

Kiandra and the Balmain Cup

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ONE cannot write of Kiandra without one's thoughts going back to the romantic days of old Kiandra when bearded gold miners enthusiastically turned the hilly Eucumbene River inside out in their mad scramble for gold, and then sliced and sluiced away hillsides for more gold. They little dreamt that they were damaging potential ski runs with water races and mine tunnels and cuttings, or that elsewhere they were making winter schusses for present day skiers. The snows and rains of many years have now largely eroded the diggings to a condition of roughness smoothed out, and the snows of winter finally disguise the mines and the remains of many of the township's buildings that have either fallen down or have been burnt down.

Hearsay stories and statistics of old Kiandra have frequently found their way into print—and much of such information is inaccurate. In fact the era of gum boots and snow shoes (Kiandra skis) did not begin until years after the discovery of gold. Old documents inform the writer that gold was first discovered on 27th January, 1860. The following abridged extracts from newspapers of the day over the first three years following the discovery of gold are informative on the likely facts:—

S.M.H. 23rd Feb., 1860. Mr. Wm. Colter states that one party consisting of 4 men got 120 oz. in the week, and another party of 3 men were getting 20 oz. per day.

Several large Nuggets weighed 6 lbs., 12 lb., 14 lbs. Another party are getting 1 lb. weight of gold per diem. The gold procured, says Mr. Smith, is coarse and scaly, and the large specimens are blended with quartz and all very much waterworn. The two brothers Pollock were the real discoverers of the field.

S.M.H. 25th Feb., 1860. Gibson's Plains is so called from having been occupied by the late Dr. Gibson. About the year 1839 he visited the country and being struck with the extreme beauty of the plain and extent of pastures he sent men up to erect a stockyard taking with them a quantity of cattle. By the time, however, that they had finished the stockyard the winter set in and the cattle perished.

S.M.H. 8th Feb., 1860. Mr. Smith reports that he and his mate obtained 394 ozs. in 7 weeks. A 7 lb. nugget and 4 lb. of small gold is reported to have been taken from one hole 4 feet deep. Three miners from Adelaide are said to have got 147 lbs. of gold. John Mobbs writes that his party secured in 3 days 34 oz. One man named Moody washed 19½ oz. with a tin dish in one day. Mr. Thos. Davies party are still averaging 25 oz. per day.

S.M.H. 7th March, 1860. I saw 80 oz. of gold washed out of one claim in the day's work, and several are turning out 50 oz. per day. These are the best claims from the Surface Hill in the middle of the

plains where the river begins. The Commissioner has taken with him to Sydney a nugget weighing 48 oz. and another weighing 26 oz. besides a large quantity of coarse gold. The diggers wash out the boxes twice a day. An ordinary yield of gold is from 60 to 70 oz., before dinner, and from 30 to 40 oz. at night. Elliott and party of 4 washed out 80 oz. last week from surface diggings. D. Scully and party have averaged 20 oz. a day for 5 or 6 weeks, so have others. Some claims have turned out as much as 100 oz. of gold per day and many as much as 40 or 50.

S.M.H. 9th March, 1860. It is a great warning in a region like Kiandra when you see skeletons of bullocks hanging in the trees 20 feet high, up the sides of hills. The depth of snow must be fearful when it is plainly shown by this that the cattle were feeding on the top branches of trees.

S.M.H. 20th March, 1860. Over an area of half a square mile the workings have proved as rich as any ever discovered in Victoria or California. But singular to say, beyond this particular spot in the river the precious metal is obtainable only in very small quantities indeed. For about one mile these bed claims are highly profitable yielding from 10 to 60 oz. per day. I learn on pretty good authority that a man named Pearson is making in a bed claim from 30 oz. to 60. per day for the last three weeks. A Circus Co. and Horse Bazaar are in town, the latter presumably for getting rid of borrowed animals. The Commissioner computes the daily average yield of Kiandra diggings at 500 oz. to a population of 2500 or 3000.

S.M.H. 5th April, 1860. Many robberies, stickings up. Thieves get their heads close-shaved or hair cut. A digger had taken the precaution of secreting 40 oz. of gold in a dog kennel, feeling satisfied that no one would approach the canine sentinel. In a thoughtless moment, however, he took the dog with him to a rush a few miles off when some sharp individual who had watched the operation of planting visited the kennel and walked off with the dust. The escort with 11 mounted troopers left Kiandra on Monday with 7409 oz. It was believed there was fully 5000 oz. in the hands of

the miners, independent of amounts brought down by the escort.

S.M.H. 28th May, 1860. Colonel Freeling, of South Australia, reports the principal and richest diggings are situated in the bed of the Eucumbene and in a gully running in it and immediately adjacent to the township. There, although the gold yield has been found in patches, the gross yield has been very considerable. The river has been extensively prospected for 6 miles above the township. The gold found has a brassy appearance and is exceedingly coarse-looking, and the river gold is much waterworn.

S.M.H. 12th July, 1860. 400 people at Nine Mile, Kiandra. Flour £90 a ton. Two Banks, Bank of New South Wales and Oriental Bank. Population of Kiandra 4000.

S.M.H. 20th Oct., 1860. Price of gold £3/12/- . Telegraph communication with Sydney opened 16th Oct., 1860.

S.M.H. 27th Oct., 1860. To-day's escort takes 1411 oz. and £900. I know it is very difficult to convince persons at a distance that there are so few men working, but my estimate of 1200 instead of being under is, I am fully convinced, an over statement.

S.M.H. 30th Jan., 1861. Kiandra proper is now a town with 1000 settled inhabitants. Good substantial weatherboard houses 200. Provisions and stores nearly as cheap as in Sydney.

S.M.H. 6th March, 1861. Great exodus from Kiandra, many dread perhaps the coming winter. I should say that there are not more than 200 diggers left or 250. Now look at last week's escort 712 oz., 9dwts., or really 3 oz. per man per week and explain the riddle if you can.

S.M.H. 12th Aug., 1861. Everybody at 4 MILE completely snowed in. No idea can be formed except by experience of the horrors of the place. General exodus. A very severe winter.

S.M.H. 14th Aug., 1861. A chinaman found a nugget worth £30. Terrible winter, great privation, severe accidents.

S.M.H. 24th Aug., 1861. Two chinamen have recently left Kiandra carrying with them £1000, the produce of several months digging in one of the river claims.

S.M.H. 21st Oct., 1861. Kiandra is once more bringing itself into notice. The amount



The Firewood Problem and a flexible saw.

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of gold regularly sent down even during the winter months when work except for a day or two in each week was impossible, has repeatedly astonished those who make it their business to remark upon these things, but now that fine weather has set in we receive glowing accounts of great and unexpected results from new quarters.

S.M.H. 4th Dec., 1861. Very bad administration on the part of the commissioners, has as much to do with the depopulation of Kiandra as the working out of the shallow diggings.

Sydney Mail 29th Aug., 1863. We learn from a private source that a considerable quantity of snow has recently fallen at Kiandra and consequently the diggers have been much impeded in their work. The population is gradually getting smaller and it is very problematical whether this once attractive spot will ever witness a revival of the olden days. It is lamentable to observe such large and expensive buildings as are to be found in the township not only tenantless, but rapidly falling into decay. A serious lesson has been taught of the folly of erecting such structures on our goldfields, the prosperity of the richest of which has been but ephemeral. However, it is the fixed opinion of some of the most persevering of the miners that there remains at Kiandra much undiscovered wealth and that should next season prove a favourable one Kiandra will once more astonish colonists.

The writer will not pursue the story as to whether the next season did or did not astonish the colonists. Neither will mention be made regarding the early days of "Snow-

shoes," as it is necessary at this point for the reader to shut his or her eyes and pass over 86 years to the occasion when the temporary population of Kiandra on the week-end of 23rd August, 1947, was probably the biggest since the gold rush days. This modern "rush" was brought about by the fact that there was not gold but snow on "them thar hills" and that it was the week-end of the Balmain Cup competition. Kiandra was positively crowded with skiers, and day visitors from Monaro towns. Fortunately the road had been opened for car traffic despite several heavy snowfalls and very cold weather. Also, for the first time by air at this locality, a party of Sydney skiers arrived from Mascot in an Avro Anson plane with Eric McIllree as pilot and Tim Lonergan as co-pilot, plus Bob Lonergan, Alan Lowe, Clive Muir and the writer. A landing was made at Adaminaby after a hour's delay at Berridale owing to the landing area at Adaminaby being covered with snow and obscured by snowstorms in the earlier part of the morning of August 23rd. The rest of our journey was completed by car in a heavy snowstorm which provided excellent snow conditions at Kiandra on the following day, 24th August, which dawned fine, if somewhat cold and windy. However, the day could not have been better for the Balmain Cup events, as the wind died down leaving the delightful combination of dry snow and brilliant winter sunshine.

The Balmain Cup was presented for annual competition amongst Southern District Ski Clubs. The Cup is awarded to the team securing best times in Downhill, Slalom, Langlauf and/or Jumping. Team results were based on the aggregate of three best times each of of each team of six. The events were

run on August 24th, and the placings were as follows:—

Downhill—two runs from Kiandra Tableland to the road.

	Total
1. Kiandra (J. Pattinson, 1-2; J. Harper, 1-9; L. Yan, 1-11 3/5)	3-22 3/5
2. Jindabyne	3-28 4/5
3. Cooma	3-56 3/5
4. Canberra	4-18

Slalom—two runs on the Township Hill course.

1. Jindabyne (Gordon Day, 1-53 3/5; H. Blewitt, 2-12 3/5; O. Weston, 2-19 2/5)	6-25 3/5
2. Kiandra (J. Pattinson fastest time, 1-48 1/5)	6-28 3/5
3. Cooma	6-46 4/5
4. Canberra	8-57 3/5

Langlauf—A short course adjacent to the Kiandra Tableland and Bullock Head Creek.

1. Kiandra (J. Pattinson, 24-9; L. Yan, 29-30; R. Clugston, 29-40)	83-19
2. Canberra (T. Ingram fastest time, 23-42)	88-25
3. Cooma	101-33
4. Jindabyne	112- 8

Kiandra therefore won the Balmain Cup, and Cooma was the runner-up. Jindabyne secured third place and Canberra was fourth.

The best individual efforts were made by the captain of the Kiandra team (J. Pattinson), who won the Downhill and Slalom and who was second in the Langlauf. Tim Ingram, of the Canberra Alpine Club, won the Langlauf. The standard of ski-ing displayed by the competitors was very satisfactory, but the courses were far too easy especially in view of the favourable snow conditions.

Mr. Wally Reed entertained the teams and a party of visitors at a dinner at the Kiandra Chalet after the conclusion of the events, a function which very happily wound up a truly delightful day on the snow and an interesting ski-racing programme.

The writer wishes to acknowledge the co-operation of Mr. James Pattinson, senior (a resident of Kiandra for 64 years), in the preparation of this article.