

KING MINE - STOKES MINE - GOOBARRAGANDRA MINE

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By Harry Hill

Some years ago a mate and I visited Dubbo Falls on a tributary creek to the Goobarragandra River. We crossed the creek above the falls and scrambled down to the Goobarragandra River. Seeing we were on the river my mate suggested we should make our way upstream and see if we could find the Kings Mine - it would be only a few kilometres.

Progress was difficult and slow - and became more difficult and slower till we came to a stop in the boulder strewn gorge with cliff faces and 100 metre plus, 70 degree slopes on both sides of the river. My mate suggested we should climb up the eastern side of the gorge and leave Kings Mine to a later trip. He started - I followed.

Twenty minutes later I was 60 to 70 metres above the river trying not to look like the terrified spider that I'd certainly become. My mate, who was above me, and making good progress, nonchalantly asked, "Could you do with a rope?" He had one in his pack and it enabled me to get out of the Goobarragandra Gorge. A 1926 Mining Map has the notation, "Inaccessible Gorge" at the spot where we made our exit. Such is an understatement.

I was able to make another attempt to reach Kings Mine in April, 1993 and it was successful. This time it was in the company of Lyn Evans, NPWS Ranger, and Jack Bridle. Lyn wanted to visit the mine site to do some official recording and Jack and I went as company - and perhaps to help.

The second trip was far less adventurous and the NPWS vehicle took us by way of Long Plain Road and Broken Cart and Feints Range Fire Trails to the ford on the Goobarragandra River. It took us about 30 minutes searching through some very rough country before we found the water race that led us towards the mine.

The construction of the race had been quite a project; in places five metres of stone wall had been built to hold the race and it was certainly wide enough to have been both race and road - we'd heard that a road had been needed to bring in some of the mining equipment.

Eventually, we found the stamper battery no more than 30 metres from the river. Nearby were several corrugated iron tanks still holding some of the crushed quartz, a galvanized iron sluice box, several ore skips and other pieces of equipment.

We believed the actual mine was further downstream so we set out to find it. The slope of the land became steeper with much loose rock and carrying a dense cover of trees and undergrowth.

We followed what appeared to be a road or track of some kind and had to be careful of many hidden mining cuts. Jack felt that we were too high up the slope so dropped down closer to the river. A little later he called out to say he'd found the mine entrance.

In descending to reach him I almost fell down a hole, or slit, which dropped away vertically and was of some depth. We subsequently found that the first working of the mine was on a series of vertical quartz reefs cutting across a ridge that rose above the river.

We found one such cut that was about 15 metres long, a metre wide, and deep enough that we couldn't see the bottom, but a dropped stone stopped its noise at about 30 metres. The walls of each cut were smooth, but not straight, and we could see pieces of timber spanning the gap. We concluded that the whole of the quartz reef had been removed and the timber spans were to prevent more of the neighbouring rock clefting off, falling into the cut and onto the miners as they worked themselves lower.

At the mine adit, or mouth into the horizontal tunnel, we found the roadway again and sitting just a few metres away was a cast iron compressor tank. We were amazed at the size of the tank; it was about five metres long and 1.5 metres in diameter. The cast iron sheets had been heavy gauge, showed little sign of rusting and the patterns of lichen and rivets brought cameras into action.

My second visit to Kings Mine was most successful but I want to make at least another trip.

From reading, talking to people with first hand knowledge of the mine and doing some research at the Mines Department

(Department of Mineral Resources) I've been able to ascertain some other interesting material about the mine and the immediate locality.

The area had been prospected and worked for alluvial gold by miners coming back from the Kiandra Field as far back as the 1860s. Some were Chinese who successfully worked the whole of Broken Cart Creek down to the Goobarragandra River.

The Stokes family left the Temora Gold Field and moved to the Goobarragandra valley near the turn of the century. They are reputed to have used wheelbarrows to move their possessions. The spot where they elected to build their house was opposite the mouth of Emu Flat Creek and several walnut trees clearly show the site to this day.

The three brothers, Bill, Charlie and Harry, spent much of their time prospecting for gold, and in general, with some success. The area around the house turned out to be rich enough to work - the gold could have washed out of Emu Flat Creek many, many years back, and they found the bed of the Goobarragandra River, above Broken Cart Creek, to be exceptionally rich.

While looking for some missing sheep Bill stumbled across a reef above the Goobarragandra River and the three brothers started to work it with pick and shovel. To give better access to the site they cut a rough track from Rung Tree (the small flat where Emu Creek Fire Trail crosses the Goobarragandra River) to the mine site. The ore was brought out by packhorse to Goobarragandra Station, from where it was sent off for crushing - possibly to Adelong.

It was decided that capital was needed so that mechanical mining could be brought into operation. A public company, "Goobarragandra Gold Mining Syndicate", was floated in June, 1915. To that time, when reputedly the Stokes family sold the mine for 2000 pounds (\$4000), it had been known as Stokes Mine. The Prospectus for the syndicate reveals that 5000 pounds capital was to be raised through the sale of 250, twenty pound shares and that Henry Stokes was to be mine manager.

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Lyn Evans and Jack Bridle examining the compressor tank near the mine entrance, April 1993

A Mr Chas A Mulholland, PhD, Metallurgist and Mining Engineer and Mining Geologist was commissioned to inspect the mine and make a report. It was a glowing report. Some ore samples assayed showed over 10 oz per ton and the average was over 6 oz per ton. Mr Mulholland calculated that the site held 24000 tons of crushable material that would yield gold worth 213,000 pounds. Most ore samples showed silver as well.

Mr JB Jacquet, Chief Inspector of Mines, visited the mine and his report of 7 March, 1916, stated, "the results so far obtained are very encouraging, and I would particularly direct attention to the high grade character of the ore already exposed many other gold-bearing reefs will be discovered."

Dick Bullock, one of my informants, who actually worked in the mine at one time, told me, "Bill Stokes was a real flash bloke. He must have found the reef at about the time of World War I. If he had money he went through it like water. He'd go into Tumut and board at the Royal Hotel. When he was half shot he'd light his cigars with five pound notes."

It's no wonder the company float was successful.

A track was constructed to take in a stamper battery and the compressor and the race built to bring water to both. Dan French, a Tumut bullocky, took in the machinery and much of it was subsequently taken out by another

bullocky, Herb Buckley. The tales about Dan, Herb and their bullock teams negotiating precipitous slopes and the narrow track on the water race are totally unbelievable - but true.

A Mr King became the Mine Manager and Stokes Mine, or Goobarragandra Mine became known as Kings Mine. The drive was put in to intersect the reefs but it seems expectations were not reached.

Mining became a stop - start affair. In the depression days more vertical shafts were put down on the reefs and alluvial mining of the river bed tried again. In the end mining stopped and much of the machinery was taken out.

As mentioned I want to visit the mine again. I'd like to find Bradleys Hut where Dick Bullock and his workmates were camped the day the Southern Cloud disappeared. (They heard it pass just above them.) The track from Rung Tree to the mine might be impossible to find but I'd like to try. In which shaft did Dick Bullock cut off a finger with an axe?

Where was it that Dan French or Herb Buckley winched their bullock wagon into the air so the team could be brought back under the suspended wagon? (There wasn't room to turn.) How did Dick catch a bag of trout using a shovel?


Where did Dick bury (and later reclaim) the contents of the sluice box when told the company was going bust and he wouldn't get paid? I missed seeing the pelton wheel on the other visit. I want to examine the

explosive store, the settlement tanks and the sluicebox more carefully.

Another informant told me he'd lost a dozen head of cattle at the mine site - they were poisoned by the cyanide residue resulting from the treatment of the ore. Should I drink the water?

Perhaps I can find the ninth, as yet undiscovered, reef. It's a pity it's in a National Park. I won't be able to pick up the nuggets sitting on the surface.

There's more stories yet in Kings Mine - Stokes Mine - Goobarragandra Mine.




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