



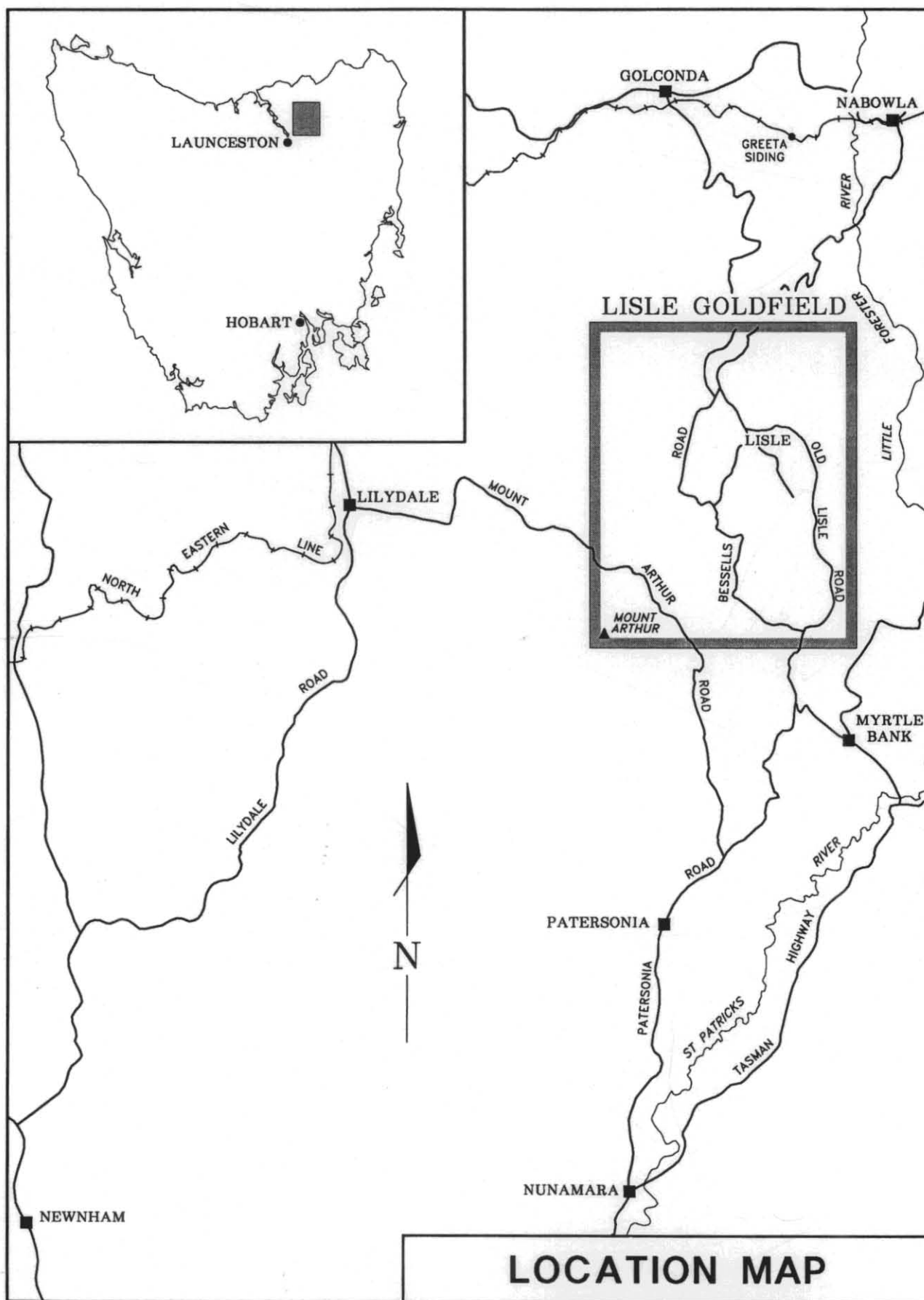
**Tasmania Department Of Resources and Energy**

**Division of Mines and Mineral Resources**

## **Report 1991/17**

# **The Lisle Goldfield — A brief history**

*by G. J. Dickens*



Draftsman :- Andrew S. Mc Guinness 22/10/91

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## THE DISCOVERY

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The former gold mining township of Lisle is situated in a secluded valley on the northeastern slopes of Mount Arthur, east of Lilydale. Access to the town is by road from Launceston, either via Nunamara (50 km) or via Nabowla (70 km).

The Lisle valley is a pear-shaped basin about 5 km long and 3 km across at the centre, and which tapers to a point towards the southern end. The principal watercourse is named Lisle or Main Creek, which during the brief period of prosperity provided the largest deposits of alluvial gold.

During the 1870s and early 1880s, the search for gold took precedence over most other metals or minerals. Extensive exploration throughout northeast Tasmania during this period resulted in the discovery of gold at Beaconsfield, Back Creek, Lefroy, Lyndhurst, Mount Victoria and Gladstone.

It was early 1877 when Charles Bessell from Launceston discovered alluvial gold deposits at Tobacco Creek<sup>1</sup>. Although this deposit was to produce almost 2000 ounces of gold, it more importantly provided Bessell with the inspiration to explore further afield. This find is known today as the Bessell Reward Mine.

It was to be almost eighteen months later that the discovery of the Mount Arthur (later Lisle) Goldfield, located 4 km to the south over Lone Star Ridge, took place. This time, it was Charles Bessell, together with brothers Thomas, Alfred and Edwin, who made the important find during December 1878<sup>2</sup>. The remaining member of the party was an expert bushman by the name of Mark Gibbs.

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## A BOOM TOWN IS BORN

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The discovery immediately precipitated a gold rush, which within twelve months had attracted some 2500 people to the area<sup>3</sup>. Mining operations were to quickly transform the valley from dense, impenetrable bush into barren gravel flats. Prior to mining activities, a feature of the area was the magnificent dense forest which covered the valley floor. This forest included tall stands of mountain ash (or stringy gum), blackwood, myrtle and sassafras, intermixed with musk, dogwood, wattle and manfern.

On 12 March 1879, Governor Weld visited the area and named the township Lisle, in memory of his wife's family name (De Lisle). The unofficial name of the settlement was Bessell's Creek. By the end of March about 1000 men were reported to be working claims extending for a distance of nearly two kilometres. By the end of 1879 reports showed that the field was producing about 400 ounces of gold per week<sup>4</sup>.

Lisle was officially proclaimed a town on 29 January 1889.

The first three years saw the construction of four hotels, five stores, three baker and three butcher shops, post office, police station and a Wesleyan Church. All the buildings appeared to be constructed of timber, with many cottages

built of slab walls and shingle roofs. Even the town's main street (The Esplanade) was paved with split slabs, because it used to become a quagmire during winter.

The four hotel licensees were Robert McKenzie of the "Lisle Hotel", William Titmus of the "All Nations Hotel", Thomas Faulkner of the "Post Office Hotel" and Daniel Connolly, who was in charge of the "Governor Weld Hotel"<sup>5</sup>. Charles Furlong operated the Post Office and store. Of the other businesses in the township, one deserves a special mention. This was a general store run by James and Charles Ogilvie, who claimed to stock "the largest assortment of mining tools at lowest prices!". James and son Charles later became successful tin miners at Gladstone.

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## LIFE ON THE GOLDFIELD

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The Skemp brothers, in their book *Memories of Myrtle Bank*, give an account of a visit to Lisle during 1883, and accurately described what they saw:-

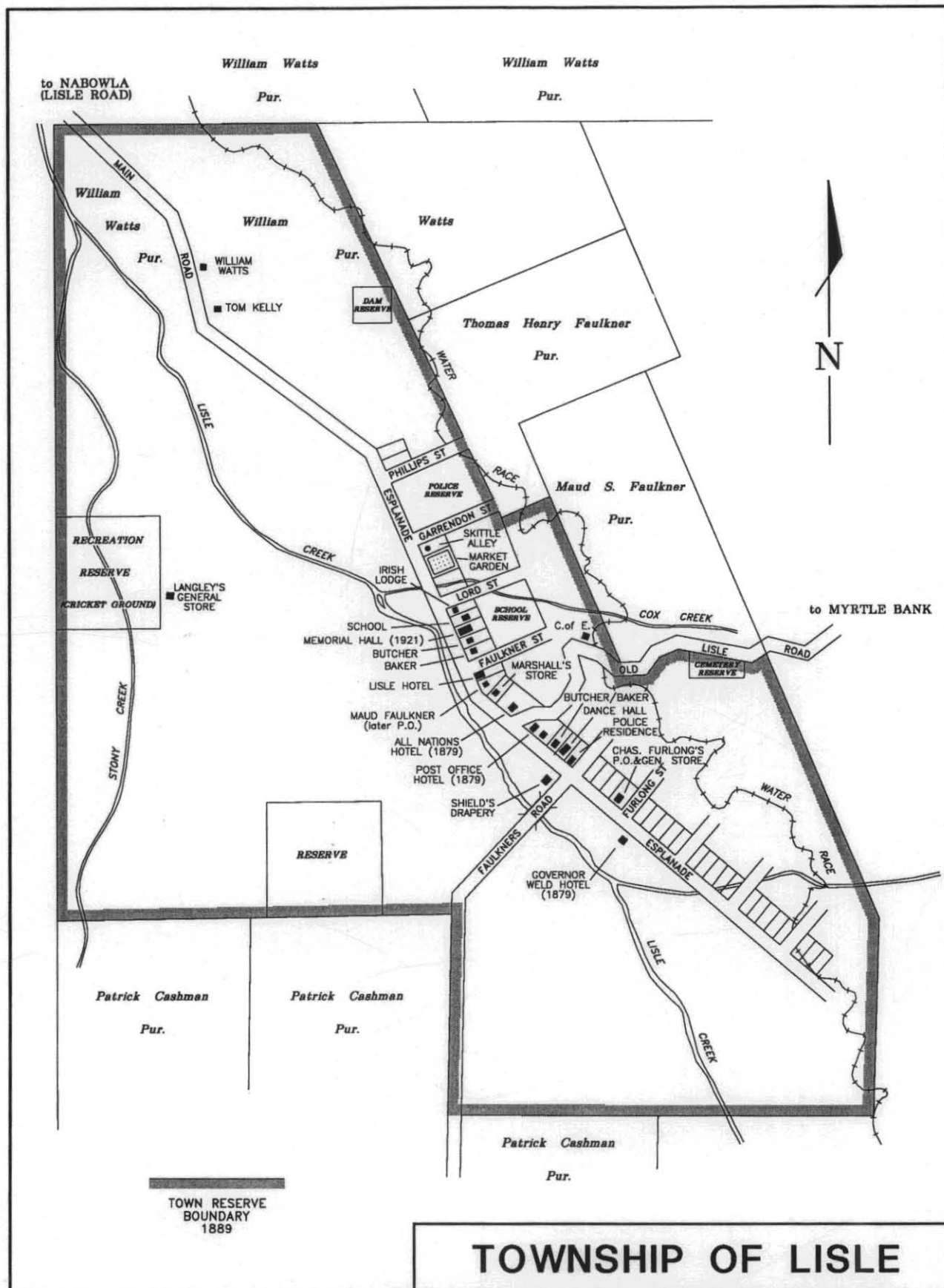
"The Lisle goldfield, although it was becoming worked out, still had 2000 men working on it. There are few places more unbeautiful than an alluvial mine, with raw yellow excavations, muddy water lying in desolate pools, or running through rough races and sluice boxes, unsightly heaps of mullock and tailings, and uprooted trees.

The miners' houses, little more than camps, are in keeping, roughly built of slabs and bark, without comfort or sanitation and obviously temporary. Even if the mine lives longer than expected rarely are they improved or replaced."<sup>6</sup>

Although the general scene displayed a lack of permanence, Alfred Bessell decided to build a nine-roomed house for his family of fourteen<sup>7</sup>. This double storey dwelling would have been the most substantial residence in the town.

Access to the diggings was by way of an extremely rough and tortuous 10 km bullock track from Myrtle Bank, the track climbing a 600 m high ridge before negotiating a steep 350 m descent into the Lisle valley.

To cater for travellers between Launceston and the goldfield, four accommodation houses were established along the way. Hotels were situated at Nunamara, Patersonia (2) and at Myrtle Bank. The main coach road through to Scottsdale at that time went via Patersonia and Myrtle Bank. Mail in and out of the valley was carried by horse along the track from Lisle to Myrtle Bank, where it was transferred to the coach which operated daily between Launceston and Scottsdale<sup>8</sup>. James Pearce, a Patersonia blacksmith and farrier, was one of the first to operate a mail service between Myrtle Bank and Lisle along the track known today as Old Lisle Road. This mail service continued until the start of World War I, after which time it was conducted via Nabowla railway station.



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## THE POST BOOM PERIOD

This scene of intense activity and immense prosperity was to change dramatically. By the end of 1884 the miner population had rapidly dwindled from more than 1000 to about 80, indicating that the rush had well and truly ended<sup>9</sup>. The 1883 goldrush to Temora (NSW) was responsible for many of the miners and their families leaving the district. The following eight years saw the population decrease to 122. The 1891 census indicated that a total of 67 males and 55 females lived in the area. The following census, taken in 1900 (9 years later), showed a total of 119, which indicated that the population had stabilised.

During the period covering both census, the number of miners working the field averaged about 50.

The following figures are supplied from Department of Mines records<sup>10</sup>:-

1886	80 miners	3000 ounces*
1887	70 miners	1720 ounces
1888	60 miners	1360 ounces
1890	50 miners	1200 ounces
1891	40 miners	1000 ounces
1894	50 miners	1440 ounces
1895	50 miners	1230 ounces
1896	50 miners	1000 ounces
1898	40 miners	800 ounces

The 1897 records indicate that many of the miners were part-time farmers, suggesting that during the dry summer months, farming helped to supplement the miners' income.

An 1894 report by Government Geologist Alexander Montgomery indicated that during the first fourteen years, the Lisle Goldfield had yielded more than 75,000 ounces of gold<sup>11</sup>.

During the 1890s Lisle suffered a dramatic decline in services. The police station, originally staffed by two constables from 1880 to 1882 with one constable thereafter, closed down during 1894<sup>12</sup>. It also appears that the only hotel to survive beyond 1890 was Faulkner's "Post Office Hotel". William Kenworthy's general store and Charles Furlong's post office and store were the only other business enterprises to survive this period. Titmus' old hotel, which was later destroyed by fire, was said to have been purchased by one of the Bessell brothers.

## AFTER 1900

The Lisle School, which opened in 1886, was forced to close about 1905 due to the small number of children in the district. Miss Adelaide Furlong, one of Charles Furlong's six daughters, had been teacher for the last six years. The "Post Office Hotel" finally closed its doors in 1906<sup>13</sup>. William Titmus, formerly of the "All Nations Hotel", had become licensee of the Golconda Hotel before finally building Lilydale's log cabin hotel.

The year 1900 saw the establishment of the Lisle Dredging Company's \$8000 plant along Lisle Creek. The following three years saw the dredge processing the old workings until finally suspending operations towards the end of 1904. At one stage the operation was employing up to 40 men. Although beset with problems, which included a lack of summer water and large areas of unpayable ground, the Company still managed to produce more than 1600 ounces of gold during this period<sup>14</sup>.

Until the opening of the Scottsdale Railway in 1889, the track to Myrtle Bank remained the most convenient access to the goldfield. However, the mail continued to use the original route for many years afterwards. In fact, this practice was still in operation during Mrs Furlong's term as Postmistress (1908-1913). Because of Lisle's isolation, church services were conducted on a monthly basis. The first permanent church erected in the township was a small Wesleyan Chapel, which appeared to have ended regular services by 1894. A fortnightly service was later performed by a visiting Anglican by the name of Reverend Wilkinson. He was also Headmaster of the Church Grammar School, which was situated in Elizabeth Street, Launceston. The Minister would travel on horse back from Launceston to Patersonia to hold a morning service at Millwood's "Mount Arthur Hotel" before riding the rough track to Lisle for an afternoon service at the Anglican Chapel<sup>15</sup>. On most occasions, Reverend Wilkinson would stay overnight at Alfred Bessell's home and return to Launceston the following day, a ritual which apparently continued until just prior to World War I.

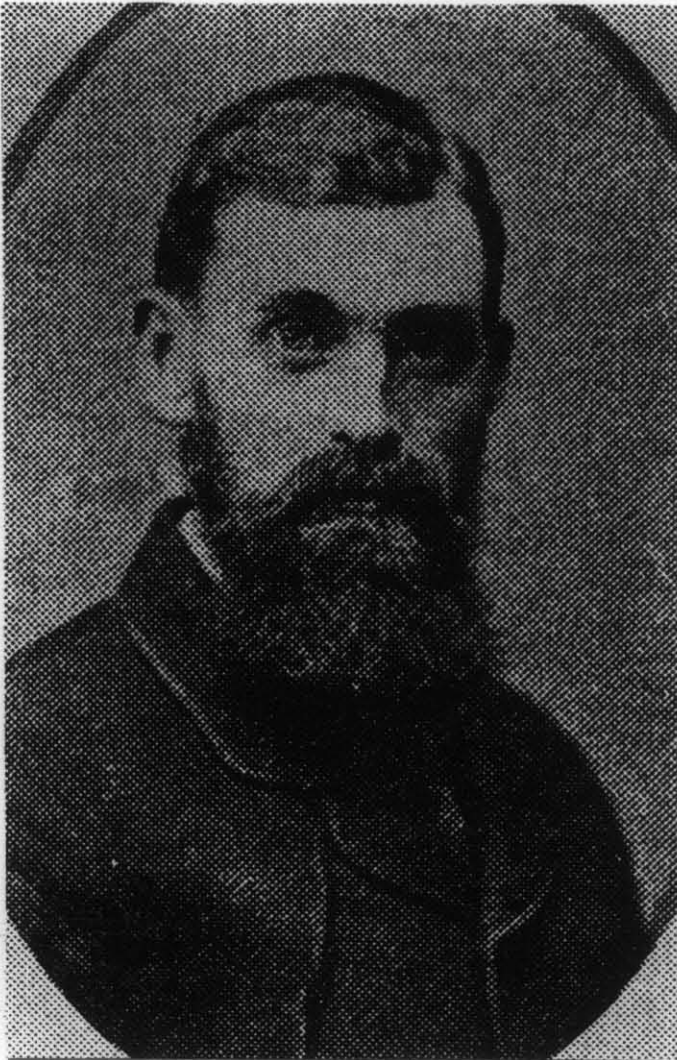
The Salvation Army was also active in the district during the early 1900s. Based at Lilydale, they would walk a 15 kilometre pack track to the Lisle Valley to provide regular Saturday night entertainment and spread the gospel.

Following the closure of the dredge, the field was virtually abandoned, with only 17 men producing 209 ounces of gold during 1907.

In 1909 Government Geologist William Twelvetrees released a comprehensive report on the Lisle Goldfield, which showed a mining workforce of only two dozen men. There was a sawmill in the valley owned and operated by George Hudson, which supplied timber for mining and building purposes in the township as well as providing employment for several men. The remainder of the valley's inhabitants occupied the few scattered homesteads.

Scrub was beginning to encroach on flat land once cleared for mining many years ago. The purchased land in the centre of the valley and on the eastern slopes had been cleared, but the remainder was still closely timbered. The hillsides were covered with tall gums, together with thick undergrowth of dogwood, musk and cathead fern. The clayey soil on the lower slopes and in the valley provided suitable conditions for grazing. Charles Furlong, the Postmaster, had apparently been successful in cultivating an apple orchard<sup>16</sup>. Some of his fruit was even exported to England.

\* The value of an ounce of gold in 1880 was \$7.65. In 1991, it is about \$480.



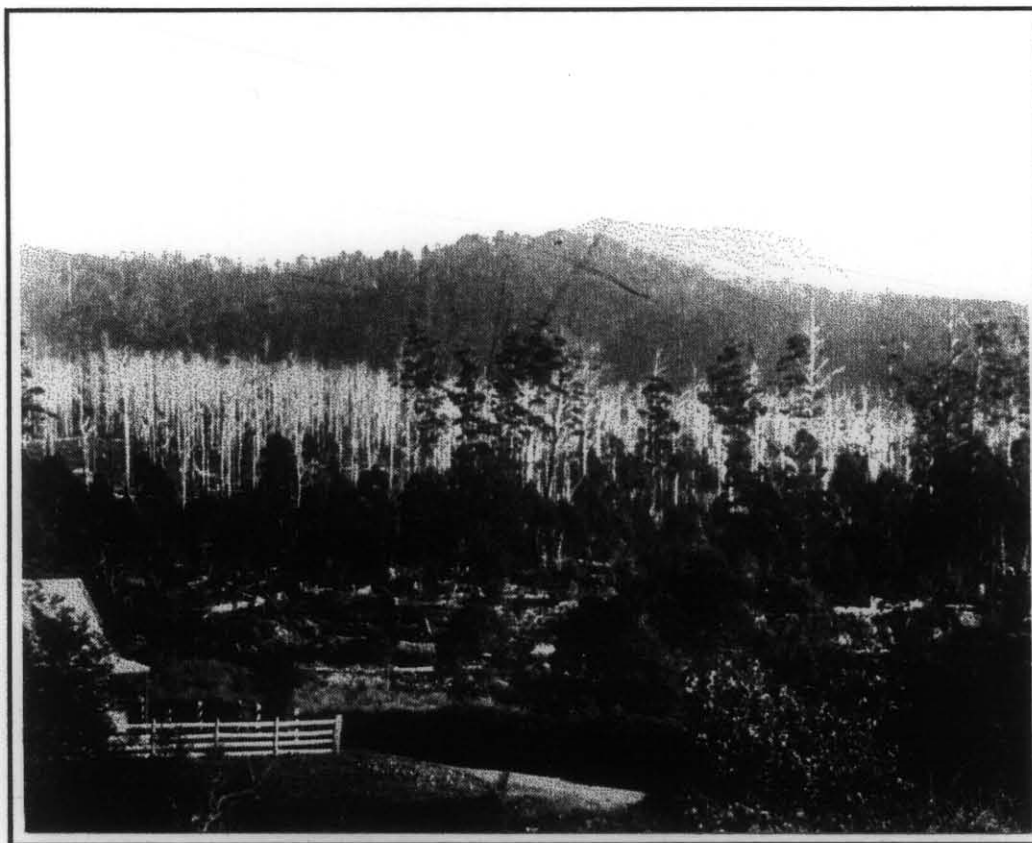
CHARLES BESSELL, who discovered gold at Tobacco Creek in 1877, and with brothers Thomas, Alfred and Edwin, discovered the Lisle Goldfield in December 1878.

[Photo: *The Mercury*]

MRS RUBY BESSELL, who married William, son of Charles Bessell. Postmistress at Lisle from 1927 to 1942. One of the last residents of Lisle.

[Photo: P. C. Sims]





Lisle Valley, 1909.

[Photo: W. H. Twelvetrees]



Lisle Valley, 1909.

[Photo: W. H. Twelvetrees]



It was evident that from Twelvetrees' description of Lisle, the township still supported a small population which was involved in a mixture of milling, farming and gold fossicking. As with the previous year, 1910 saw the field still supporting about 25 men involved in mining.

The four years from 1907 to 1910 saw gold production maintained at an average in excess of 200 ounces.

Mining activity eased during the next four years until the Lisle Hydraulic Gold Mines NL commenced operations late in 1914. The year 1915 saw this company in full production. Using an 18 horsepower engine and a 10 inch gravel pump, the company produced 108 ounces of gold from an area on the eastern side of Lisle Creek. Along with several other small claims, the Lisle area produced a total of 205 ounces of gold for the year. After a quiet 1916, the mine increased production to 294 ounces the following year while employing eight men. The company was working a one metre wide lead for a distance of about two kilometres to an average depth of seven metres<sup>17</sup>.

In the meantime, according to George Bessell's estimation, Lisle's population in 1910 was around 200, which was a marked increase from the 119 recorded in the 1900 census. Also about the same time, he recalls a general grocery store owned by George Hudson, with Bessell's father Alfred being the town's only butcher<sup>18</sup>. Hudson later operated a sawmill and built "Inglenook", which from 1927 onwards became Lisle's post office.

## THE DECLINE

In 1918 the Lisle Hydraulic Company's production of gold peaked at 560 ounces, with 300 ounces extracted from a new area on the western side of Lisle Creek. This impressive output was achieved while employing 12 men. Surprisingly, the following year saw the area's gold production drop dramatically to just 110 ounces<sup>19</sup>. Subsequent records show that the Lisle Goldfield had entered a period of permanent decline.

Although two new syndicates were established during 1922 it took only three years to prove to the mining industry that the area could no longer support a viable enterprise. The larger of the two syndicates was called the New Bonanza Mining Company, which constructed a 20 km water race from the headwaters of the Little Forester River to their leases at Lisle. This was a Hobart-based company set up to work ground on the eastern side of the Lisle valley.

The other syndicate was known as the Lisle Sluicing Company. Between them the syndicates were employing about 25 miners during the first year<sup>20</sup>.

Despite the demise of mining, the township was still home to a small permanent population. The year 1921 saw the opening of the community hall, which was built from timber processed at Hudson's sawmill. Known as the Lisle Memorial Hall (in memory of World War I dead), it took more than two years of voluntary labour to build. Maud Faulkner was Postmistress, while Robina Dallas was the teacher at the Lisle School, which had reopened in

1913. Walter Hudson (George's son) was then in charge of the sawmill, while Louisa Langley operated the general store. There were still several gold miners residing in Lisle including John Bessell and Robert Bessell, who was listed as a miner/manager. Official Department of Mines records show the production figures for the field as:-<sup>21</sup>

1923	200 oz
1924	163 oz
1925	111 oz
1928	97 oz
1929	252 oz

During 1927, Ruby Bessell\* commenced duties as postmistress from her home at "Inglenook", which was located in Bessells Road on the western side of the Lisle Valley, about three kilometres by road from Maud Faulkner's old post office. Mrs Faulkner's house was located just north of the junction of Old Lisle Road and The Esplanade (or Main Street), in the centre of the township.

Containing the only telephone in the valley, and with mails twice a week, Mrs Bessell operated the Lisle Post Office until 1942, when with husband William, she moved to Launceston. "Inglenook" was a rambling nine-room timber house with a shingle roof, built during the mid 1890s by George Hudson, who earlier owned the Post Office and General Store at Nabowla.

Directly across the road from "Inglenook", towards Lisle Creek, stood a steam-driven sawmill which was built about 1889 by Hudson's father-in-law, Alexander Gill. Hudson eventually took over the mill and constructed eight kilometres of wooden tramway to link up with Greeta Siding on the North Eastern Line. Timber used in the construction of "Inglenook" was processed at this mill, which eventually closed down during the early 1920s<sup>22</sup>.

Prior to sawmilling, George Hudson was reported to have conducted a butcher's shop and bakery from one of Lisle's closed hotels.

By 1930, the Lisle township was reduced to a Post Office, hall, school, a general store and a population of about 60.

An increase in mining activity occurred in 1932 when several parties became involved in sluicing, which netted 221 ounces of gold. Extensive prospecting was also carried out in anticipation of recommencing large-scale hydraulic mining<sup>23</sup>.

Interest was maintained during 1933 when sundry claims produced almost 200 ounces of gold<sup>24</sup>. The three years from 1936 to 1938 were the last in which an annual production exceeded 100 ounces. In 1938 125 ounces of gold were produced by ten men, compared with the following year (1939) when seven men produced 76 ounces<sup>25</sup>.

1937 proved to be a significant year, when on 23 August, the single room Lisle School closed its doors for the last time. Miss Jessie Hill, who boarded at "Inglenook" (Post Office), was the teacher at that time. The same year also saw the closure of Langley's General Store, necessitating

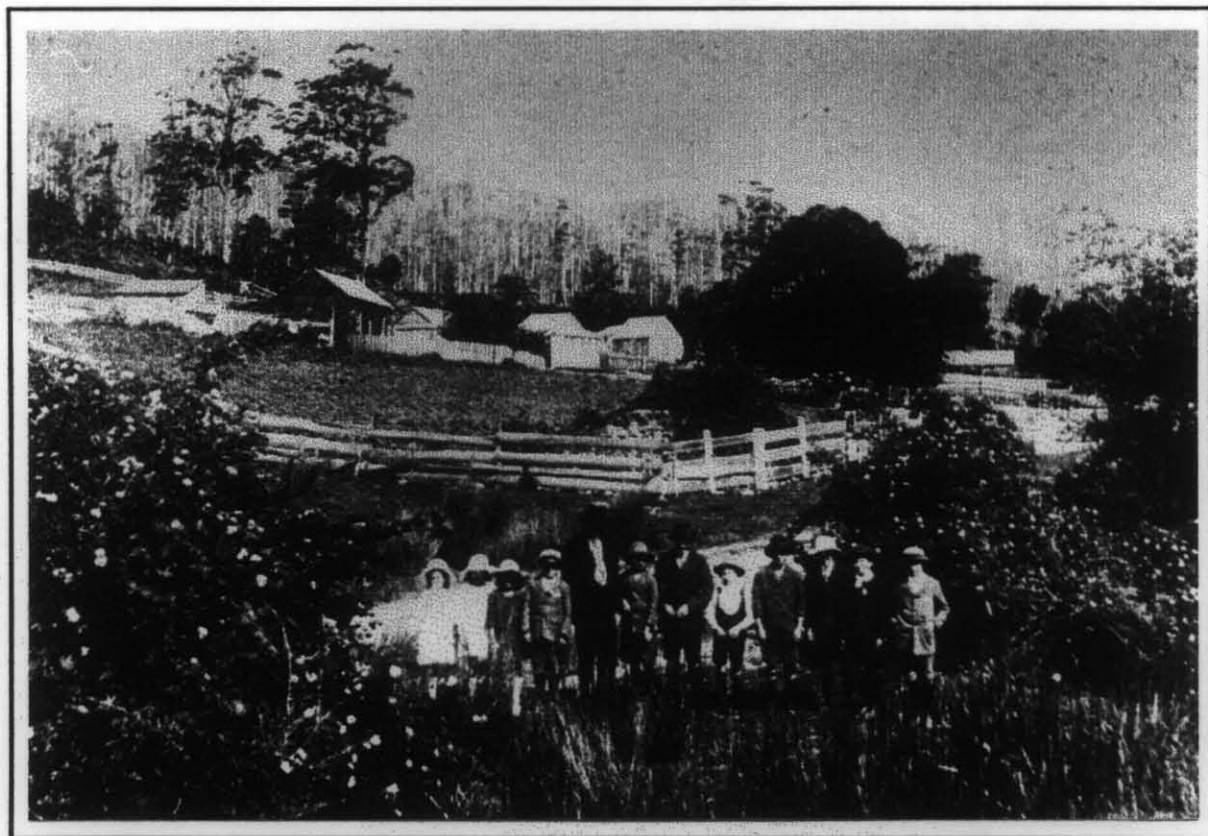
\* Ruby Bessell was a daughter of George Hudson who married William, a son of Charles Bessell





Opening of the Lisle Memorial Hall, 1921.

[Photo: *Weekly Courier*]



View of the Lisle township, 1921.

[Photo: *Weekly Courier*]



Lisle Post office, circa 1935 [Photo: J. A. Nicklason]



Hudson's Sawmill at Lisle, circa 1920 [Photo: J. A. Nicklason]

the need for a "produce truck" from Nabowla to provide a weekly service to the district<sup>26</sup>.

Lisle's population did increase during 1937 due to an influx of several families from Launceston, who were trying to escape the polio epidemic there. However by 1939 the estimated population had fallen to 54, indicating that the township was in rapid decline<sup>27</sup>.

During 1940 the abandoned Lisle School building was transported to Launceston and became part of the new Summerdale Primary School being constructed at Prospect.

By 1948, the population had shrunk to just 24 souls<sup>28</sup>. The official gold output for that year was only approximately 30 ounces from a workforce of three men. The improved output of 51 ounces during 1953 was later seen as "the last hurrah"<sup>29</sup>.

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## THE CONCLUSION

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William and Ruby Bessell returned to live at "Inglenook" during the late 1940s, from where postal services were still conducted.

When the Post Office officially closed on 31 July 1950, the township of Lisle ceased to exist. However "Inglenook" still functioned as an unofficial post office for a few more years.

In 1951 the first of many pine plantations was established in the Lisle Valley by the Forestry Commission. William Bessell obtained a job as a Foreman until his retirement in 1956. The Bessell's continued to reside at "Inglenook" until 1962, when ill health forced them to return to Launceston<sup>30</sup>.

Shortly after their departure, a Forestry Commission bulldozer destroyed the township's last remaining residence to make way for a new pine plantation.

Since 1953, the only significant gold find at Lisle came from the old school site, which has been worked periodically since 1971.

Today (1991) there is little evidence to show that a bustling town of some 2500 people ever existed. If the Bessell Brothers were to return to the townsite now they would find it difficult to recognise the area in which they once lived and worked over a century ago.

To scramble around the overgrown mine workings (much of which has been obliterated by pine plantations), it is hard to imagine that this isolated valley had produced an estimated 250,000 ounces of gold over a period of 80 years<sup>31</sup>.

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## THE BESSELL BROTHERS

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Some of the Bessell family history has been documented by Peter Sims in his book *The Norfolk Settlers of Norfolk Island and Van Diemens's Land*.

Following is a brief summary of family members involved with the discovery and development of the Lisle Goldfield.

Charles Bessell, who discovered gold deposits at Tobacco Creek in 1877, was one of fifteen children born to English migrants George and Mary Ann Bessell, who had arrived in Tasmania during 1854.

Charles, along with three other brothers in Alfred, Thomas and Edwin, discovered the Lisle Goldfield late in 1878, having walked all the way from the family home at Newnham.

After the initial boom period, Alfred (with 12 children) and Charles (with 9 children) selected 250 acres and 300 acres of land respectively as a side-line to mining activities. Both built large permanent residences at the southeastern end of the township.

Meanwhile, Thomas and Edwin had left the field to prospect for gold at Camden Plains. Although moderately successful, they finally returned to their original camp at Tobacco Creek. They found gold in nearby Cradle Creek which sparked another rush involving about 600 men. The Bessell family continued its involvement in this area prior to World War II.

Alfred and Charles continued to prospect for gold at Lisle beyond 1900, the latter was still listed as a claim holder in Twelvetre'es' 1909 report. However, the Post Office Directories of 1901-1905 listed the two Bessell brothers as farmers.

After World War I, their sons George, Ernest, Robert, John and William, carried on the mining tradition for many years. Today, the family name is perpetuated in the Lisle district by Bessells Creek, Bessells Road and Bessells Ridge, which forms the eastern boundary of the Lisle Valley. Outside the valley, along Nook Road, is a farm known as "Bessell Springs".

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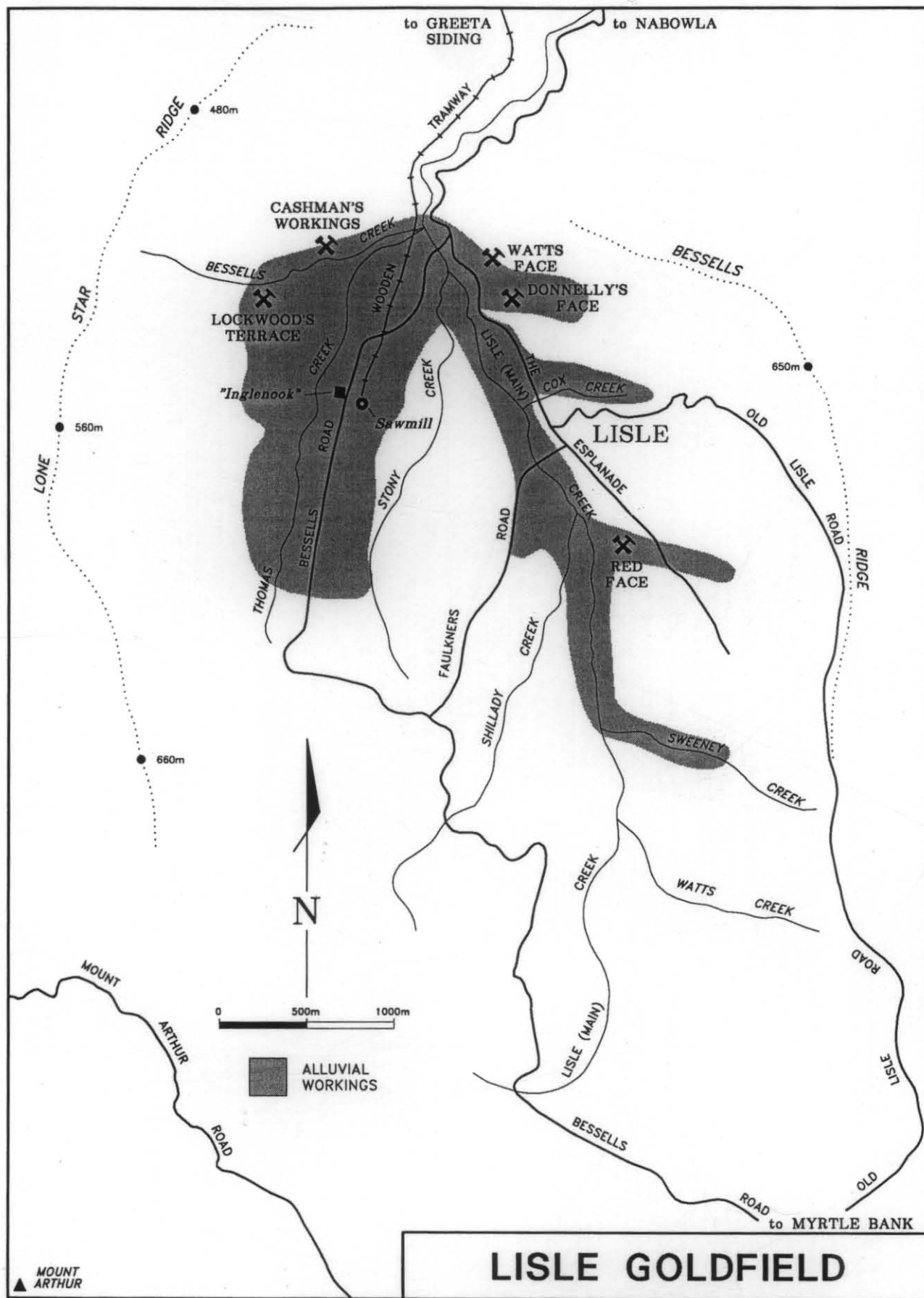
## THE MINING FIELD

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A general survey of the mining area showed that most of the workings occurred along the flats serviced by the larger creeks and mainly up along the terraces that form the northern and eastern rim of the valley. Of the creeks, records have shown that Main (later Lisle) Creek has been the principal supplier of alluvial gold. Although there were significant deposits along Bessells and Thomas Creeks, subsequent reports have indicated that Lisle Creek has been a continuous producer during the life of the field.

While referring to the terraces, or higher ground, 'Donnelly's Terrace', on the northern boundary of the township, was regarded as being the richest.





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The alluvial ground worked along Lisle Creek formed a belt of about 200 m in width containing irregular patches of gold in wash averaging between 0.5 and 2 metres deep. The deepest known ground was about five metres<sup>32</sup>. The worthwhile gold-bearing ground stretched for a distance of two kilometres, commencing near the gorge at the head of the valley and extending to an area known as the Red Face. During the boom period (1879–83) it was this section of Lisle Creek which supported the bulk of the miners on the field.

Along with Lisle Creek, the rich alluvial lead followed the two main tributaries in Bessells and Thomas Creeks. These streams descended the slopes of Lone Star Ridge, which forms the western perimeter of the Lisle Valley.

In addition to the main alluvial workings, Thureau's 1882 report indicated that there were attempts made to mine gold on higher ground. Charles Bessell tested the slopes of Lone Star Ridge with an adit<sup>33</sup>. This was located near the source of what is now known as Bessells Creek\*. Gold production (if any) from Bessell's Tunnel is unknown, although its location can still be found today.

On the opposite side of the valley, high above Donnelly's workings, were two adits driven into the side of the hill by William Titmus and party. Titmus was also licensee of the "All Nations Hotel" at Lisle. Just below was a third adit, 130 m in length, and owned by the Defiance Tunnelling Company<sup>34</sup>.

Finally, at the southern end of the alluvial workings, the Lisle Tunnelling Company had been responsible for a 150 m tunnel at the head of the gully on Sweeney Creek<sup>35</sup>.

In each case, the search for gold proved unsuccessful and the workings were subsequently abandoned.

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## THE MAIN WORKINGS

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### *Donnelly's Creek and Terrace*

These workings were located close to the valley entrance, on the eastern side of Lisle Creek, and developed into one of the richest and most extensive on the Lisle Goldfield. Originally opened up by Donnelly and party during the 1880s, they have been worked intermittently until recently (1990).

According to Charles Bessell, the original syndicate extracted more than 1000 ounces of gold from four feet of terrace<sup>36</sup>.

William Watts later extended operations during the 1890s, and according to Twelvetreets, was still working this claim in 1909. In addition to mining, Watts owned farming land just outside the valley on the eastern side of Lisle Creek gorge. After a brief period of inactivity (prior to and after World War I), interest was rekindled by a syndicate known as The New Bonanza Gold Mining Company. Although formed during 1921, mining activity commenced the following year under manager Charles G. Robinson. An area of approximately 1000 acres (405 ha) was taken up by

\* Bessells Rivulet was the original name for Lisle Creek

the Company, this area extending almost two miles (3 km) south along the eastern side of Lisle Creek, from Watt's Face (about 250 m north of Donnelly's workings) to the northwest corner of Alfred Bessell's 147 acre (60ha) freehold, referred to as Bessell's Face.

During 1922, Robinson advised the Company to purchase land from William Watts and Alfred Bessell, and was fortunately rewarded with a small rich patch of ground from each property<sup>37</sup>.

Watt's Face was reported as having a one metre thick band of gold-bearing wash beneath five metres of overburden, whereas Donnelly's Face had a gold-bearing band of three metres beneath 2 to 3 metres of light overburden<sup>38</sup>.

Bessell's Face, on the southern boundary, had shown potential but proved to be a long term failure. A small area of about two metres in depth did produce 100 ounces of gold.

As previously mentioned, a 20 km water race from the Little Forester River was commissioned to service the New Bonanza Company leases. A survey was carried out by Donald Fraser during April 1923 for the Company's applicant Harry V. Downward<sup>39</sup>. Fraser was a prominent mining surveyor and hydraulic engineer, who was previously responsible for the survey and construction of the Ringarooma Race for the Briseis tin mine at Derby.

Completed about the end of September 1923, the new race cost \$10,000 to construct and had a carrying capacity of 25 sluice-heads of water. The race, which included almost one kilometre of syphon, was cut on contract at an average cost of £2 per chain (\$4 per 20 metres)<sup>40</sup>.

The Company had earlier constructed an additional ten kilometres of water race during 1922 which diverted water on two levels from the upper reaches of Lisle Creek<sup>41</sup>. The first fortnight's result from sluicing the three main workings yielded an encouraging 95 ounces of gold. However, after a promising start, declining production levels forced the Company to abandon its leases after only three years of operation. During the final year (1924), the New Bonanza Company had tried various areas, mainly terrace wash, for small returns. Production finally ceased pending the upgrading of plant<sup>42</sup>.

Since 1925, Donnelly's Face has been worked periodically with mixed success. Argyle Minerals, the current lease holder, installed a \$48,000 extraction plant in December 1987 which was designed to increase production to 6,000 ounces of gold annually. After limited success, the Company suspended operations during 1990.

### *Red Face (or Red Cliff)*

This was considered the second richest 'terrace' of the Lisle Goldfield. The extensive workings were situated on the southern boundary of the Lisle township, wedged between the eastern bank of Lisle Creek and the main street. They were originally part of leases worked by the original prospectors who systematically worked their way up Lisle Creek. These workings have subsequently proved



Lisle diggings, 1880s.

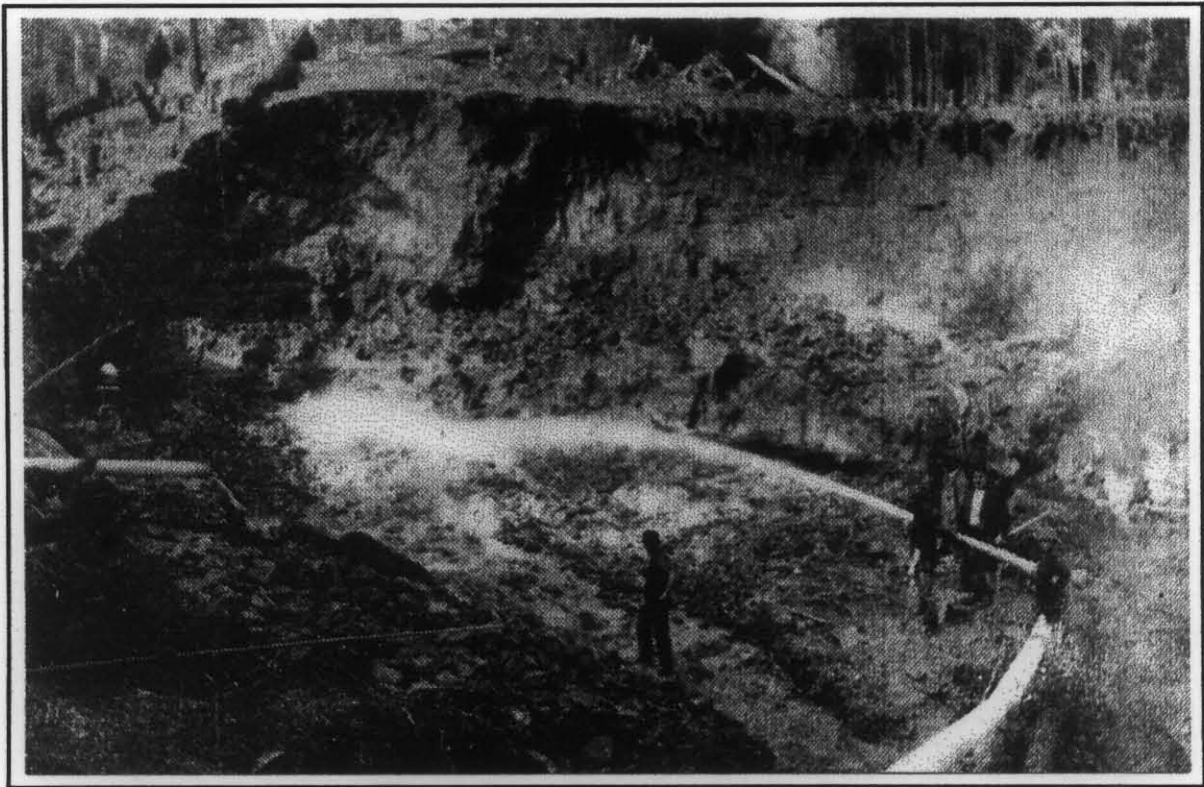
[Photo: Tasmanian State Archives, Hobart]



New Bonanza Company, Watt's Face, 1923.

[Photo: *The Mercury*]





New Bonanza Company, Donnelly's Face.

[Photo: *The Mercury*]



New Bonanza Company, Donnelly's Face, showing sluice boxes and tail race, 1923.

[Photo: *The Mercury*]

to be the limit of payable ground on the eastern side of the Lisle Goldfield. Charles Bessell believed that an early report showed that 200 ounces of gold was obtained at the face, from an area of less than ¼ acre (1000 m<sup>2</sup>), while another 600 ounces was obtained from ½ acre (2000 m<sup>2</sup>) of ground nearby. In another area lower down the creek, opposite the Post Office, 550 ounces of gold were won from a rich patch of ground. During the 1890s, the cliff workings were subjected to exploratory work by the Mount Arthur Prospective Association, who drove three tunnels into the hill<sup>43</sup>.

During the Twelvetees' visit of 1909, the Red Face was being worked by Watts and Langley, who were working a one metre thick gold-bearing wash beneath about three metres of overburden. At that time, the ground was described as clean and had the reputation of being the best on the field. Small sapphires and rubies were also being found amongst the wash<sup>44</sup>.

Like Donnelly's workings, the Red Face is one of the few areas that has been an intermittent producer until recent times. The last known occasion was from Alex White (1985–87), who not only destroyed the remainder of the workings but decimated the surrounding area in the process.

### *Lisle (or Main) Creek*

This area has been the principal supplier of alluvial gold for the whole field. From the beginning, when the Bessell brothers discovered the area, the creek has continued to be a producer when other areas had been worked out. Originally known as Bessells Rivulet, it was the scene of the initial 'rush' back in 1879<sup>45</sup>.

Charles Bessell's 1894 report relates many extraordinary stories of patches of rich ground. He mentions the Clare Brothers, who obtained more than 1000 ounces of gold from two men's ground. Shillady and party were reported to have won over 2000 ounces from their claims. The first claim that Charles Bessell worked on yielded almost 500 ounces of gold from four men's ground<sup>46</sup>.

After the brief boom period, the creek's alluvial flats continued to provide employment for a small permanent workforce.

A report by Department of Mines geologist Alexander Montgomery during 1894 stated that the alluvial workings had spread over an area of 200 m in width. His report also mentioned that the area was worked principally by ground-sluicing, and to a lesser extent, by means of hydraulicking. The gold was found to be very fine in grain with nuggets being quite rare<sup>47</sup>. For the first 30 years, Lisle Creek was mainly the domain of the individual or small syndicate miner.

The first company leases were taken up during 1900 when the Launceston-based Lisle Dredging Company was established. With Mr I. A. Molyneux as manager, a suction plant commenced working the creek during the latter part of 1901. The alluvial gravel was estimated to be worth one shilling (10 cents) per cubic metre. However buried timber proved to be a constant problem. This necessitated the dredge to be moved on each occasion. As previously stated,

a three year struggle did manage to produce 1600 ounces of gold for the Company<sup>48</sup>.

The following decade saw the area revert back to its original status. Twelvetees' 1909 report listed nine small claims along Main (Lisle) Creek, which included the names of Charles and Edwin Bessell. In 1914 the Lisle Hydraulic Gold Mines NL was established. The performance of this operation was documented in an earlier part of this report. The suspension of this company's activity in 1920 appears to be the last attempt at large-scale mining along Lisle Creek.

The one remaining lease (July 1991) is held by Launceston prospector, Ray Synfield.

### *Bessells and Thomas Creeks*

Both western tributaries of Lisle Creek, these were also important producers during the early years of the field. At the head of the Lisle Valley, situated on Bessells Creek and near its junction with the main creek, is located a deposit known as Cashmans Workings. This deposit was originally worked by Patrick Cashman, who also owned land outside the valley along Lisle Road. These workings were taken over by a prospector named Schlobohm.

Lockwood Terrace, further up Bessells Creek, was an extensive rich patch of deep ground. Originally worked by Thomas Lockwood in the early 1880s, the deepest known depth was confirmed as 20 metres.

According to Charles Bessell, 600 ounces of gold was produced in one particular year. At one stage up to 500 men were working in this area. However the lack of a reliable water supply often hampered production. During 1909, these workings were known as Harmansen's claim<sup>49</sup>.

Thomas Creek, the southern and only significant tributary of Bessells Creek, was an early source of alluvial gold.

It appears that the initial rush exhausted the rich alluvial areas very quickly, leaving only the terraces for later exploitation.

In 1909, a section was taken up in partnership by Henry Faulkner and Thomas Marshall, who were working a face by hydraulic sluicing. Further south, a few colours were found in Stony Creek (a small tributary), which would suggest the limit of payable ground<sup>50</sup>.

During the period from 1910 to 1914, two leases were being worked on the upper reaches of Thomas Creek by William Langley and John Marshall. These were later incorporated into consolidated leases 1657G and 6301G<sup>51</sup>.

Although the Hobart-based company known as the Lisle Hydraulic Gold Mines No Liability had taken up extensive leases during 1914, it was 1917 before serious mining was carried out on their western leases. The Company held a consolidated lease along Bessells Creek known as the Lisle Gold Mine, as well as a consolidated lease along Thomas Creek referred to as the Lisle Hydraulic Mine. According to Department of Mines records, a new lead had been discovered on the eastern side of Thomas Creek during 1917. The following two years saw the Company work



both areas until suspending alluvial mining along Bessells and Thomas Creeks during 1919.

The Lisle Gold Mine continued to operate intermittently until the end of 1920. The final year of operation produced 96 ounces of gold while employing two men<sup>52</sup>.

The year 1925 saw the end of large-scale mining at Lisle, when the New Bonanza Company leases were let to a local party on tribute.

During the ensuing years mining has been carried out by small syndicates and individual prospectors, systematically reworking old ground.

One new area was opened up during the early 1970s. Wilfred Imlach and Harry Graham worked the former Lisle School site with limited success. This area was taken over by Charles J. Taylor in 1984, and although he is the current lease holder, no mining has been carried out for some time.

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**LISLE, 1991**

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Lisle, 1991, showing site of "All Nations Hotel" at the junction of Old Lisle Road and The Esplanade

[Photo: G. J. Dickens]



Faulkners Road at Lisle Creek and junction with The Esplanade

[Photo: G. J. Dickens]



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LISLE, 1991

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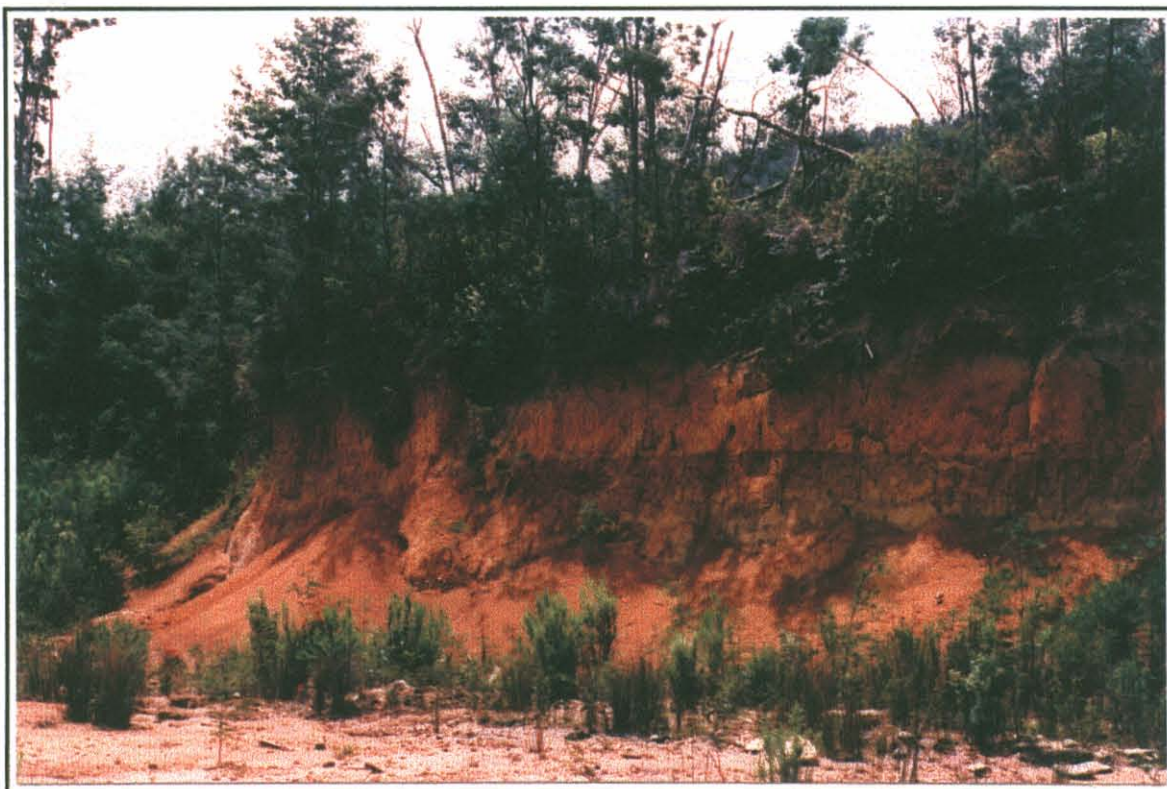


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Donnelly's Workings

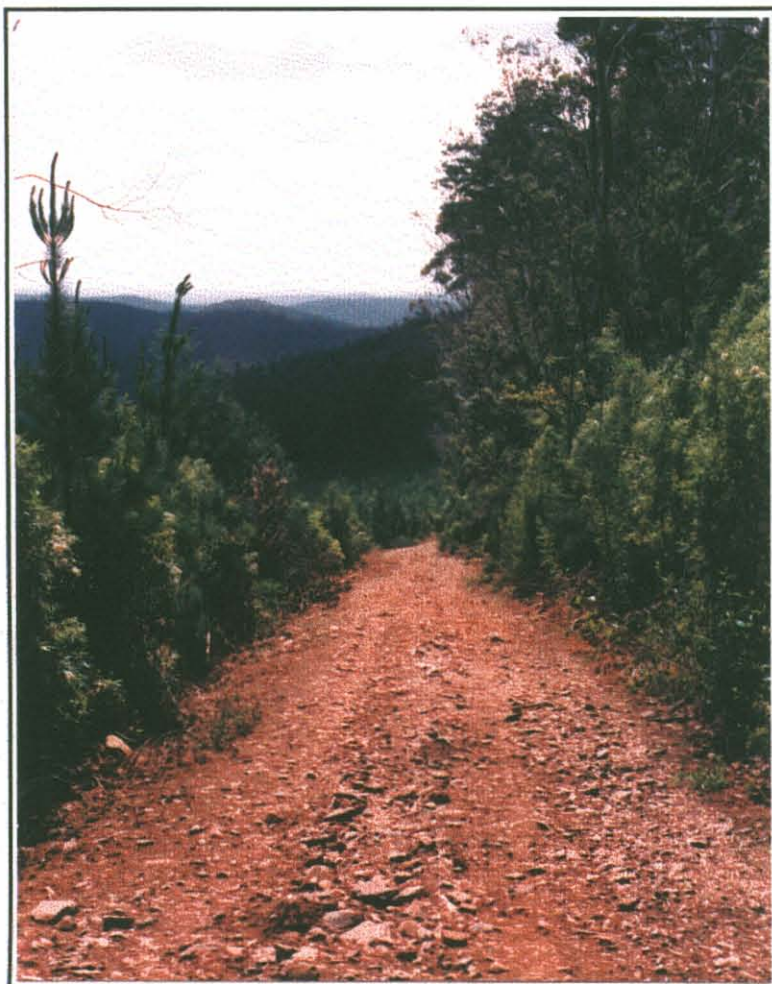
[Photo: G. J. Dickens]



Red Face

[Photo: G. J. Dickens]





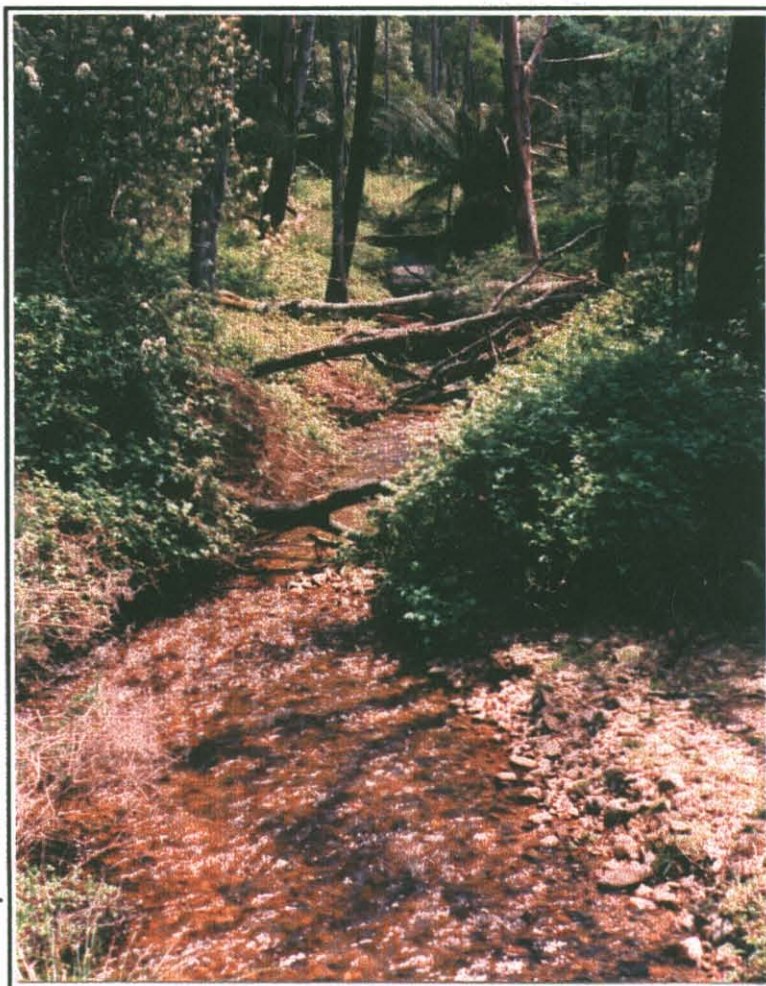
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**LISLE, 1991**

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Old Lisle Road descending Bessells  
Ridge into the Lisle Valley.

[Photo: G. J. Dickens]



Lisle Creek, scene of the 1879 "goldrush".

[Photo: G. J. Dickens]



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**LISLE, 1991**

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Mt Arthur from Hudson's Sawmill site

[Photo: G. J. Dickens]



The Esplanade, Lisle, at the junction of Faulkners Road.  
Old Lisle Road junction in the distance

[Photo: G. J. Dickens]