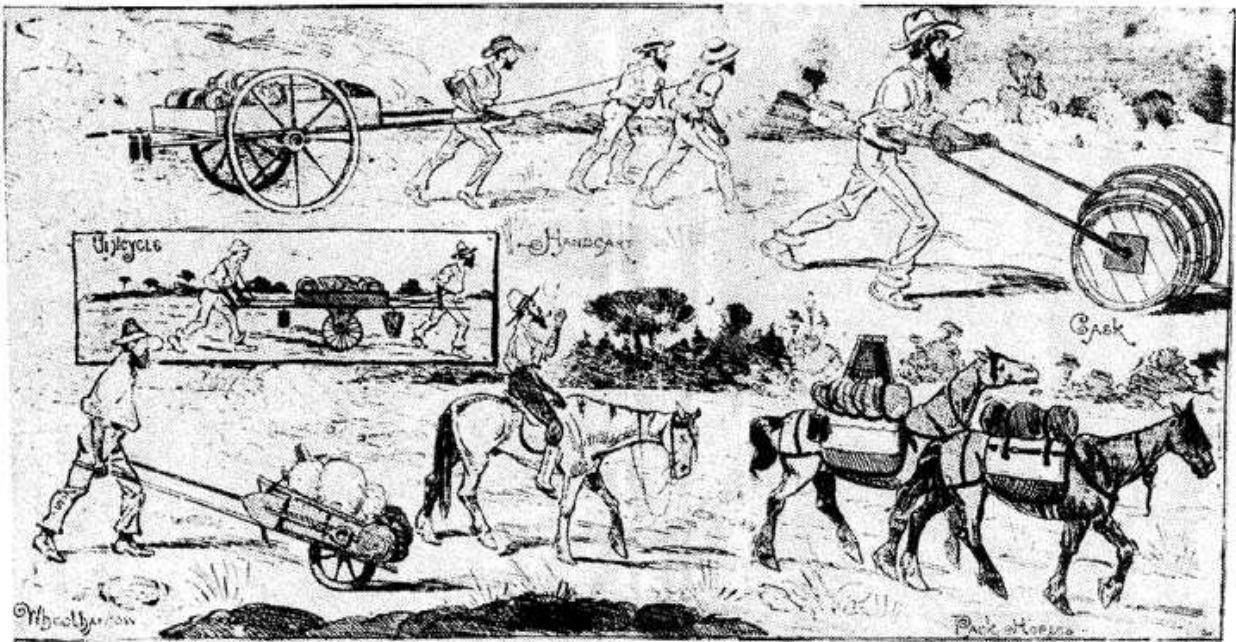


The rush to Coolgardie, 1894



Description

This is a black-and-white sketch showing various ways of travelling and transporting personal belongings to the Coolgardie gold fields in Western Australia. Separate sections of the sketch depict the different methods - three men pulling a cart, a man pushing his belongings in a barrel, a man mounted on a horse, two packhorses laden with goods, a man pushing a wheelbarrow and two men balancing a cart between them, one at the front and the other behind. All the people represented are male and dressed in traditional working clothes of the time. The sketch was published in the weekly newspaper *The Australasian* on 21 April 1894.

Educational value

- The Coolgardie gold fields are approximately 600 km east of Perth and as the railway line did not reach there until 1896, thousands of hopeful gold prospectors used various means, including those shown in the sketch, to travel a route that was little more than a track in the earliest days of WA's greatest gold rush.
- This sketch, credited to a Mr R Moline of Victoria Camp Coolgardie, appeared in a newspaper published in Melbourne as part of an article, 'Bound for Coolgardie', that commented on the departure of yet another steamer loaded with prospectors headed for the west to find their fortunes. The sketch and the article provide clear evidence of nationwide interest in the WA gold fields. Once they arrived, prospectors from different parts of Australia often camped together, for instance 'Crow's Nest' was a camp of South Australians. R Moline of Victoria Camp was obviously a Victorian.
- Prospectors carried all their supplies with them as there were none on the fields. While some hardy prospectors carried their supplies on their backs, those who could afford it used forms of wheeled transport including bicycles, horses and carts, and innovations such as the barrel and unicycle.
- The image of a man pushing his belongings in a long-handled wheelbarrow has become synonymous with WA's gold rush. Wheelbarrows were cheap and accessible pieces of equipment that travellers could even make themselves to



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carry all their possessions for the trip. Several photographs and sketches of wheelbarrows being used in this way were made at the time.

- One section of the sketch shows a man pushing a wine barrel with an axle inserted through its length and a handle attached to the axle to enable the barrel to be rolled. Once the prospector arrived on the gold fields, the barrel would have been useful as a table or, once resealed, for water storage. According to the accompanying newspaper article, the man was ridiculed by fellow travellers, who asked what 'push' (criminal gang) he belonged to. The National Trust of Australia (WA) knows of no photographs of this method of carrying goods, although there are contemporaneous descriptions.
- Important items of equipment used by prospectors are shown in the sketch, with commonly used and easily carried items including a swag for sleeping in, a bucket to carry water and a billy. In WA's arid gold fields, where any kind of water was welcome, water could be purified by boiling it in a billy, while swinging a billy of water in large circles helped to settle out mud.
- The population in the Coolgardie area was obviously expanding as miners and prospectors from all over Australia and overseas travelled to the eastern gold fields any way they could. On 24 August 1893, less than a year after Arthur Bayley and William Ford's discovery of gold at Fly Flat, Coolgardie was declared a town site, with a population of 4,000. The gold rush transformed the WA economy as gold production soared from 22,806 ounces in 1890 to 1,643,876 ounces in 1900 and this was matched by the fourfold increase in WA's population from 46,290 in 1890 to 184,124 reported in the 1901 census.
- Although horses are shown being used to reach the gold fields, the lack of water and suitable fodder made horses far less suited to the harsh conditions than camels. In 1894 there were 2,347 camels in WA compared with 50,000 horses, but more than half the horses were in already settled districts and almost all the camels were on the gold fields. Many horses perished en route to the gold fields and many others were abandoned at the fields because of the cost of keeping them.

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Creator R Moline, illustrator, 1894
The Australasian, publisher, 1894

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