GOLDFIELDS GUIDE

EXPLORING THE VICTORIAN GOLDFIELDS

Image source: Replica - Rodney Start (photographer) - Museums Victoria - https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/articles/3019

WELCOME STRANGER FIELD TRIP
MOLIAGUL, VICTORIA

PARENT/TEACHER RESOURCE PACKAGE
FOR AGES 12+

WELCOME STRANGER FIELD TRIP - MOLIAGUL

The Welcome Stranger monument and picnic area is a peaceful, fascinating and educational place to go for a barbecue or a picnic lunch. There is an intriguing bushwalk through the area where the famous Welcome Stranger gold nugget was discovered in 1869.

The main picnic area is well equipped and includes picnic tables, wood fire barbecues, running water (not drinkable) and an undercover area.

Camping is available, there are a few nice spots to pitch tents and good caravan access. Keep in mind that there are no toilets at this site, but there is a toilet block a short drive away at the Moliagul Campground.

A large stone obelisk with a fence around it commemorates the discovery of the Welcome Stranger gold nugget, and there's a beautifully presented information sign with plenty of interesting details about the discovery and the lives of the lucky miners who found it.

The Welcome Stranger Discovery Walk is 850 metres long, a half hour circuit track. The walking track travels around the surrounding bushland and takes you past many interesting examples of former alluvial and reef mining efforts. You will walk by the house sites of John Deason and Richard Oates (the two miners who discovered the Welcome Stranger nugget), puddlers, a Chinese grave and the site of a Chinese camp.

There is a second picnic area partway along the walking track which features a picnic table and a wood fire barbecue.

The walk has direction markers to help you stay on track, and it used to have many 'point of interest' signs along the way but unfortunately most of them are now damaged. Luckily there is a map on the information sign at the picnic area which indicates the points of interest along the way and what to look out for.

HOW TO GET THERE

Welcome Stranger Road, Moliagul VIC 3472
GPS Coordinates: -36.760854, 143.652059

From the Dunolly-Moliagul Road, turn on to Monument Road (across from the Moliagul Campground/picnic area).

Follow Monument Road until you see Welcome Stranger Road on your left. Take the turnoff and follow Welcome Stranger Road until you reach the monument and picnic area.

FIELD TRIP PACKAGE

This field trip package is intended for children aged 12+. Younger children may need assistance.

WELCOME STRANGER DISCOVERY WALK

The Welcome Stranger Discovery Walk is an easy going 850 metre (30 minute) return circuit that takes you through numerous fascinating examples of former alluvial and reef mining efforts.

You will see both house sites of Deason and Oates, their puddler site, an 1860s grave (believed to be that of a Chinese miner), Chinese camp, another puddler, and examples of surface mining.

Each point of interest along the walk is marked by a sign, however most of them are damaged and unreadable. The signs were merely indicators to show where each point of interest was (not detailed information signs), and you can easily make out what each of them are by bringing this map along on your walk.

WELCOME STRANGER DISCOVERY, 1869

Moliagul – Home to the world's largest gold nugget!

John Deason and Richard Oates must be among the luckiest men in Australian history. In 1869 the two Cornish miners unearthed a gold nugget just 2.5cm beneath the soil which weighed in at an astonishing 66kg (although it is estimated that it originally weighed as much as 72.5kg).

This nugget was named the Welcome Stranger, and is still the largest known gold nugget in the world.

On February 5, 1869, John Deason was breaking up soil on their claim when he struck what seemed to be stone. After a few more swings and clearing the dirt away with his pick, he spotted gold! After clearing away more dirt, Deason then broke his pick handle while trying to lever the massive nugget out of the ground.

Deason sent his son to find Richard Oates, who was ploughing in a nearby paddock. In an attempt to avoid suspicion among other people living and working nearby, the miners concealed the nugget again until later that afternoon when they unearthed it and took it down the hill to Deason's house.

They kept their discovery to themselves all weekend, until Deason and Oates decided to throw a party for their friends the following Monday. They hid the nugget under a cloth at the end of the table and waited for an appropriate moment to reveal their amazing discovery.

"Don't go home boys" said Deason. "That's solid gold and I want you to stay the night and escort it to the bank at Dunolly tomorrow".

The next morning the convoy left for Dunolly with the nugget loaded onto a spring cart. As the nugget was too large to be weighed on the bank scales, the blacksmith was called in to cut it into smaller pieces. In all the excitement no one thought to photograph the nugget, and the only sketches were made from memory. Deason and Oates later posed for a group re-enactment photograph with a large piece of quartz representing the gold nugget.

PUDDLING MACHINES

Source: image displayed on an information sign at the Battery Dam in Maryborough, VIC

Puddling machines were common on the goldfields during the 1850s and 1860s as a method of separating gold from wash dirt which contained a considerable amount of clay. The clay usually sticks together in large lumps, trapping gold inside. This clay needs to be broken up so the gold can be separated and extracted.

Wash dirt containing gold was placed in a large, circular trough along with water. The wash dirt was then broken up by a horse dragging a rake-like implement through the trough.

Heavy gold settles on the bottom of the trough, while lighter clay can be washed out with the water.

Today you can still see the remains of many puddling machines throughout the bushland of the Victorian Goldfields. They appear as shallow ring shaped depressions in the ground. See if you can spot any puddlers along the Welcome Stranger Discovery Walk!

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE, 15th Feb 1869

It wasn't long before news of the astonishing discovery in Moliagul spread all over Australia. Many newspapers reported on the Welcome Stranger within the first two weeks!

The following fascinating and descriptive account was published in the Mount Alexander Mail on Monday 15th February, 1869 – ten days after the discovery of the Welcome Stranger.

HOW THE LARGEST NUGGET IN THE WORLD WAS FOUND

The Dunolly district, after having turned out a multitude of nuggets that puts every other goldfield in the colony in the shade, has at length, in the words of the Melbourne journals, " beat the world " in producing the largest mass of gold on record. The " Welcome Stranger " was found by two men, named John Deason and Richard Oates, on Friday last, February 5, 1869, near the Black Reef, Bulldog Gully, Moliagul, a short distance from Wayman's Reef, and only about a mile from the Celebrated Gypsy Diggings.

Deason and his mate have been working in the ground for several years past, and, as is well known, had got, in digging parlance, so " hard- up " as to have been refused credit for a bag of flour a week or so ago, and we believe the very day before the discovery, were reminded by a tradesman that they were indebted to him a few shillings.

Still they persevered, until on the day named, Deason in working round the roots of a tree, at about two inches below the surface, struck something hard with a pick, and exclaimed, " D—— n it, I wish it was a nugget and had broken the pick". On stooping down to examine the obstacle, he found that the object of his dearest wishes was lying at his feet, and it seemed as if the monster was so large as to be immovable. It was, however, at length released from its virgin soil, and carefully removed.

The question, then arose as to what was to be done with it, and the first intention was to convey it to Melbourne. When the men got to Dunolly with their prize, they were advised to take it to the bank, and forthwith carried it to the London Chartered.

The news of the discovery soon spread, and the bank was crowded with eager spectators, amongst whom was a number of Chinamen, and a constable was sent for to guard the prize.

The weight in the gross was then found to be two hundred and ten pounds troy, and preparations were at once made to break the mass to pieces and smelt it. The appearance of the " Welcome Stranger " in its pristine state was something wonderful, and it seemed impossible to realise the fact that so great a mass of gold could be collected in one lump. But so it was. Many efforts were made to lift it, and many exclamations of surprise expressed at its immense weight and compactness.

A sledge hammer and cold chisels were brought into requisition, and several of the latter broken in the attempt to reduce into fragments the " Welcome Stranger " It was found to be as solid as it looked, and as chip after chip and piece after piece was dissevered from it, its appearance was as clean as a well cut Cheshire cheese. At length, after no less than five hours hammering, the monster was pounded up and smelted, the result being 2,268 oz. 10dwt. 11grs. Of gold, exclusive of at least a pound weight, which was given by the delighted finders to their numerous friends, who were anxious to retain a piece of the largest mass of gold the world has yet seen.

Over nine thousand pounds were advanced on the nugget by the bank, the final value awaiting the result of assay.

Several interesting incidents might be published in connection with the finding and finders of the nugget. Oates has, we believe neither kit nor kin with whom to share this prize, but probably soon will have. Deason has a wife and family at Moliagul, where he holds 80 acres of land under the 42nd section, which we believe he intends still to settle down upon and cultivate. Oates, we understand, intends shortly to visit his home at the Lands End.

Since writing the above we have visited the locality to be henceforth rendered worldwide in its fame. The Spot where the nugget was found is marked by a post, and was pointed out to us by, the finders of this truly " Welcome Stranger ".

Deason and Oates informed us that they came to the colony in the year 1854. On the 19th February in that year they reached Bendigo, and from that time have been engaged as working miners ; with the varied successes and difficulties appertaining to digger life. On the whole they have just managed to make a living by dint of hard work and thrift and have been steadily working there ever since, chiefly washing about nine inches to a foot of the surface soil in an old fashioned horse puddling machine.

Mr. Deason informed us that they had many times washed a whole week for half an ounce of gold, while at other times they were very fortunate. Within about a hundred yards from the spot where the '' Welcome Stranger " was unearthed they, some time ago, found two other nuggets, one weighing 108 ounces, and the other 36 ounces.

They have stripped and washed the surface sod from several acres of land, and their workings are easily traced by the red clay they have bared. They informed us that this red clay contained a little gold, but not enough to pay, consequently they do not wash it. They pointed out to us a peculiar kind of red clay similar to half burnt brick, which they regarded as indicative of gold, and which has always been found associated with their larger finds and particularly so with the immense mass of gold found by them on Friday last.

It is much to be regretted that this, the largest mass of gold ever found, at any rate of which there is any record, should have been melted before any model of it was made, and the fortunate owners expressed to us their regret that such should have been the case. But when they discovered it, the mass, as may be supposed, was unwieldly, so much so that it had to be forced from its bed by a large lever, and the place is a very solitary one, anything indeed but such a place as one would care to keep £10,000 worth of gold, or to risk making its discovery known until it could be surrounded by the necessary protection.

The mass when found was taken to Mr. Deasons' hut and placed on the fire for the purpose of rendering the quartz friable, and Deason sat up the whole of Friday night burning and reducing the mass into a somewhat manageable shape, the debris containing it is estimated about a pound and a half weight of gold. This done they took it to Dunolly, as previously stated, and it was at their request that the nugget was at once broken up and smelted.

Some golden stone was also broken out of the Black reef itself, specimens of which are preserved. It is worthy of remark that at the time of our visit Deason and his mate were working away in their shirt sleeves at the claim as if nothing had happened out of the ordinary. We are glad that the monster has fallen to the lot of such steady and industrious men.— Dunolly Advertiser.

ANSWERS – WELCOME STRANGER WORKSHEET

1. What were the names of the two miners who discovered the Welcome Stranger?
   John Deason and Richard Oates

2. Where were they born?
   On the island of Tresco, 50km south-west of Lands End, England.

3. What year did they arrive in Bendigo?
   1854

4. How long did they spend in Bendigo before relocating to Moliagul?
   Eight years

5. In 1866 the two miners discovered a smaller (but still substantial) nugget. How much did this nugget weigh?
   1.1kg (36oz)

6. Three years later, in 1869, they discovered the Welcome Stranger. How far below the surface did they find this huge nugget?
   2.5cm (1 inch)

7. Why did they place the nugget in the fire?
   To make the gold heat up and expand and cause all the quartz that was stuck to it to become brittle and loose so they could clean it all off

8. How did they reveal their discovery to their friends?
   They held a party and hid the nugget under a cloth at the end of the table, and waited for an appropriate moment to reveal their prize.

9. The nugget was too large to be weighed on the bank scales in Dunolly, a nearby town. Who did they call in to cut it into smaller pieces?
   Archie Walls, the blacksmith

10. What is a puddling machine used for?
    To break up clumps of clay and separate the gold from the clay

11. What is heavier, gold or clay?
    Gold is heavier than clay

ANSWERS – NEWSPAPER ARTICLE WORKSHEET

1. How many hours were they chipping and pounding away at the Welcome Stranger nugget before it was finally broken up and smelted?
   Five hours

2. Describe the type of ground Deason and Oates claim is often associated with large gold discoveries.
   A peculiar kind of red clay similar to half burnt brick

3. What details does the article give about the life of John Deason?
   Both miners had been working the ground there for several years. They were very poor at the time of the Welcome Stranger discovery. Deason has a wife and family at Moliagul, where he holds 80 acres of land, which he intended to settle down upon and cultivate. Both miners arrived in Bendigo together in 1854 and had been working as miners ever since, just managing to make ends meet through their hard work and persistence. Deason claimed that some times they worked all week for a mere half ounce of gold, while other times they were much more fortunate.

4. What details does the article give about the life of Richard Oates?
   Both miners had been working the ground there for several years. They were very poor at the time of the Welcome Stranger discovery. Both miners arrived in Bendigo together in 1854 and had been working as miners ever since, just managing to make ends meet through their hard work and persistence. Oates had no family or friends to share his prize with, and intended to return to his home at Lands End.

5. Imagine you are a newspaper reporter in the year 1869. You have travelled to Moliagul to meet John Deason and Richard Oates so you can collect information for a short newspaper article. What questions would you ask the lucky miners?
   No wrong answers, this is intended to be a creative exercise.

ANSWERS - WELCOME STRANGER WORDSEARCH

Q	W	E	L	C	O	M	E	N	C	W	I	X	Y	B
Z	B	M	H	L	N	C	T	T	R	I	T	K	Z	T
S	S	F	B	F	M	U	H	Z	N	J	C	B	W	W
T	D	P	F	X	V	G	G	B	L	U	L	C	V	M
R	Z	E	O	Y	I	Q	E	G	L	C	K	Z	M	N
A	Y	M	A	E	P	I	O	N	E	E	R	S	G	P
N	Y	O	W	S	A	H	G	M	L	T	R	G	L	T
G	M	L	E	T	O	D	U	P	J	V	J	O	Z	O
E	K	I	R	Y	Q	N	D	U	N	O	L	L	Y	A
R	O	A	N	Z	S	V	A	G	K	S	U	D	R	T
G	Q	G	I	I	D	I	S	C	O	V	E	R	Y	E
O	A	U	X	L	N	F	Q	W	G	L	R	U	T	S
M	R	L	R	G	K	G	A	N	P	P	D	S	D	Z
H	T	A	L	Y	Y	L	L	C	G	F	X	H	L	X
F	I	A	R	N	P	P	U	D	D	L	E	R	A	U

WELCOME
STRANGER
NUGGET
GOLD
DISCOVERY
DEASON
OATES
MOLIAGUL
DUNOLLY
WEIGHT
LUCKY
PUDDLER
MINING
PIONEERS
GOLDRUSH

ANSWERS - WELCOME STRANGER CRYPTOGRAM

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
25	24	1	2	6	3	8	4	17	21	18	7	16	13	23	10	11	19	5	20	14	12	15	9	26	22

T H E W E L C O M E S T R A N G E R G O L D
20 4 6 15 6 7 1 23 16 6 5 20 19 25 13 8 6 19 8 23 7 2

N U G G E T W A S D I S C O V E R E D I N
13 14 8 8 6 20 15 25 5 2 17 5 1 23 12 6 19 6 2 17 13

M O L I A G U L B Y J O H N D E A S O N
16 23 7 17 25 8 14 7 24 26 21 23 4 13 2 6 25 5 23 13

A N D R I C H A R D O A T E S D U R I N G
25 13 2 19 17 1 4 25 19 2 23 25 20 6 5 2 14 19 17 13 8

T H E N I N E T E E N T H C E N T U R Y ,
20 4 6 13 17 13 6 20 6 6 13 20 4 1 6 13 20 14 19 26

A N D I S S T I L L T H E L A R G E S T
25 13 2 17 5 5 20 17 7 7 20 4 6 7 25 19 8 6 5 20

K N O W N G O L D N U G G E T I N T H E
18 13 23 15 13 8 23 7 2 13 14 8 8 6 20 17 13 20 4 6

W O R L D .
15 23 19 7 2

I hope this field trip package for the Welcome Stranger monument and picnic area in Moliagul has been helpful. Please don't hesitate to share any feedback you may have, including anything that you found wasn't helpful or any suggestions for improvement.

You can get in touch by emailing info@goldfieldsguide.com.au