

# The Australian Connection

By Rex Barber

Perth is the capital city of Western Australia and is also the most remote city in the world, set in a state nearly as big as Texas. We are a young state which was colonized only in 1829 without the help of convicts.

Prior to that time, our coastline was well known to Dutch seafarers and became the graveyard for many ships and crews travelling across the Indian Ocean to the Spice Islands in the 17th and the 18th centuries.

There are several important connections between America and Western Australia. President Herbert Hoover was a mining engineer at Coolgardie in the early 1900s and the Great White Fleet visited this remote state in 1900. During World War II, an American submarine fleet operated out of our port in Fremantle. Gold miners from the Klondike came to our



**Digging at Condon Townsite/Port  
1880 gold rush in 52 Celsius with improvised shade**



**Fantastic 1880s bottle dump in crocodile infested  
mangroves swamp**

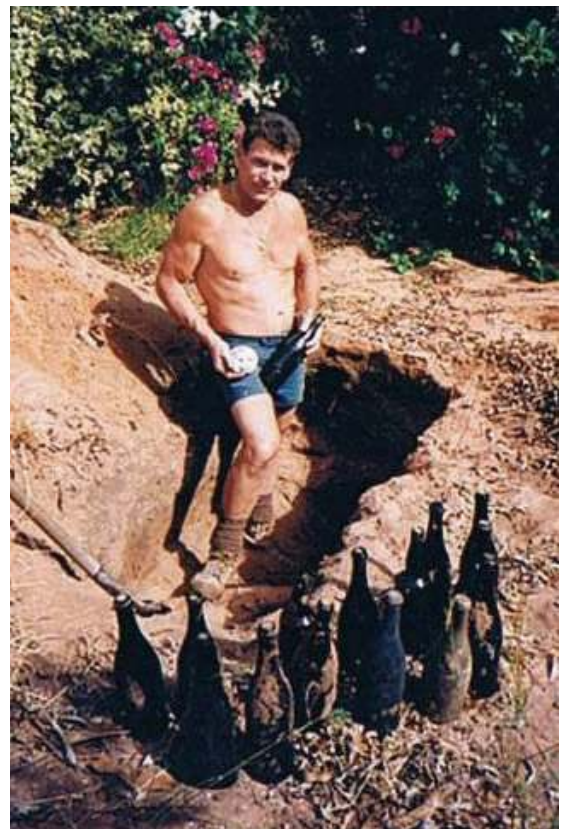
major gold rush that took place between 1892 and 1911 and, likewise, Aussies went to the Klondike.

The latter is part of the bottle collecting connection and the preceding accounts show an important part of our history and what happened in our state of Western Australia. Of course, your American 1849 gold rush coincided with our Victorian gold rush and during that time long ago, there was the same interchange of miners and expertise. You had your outlaws and we had our bushrangers; you had a big influx of Chinese as did we down here, so there are many comparisons.

During the major Victorian gold rush from 1850 to 1875, large quantities of bottles came from all over the world and, as an example, quite a few of your cathedral pickle bottles were retrieved from the mud flats of Port Augusta in South Australia. This was due to the same phenomenon that took place in San Francisco Bay in 1849. Crews simply abandoned their ships to go searching for gold with the result that dozens of vessels lay at anchor for long period of time, those left casting their rubbish over the side.

Our very first gold rush took place during the 1880s way up north in the Kimberleys with the three major ports being Condon, Derby and Wyndham, all with a lovely amount of crocodiles admiring the miners as they waded ashore into this harsh (and during the dry season) waterless environment.

For bottle diggers from the late 1960s on, it is still a harsh and dangerous area. While looking for Dutch gins at Condon, I had to keep a sharp eye out for crocodiles all the time and continually drink water in temperatures peaking at 52 Celsius (125 degrees Fahrenheit). So I can hardly imagine what these thousands of miners had to put up with. There are three huge bottle dumps at Condon, each of which covers more than an



**Digging Australian and Japanese beers at  
the site of the old Japanese pearl divers  
1880 brother in crocodile country**





**Australian embossed beers from 1890-1910 gold rush**

acre of ground, and they are composed of 90 percent beer, spirits or gin bottles so maybe they all got too drunk to care.

Even with this first gold rush, the population of this state remained very low, but with the massive gold rush of the 1890s, thousands came to this state including European royalty, American mining magnates, sons from famous families, all to make a fortune, or to replace one, or to increase one.

These people built towns overnight that lasted for as long as the gold could be recovered and some times for as little as three years. Some survive today but throughout Western Australia there are thousands of these abandoned townships. Little remains but broken glass and cemeteries.

Some of these towns had upwards of 10 breweries in their heyday and if you are lucky enough to dig an embossed glass beer, it may also have an animal or company logo on it. Ninety-five percent of the time, it will have a green glass ring seal (cork closure) and if you are really lucky, it will be from a town that ceased to exist 100 years ago.

These towns are in our eastern goldfields so there are no real crocodiles to worry about, plus there is an

added bonus: you might pick up a gold nugget, an occurrence that happens quite frequently. One of our famous Western Australian collectors, May Waghorne, while out fossicking found a top denture plate made from pure gold and over a period of time recovered seven gold sovereigns.

Some of the dumps from this era can be upwards of thirty feet high and over several acres containing bottles from all over the world, so there is a comparison again with American digs.

We have been digging now since 1970 and can still recover bottles, but not as commonly as before. Our hobby's biggest weakness is that we need to encourage younger persons to become bottle collectors.

Rex Barber

Quack cure pot lid collector

PO Box 77

Cape, Western Australia 6271

61 8 9727 1984

Barbers\_2@bigpond.com



**Australian gold rush bottles from 1850s including lime juice bottle**