

GOLD HUNTERS ADVENTURES.

We stuck to Wombat Flat for from four or five weeks, averaging about an ounce of gold a day between us, but as we concluded the chances of larger finds were rather slim, we made up our minds to seek for pastures new. The wet season was fast approaching and we knew the rain would inundate the Flat so as to prevent underground working, and there was little of what could be called dry diggings amongst the Jim Crow ranges, during the rainy season. Business was dull at Gisborne, and McDonald had met with some Kilmore relatives, who wished him to join them, in a gold mining and prospecting expedition, so we decided to close out the concern.

With this view I left Rose to do the best he could in gold mining in some of the shallow sinkings, and having borrowed his revolver, I started in company with an acquaintance by the name of Bryant, who was going to Melbourne, so by taking a short cut across to Kyneton, we managed to reach Gisborne the same night. This was the only trip in Australia when I over carried a revolver, and I feel satisfied that I kept out of more scrapes by not having one, than I should otherwise. McDonald left the next day, and I never met him again. Poor fellow, he died a few months later in the vicinity of Creswicks' Creek, from inflammation, caused by dysentery.

I immediately took an inventory of stock and placed the disposition of everything in the hands of a Mr. James, an accountant, at Gisborne.

I had intended to return with Bryant, who was to call for me in a week, but when he got along, I found it would take me another day or two to settle my affairs, so he decided to go on. Not being familiar with the country, he kept the regular road instead of taking the short cut at Kyneton, and when within a few miles of the Jim Crow, was "stuck up" and relieved of his cash by a gang of bushrangers, who happened to be operating there.

On my return Rose and I spent a few days puttering round the diggings, but without much success, and then we heard glowing accounts from the Blackwood Ranges, which were only a few miles distant in a direct line, but owing to an impenetrable growth of "scrub" as it is termed, we had to go round a distance of some 25 or 30 miles.

Several of our digger friends were pulling up stakes for Blackwood, so we concluded to do the same, and early next morning had our awags packed, and started.

A young Englishman by the name of Meacham, attached himself to our party, and stopping only to make a kettle of tea and dispose of that together with some bread and sardines, we reached Blackwood and Golden Point just in time to put up our tent, and get our blankets under cover before dark. Blackwood is the wettest place I ever struck in Australia. During that winter it rained on an average every other day.

Our first night was one of the most uncomfortable I ever spent, as it came on raining and blowing a gale. Our tent was sheltered from the wind to some extent by the high ranges, but the rain came down the side of the hill in torrents, and we soon had a good sized rivulet running through the tent. Sleep was out of the question, and we were pretty well soaked into the bargain, for the stream from the hillside had come in with a rush.

Golden Point contained 3 or 4 stores and several miners tents, and every one was lighted up that hadn't blown down, so we succeeded in getting a bottle of brandy to counteract the effects of the wetting, and prepared to adapt ourselves to the situation as best we could.

The worst of the gale was over but the rain continued day and night for over a week, raising the water in the creek several feet and doing a great amount of damage by filling in creek workings and carrying off tubs, cradles and gold wash-

ing machinery. The limits of Blackwood so far as gold had been discovered, was at that time somewhat circumscribed, but on that memorable night no less than seventeen persons were killed by falling trees, principally at Red Hill, about half a mile from where we camped.

Three men had, like ourselves, entered the diggings that evening, and pitched their tent. During the night a tall iron bark tree fell lengthwise of the tent, killing the one who lay in the centre, without injuring his mates.

For some days there was a busy time on Red Hill in cutting down the trees in this vicinity of stores and diggers camps.

The Australian axe is an article about as wide as an ordinary morticing chisel, an ugly, clumsy looking tool with a straight handle like that of a sinking pick, and it was rather amusing to see those who were not accustomed to the American axe operating these apologies for an axe in cutting down a tree.

The universal plan was to cut all round it, and then the chances were that the tree would fall any way, but the one wanted. If a tree leaned so as to fall naturally over a tent, the first move was to send some one up it to attach a rope, and then half a dozen would tail on to it, while the axeman would whack away for dear life, just about the time the tree was half cut, those who had hold of the rope would be pulling away for all they were worth, and when nearly cut through and they should have been pulling they would be holding on to the slack of the rope, so that in four cases out of five, the tree would fall on the very object they wanted to keep it clear of.

An acquaintance of mine by the name of Malcolm who had been an Ottawa lumberman, with his American axe, had all he could do for two or three days in cutting down leaning trees, not much larger than a stove pipe at £2, or \$10 per tree, and it used to astonish the natives to see how easily he could swing a leaning tree, that it would have taken a dozen of them to fall with any degree of safety.

This Malcolm had the most powerful voice for what is termed "hollering," of any man I ever heard, and by holding his hands over his mouth could get off a screech like the compound whistle of a locomotive, which could be heard a couple of miles.

Afterwards on Simmons Reef, the Vigilance Committee used to avail themselves of Malcolm's screech provider, and a certain code of numbers, to summon its members, when their services were required at night, and that unearthly sound would actually drown the sound of the half dozen stamp mills near the foot of the reef. It was almost blood curdling to be awakened by it, and the sound would be prolonged according to the nature of the signal for over half a minute.

As the water was too high in the creek, we were unable to tackle any of the creek claims at Golden Point, so after spending the day in looking round for a desirable position, Rose and I decided to locate at Red Hill, being the driest and most central position. So we left Meacham to look after tent and traps and as we had concluded it would be advisable to have a comfortable place for winter, we went to work cutting down trees and cutting them into lengths for a log hut. This it took us a week to build and cover with canvas. We also constructed a chimney of logs, stoning and claying about four feet in depth, for a fire place. All day we worked in the rain, and at night laid down before the fire in our wet clothes.

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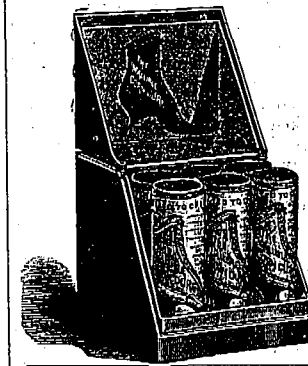
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