

# Conclusion

The notion that to the non-Indigenous miners of Victoria Aboriginal people were 'invisible, silent and nameless' has been shown to be false. Vestiges of their considerable physical connection with the goldfields are to be found in Aboriginal artworks of the period, archaeological sites and place names bestowed upon mining areas, as well as the recollections of numerous non-Indigenous miners and contemporary observers. Core motivations for Aboriginal people to engage or not engage in work on the goldfields of Victoria clearly stemmed from whether their ancestral estates rested on auriferous ground and also the kinship-styled relationships that were forged between themselves and the immigrant gold seekers. For some Aboriginal people, just as for non-Indigenous people, gold seeking as a full-time occupation to the exclusion of all other duties was an anathema, and for others it was a worthwhile and productive pursuit.

Mutual interest in each population's 'otherness' cannot be overstated. The Victorian gold miners adoption – or acculturation – of significant Aboriginal cultural features is one of the more intriguing issues in this study that has received very little attention from historians, yet provides a nexus to reconciliation through the process of sharing histories. More research is urgently needed on Aboriginal perspectives of the goldfields. This includes a working knowledge of the dynamics of Aboriginal attachment to land tenure and kinship affiliations in order to explore the variety of sexual, legal, moral, and mercantile arrangements struck.

Moreover, the large body of evidence presented here that documents Aboriginal people actively discovering and seeking gold for their own commercial gain – encompassing immigrating to foreign goldfields, independent fossicking ventures and multi-racial partnerships – has interesting and significant ramifications. Bates' notion of gold as a 'social energiser and definer' can now rightly be applied to Aboriginal society too. For some, gold seeking was consistent to some extent with traditional commercial activity, and, to a point, since many goldfields were probably located where traditional quarries had existed; there was a site usage overlay. Not surprisingly, the records emphasise select language groups (such as the Djadjawurrung) whose successful participation in labouring for gold was prodigious. Many Aboriginal people sought to find their niche in the new society, via predominantly economic channels, through trading in their manufactured goods, farming, and cultural performances, or in employment roles such as bark cutting, tracking, guiding and police work, which did not inordinately compromise their cultural integrity and took advantage of their superior traditional work skills. They also sought to accommodate and manipulate the gold seekers into their social structure by continuing to

recognise select non-Indigenous people as resuscitated Aboriginal people and entreat gold miners and townfolk to adopt an Aboriginal morality. Others chose to align themselves with the goldfields as little as possible. Gold then, spelled a freedom and a social energy rarely enjoyed in the pastoral period, or in subsequent epochs. It is my hope that this work will inspire others to delve deeper into this history – a shared history with great potential for furthering the goal of reconciliation in this country.