

Barossa Goldfield: a historical snapshot

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The Barossa Goldfield, located 10 km southeast of Gawler in South Australia, produced about 50 000 oz of gold between 1868 and 1871 (Fig. 1). Within a week of the first discoveries of alluvial gold in October 1868 about 2000 people had rushed the area. At its peak in late 1868 the rush attracted up to 4000 people, the largest gold rush in South Australia's history. The township of Barossa was quickly established consisting of a narrow lane of stores and hotels. The rush was over by 1871 but the township survived until the 1950s.

Very little has been published about the Barossa Goldfield to date. The newspaper clippings and pictures below provide a glimpse of the untold story. The South Australian Mining History Group intends to document the story on its website in the longer term.



Barossa township, 1869. This is a southwest view up Spike Gully near the original discovery site. (Photo 034379)

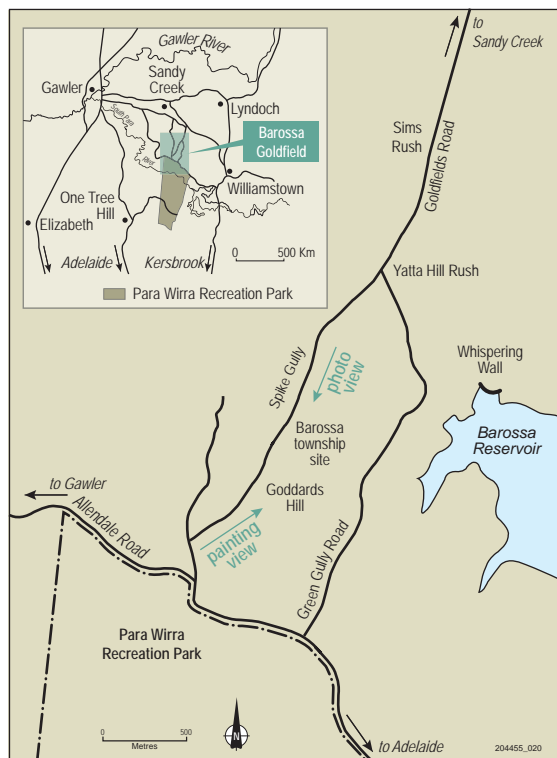


Figure 1 Locality map of the Barossa Goldfield.

The New Barossa Gold Diggings

... On Thursday, Sept. 24, a party, including Mr. Job Harris, of the Sandy Creek Hotel, Mr. Gower, and others, desirous of obtaining a gold field nearer home than the Long Gully, set out to explore in the unsold land beyond the Cockatoo Valley. Quietly they set to work in a spot where from previous knowledge or the ground they had reason to look for the colour of gold at all events. They had not been at work many days before they had accumulated a nice little show of nuggets and dust. The first hole was sunk some thirteen feet before their operations attracted much notice. On Friday, Oct. 2, a second party, including Mr. Potter, Mr. Springbett, and others, appeared upon the scene, and soon the rush began in good earnest. Before sunset forty had found their way to the field, and next day the number had been about trebled. ...

South Australian Register, 13 October 1868, p. 4.

The Goldfields, Barossa

... I have just returned from my third visit to the diggings, and am surprised at the progress made since Wednesday. Then there was one store, Mr. Bevilaqua's, on the reserve; now the place has all the appearance of a thriving fair. Stores and booths, &c, are springing up as if by magic. There were few tents on my last visit; now they are dotting the hillsides and flats in all directions. Indeed, when I consider that a week ago the fact that gold had been found in that lonely spot was known to but a few, and that to-day there could not have been less than 1,500 to 2,000 diggers working in the main creek and its branches, through the whole length of which they are finding gold, independently of the number prospecting in every direction, the whole thing seems the effect of enchantment. The diggings extend already nearly three miles in a direct line. ...

South Australian Register, 12 October 1868, p. 3.



William John Peterswald, Warden of Goldfields 1868–73. The warden's role was incorporated into the Department of Mines when it was created in 1894. (Photo 412996; courtesy of the State Library of South Australia, B 23362)

Barossa Goldfield

... Mr. Peterswald has been invested meantime with power to act as temporary Warden, and is engaged on the gold-field in issuing licences - the number obtained in town previously being only about 40 - defining claims, and adjusting disputes, if any of the later have arisen. Acting upon the advice of the Surveyor-General, the Government decided to issue new regulations, which we have authority for stating it is intended shall appear in this afternoon's Gazette. These rules will apply to both our gold-fields, and be in force in the event of further discoveries elsewhere. Provision will thus be made for the appointment of Commissioners of Gold Fields to act in the respective localities instead of retaining the objectionable centralizing system provided for in the present code, which, if strictly enforced, would require all licences to be obtained from the Crown Lands Office, and would fail to provide efficient machinery for the settlement of disputes as to claims, besides omitting other necessary provisions. ...

South Australian Register, 8 October 1868, p. 2.

Barossa [sic] diggings, South Australia. Reproduction of a painting by Albert Cooke published c. 1869 in the Illustrated Australian News for Home Readers. The painting captures the view from near the northern boundary of Para Wirra Recreation Park looking northeast down Spike Gully. In the distance is Goddards Hill. It shows in great detail the activities on the field about 12 months after the initial discovery when shaft sinking was required to extract gold from ancient river channels buried by up to 30 m of sand and gravel. Near the bottom centre is a small building flying a Union Jack which most likely is the office of the Warden of Goldfields (see inset). (Photo 040228)

