

Cancoona Gold field.

(From the Rockhampton Bulletin.)

CANCOONA is a name that will for ever be associated with the early history of Rockhampton. Often has the story been told of the first rush to Queensland, yet to the people of this district it is pregnant with so much interest that in a few lines of introduction to an account of a visit to the field as it now exists, reference to it will be recognised as admissible. It was in November, 1857, that Captain O'Connell, Commissioner of Crown Lands, who had just left the office of Government resident at Fort Curtis, which was then the *Ultima Thule* of the east coast of Australia, started on a northern tour of his district, which included all the country, we suppose, to the north of Gladstone. He took with him a practical miner, and in the course of their travels they came upon a place where the miner found about a pennyweight of fine gold. The report of this discovery was made in Gladstone, and the people there fitted out a prospecting party of half a dozen men to visit the auriferous locality. The result was that, in July following, it was announced, in an authoritative manner, that an easily accessible and remunerative goldfield had been discovered at Cancoona, in the Port Curtis district. The *Courier* newspaper stated that good-sized nuggets had been found at the new field. In August reliable intelligence reached the then populous parts of Australia that in this far northern field miners were getting gold at the rate of an ounce a day. Letters to private parties and commercial firms teemed with details of the splendid finds. There could be no mistake about it. Thus the rumour ran, and the rush commenced. By the middle of September fifteen hundred persons had left Sydney, and the arrival a few days thereafter in Brisbane, of Mr. Hamilton Ramsay, with one hundred ounces of gold, raised the gold fever to the insane pitch. Cautious and warnings were alike unheeded, and from Victoria and New South Wales people crowded ships and steamers bound for Fort Curtis. Captain O'Connell, who had been appointed gold commissioner, became alarmed at the crowd whose influx he could not prevent. By the end of September the field was almost exhausted of its alluvial gold, and the disappointed, homeless, hungry men, began to gather at the crossing of the Fitzroy, where many of them had landed. They formed the nucleus of Rockhampton. That after the rush, Cancoona exercised an influence in building up the town appears from the following reminiscence of an old resident:—"In 1858, I was in Victoria. I had a couple of teams and some horses. The times were dull. New South Wales was suffering from depression, and there was not much doing in Victoria, as the rushes were mostly over. I was going with loading from Melbourne to the M'Ivor diggings. Not having been reading the papers closely, or paying particular attention to what was going on in mining, I was surprised when our two teams came near the M'Ivor diggings to meet men coming out crying, 'Hillo, mate; what more news about Cancoona?' Well, I had heard nought about it, and could say nothing, but they told me as there was a rush to Cancoona, and they wanted to be off. 'How long would it be till I was going back again?' As soon as I can empty the team and dray, I said. 'Then how much will you want to take us down,' they said. The distance was about seventy miles. A pound a head, said I. 'All right, we'll go,' says they. You may depend I got off my loading pretty quickly, and started with twenty-four of them. Each man had his own tucker, and as their swags were in the team,

sometimes they rode and sometimes they walked. When we got to Kilmore there was a part of my loading I had left on the upward journey, and I told the man I had with me to start on with the men and I would take it up to the M'Ivor. Next morning I called out all those that wanted to get soon to Melbourne were to go with him, and of course they all went. I returned to the M'Ivor, and brought away my dray filled with men too, all anxious to get off to Cancoona. It was not long after that till some friends who had gone to Cancoona came back to Melbourne, and though they had not got gold they told me what a fine country it was for grass. Well, things was bad in Victoria, and thinking there would be a good chance in this new country then being opened up I sold off my horses that cost me £120 for little more than £30, and came off here. Some men have done better and some have done worse." This story, picked up on the Yaamba road, bears the semblance of truthfulness, and it explains how men were, at that particular time, so ready to rush away from the settled districts to this unsettled part of the country. As we have often explained before, the Cancoona rush settled Rockhampton. It looks like ingratitude, therefore, that at a time of mining development, the old original field should be almost entirely neglected. The miners disappeared from it almost as suddenly as they had flocked to it. There have always been a few fossickers coming and going to it, puddling washdirt from likely crevices and gullies. No one ever seems to have searched the country thoroughly for the reefs from which the gold might be supposed to have come. A few weeks ago we pointed out that these were likely to be found on the hills in the vicinity of the old alluvial workings. We were not then aware whether there were ranges in the immediate locality. With the view of satisfying our curiosity on the point, and noting the position of a reef, which has been recently opened up on the Cancoona goldfield reserve, we this week visited the deserted diggings.

Cancoona lies about forty miles to the north of Rockhampton. There are two roads to Yaamba, which is on the highway to it, and by going the one and coming the other diversity is given to the journey. In our visit we went out through the Agricultural Reserve, past Ayrshire Park, and crossed the Fitzroy, flowing in a pellucid shallow stream just now, at Yaamba. Coming home we followed the road from the township just named along the north side of the river. The former is the more level, but it is half a dozen miles longer: the latter cuts across rocky ridges, and besides being shorter, must be the better in dry weather. Between Yaamba and Cancoona the country is flat; the track is smooth, and the scenery of open timbered country somewhat monotonous. Leaving Rockhampton at noon a couple of Messrs. Butherford's steady gobs place us at Cancoona an hour before sundown. While kindly Mrs. Wassman, and her clever, good-looking daughter Mary, are getting tea ready we look about us. The main road to Marlborough, St. Lawrence, and the north runs through Cancoona, owing perhaps to the field having drawn it that way. Mrs. Wassman's dwelling is close to the roadside, and is virtually on the diggings. Our companion conjectured we were near the end of our journey by the number of iron-bark trees stripped for roofing as we came along the last mile, but if the seas were as dry in August, 1858, as it has been in 1885, men would not have been able to take off the bark. One learns at Mrs. Wassman's what comfortable conveniences may be

take off the bark. One learns at Mrs. Wassman's what comfortable convenience may be had in a bark humpy.

This is Canoona! A lightly timbered flat with brush and saplings growing up amid stumps. Hills overlook it from almost every side, and the idea at once occurs to us that it is the old crater of a volcano, or boiling spring such as a wandering correspondent in New Zealand told us about not long ago. The circle of eminences is almost complete. They are thickly wooded, pointed, and the slopes are steep on the nearer side. The amphitheatre enclosed by them will be about a mile in diameter. A streamlet, when rain descends, flows through it, but in what direction it is difficult to determine from its ill-defined, shallow channel. Crossing the road we find the old workings in the shape of heaps of stones and earth, and the rock laid bare. It is not difficult to discover the lateral boundaries of the area from which payable dirt has been taken. They run apart towards the north-west side of the field. So far as we can see of the lie of the land the gold could not have been swept hither by great floods. It does not seem possible for it, under surface fluvial action, to have travelled from any place beyond the encompassing hills—at least in the present order of things. The rock, which has been laid bare by the anxious gold finders, is of a soft, friable, granitic character. Being honey-combed like a sponge, it is light, and bits, it is said, float in water. Among this rock are pieces of another description; these are evidently ferruginous, being glossy, heavy, and of a deep-blackish, brown colour. Some pieces when broken display iridescent hues, shaded off like oil upon water. The

mineralogical character of the specimens picked up at once remind us of the workings of Mount Morgan. On a corner of the field a man is at work puddling—that is, washing surface earth for the gold which may be found in it. Making his acquaintance, we find he is Mr. Morgan, a selector of many years' residence in the locality. He is well up in years now, and not long ago it was our melancholy duty to narrate the death of his son at the hands of natives in the north. Puddling he engages in for amusement part of the week, and looks after his horses at other times. Talking with him about the probable origin of the gold at Canoona, he illustrates his theory by remarking that a tree has many branches, spreading out on all sides. The gold has come up from below, and these little leaders that are to be seen on the surface, are like the little branches spreading out from the main trunk. By leaders, we take it, he means the crevices in the rock from which the earth has been carefully taken for the sake of the gold in it. Those of our readers who have read Mr. Jack's report on Mount Morgan will at once see that Mr. Morgan's theory is suggestive of a hot spring or geyser. So far as we can make out, the presence of gold on the surface of the strange, spongelike rock cannot well be accounted for in any other way. Instead, however, of there being one pipe or core, as seems to have been the case at Mount Morgan, there may have been many jets of steam and molten metals, bubbling up within the crater of what may once have been a volcano of more solid matter. Hence the encompassing hills, and hence the comparatively level aspect of the ground within them, as if it had settled

the ground within them, as if it had settled in a liquid state and become consolidated. The shut of eve warns us to retire from the field, and partake of Mrs. Wassman's hospitality.

In the early morning, as the laughing jackass is heralding the dawn, we are astir, wandering over the old, alluvial workings, bethinking us the while of the strange scene that must have been presented here about this time 27 years ago. The best nugget found was 72 ozs. Within recent years Mr. Wassman has worked a puddling machine near his own house, and has taken as much as six ozs of gold out of the dirt in one week. Such a return, however, was exceptional. Puddling may be a paying amusement. We proceed to the north side of the amphitheatre of hills, and about half way up the steep slope of a mount about a hundred feet high, find the open entrance to a tunnel. Some miners, evidently of a thoughtful, speculative turn, have been trying to discover some reef in the hills, from which gold may have been washed, but they have been unsuccessful in their search, and the tunnel is abandoned. Leaving the old workings behind, passing beyond the encompassing range, and crossing a grassy flat, in a northerly direction, for the distance of a couple of miles, we come upon the workings of the Wassman Reef. It is on the slope of a hill, and the formation of the country, and the character of the rock are not the least like those we have left. Mr. Wassman, his three sons, and half a dozen men have made good progress in the development of a reef which promises to pay well. Two other claims have been pegged off beside the Wassman, and one of them, curiously enough, by Mr. Danker, who was in this district before the Canoona rush took place. We are not aware that stone from the old alluvial workings has ever been tested for gold; doubtless it has, but the difficulty which attends the extraction of the metal from the Mount Morgan stone should lead to its being examined by means of the latest modern appliances. It is to be hoped that when Mr. Jack is in this district he will find time to visit Canoona, and tell us something about it. At present we regard it as a sort of geological puzzle.