

Blackmail and free labour

The local farmers took advantage of the Chinese fear of being delayed in reaching the goldfields due to their avoidance of the poll tax. The farmers would stop the cavalcade and require the Chinese to work for them under the threat of notifying the authorities. They built the Muntham Dam, which is a huge embankment across a gully to dam a freshwater creek situated about half way between Casterton and the Lodge Corner. Edward Henty of Muntham Estate was more liberal. He did not take full advantage of the Chinese labour, as he paid them £1 a week. It is not clear though whether this was paid to each individual or the group. The Chinese built this dam by hand using wheelbarrows, picks and small shovels¹. The locals report that the dam holds water now as well as it did when it was first built². *Some buildings, still serving as homes and woolsheds in the locality, were built by Chinese craftsmen "conscripted" by squatters and contractors on the threat of exposure*³. They built the *Chetwynd* station homestead out of mud bricks, but unfortunately the Soldier Settlement Commission demolished this building after World War 2. The goldseekers also constructed the old ironstone woolshed at *Mundarra* station, then owned by the Armytage family. This building is renowned for its magnificent workmanship. The Chinese built the sheep wash at *Mt Surgeon* station near Dunkeld as well as a long stone fence. The fence is a magnificent piece of craftsmanship being about 3 feet high and 18 inches wide. It stretches up the side of a gully high up in the mountain to stop the property's sheep from straying to the mountains. Leo Dark recalls *in records of 1862 it is mentioned that 14 Chinese were waylaid at Fulham Station, near a waterhole, resting on their way to the goldfields. They were told they could stay there as long as built some stone houses. After the buildings were finished, strong doors were put on them, and they locked the Chinese up at night and kept them working on Fulham. Fulham is a sister station of Mt Sturgeon and was owned by the same family*⁴. At Warrock Homestead, Gavin Larkins says that two of the homestead's 33 buildings, the cottage formerly used as a joining carpentry workshop and the bathhouse adjoining the main house, appear to have been built with a Chinese influence. The cottage has Asian style fretwork on the window hoods and the roof of the bathhouse is reminiscent of a Chinese pagoda roof⁵.

Discovering gold at Ararat

On 9 May 1857, while on their trek to the Bendigo, a local police census recorded that a party of 900 Chinese were fossicking in the Kangaroo Range at Cathcart near Pinky Point and about 6 miles from where Ararat is today. Gold had been discovered at Pinky Point in 1854, and by 1857 the area was heavily mined by Europeans. When the Chinese arrival was discovered, the Europeans ran them off the goldfields. Stories are told that as the Chinese retreated over Mount Ararat and stopped for a midday rest, they discovered some rough gold in seepage near a stream⁶. These Chinese, from the Canton province, had stumbled on the richest, shallow, alluvial goldfield in Australia's history⁷. The find had an official production over the first six months of 158,221 ounces or 5 tonnes. The Chinese called the discovery, the Canton Lead. The gold lead was 60-90 metres deep and in some places up to 800 metres wide and 3.2 kms long.

¹ *Chinese Casterton History*, leaflet produced by the Casterton Shire Council for the Robe to Bendigo Walk on 31 March 2001, pages not numbered

² *Hamilton Spectator*, 3rd November 1990, page 11

³ *Back to Edenhope*, February 1958, page 7

⁴ *The Chinese Invasion*, Transcript of a tape of a meeting of the Dunkeld and District Historical museum held on 5 November 1990, pages not numbered

⁵ *Welcome to Warrock Homestead – 1843*, brochure published by Warrock Homestead, Warrock, Victoria, pages not numbered

⁶ *Chinese in Ararat: Canton Lead Gold Discovery*, Ararat and District Historical Society Inc., pages 2, 3

⁷ *ADHS Newsletter*, No. 200, March 2002, Avoca District Historical Society, Victoria, pages not numbered

Although it was an unwritten rule that the finder of a gold discovery had to declare the discovery by flying a flag and marking his claim, the Chinese were hesitant after the hostility of the Europeans at Cathcart. The story goes that they kept their gold strike quiet for a week. However with the need to buy provisions, a small group went to Cathcart to make the purchases using some of the gold they had discovered, as currency. The Europeans made the obvious deduction that the Chinese had discovered gold, and followed them back to the find.

Trouble on the Ararat Goldfields

By 19 May 1857 the goldrush at the Canton Lead was in full swing with the Chinese occupying the prime sites on the goldfields, which seems to verify the reports of them making the discovery. Police Inspector Winch estimated that 3,000 ounces were mined in the first week and it was reported that six Chinese mined 130 pounds from one claim. By 6 June there were 6,000 miners on the goldfield. On 8 June, a further 2,000 Chinese arrived overland from Robe and the Europeans began to get hostile as they were worried that there might not be enough gold to go around. There had been trouble for the Chinese at all Australian goldfields and this was to be no exception. On 8 June about 20 European rowdies attacked the Chinese miners at Ararat. The Chinese were bashed, their belongings were stolen, their tents were burned and they were thrown off their claims. A few Europeans did try to help them. The Resident Warden of Avoca, Charles C Dowling, reported on 9 June 1857, *I have the honour to inform you that a serious attack was last night made on the Chinese by the Europeans on the goldfield. The whole of one Chinese camp was burnt down and a considerable amount of property destroyed besides a number of Chinamen who were robbed during the row of large sums of money and gold*⁸.

The rowdies were arrested and charged with offences against the Chinese. They were eventually found guilty and sentenced to hard labour on the roads. To mine legally, all miners had to pay a miner's right of £2 per quarter. This gave miners voting rights but the Chinese miners were not given this right. In addition all Chinese had to pay a residence tax of £1 a year to have a residence ticket, and also pay a protection fee of £1. Following the conviction of the rowdies, the Chinese were allowed to return to their claims if they could show proof of claim by producing their residence ticket. Those with residence tickets were compensated for their losses which was paid out of the funds accumulated from the poll tax that they had walked from Robe to avoid. Those who did not have their residence tickets had to forfeit their claims and necessity forced them to sell their mining equipment at pitifully low prices to the very Europeans who had jumped their claims.

Mining boom

By 11 June, the population at the Canton Lead field had risen to 10,000 miners, half of whom were Chinese. Water was beginning to be in short supply as there were only a series of small creeks that flowed into Ararat, with the nearby Hopkins River often drying up in summer. The population was continuing to rise, and the Ballarat Star reported 4 days later, on 15 June, that a further 2,000 miners were on the field and the Chinese had retained the best ground. Five days later on 20 June, the population had grown again, and was estimated between 15,000 and 30,000. The gold proved to be not as plentiful as first thought and the goldfields could not provide a living for all the miners. This was despite the cost of living being very low through the cheap cost of provisions.

The Chinese had a fear of earth demons so that they were scared to go underground and deep mine as the Europeans did. They fossicked for gold above the ground by using water to wash the soil. They even reworked the tailings on the surface of claims that had been abandoned by Europeans. At Ararat they adopted the practice of surfacing by following the seam of gold and digging an open cut as deep as 40-

⁸ Dowling, Charles C; believed to be a letter to the Chief Secretary of Victoria believed to be in the Public Records Office of Victoria, reference 57/103-A4381, page unknown

70 feet and washing the dirt as they extracted it. The seam contained gold to the density of 9 inches to 2 feet and the dirt that was washed over 3 ounces of gold to the bucketload. The richest patches where gold was heaviest yielded 20-25 ounces to the bucketload⁹. However as the Chinese had the claims with the richest deposits, they eventually adopted the practice of deep mining to extract the maximum amount of gold. There were some 3,000 payable claims on the Canton Lead. Unlike other Victoria goldfields where the Chinese made up only about 5-10% of the miners on the field, at Ararat they represented half the total population.

⁹ Adcock, WE; *The Gold Rushes of the Fifties*, 1912, Cole, Melbourne, Victoria, pages unknown