



Minerals and mining in the Australian Alps

Rocks are important natural and spiritual resources for Aboriginal people. Some rocks have great value and are traded long distances across Australia. Rocky outcrops and overhangs provide shelter and art sites to record special events and journeys. Soft rocks or ochres are paint and medicine. Limestone caves provide our spiritual leaders with crystals. Rocks are used as hatchets, knives, scrapers, seed grinding mills and to shape wooden tools.

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Illustration: Jim Williams



Gold!

Remnants of gold, silver and tin mining can be seen in what is now the southern end of Kosciuszko National Park. The first discovery of gold in the Australian Alps was in 1839 by the explorer Count Paul Edmund de **Strzelecki**, who claimed the first ascent of Mount Kosciuszko.

In 1853, the newly appointed Government Botanist, **Ferdinand von Mueller**, visited Mount Buffalo with the overseer of the Melbourne Botanical Gardens to collect specimens of alpine flora. Upon their return, Mueller announced that he had also found gold in the Ovens River, causing much interest from the public.

Among the people to be attracted to the goldfields were James and John

Manfield, who climbed the plateau in 1856 with a party of miners, in search of gold. Although they did not find gold, the Manfields established a business guiding people up the plateau so that they could experience the tremendous views.

Graziers also made some of the early mineral discoveries in the Australian Alps and once news spread of discoveries, many thousands of people flocked to sites such as Kiandra in NSW and Walhalla in Victoria. This movement of people was supported by the colonial government of Victoria in the early 1850s when Alfred Howitt was commissioned by the government to cut approximately 350 kilometres of tracks linking the various goldfields.

In 1859, the discovery of gold at Kiandra, northeast of Cabramurra, rapidly stimulated a gold rush. Many miners arrived in Kiandra in the winter of 1860 and it was at about this time that skiing was introduced at Kiandra by gold miners from northern Europe (NSW NPWS 1991).

Having actively promoted the extraction of gold in the rugged vastness of alpine Victoria the Government found its aims hampered by lack of communications and transport routes. Accordingly it fitted out a track cutting expedition to provide permanent ways for commerce through the wild country and appointed as leader Angus McMillan in 1861. The expedition cut 220 miles of tracks during its twelve months' existence extending from the Wonnangatta to Dargo over the Snowy Plains to the watershed of the Macalister and Moroka Rivers and to the Barkly Range at the head of the Goulburn. Further tracks were cut from Dargo to Harrietville from the Wellington to the Moroka and to the Macalister and from the Jordan to Mt. Tamboritha. McMillan carried on to cut the last track in the Dargo area alone a sick and broken man but determined to carry out his duties. The end came quickly. His packhorse missed its footing and rolled on him. Mortally crushed he struggled towards Bairnsdale but died in Gilleo's pub at Iguana Creek on 18th. May 1865.

Source: Bogong Horseback Adventures, Mt Beauty, Victoria <http://www.bogonghorse.com.au/>

During its peak, the Kiandra goldfield supported approximately 10,000 people, including hundreds of Chinese miners. The Kiandra goldrush lasted until early 1861 at which time miners moved on to other prospering fields (NSW NPWS 1991).

The Chinese miners brought with them their traditional ways, using yokes to carry equipment through the harsh alpine country. Chinese people also stayed in the **Australian Alps bioregion** after the goldrush, some establishing supply stores which remained until the 1900s.

While gold rushes moved around the countryside with each new discovery, small-scale mining continued in the Australian Alps Bioregion from 1905 to 1930, becoming more profitable

with the introduction of hydraulic sluicing and dredging (NSW NPWS 1991).

The townships and settlements became private freehold land, but the actual mining itself was largely on public land under a licence system. After the initial rushes, mining continued in many areas for years. The impact on the environment was considerable - access tracks, vegetation clearance, huge holes in the ground, diverting of streams and frequent soil erosion.



Relic of Kiandra's past

Timber cutting in alpine areas began to supply gold miners with material for houses, as props in mine shafts and sleepers for new railways.

By 1920, the majority of mining had ceased throughout the Australian Alps and surrounding area with the exception of Mount Wills and one area near the Ovens River. Gold prices did rise in the 1930s, promoting some activity at existing mines, but this was short-lived. In 1941, the Red Robin Reef near Mount Hotham was the site of a rush which resulted in an initial crushing yield of 100 ounces per ton of ore (LRGM Services 2002, p. 11).

With the declaration of the Alpine National Park in Victoria, all mining ended in the Alps with the exception of Red Robin mine in Victoria.

1839	Explorer Paul de Strzelecki, who claimed the first ascent of Mount Kosciuszko, discovered gold in the Victorian Alps.
1852	Geologist and clergyman W B Clarke comments on the likelihood of gold in the area after hearing reports from stockmen.
1853	The Government Botanist, Ferdinand von Mueller, visited Mount Buffalo with the overseer of the Melbourne Botanical Gardens to collect specimens of alpine flora. Upon their return, Mueller announced that he had also found gold in the Ovens River, causing much interest from the public.
1850s	The colonial government of Victoria commissioned Alfred Howitt to cut approximately 350 kilometres of tracks linking the various goldfields.
1856	James and John Manfield, climbed the plateau with a party of miners, in search of gold. Although they did not find gold, they established a business guiding people up the plateau so that they could experience the tremendous views.
1859	November: gold struck in Kiandra. Officially reported in January of the following year. New strikes followed at Tabletop Mountain, and the Four Mile and the Nine Mile Creeks.
1861	Major rush over by autumn. Crushing of gold-bearing quartz, hydraulic sluicing and dredging in the Eucumbene River continued until 1949.
1894	Gold discovered at Grey Mare. Reef mining continued sporadically until 1952, with access facilitated by the construction of the Grey Mare Fire Trail in 1934. Throughout this period a number of huts were established within the Wilderness Area by

Matthews' Cottage

The land at Kiandra where Matthews' Cottage was eventually built, was first sold at an auction of Crown land to George Venterman on 29 June 1874. George, a miner, paid the sum of 20 shillings 3 pence for the land. In March 1879 the land was sold to Frederick Blaxland of Binjura, and after that it was sold to William John Foley of Kiandra.

William (Bill) Foley, the son of a warden, was born at Goulburn Jail in 1879. By the age of sixteen, Bill was working on a mail coach from Kiandra to Cooma. He was later employed on mining dredges, initially at Adelong and later at Myrtleford in Victoria. His departure from Myrtleford was by pushbike; he rode all the way to Grahamstown, near Adelong, for his wedding with Jenny Bradley. Bill married Jenny Bradley whose family had a long association with the Snowy Mountains, with family members

having settled at Talbingo, the Yarrangobilly Hotel, Yarrangobilly Caves as the first caretakers, and Kiandra.

During 1900 the Foleys moved to Kiandra where Bill found work at Oliver Harris' store. His work involved the butchering of livestock and transportation of the meat by packhorses to miners at Lobbs Hole.

The original cottage was constructed by the Foleys in the early 1900s. The Cottage had three rooms with a verandah.

It was constructed of weatherboards with a corrugated iron gable roof and the interior was lined with timber boards. The construction utilised modern techniques and materials, due to the technology available within a typical rural town at the time and the easy access to major centres via reasonable roads.



Matthews' Cottage (Photograph: Barbara Seymour © Kosciusko Huts Association)

Tin Mines

The Tin Mines is just off the Tin Mine fire trail, about 20 kilometres west of Dead Horse Gap. The area has been mined since 1873 for tin, but in 1935 to 1936, the Mount Pilot Tin Mining Syndicate built several huts on the site, but all were abandoned by 1938.

There are two huts at the Tin Mines and several piles of stones. Remains of chimneys and log posts indicate that there were more huts in the area in the past. There was also a Tin Mine Snowy Mountains Authority shelter built by the Authority in 1954 for survey work, which was later used by the CSIRO and the forestry industry. It was removed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service in 1992.

One of the remaining buildings is known as the Barn, Big Hut or Workshed. It was a workshed of the Mount Pilot Tin Mining Syndicate in 1935-36. Employees built race lines, put down pipes and improved access from Victoria to support the tin mining operation. The building is like a barn constructed with solid posts and weatherboards, four small windows, two entrance doors, a fireplace, and a roof covered with shingles that are close to a metre in length and about

15 millimetres thick. The corrugated iron section of the roof was added many years after the original construction. The floor is hard clay, and very polished, appearing almost like a wooden floor.

The other remaining building is known as Carters, Charlie Carters', SMA or SMC. It has had a varied life being used as a barn or workshed. It is a small hut with a fireplace. Part of the walls and ceiling are lined with sawn timber and the outside walls are made of hard split overlapping vertical boards.

Charlie Carter spent the majority of his life in the Alps, until his death in 1953. He lived at the Tin Mines for the last 20 years of his life. He lived as a hermit and philosopher, writing, selling horse hides and mining. He would ride by horseback into Jindabyne to sell horse-hides, deliver philosophical articles to the local newspaper and buy food supplies.

The cause of his death in 1953 remains a mystery. He could have starved, been struck down by an illness or died as a result of the strange healing techniques that he self-administered.

References

Kosciusko Huts Association website: <http://www.kosciuskohuts.org.au/>, sourced: May 2005.

LRGM Services (2002) 'Australian Alps Mining Heritage Conservation & Presentation Strategy', a report for the Australian Alps Liaison Committee, LRGM, Bright.

NSW NPWS (1991) *An Outdoor Museum: Historic Places in the NPWS Estate*, NPWS, Hurstville.

Victorian High Country Huts Association website: <http://www.vhcha.org.au/>, sourced: May 2005.

Glossary

Australian Alps bioregion

A Bioregion is a defined region with similar origin, climate, landform and vegetation communities. The Australian Alps bioregion extends into Victoria, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. The alpine region in southern New South Wales is characterised by a series of high elevation plateaus. It contains the only alpine and the majority of the subalpine vegetation in New South Wales and is often snow covered in winter. It is dominated by eucalypt open forests and woodlands and tussock grassland. Small areas of eucalypt open woodlands and heath are present.

Ferdinand von Mueller

Ferdinand von Mueller studied pharmacy and took his Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Kiel in 1847. He came to Australia in 1848 for health reasons and became a great botanical collector and writer. He was Victorian Government Botanist from 1853, and for a time Director of the Botanic Gardens. He travelled widely in Victoria and was on the A. C. Gregory expedition to northern Australia in 1855-57. He supported botanical exploration and collecting throughout the colonies.

*His botanical publications are very extensive, and include *Fragmenta Phytographiae Australiae* published over the period 1858-82.*

Strzelecki

*Mt. Kosciuszko was named by explorer Count Paul Edmund de Strzelecki after a Polish democratic leader, Tadeusz Kosciuszko. It appears that the peak's shape reminded Strzelecki of the tomb of Kosciuszko. Different sources provide different dates for this event with the vast majority quoting 1840 as the year in which Strzelecki names Mt Kosciuszko. The Collins publication, *Milestones in Australian History: 1788 to the Present* (compiled R. Brown, edited R. Appleton, 1986, William Collins, Sydney), states that during January 1840, Strzelecki, James Macarthur and James Ridley explored country between Westernport and Gippsland and on 15 February,*

Strzelecki discovers, ascends and names Mt Koscius[z]ko. The Macquarie Encyclopedia of Australian Events: Events that Shaped the History of Australia (devised by B. Fletcher, editors B. Fraser and A. Atkinson 1997, rev. edition, The Macquarie Library Pty Ltd, Sydney), states that in 1839, 'Paul de Strzelecki, Polish-born explorer and scientist who later took up British citizenship and was knighted, alone ascended the highest peak in the Australian Alps during a geological survey and named it after ... Tadeusz Kosciuszko' (p. 42). The same publication also states that in 1840, Strzelecki explored the Gippsland area of Victoria, 'covering much of the ground discovered by Angus McMillan the previous year, but without giving McMillan the credit. Strzelecki named the area after Governor Gipps, and this name came into general use in preference to McMillan's name, Caledonia Australis' (p. 42).



<http://www.australialps.deh.gov.au/>