

EUREKA  
EDUCATION

—  
THE  
WADAWURUNG  
PEOPLE  
AND  
THE  
GOLD  
RUSH

EUREKA  
CENTRE  
BALLARAT

ART GALLERY  
OF BALLARAT



# THE WADAWURRUNG PEOPLE AND THE GOLD RUSH

image, p. 17:  
**Marlene Gilson**  
(Australia, Wathaurung, b.1944)  
**Mount Warrenheip and Eureka Stockade**  
2013  
acrylic on canvas  
76.3 x 102.0 cm  
Purchased with funds from The Sir Wilfred  
Brookes Charitable Foundation, 2013  
Collection of the Art Gallery of Ballarat

The gold rush brought prosperity to the colony of Victoria but the rapid growth of the economy had an irreversible effect on both the landscape and culture of the Wadawurrung people, who inhabited the land in and around Ballarat.

The imposition of the colonial law facilitated a relentless 'land grab', first by squatters and then by then by gold rush immigrants, and this threatened the way of life of the Wadawurrung people.

Historical accounts of the gold rush generally exclude stories of the people who lived in the area before white settlers arrived. The culture and environment of the Wadawurrung people, the traditional custodians of the Ballarat area, was overwhelmed by the influx of new people. As with most First Nations peoples in south-eastern Australia, they adapted in order to survive. During the gold rush period, the Wadawurrung people adopted many roles undertaken by European settlers and miners. They were also instrumental in the discovery of gold.

## GUIDES AND TRACKERS

Many squatters and miners relied on the local knowledge of the Aboriginal people. Hiring a guide enabled Europeans to travel across the land safely, following traditional trading routes where they could use traditional water and food sources. Guides could lead miners to the goldfields and were often instrumental in the discovery of new gold deposits. Many of the roads we use today have their origins as Aboriginal tracks.

Image details  
**Eugene von Guérard**  
**Aborigines met on the road to the diggings** 1854  
oil on canvas  
46.0 x 75.5 cm  
Geelong Gallery.  
Gift of W Max Bell and Norman Belcher,  
1923.



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© The artist

## **MOUNT WARRENHEIP AND THE EUREKA STOCKADE**

In her painting *Mount Warrenheip and Eureka Stockade* 2014, Wadawurrung Elder and artist Aunty Marlene Gilson portrays the Wadawurrung people living 'on Country' during the early years at the Ballarat diggings. In the painting she has included figures carrying out roles that many Aboriginal people undertook during this time, such as serving in the Native Police Corps, mining and fossicking and caring for miner's children.

## **NATIVE POLICE CORPS**

Aboriginal people were employed by the Government to serve in the Native Police Corps, who helped police track down criminals such as bushrangers. Between 1851 and October 1852, members of the Native Police Corps were the first police presence at the Ballarat diggings. Their role was to check gold licences, patrol new finds, guard the sites and escort gold shipments.

**Eugene von Guérard**  
***Old Ballarat as it was in the summer of 1853–54*** 1884  
oil on canvas, mounted on board  
75.0 x 138.6 cm  
Gift of James Oddie on Eureka Day, 1885  
Collection of the Art Gallery of Ballarat



## **FOSSICKING**

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Before colonisation and the gold rush, Aboriginal people quarried for greenstone, sandstone, obsidian, kaolin, ochres and basalt across Victoria. Although they did not value gold in the way white settlers and miners did, the Wadawurrung people quickly understood its economic worth. Many Aboriginal people participated, in some capacity, in the mining and fossicking for gold.

## **TRADE**

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Due to the white settlers' desire for gold, Aboriginal clans such as the Wadawurrung used gold as a currency for trade. The trading of gold between Wadawurrung and shepherds began even before the onslaught of the gold rush. Gold was traded for food supplies such as tea, sugar, flour and beef and even clothing. In addition to trading gold, the Wadawurrung are known to have traded their traditional tools. Elaborate cloaks made from possum skin were especially coveted by white settlers.

### Activity 1

#### History 3–9,

##### Cause and effect

Using artworks from the Art Gallery of Ballarat website, choose images that represent a European miner and a person from the Wadawurrung clan, making notes of the differences between them. Discuss the gold rush, including different perceptions of land and land management and the effects the gold rush had on Wadawurrung people and on Australia as a nation.

<https://artgalleryofballarat.com.au/learn/discover-hidden-stories/>

### Activity 2

#### History 3–9,

##### Historical sources of evidence

In pairs, develop a role-play script of a dialogue between a European, North American or Chinese miner and a Wadawurrung person, exploring each of their experiences and perspectives of the gold rush. Use information found in the Eureka Education Kit and your own research to inform your roleplay. Present your role-play to the class.

### Activity 3

#### Visual Arts 5–9

##### Respond and interpret

Compare *Old Ballarat as it was in the summer of 1853–54* 1884 by Eugene von Guérard and *Mount Warrenheip and Eureka Stockade* 2014 by Aunty Marlene Gilson. Compare the ways each artist have depicted the Ballarat goldfields, including the view of the landscape and the representation of Indigenous Victorians. What cultural and historical factor have influenced each artist's depiction? How does each image address the history of the Ballarat gold rush?

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## DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. What affect do you think the gold rush had on the Wadawurrung community in Ballarat?
2. How do you think the changing landscape caused by gold mining impacted the food sources of the Wadawurrung people?
3. Put yourself into the place of a Wadawurrung Elder during the gold rush. How would you feel? Describe the changes you are experiencing.

## BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Visit the Art Gallery of Ballarat to view the works of Eugene von Guérard and Aunty Marlene Gilson held in the Art Gallery of Ballarat collection.

Visit the Art Gallery of Ballarat and participate in the Bunjil Murrup program to learn more about Wadawurrung culture and tradition.

## ACTIVITIES

### THE WADAWURRUNG PEOPLE AND THE GOLD RUSH

#### Pre-visit

Complete Activity 1

#### Post-visit

Complete Activity 3

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