



(McLintock, A.
H., 2009b)

1852
1856



GOLD DISCOVERIES

Early Traces

The presence of gold in New Zealand had been known from the beginning of European colonisation. As early as 1842 whalers discovered traces in the Coromandel district, while, almost simultaneously, one of Arthur Wakefield's survey parties found traces in the Takaka River, near Nelson. Nothing was done about these discoveries and, as the early prospectors were only interested in alluvial gold, there appeared little likelihood of any sustained rush to New Zealand sites. By the early 1850s, however, the authorities were concerned at the increasing stream of settlers who were leaving for the Australian and Californian gold-fields. Early in 1852 certain influential citizens of Auckland offered £100 reward (later increased to £500) for the discovery of alluvial gold in payable quantities near the capital. In September 1852 Charles Ring, of Coromandel, claimed the reward. A small "rush" occurred, but this lasted only from November 1852 till January 1853, less than £1,500 worth of gold being found during the whole period. A few miners continued to work at Cape Colville and Mercury Bay, but by June 1853 most had departed.

The next important discovery occurred in Nelson, where many minor "finds" had already been reported. By October 1856 it had been established that gold existed in payable quantities, but the Provincial Government showed no inclination to encourage miners to exploit the field. A few local settlers drifted to the Aorere Valley, near Collingwood; by February 1857 there were about 60 miners in the district. Three months later there were 1,500. The miners' interest centred on the Collingwood-Takaka district and by August 1859 nearly £150,000 worth of gold had been exported from Nelson. Hochstetter, who visited the field about this time, reported that returns were falling rapidly and that there were only 250 miners working around Collingwood. By this time most of the settlers had returned home and there had been no rush from Australia.

Between 1857 and 1859 Government surveyors reported seeing traces of gold on the West Coast districts. In November of the latter year Rochfort reported that his party had found gold "in vast quantities" in the Buller River. It was not until two years later, however, when Reuben Waite exhibited gold won from the Buller River in a jeweller's window in Nelson, that any real interest was taken in the discovery. A few miners hastened to the locality, but no concerted rush occurred.

Gold had been known to exist in Otago long before Gabriel Read's discoveries and, according to one popular tradition, Tuhawaiki is said to have told Tuckett of its presence as early as 1844. Throughout the 1850s settlers reported minor discoveries in many parts of the province. In 1858 Black Peter found gold near Lawrence and, in the following year, near Tokomairiro. In July 1860 Blacklock and Roebeck found it in the Maitai district. By the end of the year gold had been reported from all parts of Otago, but it was still not believed to exist in payable quantities. In March Samuel MacIntyre, an old Californian miner, found gold in payable quantities in the Lindis

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Pass area and a small rush developed; however, bleak winter conditions soon forced the miners to abandon their diggings.

In view of later rushes to the New Zealand gold-fields, one may wonder why these did not begin earlier. The answer lies in the fact that while early prospectors had a keen eye for topographical features resembling those of the Australian and Californian goldfields, they possessed little knowledge of the geological formations in which gold might be found; and this, together with the miners' preference for alluvial gold, led them to ignore in certain districts rich quartz reefs.

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