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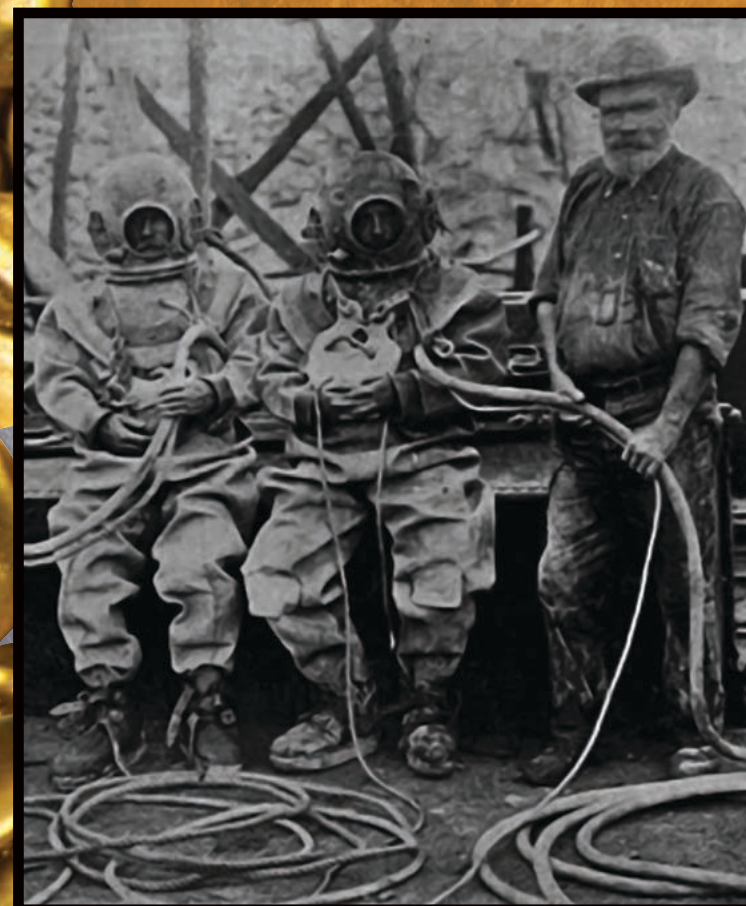
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Explanation

Two Mines, Two Rescues



Written by Vaishali Batra



Two Mines, Two Rescues



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Introduction

One of Australia's most valuable resources is gold. Since gold was first discovered in Australia in 1823, miners have been digging in the ground to find more of the precious and useful metal. Several large mines have been set up to extract gold.

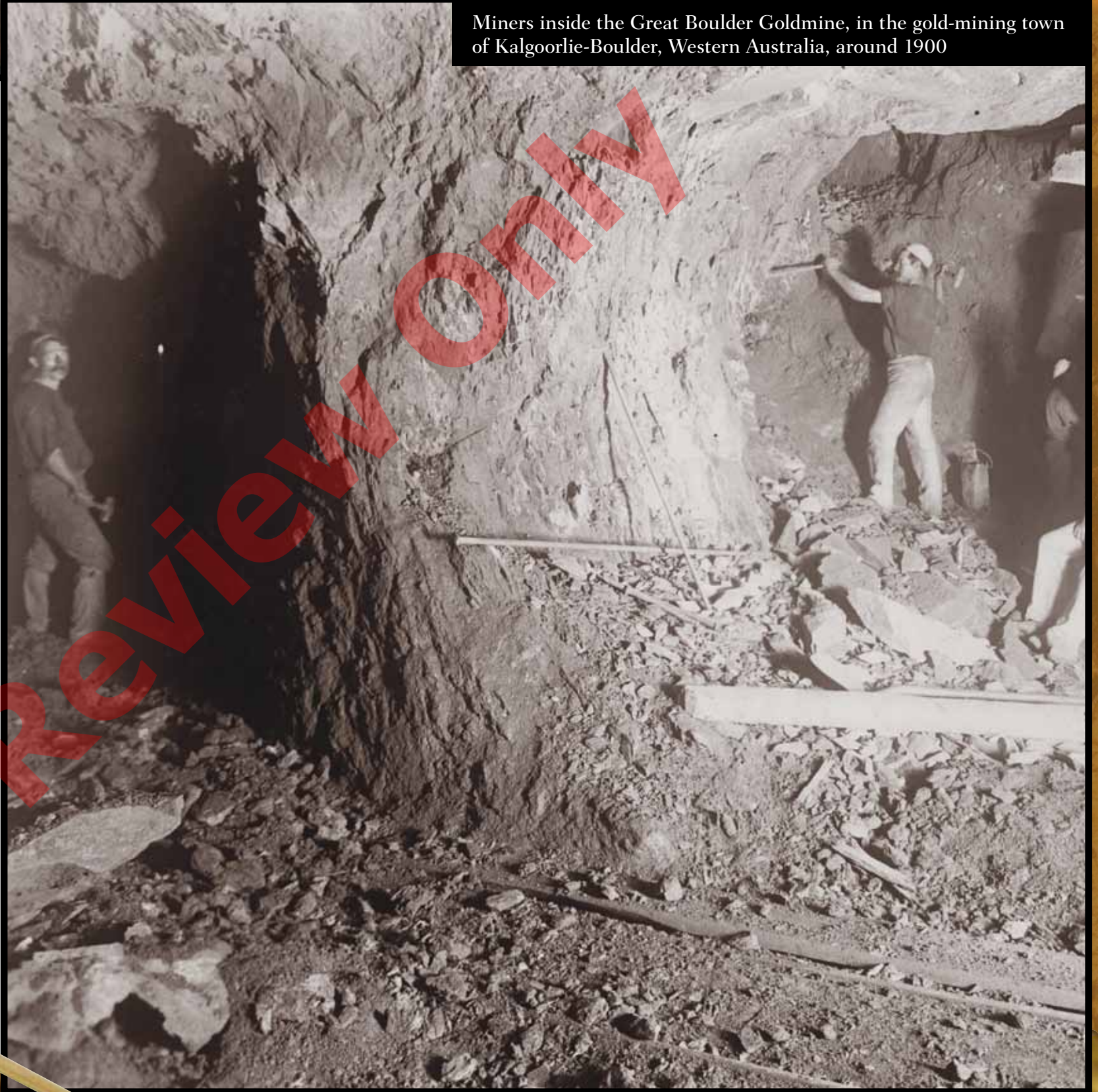
When gold was first found, it was relatively close to Earth's surface. Over time, a lot of the surface gold was extracted. Miners had to dig deeper and deeper into the ground to find and extract gold.

Mining can be an extremely dangerous job. The biggest hazard in mining is the risk of being trapped underground. Mines have a series of tunnels. Vertical tunnels are called **shafts** and horizontal tunnels are called **drifts**. The miners often access the lower drifts through an elevator that transports them and their equipment down a shaft. Sloping tunnels that provide access to the surface or between drifts are called **declines**.

Tunnels can collapse if they are not dug out properly. Sometimes, natural events such as earthquakes or floods can also cause mine tunnels to collapse. In some mines, explosives are used to **blast** tunnels and also to help extract the solid rock that contains gold and other minerals, the **ore**. Special machines are used to transport the ore to other machines that help crush the chunks of ore into smaller pieces. The broken-up ore is transported to the surface.



Miners inside the Great Boulder Goldmine, in the gold-mining town of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Western Australia, around 1900



Over the years, mining companies have developed many ways to rescue trapped miners. They provide special rescue training to miners. Mine workers are given safety equipment and protective gear to prevent injuries. They are all trained in safety procedures.

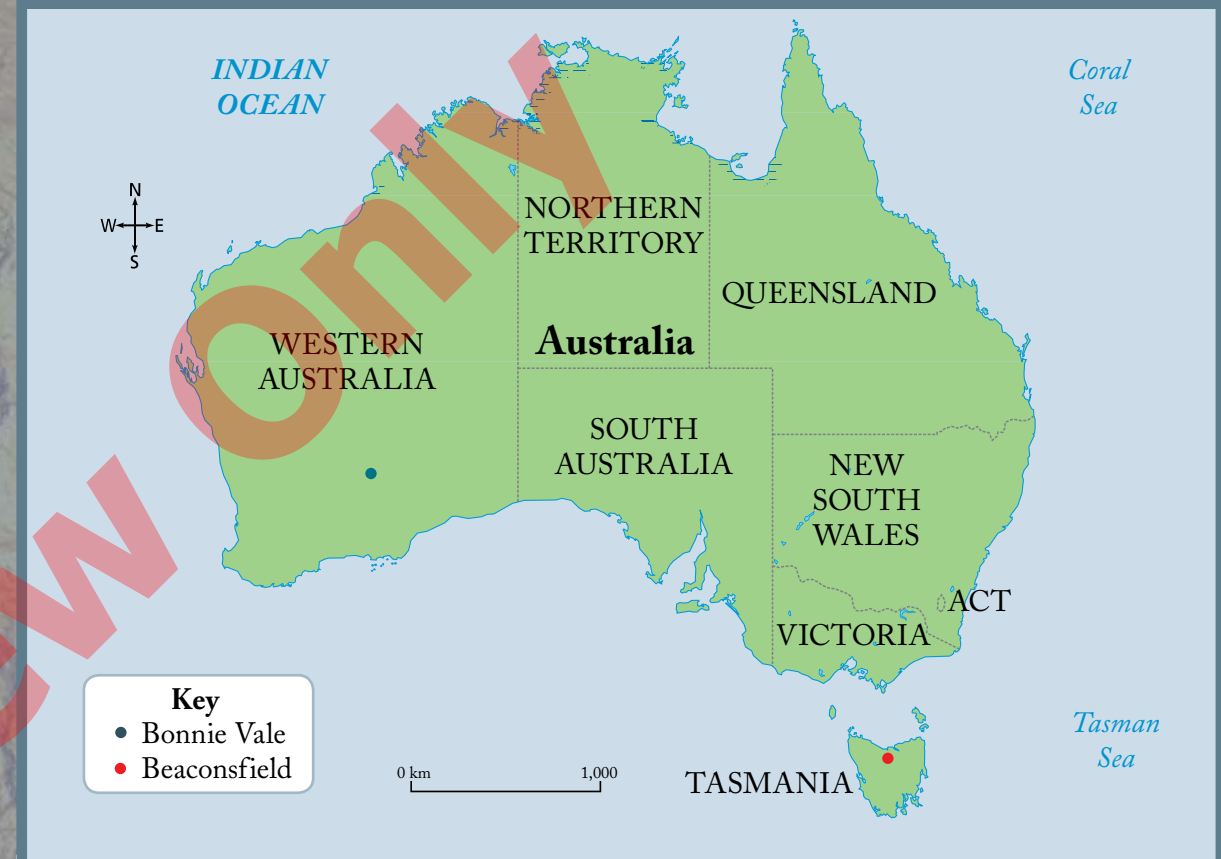
In spite of the safety procedures, accidents still happen in mines. There have been many mining accidents over the past century. Sometimes, rescue teams have been able to rescue trapped miners, but on other occasions miners have been severely injured. Some miners have even lost their lives.

Imagine being trapped in a narrow space deep under the ground. What would it be like to be confined underground in complete darkness for many days? How would it feel to not know if you would be rescued?



Emergency workers preparing a thermal camera to be used in a mine rescue

Location of the Bonnie Vale and Beaconsfield Mines



Two dramatic mining accidents in Australia happened nearly a century apart. One incident happened in Western Australia in 1907. At that time, there was little technology to help rescue teams save trapped miners. Another incident happened in Tasmania in 2006. Today, there is a wide range of technology used in mines and mine rescues. However, rescue missions are still extremely dangerous. Rescuers need to be specially trained in this job. Even with the best equipment, sometimes it becomes impossible to save trapped miners.

Both the mining accidents happened in goldmines – the Westralia goldmine in Bonnie Vale, Western Australia, and the Beaconsfield goldmine in Tasmania. Both the accidents became famous because of the bravery, skills, and perseverance of the miners and rescuers involved.

Bonnie Vale

The rescue at the Westralia goldmine in Bonnie Vale in 1907 was one of the most famous mine rescues of the last century. Bonnie Vale is a small mining town 12 km north of a place called Coolgardie.

Gold was discovered in the Coolgardie area in the 1890s. As a result, a large number of people moved to the area to search for gold. A mass migration of people searching for gold is called a **gold rush**. People from many different countries were part of the Coolgardie gold rush.

On March 19, 1907, the area was hit by a massive thunderstorm. The accompanying downpour caused water to quickly flood creeks and low-lying land. This is called a **flash flood**. The flash flood resulted in about 54 million litres of water entering the shafts of three mines in the area.

One of the flooded mines was the Westralia mine. Nearly 160 miners were inside the mine working the afternoon shift at the time of the flash floods. Most of the miners were nearly 300 m beneath the surface. The deluge of water into the main shaft of the mine forced the miners to scramble out as fast as they could. Once they reached the top, they checked to see if all the miners had made it up safely. They discovered that one miner was missing. It was Modesto Varischetti, an Italian widower and father of five. He had been working on level ten, more than 300 m underground. The large amount of water had completely flooded that level, so Varischetti was believed to have drowned.

Men digging for gold in Coolgardie, Western Australia, around 1890

