GOLDFIELDS GUIDE

EXPLORING THE VICTORIAN GOLDFIELDS

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WELCOME STRANGER FIELD TRIP
MOLIAGUL, VICTORIA

STUDENT RESOURCE PACKAGE
FOR AGES 12+

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!

WELCOME STRANGER WORKSHEET

Read the large information sign near the monument as well as pages 3 and 4 in this package. Answer the following questions:

1. What were the names of the two miners who discovered the Welcome Stranger?

2. Where were they born?

3. What year did they arrive in Bendigo?

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

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

6. Three years later, in 1869, they discovered the Welcome Stranger. How far below the surface did they find this huge nugget?

7. Why did they place the nugget in the fire?

8. How did they reveal their discovery to their friends?

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?

10. What is a puddling machine used for?

11. What is heavier, gold or clay?

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.

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE - WORKSHEET

Read the newspaper article printed on the previous two pages and answer the following questions:

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

2. Describe the type of ground Deason and Oates claim is often associated with large gold discoveries.

3. What details does the article give about the life of John Deason?

4. What details does the article give about the life of Richard Oates?

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?

WELCOME STRANGER WORDSEARCH

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

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
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