

Gold Hunters' Adventures.

In sinking our shaft we had to work through about a foot and a-half of cement, which took us over a day and a half. As powder has no effect in this cement, the only alternative is to hammer it into a powder with a hammer-headed pick, occasionally managing to loosen a pebble so as to get it out without pulverizing, but taken altogether it is a very tedious process.

It took Colclough and I a fortnight to sink the hole fifty-five feet, and we bottomed on a sloping hard slate with barely the color of gold in the bottom of the shaft. By working up the slope we got some coarse gold on a floating or false bottom which seemed to overlie the true bottom, but hardly enough to pay us for working it.

A party by the name of Weston, and his chain, were working the claim adjoining and just above ours, and with Weston I had some little previous acquaintance. A day or two after we had struck bottom he came to me and said "You've got a pretty good thing, haven't you?" "Not more than enough to pay tucker," I said.

"I don't understand that," said Weston. "We have a good thing, and from the way the lead is running, I should judge that it would pass through your claim within two or three feet of the shaft."

On the strength of this information I commenced tunnelling down the dip or incline and at the distance of nine feet from the shaft struck a gutter of some 8 or 10 inches in depth, out which I took a panfull of wash-dirt, which yielded three quarters of an ounce, or \$15. With wash dirt rich as that the gold should be readily seen in it, but strange to say this gold had an oxidized appearance, so that until we had washed the stuff we didn't know that there was any gold in it.

I then carried the tunnel at right angles working up towards Weston's claim, and that side of our claim found that the pay dirt ran three feet in depth, and averaged a penny weight or \$1 to every bucket of dirt. The current by the agency of which the gold had been originally deposited had washed against a reef at this point, which accounted for the unusual depth of wash dirt.

Finding that the gutter was running towards another claim below us upon which a shaft had been sunk, but not drifted or tunnelled, and which had been abandoned, we added four more of the members of the Lancashire Band to our party, making six in all, and part of us took possession of the adjoining claim.

One of the party commenced tunnelling in the direction of where I supposed the lead would pass, but failed to strike the gutter. Knowing that it ought to be found between the shaft and the end of the tunnel, I went down the shaft, and after picking into the clay slate and pipe-clay bottom, found that he had crossed the gutter on a false or floating bottom; so now we had the lead or gutter through two claims, and although not so rich as the first claim, it paid us very well, and for several weeks the share of each partner per week was over \$100. Every Saturday afternoon we dried our gold on an old shovel over the fire, blew out all the sand, and sold it, dividing the proceeds. In the first claim referred to, I had run two parallel tunnels, leaving a wall of about a foot in width between them. After having otherwise worked out the claim, I knew there was gold enough in this wall to pay for taking it out, if I could do so without going to the expense of lumbering or propping. So at it I went, and had worked along some seven or eight feet, lying on my side with my legs underneath the hanging wall, when without any warning this hanging wall broke off, and as I afterwards ascertained, formed one arch from the outside of each tunnel.

My light was extinguished, and my driving pick catching above my knees, threw the whole weight of this mass of earth, over a ton weight, on this particular spot. One of my partners, Charles Mitten, was in the tunnel at the time, and made

quick time for the shaft, completely skinning his shins in doing so.

After some seconds I induced Charlie to come back into the tunnel and light a candle, but his hand shook so, and he was so frightened, that it took him some time to do so. I then saw that the roof of the tunnel was arched, as I have described, and that there was no immediate danger of any more earth falling, but the mass lying across my pick handle was paralyzing me, and I thought every second my legs would snap. I could manage to get in a half sitting position, so that with a pick handle I was able to take off a little of the strain, and finally with the assistance of Charlie, who had got hold of a lever or crow bar, we managed to raise the unbroken mass of gravel, so that I drew my legs from underneath, but it was fully half an hour before I got the circulation sufficiently restored to enable me to reach the shaft. Charlie wound me up by the windlass, and for a couple of days I laid by. Then we cut some props and cap pieces, timbered the tunnel, and went to work removing the rest of the wall, but didn't get enough to pay us for the extra expense involved in timbering.

After working out these claims Charlie and I spent a few days in going into the abandoned claims which we knew had paid well, and knocking out the walls and pillars left to support the roof. We managed to do this by changing the position of the props and timbers previously used, and succeeded in making good wages.

On one spot we took over thirty dollars by pounding with the head of a pick a space of about a foot square on the hard slate to which the gold appeared to be cemented.

On Donkey Hill was a shaft which had been sunk by Hargreave, the original discoverer of gold in Australia, but this was some rods distant from any lead which had been discovered while I was there.

Several accidents occurred at these diggings while I was there from parties walking in to deserted shafts in the dark, as from the side from which the windlass was worked no headings were piled; and after the windlass was removed the first intimation one had of danger was by putting his foot into it.

I helped to haul one man out of a 50 feet shaft, who went down with an axe in his hand without striking the sides of the shaft, and was saved by 4 or 5 feet of water in the bottom. He hadn't a scratch, and was careful enough to tie his axe to the rope and send it up before being pulled up himself. Had the axe slipped loose his chances would have been mighty slim.

We pulled out another man one morning who had lain at the bottom of the shaft all night, and was bruised and maimed for life.

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