

## **About Blackwood**

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Blackwood, named after Captain Blackwood, is situated 95km north west of Melbourne, via the Western Highway, beyond Bacchus Marsh. It lies high above the Lerderderg River on the Great Dividing Range, north of Greendale and south of Trentham. It borders the Lerderderg State Park and the Wombat State Forest.

Various books quote the current population between 100-300. Quite a decline from 13,000 at the end of 1855 when Edward Hill discovered gold near Golden Point, on the Lerderderg River. Initially alluvial mining took place in the river and nearby creeks. The excavation of "The Tunnel" which diverted the river flow under a spur to allow riverbed access is testament to this. Later the banks and hillsides were sluiced. 200km of water races were cut and contoured into the surrounding hills and gullies to carry the water for these purposes. A French woman, Madame Bonford, was apparently contracted to cut these races. Her grave can be seen in the Blackwood Cemetery, likewise the graves of Chinese miners who arrived here in 1857. The Chinese persisted after the major rush petered, working the streambeds. They were credited with discovering the mineral springs at the Lerderderg River that later became the Mineral Springs Reserve in 1888. Shaw's Lake, on the opposite side of the River was hand made by the Shaw family for their gold mining activities.

Quartz mining started when James Simmons discovered Simmons Reef. Eleven companies extracted gold from Simmons Reef from 1869 to 1900. Nearly 15,000 oz of gold worth \$60,000 was recovered. The Sultan group of mines, north of Simmons Reef, were very rich. The Great Sultan at its peak employed 700 men. Other mines included The Red White and Blue, The British Lion and The Easter Monday. During the gold rush, timber was a critical resource necessary to support the mineshafts, fuel the furnaces and provide shelter and warmth for the miners and their families. Numerous waterwheel and steam powered sawmills were established within the Wombat Forest. The timber industry flourished. The forest was denuded of trees and dotted with mills and tramways.

Today the forest has returned. The vegetation surrounding Blackwood is dependant on elevation and aspect. The gold bearing soil is typically poor and dry, giving rise to sparse, stunted eucalyptus, wattles and hakeas, with heath and a good splash of wild flowers on the hill tops and northern aspects. Lower down in the moist gullies and by the river, Blackwoods, ferns, Hazel Pomedieris, Blanket Leaf, lush tall eucalyptus and even fungi survive in the more fertile and cooler, moister environment. The legacy of these goldmining tracks, water races and timber tramways have left the easy means to explore the history, interest and natural beauty of the forests surrounding Blackwood.

This article contains information sourced from:

- V Maryborough (Ed), Blair's Guide 'Travel Guide to Victoria and Melbourne 6th Edition', 1994, Universal Press Pty Ltd, pp. 73-75
- F E Goodge, 1994, 'Some Reminiscences of Barry's Reef', Blackwood Newsletter, October/November 1994, Issue No 19
- T T Thomas, '60 Walks in Central Victoria's Gold Fields and Spa Country', 1994, Hill of Content, pp. 217-218.