

DOUG RALPH

The Monster Meeting Interviews #2 Doug interviewed by Jan 'Yarn' Wositzky

Approximate running time: 35 minutes

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Doug Ralph

Castlemaine born and bred, Doug Ralph is a well-known environmentalist, activist and local historian, and a genuine local living treasure. His knowledge of the local landscape is unparalleled, and his Sunday morning bush walks a delight. In 1995 Doug was the instigator of the modern commemorations of the Monster Meeting.

Overview of Interview

Doug tells how the Monster Meeting was revived in 1995, contextualises the gold rush within a longer history of the land and Indigenous people, and talks of legacy of the Monster Meeting.

Part 1 Introduction to Doug Ralph

0:00 Doug's family came to the gold rush in 1851, settled in Maldon, and amongst other occupations were gold diggers and wood cutters. Doug was born in Castlemaine in 1948.

Part 2 Commemorating the Monster Meeting

02:33 How in 1995 the history of the Monster Meeting was discovered, and taking a cue from 1851, the Chewton/Castlemaine locals organised a monster meeting as a protest against the Victorian Government's amalgamation of local councils.

Further research (with disputation) revealed the location of the original Monster Meeting to be at the site of a shepherd's hut, and in 2001 Monster Meeting commemorations become a regular event. With a plaque on site the Monster Meeting came to be regarded as the 'birthplace of democracy' – the event that began the movement towards Eureka.

Part 3 The Monster Meeting, 1851

12:22 Mention of Robert Booley, a Chartist speaker at Monster Meeting, and early Chartist influence in Australia.

Part 4 Legacy of Gold Rush

13:39 Discussion of whether an Australian spirit was born on the goldfields, how people came here and were free to create something new, comparison with Gallipoli story re development of Australian identity.

Part 5 The Dja Dja Wurrung & the Land

15:33 Talk re irony of freedom-seeking gold diggers (and before them the squatters) obliterating rights of Aboriginal people, historical voices against this and against destruction of land, from the likes of artist Ludwig Becker.

Review of changes in the landscape from before gold rush till the present: from open woodlands with big trees to the destruction of gold rush and subsequent clearing in 1880s, to the situation today where there are more trees than ever before. Pros and cons of this re species survival.

23:49 Discussion of amount of gold found in gold fields and how rare gold actually is, and that Dja Dja Wurrung, who called gold *Kara Kara*, placed no value on it. Talk of why people value gold? Spiritual values? Greed?

The clash between values of Dja Dja Wurrung people and gold seekers, imagining feelings of Dja Dja Wurrung as their land is invaded. Question of whether Aboriginal people took part in gold rush.

(Editor's note: For a detailed account of the role of Dja Dja Wurrung and Wathaurong people in the gold rush see *Black Gold* by Fred Cahir, ANU Press, 2014).

Discussion of contemporary identity in relation to colonial history, particularly with influx of new people to the gold fields area. Doug's view on recently renewed caring for the land.

