

## 5c- Australia's place in the world : Natural Resources

### 1- Gold Rush

Gold was first discovered in Australia in 1851 – first in New South Wales and then in Victoria. The finds caused a sensation. Stories of fabulous discoveries in California were already famous and the Australian finds promised the same opportunity. Men throughout Australia immediately downed tools to 'rush' to the goldfields, soon joined by others from New Zealand. By the following year thousands began to arrive from Britain, Europe, America and then China. The impact on farms and businesses was devastating at first. As Lieutenant-Governor Charles La Trobe wrote to his superior in England, 'Cottages are deserted, houses to let, even schools are closed. In some of the suburbs, not a man is left.'

The lure of gold was huge. It represented the opportunity of a lifetime to escape from the relentless cycle of hard work and low pay that was the lot of most people. As stories circulated of fabulous finds literally picked up from the ground, gold fever gripped the imagination of thousands on both sides of the globe. Soon every available vessel had been commandeered for the long journey to Australia, and Victoria was inundated by eager gold seekers. In 1851 Victoria was still a sleepy little outpost of Britain, with a population of just under 100,000. Over the next decade this would double, then double again, to reach 537,847 in 1860, and that only included those who had stayed! Many more had come and gone. In the early years of the gold rush Melbourne was a city in chaos. Every inch of floor and almost every table and bath in the hotels and lodging houses was occupied. Hundreds at a time spent a night or more on the wharves amongst the barrels and bales. Thousands more went to 'Canvas Town' – a sprawling, makeshift tent city on the southern bank of the Yarra, near where the National Gallery is today.

Everything was soon in short supply and prices soared. Canny traders made quick fortunes and there were plenty of rogues ready to fleece trusting newcomers. Most would-be miners set out for the diggings as quickly as they could – while their money lasted. Although the stories of gold made it sound easy to make a fortune, the reality was very different. Miners worked long and hard in difficult and sometimes dangerous conditions, with no certainty of success. Writer and miner William Howitt described gold digging as, 'a lottery, with far more blanks than prizes,' and many who had travelled half way around the world returned home disappointed. At the same time prices on the diggings were ruinous – not least for the gold licences each miner had to buy. Disappointment fuelled resentment. Agitation against the gold licences spread throughout the diggings in 1854, culminating in the short-lived, but bloody Eureka Stockade. Chinese miners were also targeted by European diggers resentful of their patient success and dogged perseverance.

*Old Treasury Building, 26 May 2019*

### 2- Australian Opal

While there may be other zones beyond Australia that have established opal mining operations, Australia boasts the world's most brilliant supply of these fine and exquisite gemstones.

The essence of an opal is reflective of its birthplace

There is a reason that Australia is synonymous with the precious gemstone we know as opal.

Australian opal fields lie where inland seas once did. The rugged and desolate Australian outback provided unique conditions for silica-rich water to seep deep into the Earth's cracks, initiating the epically long process of opal formation.

When you buy an opal in its glorious and final polished state, take note that your gemstone has quite literally been millions of years in the making.

An opal is classified as 'precious' when it exhibits a unique and hypnotic play of colours – visible from all angles. A 'common' opal lacks this impressive colour dance. Australia and Ethiopia are the most competitive markets for producing opals with distinct colour play.

Australian precious opals are renowned for possessing the highest commercial value. By design, they have a tightly packed molecular structure. In contrast, Ethiopian opals are porous in nature, making their inherent structure less durable than a natural and untreated Australian opal.

In an attempt to match the brilliance of Australian precious opals, Ethiopian opals are often chemically treated to boost their colour intensity.

Due to Australia's vast landscape and geographic diversity, it is not sufficient to categorise all opals from Australia as 'Australian opals'. Instead, there are six varieties of precious opals we can identify.

*Opal Minded, [www.Opalminded.com](http://www.Opalminded.com)*

3- Edwin Stockqueler, Australian Gold Rush, 1855



4- Australian Opals (photo)

