

Arthur George Shelley at the 25 Mile Camp, 1894-95



Description

This is a black-and-white photograph of Arthur George Shelley, a grazier from Kerang in Victoria. The photograph was taken in 1894-95 at the '25 Mile Camp', 25 miles (40 km) from Coolgardie, Western Australia. Shelley's possessions are scattered around his tent under a gum tree. In the foreground of the picture is his bicycle. In the middle ground is a water tank and his tent. In the background is his horse-drawn cart and two horses for carrying his possessions. An axe and long-handled shovel are leaning against the tree and a billy is on the ground. A waterbag hangs from a branch and a panning dish and bucket are on a table behind the water tank.

Educational value

- This asset provides an example of a typical prospector's camp of the time - the hessian tent in which the prospector slept was erected under a tree for shade, and he cooked outside over an open fire; there were no arrangements for sanitation (descriptions of the time refer to faecal deposits polluting the crowded camps); all the items shown in the photograph were needed for food, shelter and transport in the desert areas of Western Australia and would have been carried in from ports hundreds of kilometres away on the coast (Albany, Esperance Bay or Fremantle).
- It shows one of the prospectors who came to the region in the early days of a gold rush - Arthur George Shelley was originally a grazier in Victoria but came to Western Australia to find gold; he later operated a store and post office with his wife Mary, four daughters and a son; today their descendents total more than 200, most of whom live, or have lived, in Western Australia.
- It shows that Shelley owned a cart and two horses for travel - many prospectors would not have been able to afford these and some would have walked and carried their own possessions; apart from the purchase price, the expense of feeding and watering horses was prohibitive; many first-hand accounts of the



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time mention the high cost of fodder and water, one traveller noting that the horses cost more per week than her bill for staying at the hotel in Coolgardie.

- It refers to the 25 Mile Camp - the camp was named because it was 25 miles (40 km) from Coolgardie, the centre of the WA gold fields; it was to become the town site of Kunanalling after gold was discovered there; the town had a population of 800 at its peak.
- It features a bicycle as a means of transport - the bicycle would have been important to these prospectors, as the mining sites centred around this camp were scattered over 20 km; in waterless terrain a bicycle had the advantage that, unlike a horse, it did not need feeding or watering; cyclists travelled quickly along camel pads (paths hardened by the feet of camels); the Cycle Express Company used bicycles to deliver letters and telegrams.
- It shows a water tank that would have held about 500 litres when filled - Shelley needed to catch rainwater because there was poor water supply to the area; a water tank saved money and guaranteed a safe water supply; Weickardt & Co of Northam used a catchy verse to advertise their tanks as a remedy for water shortage with the bonus of freedom from the fear of typhoid fever; ultimately the need for fresh water in the area led to the construction of the Coolgardie Water Supply Scheme designed by C Y O'Connor, later known as the Golden Pipeline; the bucket and gold-panning dish pictured may have been used for washing.
- It captures an image of one of the 'T'othersiders', the derogatory term for people from the eastern states ('the other side' of Australia) who had travelled to Western Australia hoping to find a fortune in gold - Western Australians in turn were called 'sand groppers'; these terms were used in inflammatory debates about the under-representation of the gold fields in parliament and the issue of federation.

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