

# Arrival in Australia

by Lois Krok

Off to the diggings...



from Swanston Street, Melbourne

Ballarat Diggings  
Colony of Victoria  
Australia  
19 November 1853

Dear Father,

We reached Australia safely after 14 long weeks at sea and were glad to disembark at Melbourne. Now we have arrived in Ballarat.

I hardly know where to start telling you about this new world because everything is so different from the Old Country. Everything.

On arriving, we were surprised to see rows of deserted ships anchored in the harbour. We were told their crew had jumped ship and gone looking for gold. Gold was what everybody was talking about, and in the streets we kept hearing the same question: 'Are you going to the diggings?'

Melbourne is a pleasant town with some handsome stone buildings, and the wide streets are busy with carts and wagons pulled by horses or oxen. There were people from Ballarat who had come to Melbourne to spend the fortune they had dug up. They were so rich—they were spending money wildly on all kinds of extravagant luxuries. Perhaps we will soon be just as rich.

Meantime, we made our little bit of cash cover the basic needs for starting life here. We wished we could afford a horse for the journey to Ballarat, but the cheapest we were offered was 20 pounds, far beyond our means. At least we bought a sturdy wheelbarrow to carry our belongings. Then we bought our mining tools—two spades, two picks, steel wedges and a crowbar. Next came a tent, two bedrolls and a supply of tea and sugar.

Lastly, we fitted ourselves out with the right clothes. Diggers all dress the same way—moleskin trousers, blue-striped flannelette shirt, heavy boots and a broad-brimmed hat. So we really looked the part as we set off for Ballarat, walking and wheeling our barrow. Although we had so little, we were better off than some people who landed in Melbourne penniless, and had to sleep on the docks right where the ship dumped them.

I think it about 70 miles to Ballarat but it seemed double that distance, and the track was rough and dusty. We started off at a good pace but were unable to keep it up. Our feet were sore and our legs were aching painfully when we finally limped into Ballarat.

At least we had plenty of company on the way. Some lucky people rode horses, and others actually had canvas-covered drays pulled by oxen. As we travelled, we often heard people say that Ballarat is the richest goldfield in the world. So we have chosen the right place.

Just before we reached Ballarat, a coach with a police **escort** came galloping towards us in a cloud of dust. It was drawn by four horses and was carrying gold from Ballarat to Melbourne. This coach delivers gold to Melbourne regularly. It travels at high speed—changing horses every two hours—because bushrangers make the journey very dangerous. They lie in wait, hiding, then rush out when the coach comes along, and grab the gold. Sometimes they grab the poor coach driver too, and tie him to a tree and leave him to be tormented by flies and mosquitos (of which there are millions). If nobody finds him, he dies of starvation. We saw this very thing. A driver had not been found in time, and all that remained of him was a bony skeleton still tied to a tree. It was a terrible sight. This is a rough, tough country, Papa.

But there is also much good here. Instead of the fog and soot and cold of London, we have warm, clear air. Besides, there is a feeling of excitement and adventure in this young colony. In London, Richard and I would have continued to toil for pitifully small payment. Here, everybody has a chance of digging up gold and building a grand future.

I remain,

Your loving son,

Adam