

Bringing back an important piece of the region's gold rush history

By Mark Fraser, who attended the handover

An active Western Australian junior has well and truly earned the quite prestigious title of being the modern custodian of an historic gold field in New South Wales.

Cortona Resources Ltd – which is currently advancing its Dargues Reef project near the tiny rural town of Majors Creek in NSW's south east – recently made a significant contribution to the cultural heritage of the region when it donated a restored mid-1800s Flandrau horse-drawn carriage to the Braidwood Historical Society.

The quick speed, short wheel based, highly maneuverable four wheeler, which had been used to transport gold during the 1860s by local miner John Blatchford, was unsuccessfully held up by the infamous bushranger Ben Hall (with the help of the area's Clarke brothers) during March 1865.

According to Cortona boss Peter van der Borgh, the company had been approached around a year ago by the society's Antony Davies, who asked him if the junior would be willing to buy the then soon-to-be auctioned carriage, have it renovated and donate it to the town.

"Of course we were delighted to," van der Borgh explained during early May's Braidwood Festival, when the refurbished gold escort was officially



The Flandrau carriage: before and after.

handed over to the museum during a brief public ceremony.

"One of the things that we as a company enjoy about being here is the heritage, and one of our ambitions going forward is to help revive the golden heritage of Braidwood, which was once upon a time the richest gold field in NSW.

"So we were pretty keen to get in behind Antony and the museum – and the community at large – to bring some of that history back and into our modern way of life."

Important addition

Davies, who is based at Dransfield's Mill in the NSW locality of Jembaicumbene and restored the vehicle himself, said the carriage would now become one of the museum's icon pieces.

Bought by Blatchford from Flandrau, a New York-based outfit which enjoyed the reputation of being the US's most



expensive and second most prestigious builder of carriages during the 19th Century, the four wheeler was built between 1850-1859 and brought to Australia.

During its heyday, Davies explained, the carriage would carry Blatchford or a professional driver, three armed troopers and a gold bullion case, which fitted in the back section of the vehicle.

Meanwhile, in the front, there was a little box which had been especially designed for the ledger which contained all of the records of the gold that was being carried on any particular day.

Two armed troopers would usually ride ahead of the carriage, with another two following behind it.

"It was used sometimes with two horses, sometimes with one – depending on the situation," Davies said.

"And, very importantly in March 1865, as it was coming up that very steep back road from Araluen to Majors Creek, it was held up at the top of the hill by Ben Hall and our very own local Clarke brothers – unsuccessfully – and there was a very vicious gun fight in which Constable (Thomas, although this Christian name has not been verified – ed) Kelly was shot.

"Nobody was killed, but the bushrangers fled into the bush and the gold was saved.

"And so it's even more significant that Cortona, which is now the custodian of our historical gold field, has been involved in saving this important piece of history for our museum."

The Perth-domiciled gold explorer is now expecting to resume drilling at



Sitting in the four wheeler with driver "Mr Blatchford" (Antony Davies, left) is Cortona boss Peter van der Borgh. Making up the police escort in front of them are Regg Webb and Terry Hart.

Dargues Reef after raising \$1.8 million during the March quarter as it fulfills its ambition of becoming a producer of the precious metal.

Its wholly-owned flagship project, which sits 60 km south east of Canberra, currently contains an indicated and inferred resource of 1.44 million tonnes at 6.2 grams/t for 286,000 gold oz.

Not surprisingly, the junior has a three phase strategy to take Dargues Reef to the production stage.

Firstly, it is looking to establish an initial underground operation on multiple headings via a centralised decline, using a centralised processing plant to treat the ore.

So far the samples looked at by the company have produced some exceptional metallurgical results using both gravity-flotation (which returned a 99% recovery) and gravity-cyanide leaching (98%).

Secondly, the junior is planning to find additional resources for medium term mill feed and increased gold production from prospects such as Exeter Farm, Copper Ridge and Dreadnought.

Finally, it will continue to look for new areas of mineralisation on its regional land holding of 700 square km.

“The old timers who worked the alluvials around Major Creek and Araluen ended up finding some 1.25 million oz during what was predominantly the second half of the 19th Century”, van der Borgh later explained.

“But, without the help of modern processing technologies, the reef mining was too challenging for them and they effectively took the field to the stage where it simply became too uneconomic to produce the precious metal.

“From the work we have done here so far, we are confident that they literally



Members of the Majors Creek float get together for a team photo prior to embarking on the journey to Braidwood.



Davies, van der Borgh, Webb and Hart with back seat passengers Greg Cozens (third from right) and Ralph Wragg. On the right is Cortona senior exploration geologist Paul Maher.

only scratched the surface.

“Furthermore, we control a significant area of real estate which covers multiple outcropping gossans, large and high tenor soil anomalies as well as a number of

other prospective geological structures.

“In short, we have plenty of exploration upside in an area which already has an impressive historical track record.”

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