



FROM SNAGS & CHEAP BEER TO T-BONES & CROWNIES

By Bruce Legendre

Poppy and Greg are 'othersiders' (from the Far East), with grown up kids and time on their hands. Both have experience prospecting in WA and Victoria but have never had that one-of-a-kind experience of having the entire season (May-December) to prospect in the WA goldfields. Short, cool days with a spot of frost and rain now and then, only a few flies and mozzies (after the first frost)

and the opportunity to stay out in the field detecting for two weeks at a time. It seems to take a few days just to settle down and get grubby enough and have your mind on the ground before you feel you can face the challenge of doing new country where you may go weeks without seeing a nugget.

They made it over the Nullarbor without incident and I met them in Kalgoorlie. I have been prospecting for 25 years in Australia (I'm not from around these

Top: Poppy (left) and Greg after the first day on the patch and 40 ounces to show for it

Right: Greg (left) and Poppy (shaved at last) and more than 100 ounces from their six months on the WA goldfields

parts) but now I have that many forms to fill out (the downside of pegging) that I rarely get a chance to go metal detecting. So, the plan was I would take them out to

my leases where I would take soil, stream sediment and rock chip samples for later geochemistry analysis (hopefully to produce a drilling target) and they would chase up earlier Au geochemical hits I had gotten from the soils.

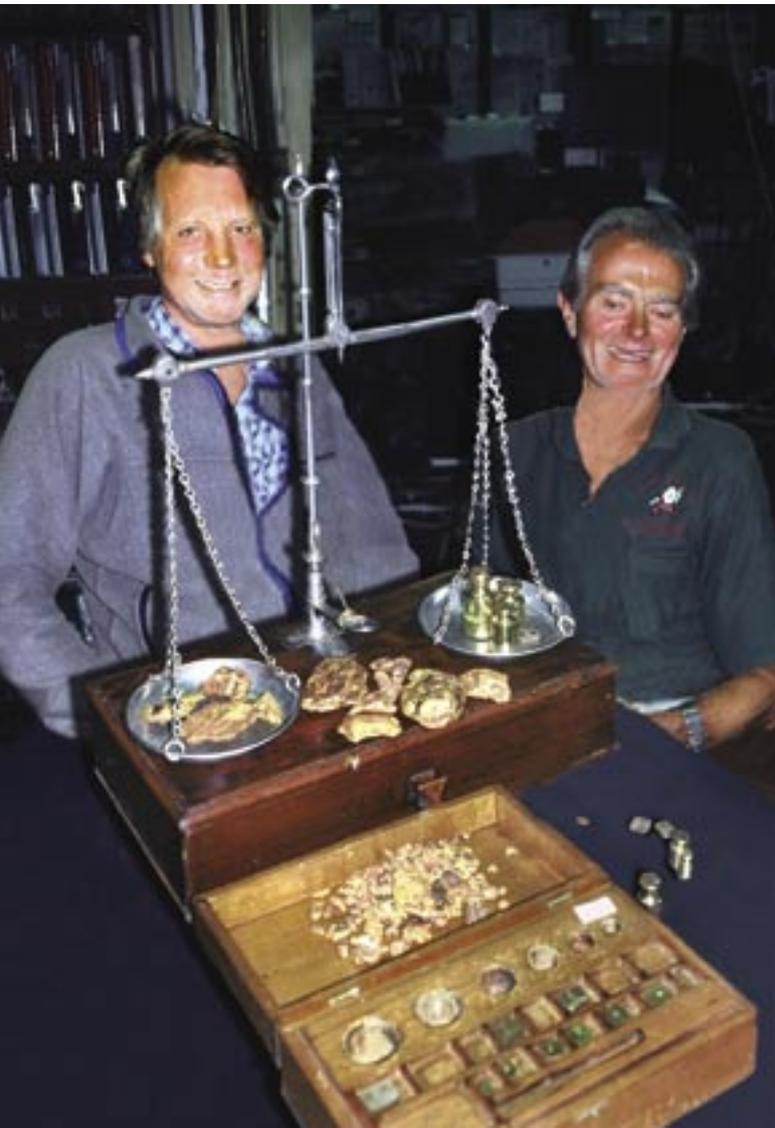
We were going to work in the eastern and northern goldfields for the season.

CHECKED THE FIELD SUPPLIES

In Kal I got the boys their Miners Rights at the Mines Department (this allows you to camp anywhere on Crown Land so the crabby pastoralist can't run you off as you are entitled to prospect) and checked the field supplies: 2 x 3500 Minelab detectors with 16-inch and 18-inch coils; spare cables, spare earphones, spare chargers (everything spare) and the 6.8-volt Reeds Prospecting Supplies dry batteries that run all day at peak performance. If you are using wet cell batteries then after your first run you won't be running at peak performance for the rest of the day).

There were also small picks for wondering, big picks for deep holes, a generator, a rock drill, an extension cord, food and, of course, the most important survival tool of all – beer. There are two kinds of blokes in the goldfields – those who go there to drink and those who drink because they are there.

The first day out of Leonora I started soil sampling on some leases and put the boys onto a geochemically-high Au cluster of soils from a previous exploration. The first day on the first run Poppy found two small nuggets in a new area. He has always had





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more ass than Jessie the elephant. This is a wonderful way to start off a trip but you have to put in the time, at least six hours a day (except when the bar on the tailgate opens early – never before 10am is the rule). Take a GPS so you won't get lost and work the ridges between the hilltops and the creeks, working your way down to the creeks in a zigzag pattern so you are traversing a potential shed of gold from side to side. Don't walk in a straight line for two hours and come back to camp and tell me there is no gold in the area, unless you are the returned Messiah.

Poppy got a few small floaters and a nice 2-ounce bit but it was out on the floodplain and we could never work out the source.

OPTION TO PURCHASE A LEASE

We moved onward over the next week stopping at Darlot where I had an option to purchase a lease, so while I had a look around the boys chased the high Au soil samples but turned up nothing. I was able to detect for a few days myself and thought the ground looked very prospective but that's always the problem in WA where you can read the ground (unlike Victoria where the loam is too thick). There is so much that looks good and so little that has patches. So, pick an area and do it all so you don't have to return. You should be satisfied you gave it a proper going over and if it was there, well, it wasn't yours to find. 'Never yield to despair,' said Frank Hann, probably the one prospector in old WA who spent all his time in the bush until he retired.

Work in new country, don't scrounge and you won't be digging rubbish. You'll get a few bullets now and then and of course if you keep at it, one day a virgin patch. Work out of the known alluvial patches to the north-west and south-east on the greenstone belts. There will be plenty of patches the old guys couldn't find.

Fortunately, Petra Wasse from Reeds Prospecting Supplies, was working out of the Murchison about the time we went



through so we went out to her camp and spent the night. The next morning she took us to a patch where some previous prospectors had won 30 ounces (a new discovery) but she was still able to pull 2-grammers from 25cm down just on the edge of a creek. Her gear was a Minelab 3500 with a 16-inch XP NuggetFinder using mono mode with normal setting for the coil on the switchboard. This was a Golden Lesson for us: use mono/normal for maximum penetration.

Petra's mate also found a small nugget. We found nothing in the hour we were there so we bid our farewells and headed for the pub for a quick one, then off down the road to make camp. Poppy and Greg never spent even one night in any of the outback towns – one or two beers at the pub then out to the bush.

SLEEP ON THE GOLD

You've got to sleep on the gold. It's no good camping just anywhere. Plan your day so that you sleep on the gold every night or at least auriferous-looking ground. Every winter in WA you'll get a downpour and not be able to move for some time so it's particularly important that when you see the storm clouds coming, you get to a place where you'll be happy to walk out of camp and detect for a week.

Above: That rock drill comes in handy when digging in unforgiving conglomerate

Above, right: Greg and his second 15-ounce slug from the bottom of a half-metre hole

Just before sunset I spotted a range off to the side of the graded Shire road on which we were travelling that I had never prospected. I could see it was greenstone and not granite, so we pulled in about 2km off the road. At this distance you can't hear passing traffic when you're trying to sleep (particularly the road trains) and, more importantly, no one can see you.

This is imperative when looking for new patches. You have to hide your camp after you pull your first few nuggets. There is nothing worse, after the first day or so on the patch you have spent the last two months looking for, than seeing a couple of vehicles loaded with metal detectors pull up to check out the area. And it happens all the time. You have to be stealthy.

In the morning we all went for a wander with the detectors and I managed to find two bits in the creek about 300 metres from camp before I went off soil sampling.

The boys stayed for the day detecting but could only find a single piece about 100 metres down the creek from my two



nuggets. We decided to mark down the area for a more thorough search at some later date.

Well, I finally had to leave the boys for 10 weeks in the bush on their own. I have a wife and two kids and if I stay away too long they're inclined to rent out my office.

BATTLING TO FIND A DECENT PATCH

Upon my return in July I found them still battling to find a decent patch and looking a little down in the dumps. They had been chasing soil geochemical cluster Au anomalies on maps I had left for them, as well as working whatever country had a 'vibe'. They had a few ounces in small bits and anyone who has ever worked new ground will tell you there are a surprising number of squibs out there with only a few nuggets. Sometimes a single nugget will keep you looking for days for a patch with no return. But those of us who have been fortunate enough to find good patches in new country will also tell you that after you clean the patch up, there are floaters hundreds of metres away from the main patch, sometimes a 1,000 metres or more, so maybe those one or two or several small bits you've found are on the perimeter of a 2,000-ounce patch.

My brother and I found a 2,000-ounce patch and a few other decent ones as well in new country and the nuggets can be very dispersed. In this regard, Robert Hough from the CSIRO is doing some good work on nuggets found by prospectors. The short of it is that the electron microscope proves almost all nuggets are primary. So what's under your patch could be the fortune.

The first night's camp with Poppy and Greg was an eye-opener. Apparently funds were running a bit tight and they were having snags on toast for tea. Brekky was cigarettes and coffee for Greg and a cup of tea with milk for Poppy. Lunch was a biscuit and five stubbies of whatever was on sale. But they persevered. Bedtime



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was around 8pm on a big night out. A very exciting crew!

July 21st was my wedding anniversary and we were camped in the Murchison. As per usual I gave the boys a map of where some good Au values had been found in soil samples and headed off for a day of soil sampling myself.

A MONGREL OF A DAY

Well, I had a mongrel of a day as the pastoralist never graded the firebreaks on his mill roads so they had been washed away in the annual cyclonic rains we get in the Murchison in summer and I spent the whole day trying to get access to the target area. By the time I arrived it was late and I only had time to get 40 samples whereas I usually shoot for between 80 and 100 a day.

I got back to camp in a grumpy mood and because it was already dark and a light frost was in town, the boys were huddled around the fire. When I pulled in they were quietly sucking on stubbies. Greg said they had had a gutful of the joint and they were going to pull the pin. Poppy said it had been 10 weeks and they had found

only a few ounces and were tired. I said their depression was understandable and then I caught a smirk on Greg's face.

"You bastards found some metal, didn't you?" I asked.

At that they both broke into big grins and Greg tipped out 40 ounces he had stashed in his shoe onto the top of the Esky. The 15-ouncer had been lying on the top of the loam under a mulga and he had specked it before he bipped it. The other bits and pieces brought the day's take to 40 ounces, which meant they were men of means now. They went straight into town and bought a slab of Crown Lagers and kilos of T-bone steaks.

The next day we moved camp onto the patch putting the Landcruisers behind a dense creek so as not to be seen by any passing vehicle. The boys were getting heaps of gold but it was scattered over a couple of football fields and would take them a couple of months to grid out. For this, tent pegs and cord is best. If you use the traditional method of heavy chains dragged behind you, every man and his dog will know where you have worked and the new patch will be the new gold rush.

Above, left: After the patch it was T-bone steaks all round

Above: Greg about to launch into his Slug Dance

Out will come all the caravan park people and our indigenous friends and folks you never knew were even in the bush.

HAD ABOUT 100 OUNCES

After another 10 weeks of gridding, Poppy and Greg had about 100 ounces. Greg found a second 15-ounce piece down a bit over half a metre. He was grateful for the rock drill that day. He has a slug dance he does and I am led to believe it is not a pretty sight.

Good chisels and hammers should also be part of your kit.

What a great result for a first time out for the entire season. And if they can do it, you can too mate. Just keep it simple and work out the back of a 4WD – lots of spares of everything including tyres and tubes, plenty of water, Minelabs and layers of clothing. It can be hot in the day and cold at night but the slugs will keep you warm.

