

REASONS FOR GOLD RUSHES:

- The discovery of gold anywhere caused thousands of men to rush there in the hope of becoming rich quickly and easily.
- The search for gold inspired thousands of people to move to the west, into new areas.
- They went to get rich quickly.
- They were almost all men.
- The main gold rush was to California in 1848/9. After that there were gold rushes to various parts of the Rockies.

PROBLEMS OF MINING:

- Prospecting for gold was not easy. Most miners were not trained in mining and had little hope of finding gold.
- The miners only had the tools to look for gold on the surface. Most of the gold was below the surface so it was not possible for the ordinary man to find it.
- Some went by sea, but most went overland, which was much cheaper. Several wagon trains were setting off every day. 5,000 died of cholera on the way.
- They did not stay in one place but moved around as new deposits of gold were found.
- There was no law and order so it was difficult to enforce your claim to a particular area. In any case, most good claims were already staked out by the time the rush was under way.
- The lack of law and order meant that if you found gold it was difficult to enforce your claim to it. 'Claim-jumping' was common.

PROBLEMS OF MINING TOWNS:

- Mining towns were often the most lawless in the west. They grew too fast. The people in them had little respect for law and order. They were a long way from officials, such as judges and sheriffs.
- The miners' only interest was gold. Their communities were lawless and the miners had guns. These guns could be used to defend their mining claims, but could also be used against the Indians.
- Most of the mining towns were in Indian territory so the government had no right to send its officials to run them.
- The absence of law and order in the mining towns was a difficult problem for the government in Washington to solve.
- Some mining towns set up their own law and order, with their own rules, miners' courts, Vigilance Committees, and rapid justice.
- Because of the lack of government and planning, mining towns were also unhealthy. There were no sewers, fresh water supply, decent food supplies.
- They were really just camps. Illnesses were common.
- There were very few women and children, so they were not proper communities with schools and churches.

IMPACT OF GOLD RUSHES:

- A very few did become rich, so the myth that it was possible to find your fortune lived on.
- Following the 1848 gold rush to California, the trickle of people travelling the trails to the West became a flood.
- The discovery of gold took thousands of Whites to parts of America which had, until that point, only been lived in by the Indians.
- The miners knew little of the Indian way of life and cared even less.
- Sending in law officers would mean breaking treaties signed with the Indians about the ownership of the land.
- When the gold had been used up the whites found other ways to live in the places the gold had been. It was the search for gold which brought about the final conflict with the Indians.
- In 1874, there was a gold rush to the Black Hills of Dakota, in the Great Plains region itself.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MINERS AND OTHER SETTLERS:

- Mining towns grew very quickly and often disappeared just as quickly. They only lasted as long as there was gold to mine.
- The men who went there were only interested in getting rich quick, or in having a wild time. When the gold ran out, the mining towns became ghost towns.
- They were not really migrants because they did not stay in one place and build a new life for themselves.
- They went all the way west to California and then began moving back east little by little.
- There were very few women and children, so they were not proper communities with schools and churches.
- The miners' only interest was gold. Their communities were lawless and the miners had guns. These guns could be used to defend their mining claims, but could also be used against the Indians.