Student activities

Task no. 1

Eugene von Guerard

This portrait of von Guerard was drawn in 1855 by Aboriginal artist Johnny Kangatong. Johann Joseph Eugen von Guerard was born in Austria in 1811. His father was official court painter to the Emperor Francis I. Von Guerard studied at the Düsseldorf Academy and travelled in Germany and Italy. In 1852 he decided to join some Frenchmen who were heading to the goldfields of Victoria with the intention of becoming rich. Instead, von Guerard ended up making his living by doing various sketches at gold fields. He travelled extensively in Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and Tasmania and produced landscape paintings and sketches.

Extracts from Eugen von Guerard’s diary, 1852-54.

Jan 11. ...left for Eureka [goldfields] this morning, having chartered two bullock wagons to take our belongings...

Jan 18 After travelling for a week, we have arrived at Ballarat...[on the way we] met a poor young fellow who had been attacked by bushrangers, robbed of his horse and all the money he possessed and then tied to a tree.

Jan 25 Yesterday we went to peg out our claim at Eureka Hill. Our nearest neighbours are Chinamen, Englishmen and Americans.

Jan 27 Having dug to a depth of twenty-four to twenty-five feet...we came upon rock...our only gain being a practice in digging!

April 15 We are subject to periodical unexpected requests to produce our diggers’ licenses. ..[Those who are caught without licenses] are then imprisoned with robbers and other criminals. This is causing a good deal of bad blood.

June 7 ...I found a little pocket of nuggets the weight of which amounted to 1 ¾ pounds.

July 25 Have just heard that news has reached Ballarat of the holding-up by bushrangers of the gold escort between Maclvor diggings and Melbourne, the whole of the gold taken, and several of the escort left dead on the road.

August 20 Am at the moment storekeeper...[some friends] begged me to undertake the job as Armand (their storekeeper) had to go to Geelong.

September 2 One hears quite often of diggers disappearing suddenly, and long afterwards their corpses are found at the bottom of shafts into which they had fallen and been drowned in the mud. Among my new neighbours are several Chinamen who are thriving as butchers. They are frequent customers at my store, but can’t speak a word of any language but their own, so all our dealings are done by sign.

Questions:
In which state was von Guerard digging for gold? How do you know?
From which other countries did people come to search for gold?
What happened to diggers who did not produce their licenses?
Identify one significant danger faced by diggers who struck it rich on the goldfields.
What job did von Guerard undertake on the goldfields?
What was von Guerard's opinion of the gold rush? How do you know?
Portrait of von Guerard sketching, 1855
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