

**A PILE OF ROCKS AND A HOLE IN THE GROUND: HERITAGE
TOURISM AND INTERPRETATION OF THE GOLD RUSHES AT
THE MOUNT ALEXANDER DIGGINGS**

Warwick Frost

*Working Paper 41/02
December 2002*

WORKING PAPER SERIES

ISSN 1327-5216

(Abstract on next page)

This paper is a work in progress. Material in the paper cannot be used without permission of the author.

Abstract

The Mount Alexander Diggings is a series of 33 linked Gold Rush sites at Castlemaine and Maldon in the state of Victoria, Australia. The sites are not reconstructions, a small number have been restored, but the majority are ruins – piles of rocks and holes in the ground. Interpretation is provided through either a guidebook, guided tours or (in a small number of cases) on site signage. The sites are nearly all on public land. In 2002 many of the sites were given National Parks status in the newly established Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park. The Victorian Government is currently engaged in developing a World Heritage Listing application for the area.

Historic tourism focussing on the Gold Rushes in Australia is dominated by one large-scale tourist attraction. This is the Sovereign Hill Outdoor Museum at Ballarat, 90 kilometres south. This highly successful reconstruction of the Gold Rushes has the highest level of visitation of any tourist attraction in regional Victoria and of any historic attraction in Australia. Developments such as the Mount Alexander Diggings are strongly influenced by the style of Sovereign Hill (including its interpretation) and by its success as an attraction and as a focus of regional tourism for Ballarat.

This study considers three main issues arising from the development of the Mount Alexander Diggings and its positioning in relation to Sovereign Hill. The first is the difficulty of providing meaningful interpretation for visitors to historic mining landscapes. The success of Sovereign Hill at Ballarat and of a number of historic gold towns throughout Australia has preconditioned tourists to associate the Gold Rushes with townscapes and buildings. However, in the case of the Mount Alexander Diggings few of its sites are standing buildings and many are in isolated bush areas. This study highlights how this contrast may be turned into an asset rather than a liability through appropriate interpretation.

The second issue concerns the role of interpretation in adding depth to the experience of visiting historic sites of extreme environmental degradation. For the Mount Alexander Diggings this includes attempts to interpret what the landscape was like before 1851 and how the various features of the Gold Rushes changed it.

The third issue relates to the characteristics, activities and expectations of those who visit such historic sites. Unfortunately in Australia there has been very little published research into the types of tourists who are attracted to historic areas. Here the study draws on preliminary results from the Mount Alexander Tourist Survey which commenced in 2001.

A PILE OF ROCKS AND A HOLE IN THE GROUND: HERITAGE TOURISM AND INTERPRETATION OF THE GOLD RUSHES AT THE MOUNT ALEXANDER DIGGINGS

INTRODUCTION

The Victorian Gold Rushes were a key event in Australian and World history. In many ways the Gold Rushes are a simple concept for visitors to understand – people came to Australia to dig for gold. However, that simplicity masks a range of complex issues. These include the different types of mining, regional variations, ethnic differences between the miners, the migrant experience, the impact on Aborigines and the environment, gold's impact in *transforming* Australian economics, society and political structures and the impact on the World economy (the best summaries of the complexities and impacts of the Victorian Gold Rushes are in Bate 1988 and 2001). Nor is the history of the Gold Rushes fixed, new interpretations and emphases continue to develop (Goodman 2001). Tourists may read about these issues in a wide range of books on the history of the Gold Rushes, but how can such complexity be included in on site interpretation?

Heritage tourism is well developed in Gold Rush cities and towns such as Ballarat, Bendigo, Castlemaine, Daylesford, Beechworth, Maldon, Walhalla and Ararat (see Tourism Victoria 1997 for an overview of tourism in the major areas). In the aptly named Goldfields Tourism Region, tourism has grown to challenge agriculture as the main economic base. The main tourist attraction is Sovereign Hill Outdoor Museum, a reconstruction of Gold Rush Ballarat. Established in 1970, Sovereign Hill has come to dominate heritage tourism in Victoria and Australia. In scale it is the biggest attraction in regional Victoria, with over 500,000 visitors per year and a staff of over 300. Run by a not-for-profit community association, it is highly unusual in that it does not require government subsidies in order to operate. For Ballarat and the surrounding area it has become the driver of a successful tourism industry. Echuca-Moama and Kyneton, which were Gold Rush supply centres rather than goldfields, also benefit substantially from heritage tourism. In recent years, Melbourne, with its Golden Mile Heritage Walk, Immigration Museum and Gold Treasury has also promoted its Gold Rush connections (Frost 2001B, 154). In contrast, some Gold Rush towns have emphasised other attributes, preferring images of modernity over history (for a discussion of opposition to heritage and tourism in Gold Rush towns, see Griffiths 1987, 85-88 and 1996, 239-248).

However, despite its importance to regional Victoria, there has been little research into heritage tourism arising from the Gold Rushes. Much of the sparse literature focuses on Sovereign Hill, which is hardly surprising, given its scale and success. In the literature, Sovereign Hill is primarily presented as a case study of excellence in interpretation, both through the authenticity of its reconstructions and its use of staff in Gold Rush costume and character interacting with visitors (Evans 1991, Davison 1999). Sovereign Hill and its reconstruction have changed the way that the Gold Rushes are seen and written about. When the classic histories of the Gold Rushes were written by Serle (1962) and Blainey (1963), there was no Sovereign Hill to influence them or their readers (Bate 2001, 10-12), whereas any work since 1970 has had to account for the images emanating from it. In particular, Sovereign Hill and new printing technology have transformed our image of the Gold Rushes from black and white to colour. In California, the development of a series of linked Gold Rush State Parks has been significantly influenced by Sovereign Hill's performance and style (Frost 2001B, 152). Sovereign Hill's viability seems to be unique, most other historical reconstructions in Australia have struggled financially and only survive through subsidies (Davidson and Spearritt 2000, 264-7).

Sovereign Hill has also drawn criticism. By not having any Aboriginal characters, it possibly reinforces a view that Aborigines were not involved or even present in the Gold Rushes.¹ Sovereign Hill's creation has

¹ While briefly touched upon in a wide range of sources, this issue is dealt with in detail in a soon to be published article by Ian Clark, 'A critique of forgetfulness and exclusivity: the neglect of Aboriginal themes in goldfields tourism in Victoria'. Recently, Sovereign Hill had a Gypsy character. While she was popular, research failed to uncover any evidence of Gypsies in the Gold Rushes, so the character was abandoned (personal communication from Barry Kay, Sovereign Hill).

been linked to a decline in 'serious' historical interest in the Gold Rushes, for Sovereign Hill, 'only confirmed a sense that interest in the gold rush was mostly for children and tourists' (Goodman 1994, x).

The dominance of Sovereign Hill, both of tourism and of the research literature, creates a range of problems. Other Gold Rush areas may wish to increase tourism visitation through promoting heritage tourism (see Tourism Victoria 1997 and Australian Heritage Commission and Tourism Council of Australia 1999). However, do they do this by imitating Sovereign Hill or by developing in a different manner? It is not enough for a town to just have a Gold Rush history or a heritage of buildings and sites, for 'the nature of the heritage product is determined ... by the requirements of the consumer not the existence of the resources' (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996, 9). How can Gold Rush towns convert their heritage into tourism? Some important questions which tourism operators, regional tourism organizations and local councils in Gold Rush areas need to consider include:

- Is their market the same as Sovereign Hill's? Is there a homogeneous heritage tourist market, or a series of niche special interest markets?
- Should they follow the style of interpretation which Sovereign Hill has developed? Is Sovereign Hill's style what the visitor always expects?
- Does regional variation count? Other areas have different stories and experiences, do they require different styles of interpretation?
- Are there other destination attributes which Ballarat has which complement Sovereign Hill? In contrast, do other areas have different complementary attributes to Ballarat (for example a wide range of wineries)?
- Is it economically feasible to imitate Sovereign Hill? Or does Sovereign Hill now have a natural monopoly due to its scale and maturity?
- Is there community support for the development of tourism? Is there potential for conflict?

My intention in this chapter is to explore this development of visitor attractions and interpretation which *contrasts* with Sovereign Hill and its hegemony. My focus is on the Mount Alexander Diggings (in particular the Castlemaine portion of the project which has been established as a National Park). In developing this attraction there has been an interesting tension between desiring to attract a significant proportion of those who visit Sovereign Hill, versus the difficulties which arise because the Mount Alexander Diggings are different to Sovereign Hill. Both the scale and the nature of the Mount Alexander Diggings require the development of different forms of interpretation to Sovereign Hill.

CASTLEMAINE AND THE MOUNT ALEXANDER DIGGINGS

Gold was discovered at Castlemaine (then known as Mount Alexander) in 1851. Within a year it had become the richest shallow alluvial gold diggings the World has ever known, a name synonymous around the globe with great riches. However, unlike Ballarat and Bendigo, there was little later development of underground mining, so that as in many heritage towns, Castlemaine's boom was followed by a long period of little development, so preserving much of its heritage. Nearby Maldon and Daylesford went through similar, though later, periods of boom and then slow decline. A similar process also took place with the Gold Rushes in California (Frost 2002, 45-8) and New Zealand, where the Gold Rush towns were generally smaller than their Victorian counterparts and no cities like Ballarat or Bendigo developed.

Since the 1960s Castlemaine has developed as a heritage destination. Much of the appeal is in its relatively intact townscape, dominated by civic and commercial buildings from the mid to late nineteenth century. This is in contrast to the Californian Gold Rush towns which have suffered from the building of freeways and parking lots (Frost 2001B, 151) and New Zealand towns which have mainly been damaged by dam construction and ski tourism development.

Castlemaine may be characterised as an *historic gem*, that is:

those, usually small, cities in which the historic resource is both so dramatic, extensive, and complete and also so valued as to dominate their urban morphology, their identity and their policy

options. They are frequently dominated by structures from a single historical period and contain, at least in their central areas, few architecturally discordant elements ... in the New World they ... [are] associated with pioneer settlement (Ashworth and Tunbridge 2000, 155-6).

This development was due to Castlemaine's location. On a major highway 120 kilometres from Melbourne, it is conveniently placed for day-trippers. It is also well situated on a major touring route linking Ballarat (84 kilometres to the south), Daylesford (37 kilometres south) and Bendigo (39 kilometres north). In addition, Castlemaine has developed a strong reputation as an arts and cultural centre.

However, the development of tourism in Castlemaine has not been anywhere to the extent of either Ballarat or Bendigo. Yield per tourist is low. Most visitors are day-trippers, either returning to Melbourne or spending the night at other Gold rush towns. While a strong bed and breakfast niche has developed, motel capacity is well below that of Ballarat or Bendigo.

The Mount Alexander Diggings is a linked series of 33 historic Gold Rush sites in the Shire of Mount Alexander. Most of the sites are managed either by Parks Victoria (the State Government agency responsible for National Parks) or the Shire. The Castlemaine portion contains 19 sites including town buildings (market, courthouse), cemeteries, forested mining areas (*diggings*) and mine ruins. Interpretation is provided through a guidebook - *Discovering the Mount Alexander Diggings* (Mount Alexander Diggings Committee 1999), guided tours and in some cases on-site signage. Though not termed as such, the Mount Alexander Diggings may best be thought of as a trail linking the various sites. Its starting point, identified as site number one in the guidebook, is Castlemaine's Market Building (1862), which has recently been refurbished as a Visitor Information Centre. As a well-known historic building located in the town centre it is the logical place for tourists to start exploring. It is also the best place for booking tours and selling guidebooks.

Like many heritage attractions, the Mount Alexander Diggings was conceived with multiple objectives. Based on my research these include:

- The preservation of historic sites
- The provision of interpretation for these sites, so increasing understanding of the area's heritage
- Increased community awareness and pride in the area's heritage
- Increased visitor numbers (thereby sharing this heritage with others)
- Increased direct economic benefits from visitors (for example through guided tours)
- Increased indirect economic benefits (through tourism services, such as accommodation, and through other services, such as retailing)
- Financial viability

Unfortunately, multiple objectives create the potential for problems (Frost 2001A). Different individuals place different weightings on various objectives and these objectives may conflict. There may be different ways of measuring or interpreting performance. These problems are well illustrated in the case of Coal Creek Heritage Village in south-eastern Victoria. Local councillors proposed its closure as they saw it as not financially viable. Supporters of Coal Creek countered that this was just one of a number of objectives and that viability had been narrowly defined to exclude indirect economic benefits (Frost 2001A). It is likely that the Mount Alexander Diggings may in time be the subject of similar debates.

There are two immediate differences between Sovereign Hill and the Mount Alexander Diggings. The first is that whereas Sovereign Hill is a self-contained attraction on a single discrete site, the Mount Alexander Diggings is a collection of sites scattered over a wide area. Visitors to Sovereign Hill can immerse themselves in the Gold Rushes and visit all parts by walking. Visitors to the Mount Alexander Diggings step back and forth, into and out of the separate sites. Most will journey from site to site by car. The second difference is that Sovereign Hill is a reconstruction of the Gold Rushes, shaped to fit within the boundaries of the site. In contrast the Mount Alexander Diggings consists of actual sites.

Three main issues of interpretation, which are considered in this study, arise from these differences. The first is whether visitors expect a Gold Rush site to look similar to Sovereign Hill, that is, primarily urban with recognisable Gold Rush buildings and streetscapes. However, the Mount Alexander Diggings is

primarily in a rural forested landscape. Will visitors understand why it is different to Sovereign Hill? Second, this rural forested landscape has been highly modified by the Gold Rushes. Mount Alexander Diggings is a place of *extreme* environmental degradation. Furthermore, the environmental impact of the Gold Rushes is an area of little published research, an area of new research and interpretation. How can interpretation help visitors to make sense of what they see? How can interpreters get across the notion that the environmental impacts are still being explored? Third, we know very little about the characteristics and expectations of visitors to Castlemaine. We cannot assume that they are simply the same as those of visitors to Sovereign Hill. We need to know the characteristics of these visitors in order to shape the interpretation and overall experience and thereby satisfy their expectations (and attract more visitors).

A RECOGNISABLE LANDSCAPE

The Gold Rushes were urban phenomena. Where there was gold, large numbers congregated together in sprawling, bustling camps. Within a year of the discovery of gold, Castlemaine had a population of 30,000. If there was enough gold (usually deeper underground), these camps developed and rapidly became permanent (Bate 2001, 10). In time they came to function as service towns for their agricultural hinterland. If the gold ran out, they were quickly abandoned.

This urban progression is evident at Sovereign Hill. After entering through the main gate, the visitor enters the first stage of the Gold Rush. There are no houses, only tents. A small stream is busy with people (mainly tourists) panning for gold. The technology is simple and the settlement represented may be transient. As the visitor moves on (up the hill) they enter a recreation of Ballarat's Main Street. Buildings are established and substantial. The businesses are thriving and recognisable (pubs, theatres, shops). A great deal of care has been taken with their authenticity, most have been based on actual photos or drawings (Evans 1991). Further up the hill, there are more buildings, mainly wood, but substantial and permanent. Houses, schools, churches, shops and public buildings represent the Gold Rushes just a few years after discovery. At one end are deep mine shafts and mining machinery, the later technology required to reach deeper gold and sustain the boom. The first stage, the canvas town by a stream is dwarfed by the greater scale of the urban mining environment. Sovereign Hill represents progress (possibly even nation-building), how the early tent camp rapidly turned into the substantial city of Ballarat.

The urban nature of the Gold Rushes is reinforced by the popularity of today's Gold Rush towns and their heritage streetscapes and buildings. Probably the main activity of tourists in heritage areas is just wandering about and looking at the buildings. This is often overlooked in discussions of tourism, for the tourists are not paying any admission prices and therefore are not being counted (though they have a strong economic impact in visiting cafes and shops). While individual historic buildings have appeal, tourists are primarily drawn to relatively intact streetscapes. In turn this has led to policies to preserve such streetscapes (as in Beechworth, for example, where new buildings must be in the style of their surroundings) and in the fashion for attaching lace verandahs, even if the building originally did not have a verandah (Griffiths 1996, 239-242).

This image of the Gold Rushes as an urban experience creates two problems for interpreting the Mount Alexander Diggings. First, most of the sites in the Castlemaine section are not urban. Only three of the nineteen sites are in conventional town streetscapes (the market, the art gallery/museum and the Chewton town hall). The other sites are *out* of town, either on the urban fringe or in the surrounding forests. That the starting point of the Mount Alexander Diggings is in the main street of Castlemaine may cause difficulties. Will tourists be enticed to leave the town, with its cafes and shops, to venture *away* from it and into the bush?

The second problem is that there are very few standing buildings in the Mount Alexander Diggings. Only six of the thirty three sites are intact buildings. Four of the nineteen in the Castlemaine section are intact buildings, but three of these are in town areas. Some of the main mine sites are in ruins. The Garfield Mine had a giant waterwheel over 20 metres high, but all that remains is its foundations. At the Eureka Reef there is a well-preserved Cornish or horizontal chimney. This seems a particularly hard site for visitors to

understand, after all chimneys should be vertical. In the great majority of sites the only hints of buildings and mining are scattered bricks and rocks and overgrown holes.

This is a very different experience to Sovereign Hill. Instead of streetscapes, there is a mainly bush landscape. Instead of crowds and colour and movement, there is isolation and quiet. Whereas the mining equipment and steam engines at Sovereign Hill are actually working, much of these at the Mount Alexander Diggings are in a ruined state, making it hard for visitors to visualise how they worked. I took my seven year old son Stephen, a Sovereign Hill veteran, to the bush-covered Eureka Reef site. Expecting Sovereign Hill, he exclaimed in disappointment – ‘where are the displays’. It was some minutes before he understood (and ultimately enjoyed) that the interpretation was in sections of the guide book to be read at numbered posts.

The interpretation provided at the bush sites in the Mount Alexander Diggings must by necessity tell quite a different story to Sovereign Hill. Isolation is highlighted. Five of the nineteen sites in the Castlemaine section are cemeteries or graves. At the Pennyweight Flat Cemetery, it is emphasised that this was mainly a children’s cemetery and that child mortality was very high in the early years of the Gold Rushes. It is a lonely undeveloped spot, because the miners chose to locate it in a barren rocky area which they were certain contained no gold. The Escott Grave, located in a lonely bush setting apparently far away from any related ruins, contains a widow and her daughter. At the Garfield Mine and waterwheel, the interpretation focuses on the lonely life of the manager and his family who lived on site, and how one of their children was injured by falling onto the waterwheel. At the Eureka Reef, which is about five kilometres from the main diggings, the story is told of how it was discovered by miners. Digging for gold was forbidden on Sundays, so many miners went for long walks in the forest. They could not dig, but if they found some gold by chance then that was allowable. Such a party out for a Sunday ‘walk’ found the Eureka Reef.

The theme of how lonely and dangerous the miner’s life might be, is used at many of the sites. Through such a theme, the story of the miners’ lives becomes personalised for the visitor (one of the five principles of effective interpretation, see Weiler and Ham 2001B). The visitor may at first find the landscape to be quite different to what they might associate with the Gold Rushes, but the isolation and risk of tragedy are concepts which they can easily relate to and understand. To further encourage this personal identification by visitors, many of the sites emphasise women and children. Thus, the interpretation of the sites enhances the visitors’ understanding of a different perspective of life in the Gold Rushes.

EXTREME ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Despite strong popular interest in Australia’s environmental history, the environmental impact of the Gold Rushes remains greatly under-researched and only partly understood. It is one of the new directions for historical research on the Gold Rushes, wide open for changing interpretations and debate (Goodman 2001). In 1976 Powell predicted that the environmental legacy of the Gold Rushes and pastoralism would be the two great areas of new research (Powell 1976, 32). While he was right with the latter, the impact of the Gold Rushes attracted little attention until the recent 150th Anniversary (see for example Garden 2001). Even then, the Gold Rushes are still often ignored, as in Bonyhady’s otherwise excellent telling of Australian environmental history through the medium of (predominately landscape) paintings (Bonyhady 2000), an unfortunate occurrence given the massive and spectacular range of paintings, drawings and photographs from the Gold Rushes.

Many of the sites of the Mount Alexander Diggings are in bush settings. However, what at first may appear to be a *natural* bush, is a highly modified environment. It is not just that miners dug holes looking for gold, though there is plenty of evidence of that. Just as importantly, the forests around Castlemaine are themselves products of the Gold Rushes (Environment Conservation Council 2000). How much they differ from the landscape before the Gold Rushes is still subject to further research and debate.

Again the Mount Alexander Diggings differs from Sovereign Hill. The latter is a constructed landscape, mainly urban and contains only hints of environmental degradation or modification. At the Mount Alexander Diggings it is a central part of the story.

That the story is imperfectly known, represents an advantage rather than a disadvantage. The gaps in our knowledge and the possibilities of ongoing research make the Mount Alexander Diggings a more interesting place to the visitor. This is further so if the visitor, while interested in the Gold Rushes, has not previously explored or heard much about the environmental impact.

The environmental impact of the Gold Rushes has been developed as one of the key themes at many of the Mount Alexander Diggings sites. The uncertainty of the interpretation adds to the interest. Examples include:

- How Aborigines lived and used the bush before and after the Gold Rushes. At the Eureka Reef there are Aboriginal wells (though one guide suggests that they may have been created by miners grinding quartz).
- The forest trees were probably larger and wider apart before the Gold Rushes. Kangaroos are probably more plentiful now.
- Most of the trees will shoot from the base when cut down (*coppicing*). What appear to be clumps of small trees may be quite old individuals, which have been cut two or three times since the start of the Gold Rushes.
- Water was vital to the miners. Washing was the main method of separating the gold from gravel and clay. Extensive water channels are found throughout the bush. At the Forest Creek Mine, water was concentrated through a high pressure hose to break up alluvial deposits (*sluicing*), creating a highly degraded and weed-infested environment.
- While it is commonly thought that environmental concern is a modern phenomenon, as early as 1855 some miners were voicing their concern about environmental degradation.

It is valuable in considering the presentation of environmental impacts at the Mount Alexander Diggings to reflect on why tourists choose to go on guided tours (or indeed use guide books). A long held view is that guides are chosen as providers of access (Weiler and Ham 2001A). Their role is to take tourists to places which the tourist would find much more difficult to find by themselves. A counter view is that guides are being increasingly chosen as providers of interpretation. What the tourist really values is the meaning and understanding that an effective guide provides (Weiler and Ham 2001B).

The sites at the Mount Alexander Diggings are not difficult to access. Nearly all have clearly visible signposts and some have been popular stops for years. The tour guides and guide book are not primarily to provide access. Their primary role is in providing interpretation. While many visitors will know the basics of the Gold Rush story, it is in the lesser known areas, such as the environmental impacts, that the guides and guidebook can really add to the tourists' experiences, providing multiple perspectives on such issues.

VISITOR CHARACTERISTICS

In developing a tourist attraction and associated interpretation it is important to understand the potential visitor. This could include information as to their origin, demographic characteristics, special interests and preferred services and activities. Such information is then used to develop the features and services of the attraction and aim to attract specific market segments with targeted marketing strategies. If this information is collected regularly, it can also be used to monitor performance.

Unfortunately, the Shire of Mount Alexander and the Mount Alexander Diggings faced a significant lack of such information relating specifically to their local region. In this they have a similar problem to many other small regional areas. High quality data are available from the International and National Visitor Surveys conducted by the Federal Government's Bureau of Tourism Research. However, as these are sample surveys, the data from these collections may not be statistically reliable for small regional areas which may only have a small number of respondents. As such the results are only published for large regions, which may consist of a number of quite different towns and smaller areas (for a more detailed discussion of this problem see Frost and Foster 2002).

The Shire of Mount Alexander is located within the larger Bendigo-Loddon Tourism Region, which consists of the regional city of Bendigo and a range of smaller towns. In utilising statistical data for this region,

planners and tourism operators need to assume that visitors to Mount Alexander share all the same characteristics as those for the whole region. Given, for example, Castlemaine's development as an arts and crafts destination, the validity of such an assumption is limited. Indeed it seems that the available data are drawn mainly from Bendigo.

Even if they could access data for just Mount Alexander, it would also be of limited statistical reliability. The Regional Tourism Trends Project, conducted by Parks Victoria and the author, analysed the *unit records* (ie individual responses) for the 1999 National Visitor Survey. Of the 28,000 Australians surveyed who made overnight trips, only 41 stayed overnight in the Shire of Mount Alexander. This is far too low a sample to have any meaningful value.

In order to obtain more relevant information, the Shire of Mount Alexander initiated its own visitor survey (as have other small regional areas, see Frost and Foster 2002). The Mount Alexander Visitor Survey began in October 2001. Visitors are surveyed at the Castlemaine and Maldon Visitor Information Centres (VIC). Each day, up to ten visitors are selected at random and surveyed by the VIC staff or volunteers. With a target of over 2,500 responses per year, the survey is much larger than many which are run in small regional areas, but such a high number raises its statistical reliability.

Eight questions are asked. These are:

1. Origin (if Australian, postcode is recorded; if overseas their country)
2. Length of stay (if overnight, number of nights recorded)
3. If overnight, type of accommodation.
4. Mode of transport.
5. Reasons for visiting *this* Visitor Information Centre.
6. Sources of information *before this* visit.
7. Activities on *this* visit.
8. Reason for this visit.

The results of this survey are relevant for the Mount Alexander Diggings and the interpretation it provides in two main ways. First, it provides a general picture of the characteristics and activities of tourists in Castlemaine and Maldon. This may be used for changes to the project and its marketing. As noted above, previously decisions were based on results for the much larger Bendigo-Loddon Region.

Second, it is possible to analyse the data to answer questions of specific relevance to the Mount Alexander Diggings. For example, there has been some concern as to whether visitors to historical mining sites also engage in other activities or not (implicit in this is whether or not they spend money elsewhere). This question can be considered by comparing survey results for people who said they were going to visit historic mining sites versus those who indicated that they would not.

At this stage, the comparison is for the first five months of the operation of the survey (October 2001 to February 2002). In that time 1066 visitors were surveyed, of which 35% visited historical mining areas, as against 65% which did not. The comparisons are shown in table 1.

Table 1: Characteristics and activities of visitors to Mount Alexander, October 2001 – February 2002 (%)

Characteristic/Activity	Percentage of respondents visiting historic mining sites N = 373	Percentage of respondents NOT visiting historic mining sites N = 693
Overseas visitors	22	13
From interstate	33	30
From Victoria	45	57
Day tripper	48	61
Overnight stay	52	39
Visited VIC for information on attractions	83	61
Visited VIC for information on tours	32	20
Visited VIC for information on history	58	34
Visit historic buildings	67	38
Visit a museum	37	17
Ride a steam train	36	23
Take a tour	23	15
Visit galleries or craft shops	42	36
Visit antique shops	43	36
Visit park or garden	34	24
Eat at a restaurant	57	46
Go bushwalking	15	7
Visit a winery	15	10

The results are only preliminary and should be treated with some caution. They tend to indicate that visitors to the historical mining sites are different to those who do not visit. In particular:

1. Historic mining areas are attractive to overseas visitors. 22% of those who visited mining areas were from overseas, as opposed to the overseas only comprising 13% of those who did not visit mining areas. Furthermore 46% of overseas visitors went to mining areas. As found in the survey, the main sources of overseas visitors were Great Britain, Northern Europe (especially Germany), New Zealand and the USA.
2. Visitors to the historic mining areas were more likely to stay longer. Just over half of them stayed overnight in the immediate area. In contrast less than 40% of those who did not visit the mining areas stayed overnight.
3. Visitors to historic mining areas had higher rates of usage of the VIC in general and specifically for information on attractions, tours and history.
4. Not surprisingly, visitors to the historic mining areas seemed to be history buffs. They had much higher rates of visiting historic buildings and museums, riding steam trains and taking tours (which are mainly historical).
5. In addition, those who visited historic mining areas also patronised non-historic activities. They recorded slightly higher rates for eating at restaurants, visiting antique shops, galleries, craft centres, parks, gardens and wineries. This indicates that their economic benefit is widely spread across the businesses of the two towns.
6. Visitors to historic mining areas had a much higher rate of engaging in bushwalking.

Even though the results are from a limited period, they indicate that the Mount Alexander Diggings has a positive effect on the broad range of tourism operations within the Mt Alexander Shire. These results can be used to customise interpretation for visitors at the various sites.

CONCLUSION

Sovereign Hill has shaped the way we see the Gold Rushes. Its success has created both opportunities and difficulties for other regional areas and towns with Gold Rush histories. The opportunity is to capture some of the heritage tourism market which Sovereign Hill has gained and stimulated. The difficulty is of breaking away from the Sovereign Hill structure and style.

This has been a major issue for the interpreters at the Mount Alexander Diggings. The sites and stories they have developed are often fundamentally different to those of Sovereign Hill. Many of their sites are in isolated forested areas, greatly removed from Sovereign Hill's urbanisation. The nature of their sites has led to a greater emphasis on environmental change. It is likely that the nature of the tourist and the experience they are seeking are different to those of Sovereign Hill. The challenge at Mount Alexander Diggings is to tap into Sovereign Hill's market and marketing, but distinguish its experience from Sovereign Hill's, to both compete and complement.

REFERENCES

- Ashworth, G.J. and Tunbridge, J.E. (2000). *The Tourist-Historic city: retrospect and prospect of managing the heritage city*. Pergamon: Oxford.
- Australian Heritage Commission and Tourism Council of Australia, 1999. *Draft heritage tourism guidelines: best practice for people involved in tourism and heritage places – a discussion paper*. Australian Heritage Commission: Canberra.
- Bate, Weston (1988). *Victorian Gold Rushes*. McPhee Gribble: Melbourne.
- Bate, Weston (2001). Gold: social energiser and definer. *Victorian historical journal*, 72: 1-2 (special edition *Victoria 150 years of Gold*), pp. 7-27.
- Bonyhady, Tim (2000). *The colonial earth*. Miegunyah: Melbourne.
- Davidson, Jim and Spearritt, Peter (2000). *Holiday business: tourism in Australia since 1870*. Melbourne: Miegunyah.
- Davison, Graeme (1999). *The use and abuse of Australian history*. Allen and Unwin: Sydney.
- Evans, Michael (1991). Historical interpretation at Sovereign Hill. *Australian historical studies*, 24: 96 (special edition *Packaging the past*), pp. 142-152.
- Frost, Warwick (2001A). The financial viability of heritage tourism attractions: three cases from rural Australia. In *New directions in managing rural tourism and leisure: Conference proceedings*. Scottish Agricultural College: Ayr.
- Frost, Warwick (2001B). Golden Anniversaries: festival tourism and the 150th Anniversary of the Gold Rushes in Victoria and California. *Pacific tourism review*, 5: 3-4, pp. 149-157.
- Frost, Warwick (2002). Powerhouse economies of the Pacific: a comparative study of nineteenth century Victoria and California. In Dennis O. Flynn, Arturo Giraldez and James Sobredo (Eds), *Studies in Pacific history: economic, social and political history*, pp. 42-55. Valorium/Ashgate: Aldershot UK.
- Frost, Warwick and Foster, David (2002). Strategies for effective tourist data collection for small regional areas: a case study of the Echuca-Moama Tourism Study. In *Proceedings of the Twelfth Council of Australian University Tourism and Hospitality Educators International Research Conference*. Promaco: Fremantle.
- Garden, Don (2001). Catalyst or cataclysm? Gold mining and the environment. *Victorian historical journal*, 72: 1-2 (special edition *Victoria 150 years of Gold*), pp. 28-44.
- Goodman, David (1994). *Gold seeking: Victoria and California in the 1850s*. Allen and Unwin: Sydney.
- Goodman, David (2001). Making an edgier history of gold. In Iain McCalman, Alexander Cook and Andrew Reeves (Eds.), *Gold: forgotten histories and lost objects of Australia*, pp. 23-35. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Griffiths, Tom (1987). *Beechworth: an Australian country town and its past*. Greenhouse: Melbourne.
- Griffiths, Tom (1996). *Hunters and collectors: the antiquarian imagination in Australia*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Mount Alexander Diggings Committee (1999). *Discovering the Mount Alexander Diggings*. Mount Alexander Diggings Committee: Castlemaine.

- Powell, J.M. (1976). *Environmental management in Australia, 1788-1914: guardians, improvers and profit*. Oxford University Press: Melbourne.
- Serle, Geoffrey (1962). *The Golden Age: a history of the colony of Victoria, 1851-1861*. Melbourne University Press: Melbourne.
- Tourism Victoria (1997). *Goldfields regional tourism development plan*. Tourism Victoria: Melbourne.
- Tunbridge, J.E. and Ashworth, G.J. (1996). *Dissonant heritage: the management of the past as a resource in conflict*. Wiley: Chichester.
- Weiler, Betty and Ham, Sam (2001A). Perspectives and thoughts on tour guiding. In A. Lockwood and S. Medlik (Eds.), *Tourism and hospitality in the 21st Century*, pp. 255-264. Butterworth Heinemann: Oxford.
- Weiler, Betty and Ham, Sam (2001B). Tour guides and interpretation. In David B. Weaver (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of ecotourism*, pp. 549-564. CABI: Oxford.

NOTE ON AUTHOR

Warwick Frost teaches Tourism at Monash University. He previously developed and taught Heritage subjects at La Trobe and RMIT Universities. From 1997 to 1999 he was the chair of the 150th Anniversary of the Victorian Gold Rushes Festival organising committee. He is currently engaged in research into the dynamics of tourism in historic towns and the environmental impact of the Gold Rushes.