

# THE WALK FROM ROBE



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GOLDEN DRAGON MUSEUM  
BENDIGO VICTORIA AUSTRALIA

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Year of the Snake.

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*Cover: Line of Chinese at a water hole.*

*Pencil sketch by Charles LYALL, c1854.*

*La Trobe Library Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria.*



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# PREFACE

In the year 2001 we are celebrating the centenary of the Federation of the  
Australian Colonies into one Commonwealth.

The year 2001 is also the 150th anniversary of the discovery of Gold in  
Victoria - an event which fired the great wave of migration to Australia in the  
1850's.

The walk from Robe to Bendigo is a celebration of the Chinese community  
to commemorate the determination and suffering of the Chinese during the  
latter half of the 19th century and to recognize the contribution the Chinese  
community has made to Australian society.

There were a number of routes which the Chinese sojourners took from Robe  
in South Australia, to reach the Victorian Goldfields. The Walk from Robe to  
Bendigo will take what is believed to have been the most common route.  
Walkers will leave Robe on the 1st April 2001 and arrive in Bendigo on  
Saturday 14th April, walking an average 40 kilometres per day.

We hope that each of the towns along the way will take the opportunity to  
reflect upon the influence which, not only the Chinese, but people of all  
cultures had on their towns and the development of Victoria.

## GOLD SEEKERS

Gold was discovered in Victoria in 1851. This discovery started one of the world's greatest gold rushes. Gold seekers from many countries arrived in Victoria to seek their fortune on the Victorian goldfields. By 1856 some 40,000 Chinese had arrived. In 1856, the Colonial Government of Victoria imposed a £10 (\$20) head tax on Chinese disembarking at the Port of Melbourne. This tax did not apply to any other nationality.

In China by the mid 1800's, the political and economic life had been shattered by the introduction of opium, droughts, over-population; famine and political rebellion. This in turn led to many Chinese families suffering severe economic deprivation.

In Australia, convict labour was being phased out and the Colonists were looking for ways to replace their original source of low paid workers. Recruitment of labourers from Asia, including China, and the Pacific Islands was actively encouraged.

In the period from 1848 to 1851, 2260 immigrants from Amoy, 30 from Shanghai and 200 from Singapore arrived in Australia. Many of these immigrants were under contract as indentured labourers but a number were free settlers. Some arrived in Melbourne but the majority disembarked at Sydney, and from there were employed as shepherds, grooms, cooks and house-servants, most often on sheep stations.

In China, many Chinese took up the role of agent and formed partnerships with foreign traders, in order to profit from and induce men into indentured labour in places as diverse as Mauritius, Cuba, Peru and Australia.

The Chinese agents commonly worked from tea houses, which afforded them access to the greatest number of people, allowing them to spread the word of

prosperity in foreign lands. As a further inducement, agents would also employ 'idlers' (men who travelled from town to town seeking work). The 'idler's' job was to convince the inhabitants of the more isolated villages to enter into contracted labour, by repeating the agent's somewhat dubious promises of wealth.

Some of the more unscrupulous agents arranged kidnapping of a sufficient number of men to form work gangs for indentured labour, perhaps out of greed, or perhaps bowing to pressure from foreign traders. Unfortunately for the prospective workers, the reality of indentured labour was such that the men would usually be immersed in ever-deeper debt, with costs of accommodation, food and transport being accumulated as a debt to the agent. The men were also unaware of the often unsanitary and dangerous conditions in which they would live and work and that once on foreign shores many would never be free from debt, or return to their homeland.

A short time after the immigration of indentured labourers, news of the discovery of gold in Australia made its way back to China. Large numbers of people emboldened by the promises of wealth and seeking to avoid the ongoing effects of political wrangling and economic woes, decided to set out in search of the gold that would help restore wealth to the country and its people.

The greatest number of Chinese who decided to travel to Australia in the search for gold, were from Sze Yap (also spelled See Yap), which comprises the four districts of Kwangtung. Departure from their homeland was a well organised event, undertaken with a characteristic determination that ensured the villagers were adequately prepared by the standards of the day.

The sorrow of parting from loved ones on such a long and arduous journey was no doubt greatly increased for the many young men who were married only very shortly before leaving. These hasty marriage arrangements were made to maintain the strong cultural and social traditions of the times, which added to the huge responsibility to do well and send money home for the extended family, to pay off debts and provide for the future.



*Wives and children were left behind as the elders opposed the migration of whole families. This was in part due to the prohibitive cost of travel and also out of fear that the son's family and money would be lost to a foreign land.*

Sorrow was equally strong for those women left behind, whose happiness hinged to a great degree on the kindness of their husband's family, with whom they lived, undertaking a life of virtual servitude.

The men set off wearing simple loose fitting garments, straw hats and sandals, with ta'am balanced on their shoulders holding provisions necessary for their journey. Added to this was the need for artisans, shopkeepers and scholars to carry with them the tools of their particular trade. Their initial journey from villages into the port-side towns of Amoy and Canton, took up to three days of fast paced walking and was merely a taste of the trials that awaited them.

Upon reaching their respective destinations, the men would then board a junk bound for Hong Kong in order to link up with the British and American transport ships that regularly travelled to Australia. The junks were often overcrowded, causing some dissension amongst the men. Yet, accounts of the time suggest that for those travelling along the Pearl River, the last scenes of their homeland slowly unfolding along its banks must have brought some measure of quiet reflection to the men, serving to quell much of the disharmony.

Some of the men were lucky enough to have family in Hong Kong who could house them until their ship was ready to leave. Others, however, were confined to temporary shelters, run by the same agents who had advanced money for their journey. The shelters provided little or nothing in the way of comfort; being scarce of food, extremely overcrowded and dirty. The confinement also allowed traders greater assurance of their investment by limiting the scope for escape.

Opportunism, as always, abounded and during their confinement some men were enticed into amassing huge gambling debts, and even less fortunate were those who became addicted to opium. All the while, making both foreign and Chinese traders very wealthy.

Finally embarking on their overseas journey, the would-be gold seekers boarded one of the many ships berthed at Hong Kong. Once on board the men were at the mercy of the ship's Captain and crew, some of whom treated the Chinese passengers equitably enough. Others, however, were quite unscrupulous and increased previously agreed on prices for provision of the most basic necessities. As on the junks, overcrowding was rife, yet having come so far already, it seems that the men did not return to their villages in any great number. For the vast majority of the men, it would have been too late to change their minds anyway, as they had already amassed debts to the traders before they left Chinese shores.

In May of 1854 an Emigration Officer was employed in Hong Kong to oversee the ever increasing volume of immigrants, whose records detailed the arrival and departure of the sailing ships that would transport over 30,000 Chinese to the Victorian gold fields between 1854-1859.

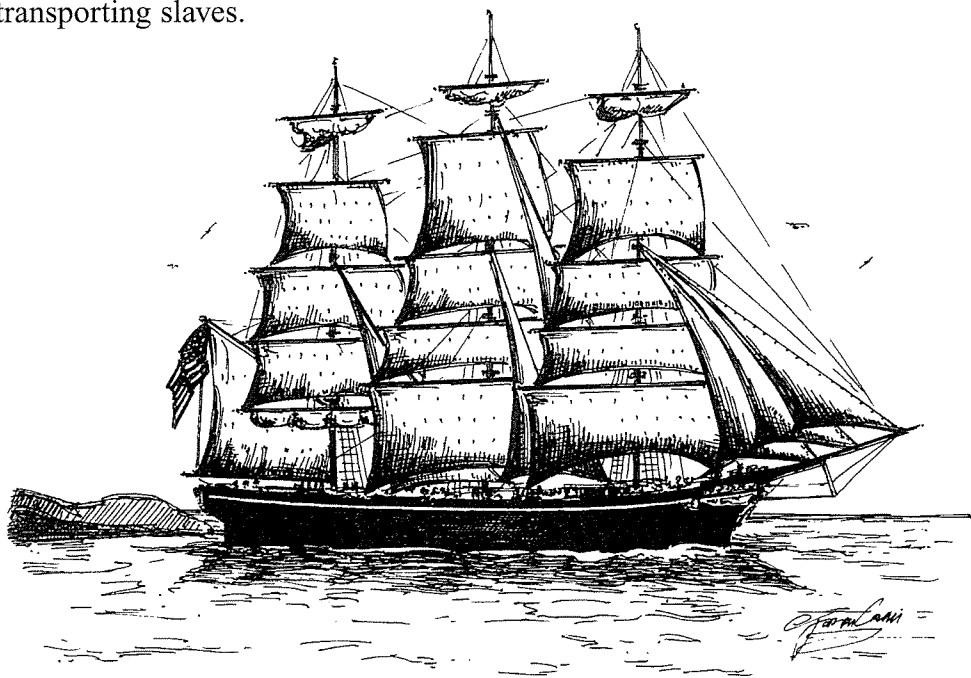
Amongst the first of the ships to depart Hong Kong in 1854 were the 'Loiusa Baille', 'Rose of Julpha', 'Amelia' and 'Clarita', bound for Port Phillip Bay. Each of these ships had a particular tonnage that they could safely carry, if the number of passengers were balanced accordingly. The temptation to exceed the tonnage limit by overcrowding the ships and thus make a larger profit was often too great for the shipping lines and their staff. As a result, many ships became dangerously overcrowded resulting in unsanitary and uncomfortable conditions.

As early as 1855 the British government took steps to reduce the problem of overcrowding by introducing the 'British Passenger Act', which restricted the ships to carrying only one passenger to every two tons of weight. The Act also decreed that the ships should provide somewhat more humane conditions and outlined various regulations with which the ships should comply. These included - allowance of room for passengers to exercise on the upper decks, provision of interpreters and medical staff, adequate food and water and carrying goods that would not harm passengers' health.

## ARRIVAL IN THE COLONIES

These rules were often broken, and the British Government in the spirit of equity underlining the imposition of the Act, did in fact prosecute a number of ships' Captains for their failure to abide by the new laws. Captain Moore of the 'Amelia' was found guilty by a Melbourne court, whereby he was ordered to pay compensation costs and was fined £225. In retrospect it seems that the penalty was not harsh enough, as 17 people lost their lives under Captain Moore's 'care' during the trip to Australia over which he was subsequently prosecuted.

For the uninitiated Chinese traveller, the contact with the ship's Captain and his crew was possibly the first exchange they had with Europeans, and given their often less than hospitable treatment as paying passengers, first impressions must not have been too kind. From the point of view of many of the Captains and their crew though, this was most likely not all that worrying, as the shipping industry as a whole had not long completed the last journeys transporting slaves.



*The 'Kate Hooper', an American ship, was one of the first ships to bring Chinese immigrants to Australia.*

Upon arrival in Melbourne, the men were greeted by Customs officials, traders and representatives of the Chinese Society (Sze Yap Society or See Yap Society), which they were required to join for a fee of 25 shillings. In return for the cost of joining the Society, the men were encouraged to assist one another through adhering to a set of rules, which primarily promoted courteous and helpful behaviour. The Chinese Societies provided them with a stable base from which to begin their lives in a remote foreign country. The rules ensured greater harmony 'on the trek to the goldfields, through observance of those guidelines governing everything from general conduct to disposal of wastes. The Chinese leaders in the Society showed a great deal of understanding of their European counterparts by clearly addressing the issue of race relations on the goldfields. They made it clear to members that where possible they should conform to European laws, customs and even standards of dress.

When a sufficiently large group of the Chinese travellers had readied themselves at the port for the journey to the goldfields they would set off in a long, orderly line. To the eyes of the Australian residents they posed an unusual and exotic sight, their fast paced walking making their ta'ams and plaits swing rhythmically. Their unusual foreign ways resulted in crowds gathering in Melbourne's inner city, and later at Robe and other ports, to see the gold seekers off on their journey.

The large and frequent arrivals of Chinese gold seekers in Melbourne was not destined to last long. The Government, alarmed by their increasing numbers introduced a £10 capitation tax on the Chinese immigrants to the Colony of Victoria and further restricted passenger numbers by allowing only one Chinese person per 10 tons of a ship's weight. This decision was to prove



a turning point in Australia's history, bringing about a fascinating chain of events that has captured the interest of many people over the intervening years.

For the Chinese the £10 fee was equal to their passage from their homeland to Australia, adding an even greater weight to their already heavy financial outlays. To avoid paying this tax, ships by-passed the Port of Melbourne. The attraction of the potential riches to be won in the goldfields was an impetus for the continuing Chinese immigration, so another port of entry had to be found where the tax was not applied. The Colony of South Australia was still a free port at this time, so the ships initially landed their cargo of migrants at Adelaide. Later the ships called at Kingston and finally Robe, both of which were much closer to the goldfields and considerably reduced the walking time to their destination. The distance from Adelaide was 500 miles (approximately 800 kilometres), and from Robe, about 310 miles (500 kilometres). As a result Robe, on Guichen Bay, was where the greatest number disembarked. Between 1857 and 1863, 16,261 Chinese males and one female landed here.

Guichen Bay was not a particularly good harbour, and three vessels were driven ashore during bad weather, and sometimes due to carelessness on the part of the Captain. The ships were total wrecks although the loss of life was not thought to be great. For some years burial mounds of the Chinese were to be found at various places amongst the sand dunes - in one area there were seventeen, side-by-side.

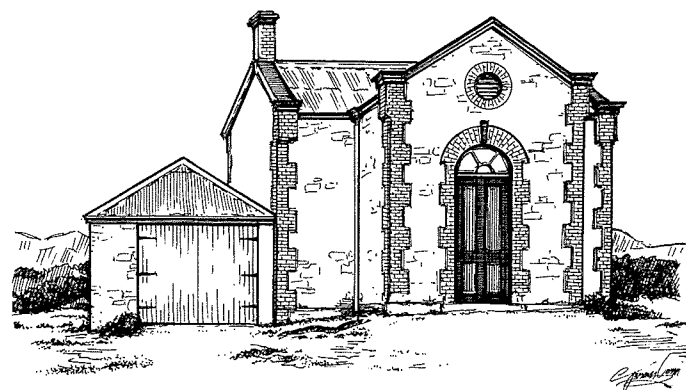
So began the landings of the many Chinese in the port of Robe, South Australia from where they would trek over hundreds of kilometres through the unforgiving Australian landscape to the goldfields of Victoria and the tin and copper mines of South Australia.

## CHAPTER 3

### ROBE

The first ship carrying Chinese goldseekers to arrive at the port of Robe was the 'Land of Cakes' - a ship with an unusual name which originated in Scotland, but strangely fitting for the passage of Robe's first Chinese visitors. There were 264 Chinese migrants on board. One can only imagine the surprise of the townspeople, who would see their small population of 200 double overnight and treble in the ensuing weeks, when more Chinese arrived to seek out their fortune.

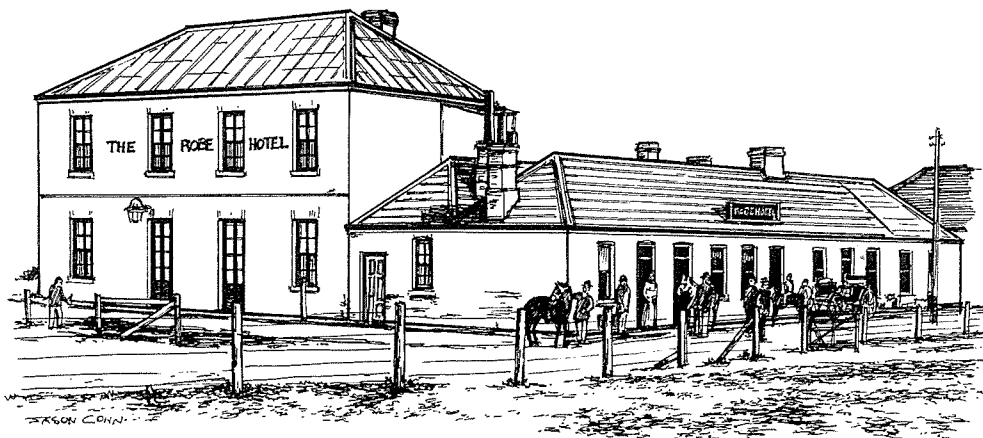
In the mid 1800s, Robe was a comparatively small portside town, comprised of a customs office (manned by one staff member), several hotels, banks, shops, churches and residences and whose economy was based primarily on wool exports. At this time, the town's economy centred around the arrival and departure of material goods, but the residents were not without some experience in the attendant problems associated with receiving large numbers of human cargo. In 1856 approximately 100 Scottish families who had been evicted from their properties in the Highlands, sought refuge in Australia. They landed in Guichen Bay and camped on the beach front, until they eventually dissipated through finding work and accommodation inland.



*Robe's Customs house was not built until 1863 - at the end of the Chinese immigration through that Port. It was used as the official clearing point for the many Chinese passengers and their ship's cargo that arrived in Guichen Bay. The building subsequently fell into disrepair, but has since been restored by the National Trust.*

Generally, the local people seemed to accept the presence of the Chinese but there were some rumblings of disquiet when at the peak of immigration, their ranks had swelled to approximately 3,000 - far outnumbering the local population. As a result of this unrest, twentyfive Redcoat soldiers were dispatched to monitor the situation. The locals' fears proved groundless and the Chinese moved around the town in a peaceful fashion without any great incident occurring.

The townspeople, while no doubt awed by the unusual sight of so many Chinese people milling excitedly on the deck of the *Land of Cakes*, readily seized on the opportunity to make a profit on their need to reach the shore. The fee for ferrying the passengers ranged somewhere between four and five shillings, and once on dry land, more money changed hands to obtain the services of a guide to show them the way overland to the Victorian goldfields. The Chinese freely intermingled with the locals, trading goods, bartering for supplies and gathering information about the long journey that lay ahead of them.



*The Robe Hotel was one of a number of pubs that provided a gathering place for the townspeople to speculate on events occurring in and around the town.*

They walked overland to the central goldfields of Victoria - Ararat, Ballarat, Castlemaine, Bendigo - travelling in stages of about 20 miles each day. During the journey they dug wells for fresh water and purchased sheep for fresh meat. The Chinese passed through many towns, leaving messages for their fellow countrymen who followed, in the hope of making the journey easier. Often the messages contained the location of natural water sources or of the well which had been dug previously. Not all the Chinese who landed made the complete distance to the goldfields. A few stopped, found work and made their homes in isolated areas and towns along the way.

Some of the guides proved to be dishonest and unreliable, whereby after one or two days of travel they would desert the Chinese leaving them stranded. Even those who went most of the way with the Chinese were reluctant to accompany them on to the field due to the hostility of the European miners. The Chinese quickly learned from such misfortunes. They marked the way by inscribing Chinese characters in the bark of trees, leaving a trail for their compatriots to follow and reducing the necessity for a local guide.

There are still to this day relics of those long forgotten Chinese travellers to be found in Robe, such as 'holey dollars' and ginger jars, reminders of their history making, though short, stay in the small port town.

## ROUTES

There were a number of different routes used by the Chinese which depended in part upon the terrain and the season. In the following scenarios, the present day names of towns are given.

From Adelaide, the journey to Melbourne may have been via Echunga, Strathalbyn, Tailem Bend, Wellington, Meningie, along the Coorong to Kingston and thence via Naracoorte and Harrow, Cavendish and Balmoral or Penola and Dergholm to Casterton. Another alternative would have been to follow the established track to Melbourne via Kingston.

From Kingston, the track may have been via Millicent and Mt. Gambier to Casterton or via Clay Wells, Penola and Casterton.

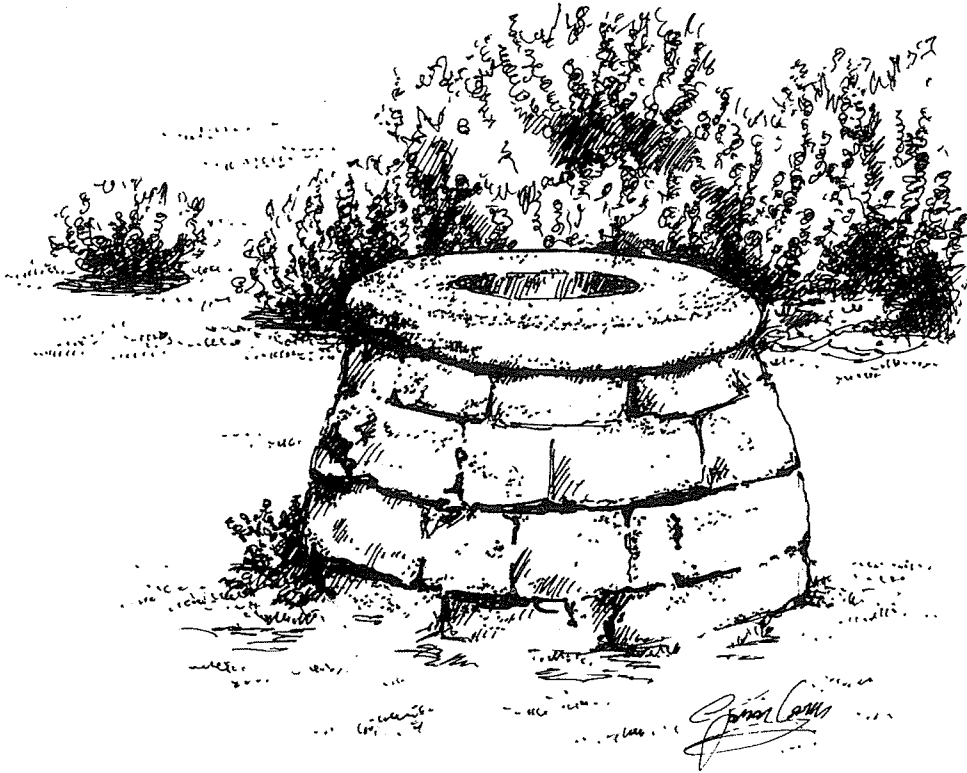
The route to Ballarat would have diverted around the southern end of Lake Bolac then via Skipton to Ballarat.

From Robe, the most direct route to Bendigo is via Glenroy, Clay Wells, Penola, Casterton, Cavendish, Dunkeld (at the southern end of the Grampians Range), thence to Ararat, Avoca, Maryborough, Maldon, Lockwood and on to Bendigo. This is the route to be followed by the re-enactment of the **Walk from Robe** in the year 2001.

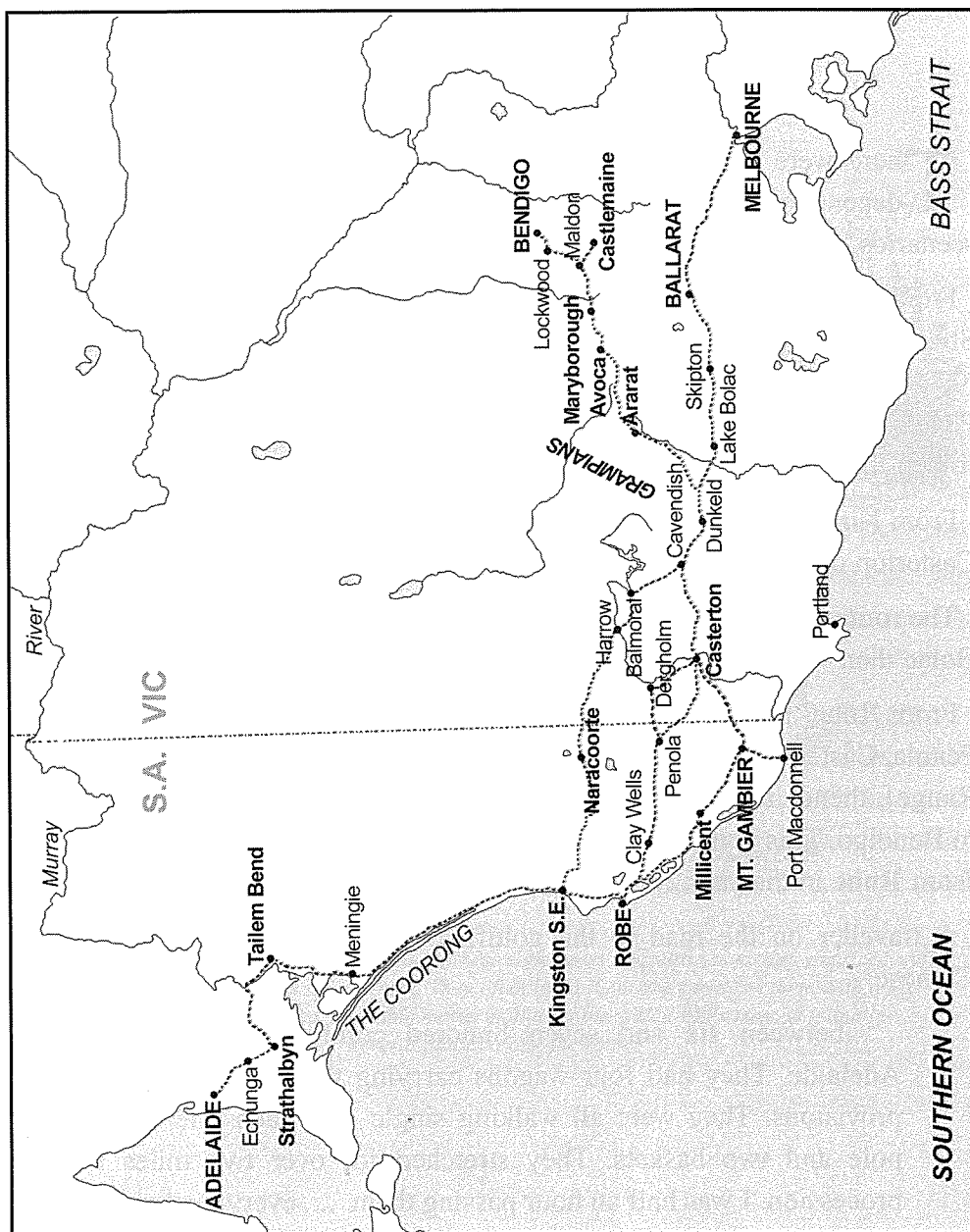
A traveller on the road to the goldfields in 1854 described a group of Chinese:

“...between six and seven hundred coming overland from Adelaide. They had four wagons carrying their sick, lame and provisions. They were all walking single file, each one with a pole and two baskets. They stretched for over two miles in procession. I was half an hour passing them. .... everyone behind, seemed to be yabbering to his mate in front in a sing-song tone.”

Extract from *The Loddon Aborigines* by Edgar Morrison, pp 85-86.



*Along their routes to the goldfields, the Chinese sometimes dug wells, sometimes utilized wells used by the aborigines before them. They often lined them and provided them with a lid to prevent animals and vegetable matter polluting the water. Wells may be found in several places along the route.*



### Along the routes:

**Ararat.** In 1868 there were 150 Chinese in the Chinese Camp, and over 1000 in other areas in the district. The Canton Lead, discovered by a group of Chinese in 1857, was named after the city in Kwantung where most of the Chinese diggers originated. This lead was believed to be the world's richest shallow alluvial goldfield. The Chinese worked the lead for sometime, but it was not long before European diggers heard of their good fortune. The Europeans surrounded the Chinese Camp, which consisted of three or four stores and numerous tents, and burned them to the ground. The Warden at that time was a Mr Dowling, who did his best to protect the Chinese, but was powerless to stop the white diggers. (ref. *The Ararat & Pleasant Creek Advertiser*.)

**Castlemaine.** Castlemaine has a comparatively long history by Australian standards, with the first settlers arriving in the district by the mid to late 1830's, much to the surprise of Major Thomas Mitchell who travelled to the area in 1836 believing he was the first European to do so. In fact, he had been beaten by some enterprising free settlers, who had established homesteads in the area where Castlemaine now lies.

Almost 20 years later Castlemaine and the surrounding district proved to be rich in gold deposits, which encouraged many of the Chinese to come to the area. By the late 1850's the surveys of the time estimated the Chinese population to be around 3,200.

Chinese camps to accommodate the gold diggers were established at Barker's Creek, 'Mopoke' (south of the township), Golden Point (east of the town), Diamond Gully (west of the town) and in Castlemaine itself. One of the Chinese camps was a strip of land recovered from Forest Creek. This segregation did little to appease the European population, many of whom were resentful of the Chinese presence and openly agitated for their removal from the gold fields. In response to this 3000 Chinese gathered at Castlemaine to protest over the treatment they received from the Europeans, forming a policy of non-trade with European businesses. The unrest between

the Chinese and Europeans continued throughout the duration of the goldrush in Castlemaine, yet the Chinese still managed to make their presence felt in a tangible way.

In 1868 a government surveyor reported that the Chinese had established a number of businesses in the various camps in and around Castlemaine. These included general stores, opium shops, gambling houses, barber's shops, fishmongers, druggists, tea shops, market gardens and butcher's stores. One enterprising Chinese man even established a carpentry business employing two workers, whilst others struck out independently hawking food and 'fancy' goods.

Many Joss houses also sprang up around the town, some of which were portable, able to be transported in and around the goldfields. One at least was made of solid brick and was located at nearby Forest Creek.

**Cavendish.** Cavendish was a crossing place over the Wannon River on the overland route from Adelaide to Ballarat and Geelong. A manuscript in the LaTrobe State Library includes an observation about the Chinese travellers.

"On one occasion some hundreds of chinamen bound for the Ballarat goldfields, unable to speak English and marching in indian file behind three bullock drays which carried their blankets and whatever baggage they possessed, arrived here one afternoon and remained until Monday, the drivers having got on the "spree". One old resident who was then a boy states that beef and mutton were scarcely procurable at that period and the boys were in the habit of selling opossums to the passing chinese at as high a price as 3/- (30 cents) a piece. The price depending on the size. In this way John supplied himself with fresh meat. Native cats were even not despised. Very often a resident upon getting up in the morning would find that his hen roost had been robbed during the night."

An extract from the diary of 1863 of John MacKersey, of Kenilworth Station, Cavendish states:

"August 22. Large party of Chinamen passed en route to the diggings."

**Guildford (near Castlemaine).** This was the largest Chinese settlement in the days of the mass migrations. At its greatest, it held between five to six thousand men and one Cantonese woman. By comparison, in Sandhurst (Bendigo) the 1861 census showed that there were 1168 males and 3 females, while the Ballarat community was 1296 men and 4 women.

The Guildford camp was on an elbow of land on the banks of Campbell's Creek between Yapeen and Guildford. In 1876 the Chinese village was destroyed by fire. The Camp faded as quickly as it grew. Many moved to other fields, some gave up mining to establish market gardens, the lucky few returned to China.

**Maldon (Tarrangower).** At one stage there were known to be 1,000 Chinese on the Tarrangower field and they worked the field in dwindling numbers for fifty years. Herds of wild goats were a problem in the early years and one writer compared the Chinese to these animals, as "a nuisance in the district". The Chinese were segregated in separate camps, the largest being at North Maldon along the road leading to Porcupine where many shops, opium dens and a Joss House existed. Most of the Chinese were well mannered and honest in business deals and market gardeners made a good living all year round. Herbal medicines were also sold and in great demand by Europeans and Chinese alike, especially an eye ointment for 'sandy blight' which was common in summer.

William Evans, an ex-farmer from Wales, kept a detailed diary from 1869 to 1896. He described living as an itinerant farm worker in the area around Maldon and although he tried his hand as a digger, he was not successful. He comments in his diary of the wastefulness of farming practices of this period by the Europeans and of the success of the Chinese. He saw Chinese gardens with cabbage and green vegetables all year round and states in 1867, that "they have the knack of capturing the precious metal (gold) through using quicksilver."

**Maryborough (Old Lead McIvor).** A correspondent to the Melbourne Herald (17th August 1854) described his first view of Maryborough:

“Five weeks ago the peace was as solitary as the plains. Evening was closing in as we topped the rise, and below the place teemed with life and activity. Before the thousands of tents, fires burned as cooking operations were in full progress. In the main street the places of business are as densely packed as Collins Street, and the traffic is as great. There are stores unending, lodging houses, refreshment tents, gold buyers boxes and thinly disguised grog shops. There are doctors’ tents, auctioneers’ tents, bowling alleys, and the ubiquitous Ethiopian Serenaders are already reaping a harvest from the fashionable foibles of the ten day old city. Amidst camp fires gleaming far and wide, we sat down at a friend’s tent to tea and mutton. Going to ‘Lombard Street’, the Camp, where £1,000 in cash had just arrived, we kept off the myriad dogs with a stout stick.”

The census of 1868 revealed that the population of the Chinese alone was 1400 in 70 encampments.

**Percydale (6 km north of Avoca).** Gold was discovered in the Avoca district in the years 1848-50 and quickly brought a rush from other fields. Percydale was originally called ‘Fiddler’s Creek’, the origin of this name being due to a miner who liked to play his fiddle by the fire at night. He and his mate had discovered a rich source of gold and managed to keep the site secret for some time. His musical instrument finally enabled the other miners in the district to locate their camp and create a new mini-rush. The area was eventually renamed Percydale after Percy Carr, the Police Magistrate’s son.

Very early after the field was discovered, a small party of Chinese arrived. They pegged out an area of ground and erected a tall palisade of logs over which no-one could see and carefully guarded this area. They sank shafts at the four corners of the palisade and tunnelled inwards and outwards below the surface. The group behind the pallisade found rich gold and passed the news secretly to their friends and relatives in China. A large party sailed to Australia and disembarked at Port Macdonnell (south of Mt Gambier) which was at that time an important port in South Australia. This considerably reduced the walking time to the goldfield. In the early hours, one morning, the local inhabitants heard the sound of bare feet and of wheelbarrows being

pushed along the main street accompanied by soft voices speaking in a foreign language. When daylight came, the European population was surprised to see the whole of the valley below pegged out and large numbers of Chinese pitching their tents. The lead discovered by the Chinese came to be known as “The White Lead” but it will never be known just how much gold had been won.

## CHAPTER 5

# THE CHINESE IN BENDIGO

Most of the Chinese arriving in Victoria were members of organised and self sufficient communities. They carried identification particulars with them which assigned them to appropriate associations, usually connected with their home districts in China. They were contracted through the headmen of their association to work in assigned diggings and to live in camps of their particular clan groupings and who spoke their particular dialect. For instance, See Yap district natives who spoke different dialects were assigned to live in different camps. There were nine such camps in the Bendigo district and in this way the headmen kept firm control on the activities of the diggers in the camps.

On arrival in Sandhurst (Bendigo), the travellers were directed to take up residence in one of these Chinese camps in the district, which were controlled by a Chinese Protector.

As so often happens in history, the Chinese camps at the time of habitation were not recognised as being terribly significant and their locations were not

very well documented. Many areas were called campsites where there was a group of Chinese in tents or huts. By 1855, there were 5325 Chinese in Bendigo in nine Chinese camps. The camps were located in Golden Gully, Spring Gully, Back Creek, White Hills, Long Gully, Myers Flat, Peg Leg and Iron Bark (Emu Point) and Eaglehawk. (see *Bomford, Jannette.*) Each camp had their own headman who acted as a “go between” between the village and the Protector (see below ‘Protectorates on the diggings’).

The population of these camps fluctuated for a variety of reasons, but in the main were due to people either returning to their homeland or moving on to other goldfields. The highest number of Chinese living in Bendigo during the 1800’s was in 1859 when the population reached 3,760. In the years before 1865, over 23,000 Chinese left Victoria, many being forced to borrow their fare home. The 1868 census report showed that there were 3,500 Chinese in Sandhurst (Bendigo) at that time.

### **Protectorates on the diggings.**

On the Bendigo diggings in 1854 William Denovan, a Scottish digger, took on the role of insurrectionist, encouraging some 1500 assembled Europeans to gather together and drive the Chinese from the Bendigo goldfields. Fortunately for the Chinese residents, the Police acted quickly and with the help of additional troops summoned from Melbourne they successfully guarded the camps, warding off any attack by Denovan and his followers. Similar incidents occurred in other goldfield towns and in some instances ended in the loss of lives.

In 1856 the Victorian government produced a set of regulations outlining the introduction of the protectorate system. A “Protector” would be assigned to an area to oversee application of the rules with the assistance of Police constables, interpreters and Chinese ‘headmen’- selected to explain the Protector’s actions and decisions. The system of designating particular areas as Chinese camps was ostensibly to protect the inhabitants, but it is also obvious that the men could be more easily controlled in this situation and discouraged from associating too closely with the European community.

Given the harshness of those times though, the system whilst not without its faults and viewed nowadays as segregationist, was probably a good way of reducing friction between the nationalities.

The camps were originally composed mostly of canvas structures, but as time wore on some buildings became more permanent. For instance, the Bendigo Chinese camp located in Ironbark had at least one brick Joss House. The community on Bridge Street occupied shops with verandahs and a house attached, and when finances permitted, purchased a building to house the Chinese Association.

There were a number of problems inherent in the protectorate system. The government was unwilling to appoint Chinese to act in any positions of power to carry out duties in enforcing protectorate regulations. This caused some consternation amongst the Chinese, yet the government refused to amend their original decision and only appointed Chinese in the capacity of interpreters and headmen. The headman at Bendigo was John Appoo who originally arrived in Australia in 1838, while the interpreter was Fok Sing. People within the Chinese community such as Appoo and Sing enjoyed a measure of importance amongst their fellow countrymen, yet monetary reward for their positions was generally slow in arriving and was not of any great amount.

In 1857 the first Protector in Bendigo was Captain Frederick Standish, (later replaced by Mr Vincent Pyke) who had trained at the Royal Military Academy in England and was subsequently appointed Assistant Commissioner to the gold fields. He apparently ruled the camp in the style and manner of the military institution in which he was trained and whilst not known for any particular kindness toward the Chinese, his term as Protector was relatively unremarkable with no incidents of discrimination recorded about him.

Other organisations such as ‘secret’ societies and the Sze Yap (See Yap) society continued to play a large part in dictating how the Chinese would interact socially and live on a daily basis. Somehow, even within the



constraints of European laws and their own complex social rules the Chinese population flourished to some degree with many of the men establishing businesses or working in occupations as diverse as market gardeners, hawkers, launderers, herbalists, carpenters and restaurateurs. These businesses often had a good deal of economic impact on the European population, such was their success.

### Discrimination.

From the very beginning of their arrival in Australia, the Chinese were subject to a wide range of negative reactions from the European population, which resulted in a number of government Acts and reports being produced to address this problem. The Chinese came at a time when alluvial gold mining in Bendigo was declining, but serious quartz mining had not yet begun. They reworked the diggings through a system known as puddling or sluicing. As the gold became scarcer, many established market gardens close to their camp and supplied the miners and local population with fresh vegetables. As the township of Bendigo developed, Bridge Street became the centre of Chinese life. General stores, grocers, herbalists, gambling and opium shops were established. This area was called the Chinese quarters, or Chinese Camp.

By 1880 the number decreased to between approximately 700 and 1,500 and toward the turn of the century dwindled even further. Chinese settlements such as the Ironbark Camp became less prosperous and self sufficient. In the 1880s and 1890s there was a resurgence of anti-Chinese legislation, including the Factory Act, making it difficult for Chinese manufacturers to compete with the Europeans. The Act stated that one Chinese worker would constitute a factory. In effect, this meant that Chinese employment was confined to market gardens and laundries which offered no competition to the Europeans. The gardens provided much needed fresh fruit and vegetables for the Bendigo and Melbourne markets, and were frequently sold by hawkers walking from house to house.



*Chinese market gardeners carried their vegetables from house to house using the traditional ta'am, a wheelbarrow or horse and cart, no doubt a measure of the Hawker's affluence.*

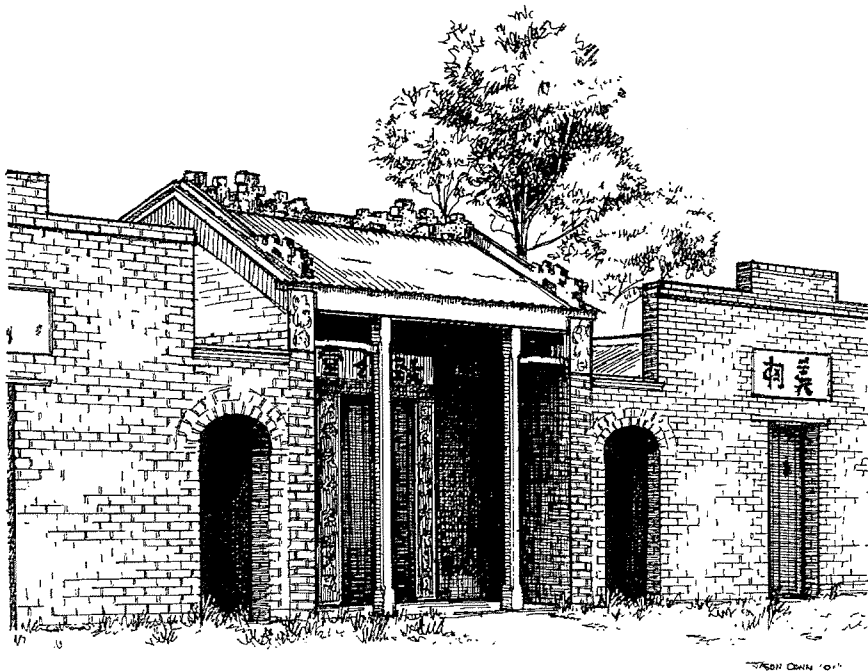
Because the Chinese labourers were prepared to work more cheaply, their products were also cheaper and in the instance of furniture production the government stepped in and decreed that all furniture produced from Chinese labour should be marked as such. This and other legislation governing Chinese labour laws eventually forced Chinese furniture makers out of business.

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, Chinese entry into Victoria was sporadic. The Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, commonly known as *The White Australia Policy*, curtailed Chinese immigration which effectively ceased. Families living in China or Hong Kong were only allowed entry to Australia for a period of 6 months at a time. Many families were separated for the whole of their lives. Some of the miners never returned to their homeland, and lived lonely and isolated lives until their death.



## EPILOGUE

The only Chinese building remaining from the 19th century is the Joss House at Emu Point. This historic relic, which is under the care of the National Trust, is a visible reminder of Bendigo's Chinese heritage. The processional regalia such as dragons, lions, costumes, banners and many invaluable items such as books, photographs and musical instruments were housed in a building built especially for the purpose by the Bendigo Chinese Association in 1992. Here in the Golden Dragon Museum history comes alive. The Chinese made a great and lasting impact on Bendigo in areas of culture, industry and community service, which continues today.



The Bendigo Joss House in North Bendigo is an original building and is classified by the National Trust. It was formerly in part of the Ironbark Camp at Emu Point.

## THE WALK FROM ROBE

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