



Photo by Alan Horsfield

In the early years of Henry Lawson's life (1867–1922), prospecting for gold was still quite common in Australia. These were the days of gold rushes. The isolated goldfields (diggings) became littered with mine shafts where some men made fortunes but many more barely survived in the harsh conditions. The goldfields were served by the Cobb and Co. stage coaches. These coaches delivered the Royal Mail and transported the gold back to the main towns. Lawson's poem 'Roaring days' captures the feelings of long-time miners on a goldfield that had been fully worked.

Roaring days

The night too quickly passes
And we are growing old,
So let us fill our glasses
And toast the Days of Gold;
When finds of wondrous treasure
Set all the South ablaze,
And you and I were faithful mates
All through the roaring days!

Off when the camps were dreaming,
And fires began to pale,
Through rugged ranges gleaming
Would come the Royal Mail.
Behind six foaming horses,
And lit by flashing lamps,
Old Cobb and Co., in royal state,
Went dashing past the camps.

Oh, who would paint a goldfield,
And limn* the picture right,
As we have often seen it
In early morning's light;
The yellow mounds of mullock†

With spots of red and white,
The scattered quartz that glistened
Like diamonds in light;
The azure‡ line of ridges,
The bush of darkest green,
The little homes of calico
That dotted all the scene.

But golden days are vanished,
And altered is the scene;
The diggings are deserted,
The camping-grounds are green;
The flaunting flag of progress
Is in the West unfurled,
The mighty bush with iron rails
Is tethered to the world.

*paint

†mounds of waste dirt from underground
mine diggings

‡a deep blue