

Dryblowing with dishes, c1896



Description

This is a black-and-white print of a miner refining gold-bearing ore using a dryblowing technique that takes advantage of gravity and the high density of gold. It shows a dish of crushed ore being tipped and the rock and sand being poured off carefully into a lower dish. The picture was taken in the diggings and the miner's shaft can be seen behind him, among many piles of spoil. A tent camp is visible in the background. A box with raised lid on legs behind the miner is a dryblowing tray, which was operated on similar principles. The photograph measures 15 cm x 21 cm. The title, number and photographer of the picture are handwritten on the bottom left in the caption: 'Dryblowing With Dishes 172 Dwyer Photo, Kalgoorlie'.

Educational value

- This asset shows a system developed for extracting gold using the action of air to separate out the heavier gold particles, rather than the action of water - water was a scarce and an expensive commodity on the eastern gold fields before the Golden Pipeline opened in 1903, bringing a reliable supply of fresh water.
- It illustrates the process of dryblowing with dishes, sometimes called drypanning - in this process, the prospector held at shoulder height a large dish or pan of material thought to contain gold and gently tilted and shook the pan to allow the material to pour out; as it fell, wind blew away the dust, and the heavier parts, hopefully containing gold, landed in the dish below; the process was repeated often.
- It shows a dryblowing machine in the background - the techniques of drypanning and machine dryblowing were often used in conjunction with one another; the dryblowing machine allowed larger quantities of material to be separated and once the heavier gold-bearing material had been sifted it could be drypanned.
- It gives an indication of working conditions on the Kalgoorlie field - dryblowing



Categories: Gold

was a dirty, dusty and hard way to win gold; before the Coolgardie Water Supply Scheme, later named the Golden Pipeline, was built, prospectors would not have had the water to wash the dirt from gold or wash themselves or their clothes afterwards; miners paid high prices for enough water to drink; gold prospectors worked with no protection from the extremes of the weather in the dry, dusty landscape of the desert regions where gold was found; if there was a little water to spare, a prospector might wet a cloth to tie around his neck like the man pictured; this would help to keep him cool through the cooling process of evaporation.

- It shows an inefficient, time-consuming and difficult way of finding gold - the mounds of sifted soil alongside the potholes from which the material was extracted still contained gold after considerable efforts by miners; a canvas sheet was even spread downwind behind the dishes to catch any 'colours' of gold (very fine gold particles blown away while pouring material from one pan to another); reworked with today's modern methods of extraction, such old diggings can still yield payable amounts.
- It is an example of the work of J J Dwyer - Dwyer was a photographer who recorded much of the life of Kalgoorlie after arriving on the eastern gold fields of Western Australia in 1896.

Copyright Reproduced courtesy of Battye Library

Creator J J Dwyer, photographer, c1896

Identifier Battye Library number 008930D

Source National Trust of Australia (Western Australia), <http://valuingheritage.com.au>



Categories: Gold