

Editorial

For many people mining is a subject of ongoing fascination. Mining museums dot the countryside and together attract tens of thousands of visitors annually. Former mining towns and mine sites are featured in tourist drives and heritage trails while hundreds of thousands of people annually visit Sovereign Hill, the historical park in Ballarat that simulates a gold rush town of the 1850s. Despite this obvious popular appeal, Australian historians in recent years have been reluctant to engage with mining as a subject of scholarly attention. David Goodman attributes this to the current fashion in social history that disdains the event in favour of the longer term process.¹ As a result mining is treated as an aspect of local and regional histories but rarely as a subject in its own right.

Although mining has failed to excite the historical imagination, it has had the opposite effect in archaeology. The papers in this volume represent only the tip of the large iceberg that is mining archaeology. There has been at least one article related to mining in each of eight of the twelve volumes of *AHA* published to date. When Peter Bell, who preceded me as editor, nominated mining as the topic for this volume in 1993, his most pressing problem was that of how to limit the number of contributors and papers rather than whether there would be enough. The authors of the papers here are only a few of the people studying mining and mining sites and since that first call for papers new scholars have entered the field and new studies have been undertaken.

Mining archaeology is a large and vigorous field and that raises a question: why is the situation so different to that in history? Why are archaeologists so drawn to mining? At a recent international conference on mining archaeology, Stephanie Moser noted the historical links between the development of the disciplines of geology and archaeology. Some of the first discoveries of ancient archaeological remains in Europe were found by miners and geologists in caves and quarries and both disciplines have a tradition of holding fieldwork in high esteem. Historical archaeology also has strong intellectual links with industrial archaeology and there too the history and technology of mining has played a prominent role.

There are other reasons for this preoccupation with mining. Archaeology is by definition the study of physical traces of the past, the objects and landscapes left behind by previous human activity. Mining has been almost unparalleled in its effect on

the Australian landscape, and in the scale and scope of traces left behind. Mining landscapes are large and permanent; prominent physical features that demand attention. Mining landscapes are also ubiquitous in Australia and are found in every state and territory. For people trained in reading physical remains, the evidence of mining is everywhere and hard to miss. A further stimulus in mining archaeology was provided by the resource boom of the late 1980s when high prices for base metals led to a revival in mining. One of the most serious threats to mining sites is further mining, and as a result heritage managers and mining companies alike have commissioned mining heritage studies in order to assess the impact of renewed mining.

The papers in this volume represent the spectrum of studies in mining archaeology, including metallic and non-metallic mining, hard rock and alluvial mining, technology, mining communities, and management issues. The volume begins with a paper by Michael Pearson on assessing the significance of mining places. Following this are papers by Jan Wegner and Ruth Kerr, both of which describe mining machinery surviving on sites in Queensland. Cos Coroneos' paper on the Lisle-Denison goldfield in Tasmania continues the focus on the process of mining, as he examines the costs of various approaches to working alluvial deposits. The final group of papers, by Ian Jack, Jillian Comber, Greg Jackman, and myself, situate a consideration of technologies and processes within the social fabric of the associated mining communities and include a shale-oil community, Chinese miners, subsistence gold miners and tin miners. While most of the papers were initially prepared in 1993 and 1994, publication has been delayed and as a result some of the papers have been substantially rewritten in order to reflect changing circumstances. Because all of the papers make use of units of measurement which may be unfamiliar to readers, a table of measurements has been included for ease of reference.

Credit for the conception of the idea this special volume on mining must go to Peter Bell, who also edited it in its initial stages. When other commitments made it necessary for Peter to end his involvement, I was pleased to be invited to take over the job of editor.

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1 David Goodman, *Gold Seeking: Victoria and California in the 1850s*, (Allen and Unwin, St. Leonard's NSW, 1994) p. ix.