

**THE FIRST GOLD
DISCOVERIES
IN NEW ZEALAND**

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The First Gold Discoveries in New Zealand by R. A. Loughnan

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R. A. LOUGHNAN

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FIRST GOLD DISCOVERIES
IN
NEW ZEALAND.

By R. A. LOUGHNAN.

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It was, however, not only to the sleepers of Ballarat and Bendigo that the welcome sound of the miner's pick went out in 1851 as an awakener and a harbinger of good tidings. Within a few months (October, 1852) of the announcement of the discoveries of Hargreaves the sound of the pick and the shovel and the all-convincing tin dish was heard on the shores of the Hauraki Gulf, and before the end of the year Charles Ring delighted the public of Auckland City by producing some gorgeous specimens of golden quartz and sundry grains of remarkably fine gold. Enterprising men were located in the northern city in those days, and these, forming a committee, had offered a reward for discoveries in New Zealand similar to those which Hargreaves had made in the mother colony. There is more than meets the eye here; for in some other parts of the colony the gold-discoveries were viewed with suspicion and a sense of disquiet, much as the totalisator and the consultation are viewed nowadays by some people, who see in the race-track the demoralisation of man and the downfall of that steady industry which alone can assure the fortune of nations. Charles Ring proclaimed the locality of his finds—Kapanga Stream, Coromandel Peninsula—and claimed the reward of £500 offered by the enterprising committee aforesaid.

Very soon three thousand miners were on the ground, to the amazement of the Maori tribes. Some years before these had sent a war-party to overawe the pakeha, of whose rising city on the shores of the Waitemata they had conceived a jealous suspicion. The great war-canoes had swung close to the beach, and some of their men, landing, had danced a war-dance in approved fashion. Before they could do anything more practical these warriors discovered that the guns of a frigate which happened to be in the harbour were trained upon them, and saw unmistakable signs of preparation among the artillerymen on the shore above their heads. They therefore lost no time in re-embarking, and were very soon back at home safe and sound and vowing vengeance.

Imagine their feelings when the thought of the mining invasion occurred to them.

But Governor Wynyard was well advised, and things were done properly. The rights of the Maori owners were respected, and their feelings in no way surprised or outraged. These owners were the Ngatipaōa, the Ngatiwhanaunga, the Ngatimaru, and the Ngatitama-tera. "The claims of these people," wrote Mr. Commissioner Mackay, who was charged with the important duty of preliminary investigation, "extend over the country on the east and west shores of the Hauraki Gulf, and as far south as Katikati on the east coast, and to Te Aroha Mountain and Waitoa in the valley of the Thames. Their lands are very much intermixed, and there is hardly a tribal boundary which has not been the subject of dispute for some generations past." In addition, he named other tribes who claimed to share with the original owners for each and all of the various reasons familiar to all who understand the mysterious subject of Native-land titles. All these tribes were glaring at the beach, expecting every moment the arrival of the gold-hunting pakeha.

The pakeha arrived in the person of the Acting-Governor, Colonel Wynyard, Bishop Selwyn, and the Chief Justice, together with the usual official train.

On the Maori side the most respected and influential of the chiefs was the venerable Te Taniwha, of the Ngatimaru. In his boyhood he had seen the arrival of Captain Cook and had been taken on board the ship of that navigator, of whom he in after-years was wont to speak with the greatest respect and appreciation. Since then he had seen the arrival of the colonising pakeha, and had joined with the more enlightened of his brethren in wishing the accomplished stranger to stay in the land of the Maori. The old chief was, of course, consistent on this occasion of the opening-up of the first goldfield. "It is well," he said to his people. "These are the tokens of peace: the presence of the Governor, the Bishop, and the Chief Justice. Ye who are here acknow-

ledge these as your parents. My children, be not sad. It is well: all is well. The messengers of God, of truth, stand there, even the bone of that which is good. The arrangements are left to you, O Governor, the Bishop, and the Chief Justice!"

This prevailed with a certain number, more particularly of the tribe of the Ngstimaru, although there were irreconcilables even in those days before the King movement and the outbreak of the great Waikato War. These stood out against any arrangement at all. But enough was agreed to for the opening of the country between Cape Colville and Kauaeranga, or the district which came to be at once known as Shortland. Within that country the pakeha was to be permitted to seek for gold on the following terms: Payment for under 500 men, £600; from 500 to 1,000 men, £900; from 1,000 to 1,500 men, £1,200; from 1,500 to 2,000 men, £1,500. In addition to the above, a sum of 2s. was to be paid for every license issued to miners. There were other details, but they are immaterial; suffice it that three thousand men began work on those terms.

Compare this moderation with the charges on the goldfields of Victoria which so excited the ire of the diggers of the early days. In October, 1853, twelve months after the above arrangement with the Maori owners of part of the Hauraki, the Victorian charge for a license was £2 per month. Here is an instance:—

GOLD LICENSE.

Colony of Victoria.

No. 38.

5th October, 1853.

THE bearer (G. Preshaw) having paid the sum of Two POUNDS on account of the General Revenue of the Colony, I hereby license him to mine or dig for Gold, or exercise and carry on any other trade or calling on such Crown Lands within the Colony of Victoria as shall be assigned to him for these purposes by any one duly authorised in that behalf.

The License to be in force until the MONTH OF NOVEMBER, and no longer.

P. C. CRESPIGNY,

Commissioner.

The new goldfield at Shortland did not, however, progress according to expectations. It was not a poor man's field at all. The spirits were only half awakened, and while the miners were toiling in discomfiture two causes supervened to take their attention away from the Hauraki as a field of fortune. Firstly, the Maori people began to get unsettled and the shadow of impending war fell over the land. Then news came that elsewhere in New Zealand, where the Maori did not think of troubling, the imprisoned spirits of the golden world had heard the advancing picks and had come out to meet the liberating miner with far more alacrity. The field of Shortland was almost abandoned for these reasons. In his report to that effect Mr. Mackay, sketching the other gold-finds of this colony, gives us the chronological order thereof: "The discovery of alluvial deposits by Mr. William Lightband at Aorere (Collingwood) in 1857; by Mr. John Rochfort, in the Buller River, in the Province of Nelson, in 1859-60; and by Mr. Gabriel Read in 1861 at Tuapeka, in the Province of Otago, in consequence of which the southern goldfields offered attractions to the mining population of Australia and this colony, and tended to prevent the further development of the auriferous wealth of the Province of Auckland."

The scene, therefore, naturally shifts to the Nelson District. Let us take a look at the imprisoned spirits listening for the sound of the liberator pick. We can do so easily, for Hochstetter lifted the veil of rock with the lever of science some years later—it was in 1859, when the Provincial Government of Nelson gave him the commission to inquire into the secret of the hidden wealth of that favoured region. We quote from his report of that year:—

The mode of occurrence of gold in the Province of Nelson is quite different from that in the Colony of Victoria. The Australian gold was originally derived from quartz reefs passing through fossiliferous strata of Silurian age, which are but very little metamorphosed, and the gold is obtained partly as alluvial gold from deposits of gold-drift ("washdirt" of the miner).

partly from the quartz veins themselves, by crushing the quartz, and subsequent washing and amalgamating processes. Upon the Nelson goldfields the gold has been originally derived from quartz veins, which occur in non-fossiliferous crystalline (or metamorphic) schists. The mica-schist and clay-slate zone, which in a breadth of fifteen to twenty miles includes principally the Anatoki and Haupiri Ranges, contains in its quartz veins and beds the matrix of the gold. The gradual denudation of the mountains, continued through countless ages, has produced masses of detritus, which were deposited on the declivities of the mountains in the shape of conglomerates, and in the river-valleys in the shape of gravel and sand. In this process of deposition, carried on under the influence of running waters, Nature herself has effected a washing operation, during which the heavier particles of gold combined in the mountain detritus collected themselves at the bottom of the deposits and close to this source, so that they can now be obtained by digging and washing. The conglomerates accumulated on the slopes of the mountains are the proper field for the "dry diggings," while from the gravel and sand of the beds of rivers and smaller streams the gold is obtained by "wet diggings."

The latter were those first worked. Writing some years later,* Dr. (now Sir James) Hector pointed out that Professor Hutton attributed the rich deposits found at Golden Gully to the denudation of the schists on which they rested, and claimed the schist as the source of the heavy deposits of quartz pebbles that formed the auriferous wash; whilst Mr. Herbert Cox, the Assistant Geologist, was equally explicit in his opinion that the drifts were not of a local character.

The progress of the "liberator pick" on this Nelson field was at first slow. Gold was found at the Moutere and along the shores of Massacre Bay soon after the discoveries at Coromandel in 1853. Two or three years afterwards the late Mr. W. T. L. Travers, F.L.S., that strenuous spirit who was ever in the van of exploration and scientific research, made a trip to the Takaka, and returned with some fine quartz specimens. But in those days what was quartz? Men had not awakened to anything more than the chances of the pick and shovel.

* "Geological Survey Reports," 1890-91.