreaves is a Gold Rush Mega Star

When will the penny drop and local Tourism Authorities begin to promote Edward Hargreaves who 'fathered the golden baby' in one of Australia's most picturesque regions bordered by Mudgee, Orange and Bathurst. Not only is the area a mere four hours drive west of Sydney it also includes the spectacular Macquarie and Turon River valleys.

Mudgee, Gulgong, Hargraves, Wendeyer, Stuart Town and Ophir never developed into the prosperous Victorian cities of Bendigo and Ballarat with their deep quartz mining.

As the New South Wales gazetted goldfields declined they were opened up to closer settlement and the Crown Land (public land) was drastically reduced denying access to prospectors. This process has been able to continue to the present and the final insult is that the few remaining Goldfields have been absorbed into National Parks or State Conservation Areas which exclude prospectors as well as recreational fossickers.

The NSW Miners Right was the first to be abolished and even the replacement 'Fossicking License' has been repealed. The Mines Act of 1992 allows fossicking in the State, except National Parks, if no other Act or law prevents it. Fossicking in NSW is at the end of the pecking order.

The Environmental Impact of Recreational Fossicking

Recreational fossicking has very little environmental impact when the main means of extracting gold is by panning or metal detecting using hand tools. Prospecting is usually limited to areas where there has already been major land disturbance e.g. existing Goldfields.

Not a lot has changed over the 160 years since the first rushes to NSW and prospectors buy all sorts of gadgetry in the hope of finding gold. It is also an excuse to use camping gear and their expensive 4 wheel drives. Fossicking is fun and something they can do with their children.

Tourism authorities, bureaucrats and politicians have been quick to recognize the importance of the built environment left by the Gold Rushes and promote and invest in preserving it; however they have failed to see the linkage between the surrounding bush (public land) with their mine shafts, water races, puddlers, and massive trenches cut through mountain sides and exposed surfaced areas as being of similar importance.

The Pull of Gold

We should not ever diminish the pull of GOLD. It was the GOLD that trebled Australia's population by 1860. The amazing thing is that fossickers don't have to actually find any - it is the experience of looking and being able to look that is the attraction.

In conclusion

We are on the brink of one of the biggest waves of potential travelers hitting retirement age- **The Baby Boomers**. Many armed with their new 4x4s, exotic tents, caravans, winabargos, fishing rods, cameras, gold pans and metal detectors. They are desperate for somewhere to go. Will they be attracted to the Goldfields of NSW where Australia's gold industry began or will they flock to Victoria's Golden Triangle or Western Australia where they are made welcome?

They are certainly not welcome in NSW - National Parks and State Conservation Areas, especially with pets. Can Regional Tourism in NSW afford to sit back and ignore recreational fossicking and the opportunities it can open up for sustainable tourism in regional areas?

I have included two of my recent articles which should be read in conjunction with this short submission.

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