

(1)



KING RIVER AND MOUNT LYELL GOLD FIELDS.

Trial Harbour, 19th September, 1885.

SIR,

HAVING just returned from a visit to the King River and Mount Lyell Gold-fields, I have the honor to submit the result of my observations thereon.

The only present operation in the vicinity of King River is that of the King River Prospecting and Gold Mining Association. Although so many lease sections were applied for adjoining those of the King River Company, nothing in the way of prospecting has yet taken place on any of them, and the holders seem to be still awaiting the operations of the Company mentioned. The mine of this Company is situated immediately contiguous to Lynch's Creek, where the original discoverer and others obtained a large quantity of gold two years ago. The main tunnel is 200 feet below the surface. In this the reef has been driven upon and proved for a space of 500 feet, its maximum width being 7 feet, the average width being 3 feet, and pronounced payable. Thirty feet of this distance consists of a "shoot" containing exceptionally rich stone, out of which prospects at the rate of 20 ozs. to the ton were taken, unpicked, from a face six inches in width. The reef has also been driven upon in the upper levels—in the 70 feet level, 245 feet, average width 2 feet, and payable; in the 33 feet level, 40 feet, 10 inches wide, and payable. The total length of tunnelling in the main level is 700 feet. The manager is still driving on the reef, having 3 men employed, and "paddocking" the stuff ready for crushing whenever the means shall be provided.

The other principal centre of gold-mining is situated in the vicinity of the Linda River, under Mounts Lyell and Owen, and is reached by what may be said to be literally a "wallaby track" made by prospectors and diggers through extremely broken, precipitous, and densely wooded country, and extending about eight miles, and crossing the Queen River twice by means of spars felled across the stream. In some places the traveller has to climb acclivities by the use of hands and feet, with the aid of roots and branches of trees. Added to this is the ever present mud, from 6 inches to 2 feet deep even on the steepest hills. The labours of the unfortunate gold-seekers, carrying from 50 lbs. to 80 lbs. on their backs, as the only means by which they can continue to inhabit the region, can be only slightly imagined by those who have not had personal experience of these tracks. But it is confidently stated by men well acquainted with the country in question that a good track can be obtained by means of the spurs of the hills without crossing the Queen River. This, however, belongs to another branch of the subject, of paramount importance to these gold-fields, if their development be desired, and which I purpose taking the liberty of bringing under the notice of the Government in a separate communication.

The Linda, a tributary of the King River, takes its rise among the lower hills on the eastern side at the base of that portion of the West Coast range known as Mounts Lyell and Owen; and in this locality are situated the present principal gold workings. On the summit of a lower ridge connecting these mountains a quartz prospecting claim is held by the Mount Lyell Prospecting Association, which consists of a co-operative working party of six members, with one special prospector. They also generally employ two extra men on wages. The prospecting operations proper of this association consist in excavating into the ridge mentioned with at present a face of about 20 feet in depth, which depth is nearly all "stripping," and consists mainly of immense rocks of iron ore—indeed, almost pure iron. These masses of iron ore are some 10 to 20 tons in weight, and necessitate, as may be supposed, a vast amount of labour, with appliances of screwjacks and dynamite to remove them, and the drilling operation for blasting is an extremely slow and laborious operation. The party have also secured under their Miners' Rights their quarter-acre claims for alluvial on this spot and below it, where there is a lead of surface gold of highly payable quality, but generally so fine as to be incapable of separation from the sand without the aid of mercury; and whilst following this lead into the hills they are very sanguine of

finding the reef from which the gold has been derived. There is also under foot on the ground where this party is working a large mass, apparently a continuous lode of pyrites, and persons assuming to be conversant with the subject are of opinion that this will prove to be the identical lode from which the gold has been shed. It is, however, to be regretted that the proprietors have never yet sent any portion of this pyrites for analysis. In the same working also occurs masses of a dark chocolate-coloured earthy matter, said to be "gossan," thickly impregnated with small grains of native copper. Down the face of the hill in the same line the soil contains fine gold on the surface. The party, whilst judiciously pursuing the work of prospecting for the reef, are simultaneously by the same operation working their alluvial claims by means of sluicing, with tolerably complete appliances for saving the fine gold. It is fortunate that payable gold is obtainable in the course of their work; were it otherwise it would be impossible for persons without considerable capital to meet the great expense of such operations in such a country, and what will probably prove to be a valuable discovery would have little chance of being ever accomplished. Many spots on the same slope of this ridge have been profitably worked by small parties by means of sluicing, from near the surface to four or five feet in depth. North of this locality, and about half a mile distant, is situated White's Creek. Here are located three other co-operative parties, two consisting of three men each, and one of four men. This creek was worked out and abandoned some 12 or 18 months ago, after yielding a large quantity of gold down to what was supposed to be the bottom. Extended claims of an acre, under the Regulations, have recently been taken up upon it, and the supposed "bottom" having been broken through, a lower deposit of auriferous character, judged to be payable by sluicing, was discovered. One of these parties, Messrs. M'Donough Brothers and Yieder, are sluicing a face of 30 feet deep, and they have not yet reached the bottom. I assisted in washing two dishes of earth, one taken from near the bottom, and the other from near the top of this face. The yield could not be entirely freed from sand, owing to the extreme fineness of the greater part of the gold. Having since weighed the mixture it showed 9 grs., but it is estimated to contain about 4 grs. of gold, which is considered an exceptionally satisfactory yield. The other claims are not so deep as this one, owing to the natural slope of the surface. The nature and appearance of the alluvial soil of the whole locality remind me forcibly of Beaconsfield; there are also fragments and pebbles of the peculiar conglomerate there called "cabbage-tree." Properly the whole of the alluvial wash should pass through a battery, and doubtless would do so if such were available; as it is, there is a vast quantity of indurated clay and soil which escapes disintegration in sluicing, and probably in some remotely future day these tailings will amply repay the enterprise of crushing them. Those enumerated are the only quasi-permanent works. There are several men in the various creeks and gullies about the Queen River, on the western side of the range, "gully-raking" and prospecting, with highly satisfactory success in some few instances, if it were not for the expense and great labour and loss of time in keeping themselves supplied with provisions in so inaccessible a place. The total number of men on the field is 35, but it is to be feared that on milder weather setting in a larger number will be tempted to try their fortune there. This is at present much to be deprecated, as such men will quit the place again immediately after experiencing the inexpressible hardship which is the inevitable condition of their remaining. It is quite useless to expect the development of this Gold Field until efficient pack-horse tracks to the King and Linda Rivers are provided. Notwithstanding its great promise it is impeded by natural obstacles, the removal of which must involve a very considerable lapse of time, even if the necessary pecuniary means were at once available.

I have the honor to be,
Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

W. H. GLOVER,
Commissioner of Gold Fields.

BERNARD SHAW, *Esquire, Secretary of Mines.*