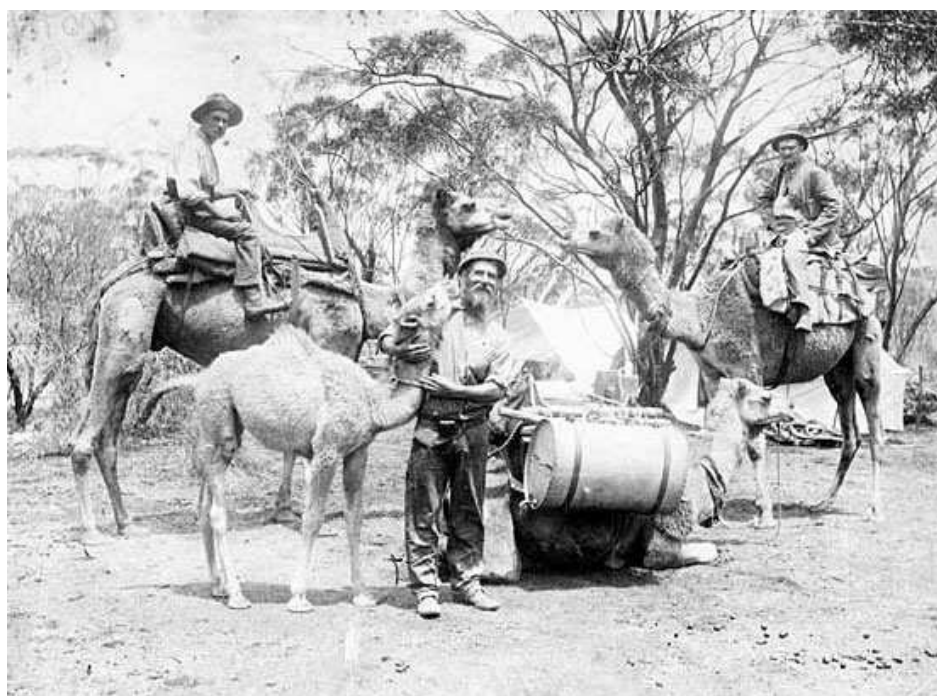


## Prospectors with camel team, c1895



### Description

This is a black-and-white photograph of a gold-prospecting party of three men, three working camels and a baby camel. The camels are saddled and one carries large drums, presumably containing water. The men are dressed in typical working clothes of the period. In the background is the camp set up by the men. The photograph was taken in the vicinity of Coolgardie, Western Australia, around 1895. It measures 14 cm x 20 cm.

### Educational value

- This asset portrays a gold-prospecting party typical of those that travelled across vast areas in search of quartz outcrops - these teams often made the big finds, spotting the most prominent quartz outcrops standing out in the landscape from the height of their mounts on the camels; an outcrop would be broken open with a pick to find traces of gold; if traces were found, the team would search the area for alluvial or surface gold (nuggets that had originally been part of a quartz outcrop); men on foot travelling more slowly sometimes found gold pockets overlooked by these mounted parties.
- It shows a kneeling adult camel wearing a baggage saddle designed to carry two 44-gallon (about 200 litres each) water drums - the prospecting teams needed to carry all their provisions with them and plan for their water to last the whole time they were away from settlement, up to a month in some cases; this water would have been replenished whenever possible from natural soaks and rockholes as there were no lakes or rivers in the area.
- It depicts the use of camels as transport for both people and supplies - the camels were an excellent form of transport as they could travel for many days without needing water, and would also eat the native vegetation; camels could



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also carry substantial loads over harsh terrain, assisted by the spongy pads on their feet; one camel in this picture carries a seat designed to take a second adult person; between 1860 and 1907, more than 11,000 Arabian camels were brought into Australia.

- It shows a baby camel, probably offspring of one of the adult camels - if the babies were not needed, they were disposed of so they did not take any of the precious water; in this picture, a man in working dress is handling and possibly gently restraining the calf, suggesting that it will be retained; a calf born on the road might be restrained in a sitting position and put in a bag with its head left sticking out, and tied to its mother's load until it was strong enough to walk with the others.
- It suggests difficult living conditions on the gold fields - prospectors had to carry with them everything they needed, including shelter; the picture shows two tents in the background, erected under the rather sparse shelter of several gum trees; as temperatures could reach above 40 degrees C in the summer, the small amount of shade was a luxury.
- It reveals that the ground surface was hard and dry, so the photograph was probably taken during summer - in winter the area may have been flooded and muddy; rain, or rather the absence of rain, dictated when prospectors could go in search of gold; they would often remain at a source of water waiting for news of rain before venturing out; more reliable water supplies, thanks to increased precipitation and lower evaporation rates, combined with milder temperatures, made prospecting safer in winter.
- It shows a camel carrying water tanks - camel trains brought water from outlying soaks and wells to centres such as Coolgardie, providing these communities with a regular supply of daily water, as well as carrying water to the most remote of the gold finds; when the gold fields water supply pipeline was opened in 1903, camels were no longer needed for this purpose.
- It suggests prospecting continued after the initial large finds at Coolgardie and six months later at Kalgoorlie - adventurous prospectors roamed the arid surrounds and when news of a find, even hundreds of kilometres away, reached these centres a rush would ensue; in 1895, when this photograph was taken, major discoveries were still being made close to existing centres; syndicates were formed to finance large-scale prospecting parties since they would need to be well-equipped with camels, portable condensers, equipment and foodstuffs.

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