

Crossing the border

After leaving Penola, the group would travel to *Bogalara Homestead*, sometimes via Glenroy, where they would stop at the *Inverness Inn*, which was licensed to a person named McKinnon who was originally from RobeTown¹. There is still some sort of marker where the Bogalara Homestead used to stand. The Chinese then travelled to *Tallengower Homestead*, which was an outstation for the Edgar family of Pine Hill, Harrow. It stood on a hill overlooking Gray's Crossing not far from where Power's Creek flowed into the Glenelg River². During the dry months, the Chinese would cross the Glenelg River at Gray's Crossing. Their route would then be through *Chetwynd Station*, *Wando Dale Station*, near the town of Wando Vale, and finally through *Koolomert Station* which was 8 miles from Harrow or Coleraine and also owned by the Edgar Family. They would then join the well established track to Ballarat³. It is likely they travelled via *Warrock Homestead* between *Chetwynd Station* and *Wando Dale Station* as there are Chinese influences in some of the buildings and stories of the Chinese having camped there. During the wet months they travelled over higher ground to avoid swamp areas⁴.

When the Glenelg River was too high to cross at Gray's Crossing, their journey took them on to Casterton and to the pub across the Glenelg River. The punt was owned and operated by McKinley, the proprietor of *McKinley's Inn*. This hotel has been rebuilt after a fire and still stands although it is now called the *Glenelg Hotel*. The continued up the Wannon River to just North of Hamilton at the property known as *The Grange*. A couple of days walk from there they turned off North East to Dunkeld onto Mount William and then finally to either Ararat or Ballarat while some continued straight on to Bendigo through Castlemaine⁵.

There is some speculation that the Chinese travelled through Cavendish and then trekked through The Grampians and Halls Gap to Ararat due to the winter floods on the plains on the other side. The Chinese used to carry wooden "bows" across their shoulders to carry water or heavy loads. Norm Reid reports that *I was told that bows were found in the bush in The Grampians either abandoned or lost... Apparently if the weather was right they would cut through The Grampians*⁶. It may seem strange that the Chinese travelled from station to station, rather than town to town, however in the early days there were few townships and provisions such as sheep were available from these properties. They were led along the bullock trails, which were basically trade routes running between the stations and inns. So many Chinamen used the summer route that they left behind them a virtual road that became an important communication link between Penola and the Chetwynd area for many years⁷. The length of the trip from Guichen Bay to Ballarat took as long as five weeks and four days, and as little as three weeks. The Port Phillip Herald reported *one hundred and sixty-four have landed from a vessel lately wrecked in Guichen Bay, arrived in Ballarat yesterday after three weeks overland journey*⁸. This is likely to have been a party of Chinese from the shipwrecked *Phaeton*.

Chinese travelling the roads

¹ Bermingham, Kathleen; *The Fourth Eleven Tales of Robe*, 1973, page 26

² The Neighbours "*MacKinnon*", www.users.chariot.net.au/tucker/hope/neighbours_mackinnon.htm

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

⁴ *Argus*, 21 April 1857, page 5

⁵ Rolls, Eric; *Sojourners; Flowers & the Wide Sea*, 1992, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland, page 137

⁶ *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

⁷ *Hamilton Spectator*, 3 November 1990, page 11

⁸ *Port Phillip Herald*, 4 March 1857, page unknown

John Myers recalls that his grandfather, Angus McKinnon, who was the mailman between Penola and Guichen Bay during the 1857 invasion, *had vivid memories of "all the roads" being crowded with Chinese going to the goldfields*⁹. The reports of observers at the time certainly paint a bizarre picture that could not go without notice. *On my homeward journey (from Wickcliffe to Wando Dale) I was continuously passed by a curious cavalcade going in the opposite direction. There were twenty to thirty miles of Chinamen in single file, each with the proverbial two baskets and each one going to the diggings. As I passed each man, he said what was supposed to be "Ballarat" but sounded more like "Balrat" which was pretty monotonous after the twenty-fifth mile. It rings in my ears when I think of it*¹⁰. Others described these processions of Chinese as *winding across the plain like a long, black mark*¹¹. They travelled up to 35 kms each day¹². Each carried a long bamboo pole of up to 5'11" when they were only about 4' to 4'6" tall themselves. They carried the pole over one shoulder, weighed down on each end with baskets carrying loads that could total up to 35 pounds¹³. This load represented the Chinaman's entire belongings including bedding, cooking utensils, picks, spades, cradles, buckets and oil lamps. Dressed in blue, wool lined blouses and wide blue trousers, with parasol hats atop long black pigtailed, they would travel in large groups of up to 700 men in single file. The procession would spread for kilometres as room was needed for each man's shoulder pole. The Chinese travelled together for security, as sometimes *wayside villains would rob defenseless travelers bound to or from the goldfields*¹⁴. They developed a kind of *jog trot* gait that was fast smooth. As they took each step the pole would bend so that the baskets touched the ground, and the rebound of the pole would bounce the load off the ground allowing the Chinaman to move it along. Contemporary observers reported that *to keep in step as they trotted, each man would chant a suitable work or phrase, the most popular being "Ballalat, Ballalat"*¹⁵.

The European's certainly monitored their progress along the different routes. *The Adelaide Times* reported on 4 March 1857, that *during the last few days, 260 Chinese were travelling on the Horsham and Lexton Road, 160 in the Upper Glenelg and a similar number by Casterton and Mt Sturgeon and nearly 300 were crossing the plains between Streatham and Ballarat beside several smaller parties*¹⁶.

A treacherous trek

The Chinese must have suffered unbearable hardship from carrying those heavy loads on such a long journey. A narrative by Father Julian Tenison Woods, an English Catholic Priest, who arrived by ship at Robe and travelled to Penola, indicates that many Chinese were forced to lighten their loads along the way. This must have been heart breaking for them because they had bought the chattels so far. Father Tenison Woods writes about a journey where he encountered the Chinese. *A dreary and melancholy 73 miles ...Both sides of the track were marked by stray articles of clothing or baggage, indicating how like a retreating army, nature had made them abandon their goods one by one. Many of the objects were both*

⁹ *Hamilton Spectator*, 3 November 1990, page 11

¹⁰ Moodie, William; *A Pioneer of Western Victoria*, page 69

¹¹ Chandler, John; *Forty Years in the Wilderness*, 1990, Lochaven Press, Melbourne, Victoria, pages 78-79

¹² Dean, Lois; *Robe's Chinese Connection: Portrait with Background*, Address for the Robe-Bendigo Walk Reenactment, pages not numbered

¹³ Rolls, Eric; *Sojourners; Flowers & the Wide Sea*, 1992, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland, page 117

¹⁴ Cawthorne, Ellen Mary; *The Long Journey*, 1974, Hansen Print, Naracoorte, South Australia, page 11

¹⁵ Unknown publication, Local History Collection, Robe public Library, pages not numbered

¹⁶ *Adelaide Times*, 4 March 1857, pages unknown

*useful and ornamental, but they were too numerous to attract attention and really, the population of the district was then so scattered and so small that there was no one to collect them*¹⁷.

The journey was treacherous, particularly in winter, when many of the Chinese died from the cold or exhaustion. *The Ballarat Star* reported on Monday July 20, 1857, that *an inquest was held into the death of AH TONG aged 22 who arrived at Ballarat from Guichen Bay on Thursday July. Death was from "inflammation of the lungs due to the late inclement weather"*¹⁸. Their ages varied and *The Ballarat Star* reported that the latest arrival of Chinese at Ballarat which included many apparently old men and young boys. These boys, who were only nine or ten, accompanied their fathers and some were orphaned along the journey leaving them with no kin or villager group to look after them. Reports tell of one such boy being found wandering the street of Castlemaine, alone, wearing clothes turned to rags and with unshod and bleeding feet¹⁹.

An unusual diet

Sourcing food continued to be a chore for the Chinese and their diet, methods of acquiring food and cooking both fascinated and horrified the pastoralists they encountered. The head of the party usually undertook to bargain with farmers for the purchase of livestock. The farmers were keen to bargain for the sale of their sheep, as if they refused, some would probably mysteriously disappear. It was observed at the time that this bargaining was done remarkably well. Having paid the price that had been agreed, the head Chinaman would divide the sheep with impartiality amongst his countrymen. Rather than skinning the sheep, the Chinese killed and scalded the sheep. They then plucked the fleece from the skin, in much the same way as one would pluck feathers from a chicken²⁰. The Chinese also ate wombat and kangaroo when they could catch them. Many of them had their diet staple, rice smuggled out from China. James Bonwick reports of *a party of five hundred of the latter (Chinese) having camped the night before Coleraine, cooking their rice in pans over fires laid in small holes scooped in the ground*²¹. However, the bullockies and farmers soon learned that the Chinese had other, even more foreign tastes. William Moodie encountered them and wrote, *they carried their rice, but it was hard to find meat for them and people living along the route had to keep their eyes on their dogs. Their route did not take them past our gate so we had none of them at Wando Dale and our dogs were spared*²². Bullockies also had to be careful to keep their dogs close to them. The Chinese appeared to find young, black dogs and old yellow cats to be the tastiest of this gruesome delicacy²³.

Waylaid by the constabulary

As they travelled, the Chinese lived in fear that they would be caught by the Victorian police as they crossed the border, and forced to pay the poll tax. With such long cavalcades of Chinese journeymen being so visible and recorded, it is a wonder that they were not caught more often. The Chinese generally avoided the established towns, like Hamilton, as they had a greater risk of being arrested. John Sadler, in his recollections of a Victorian Police Officer recalls *it was not until the Chinese reached Hamilton that the police interfered with them. There they were stopped, and payment of tax demanded,*

¹⁷ Clifford, G & G; Lecture; *Ten Years in the Bush 1866 by Julian Tension Woods, Abridged Version*, Penola Historical Selections, Penola, South Australia, pages 40, 41

¹⁸ *Ballarat Star*, Monday July 20, 1857, page unknown

¹⁹ Rolls, Eric; *Sojourners; Flowers & the Wide Sea*, 1992, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland, page 130

²⁰ Cawthorne, Ellen Mary; *The Long Journey*, 1974, Hansen Print, Naracoorte, South Australia, page 11

²¹ Bonwick, James; *Western Victoria Educational Tour*, 1857, page unknown

²² Moodie, William; *A Pioneer of Western Victoria*, page 69

²³ Rolls, Eric; *Sojourners; Flowers & the Wide Sea*, 1992, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland, page 427

but the only answer was “No savee”, and then they were brought before the magistrate. The sentence of two months imprisonment in the Portland Gaol did not seem to disturb them in the least. They camped in the police paddock without guards to look after them, but they never thought of going out of bounds. Thence they were marched to Portland, where they encamped in the reserve for public gardens. This place their enforced labour turned from a wilderness into one of the beauty spots of the south. They never repined, never lost patience, nor did they give a moment’s trouble; and when their sentence expired they marched away for their destination, placid and uncomplaining as if no wrong had been done to them²⁴. It is reported that 51 Chinese were involved in this detention²⁵.

²⁴ Sadler, John; *Recollections of a Victoria Police Officer*, 1973, Penguin Colonial Facsimiles, Blackburn, Victoria, pages 113, 114

²⁵ *The Mount Gambier Standard*, 24 April 1863, page unknown