

GOLD RUSH

JIM RICHARDS

ABOUT THE BOOK

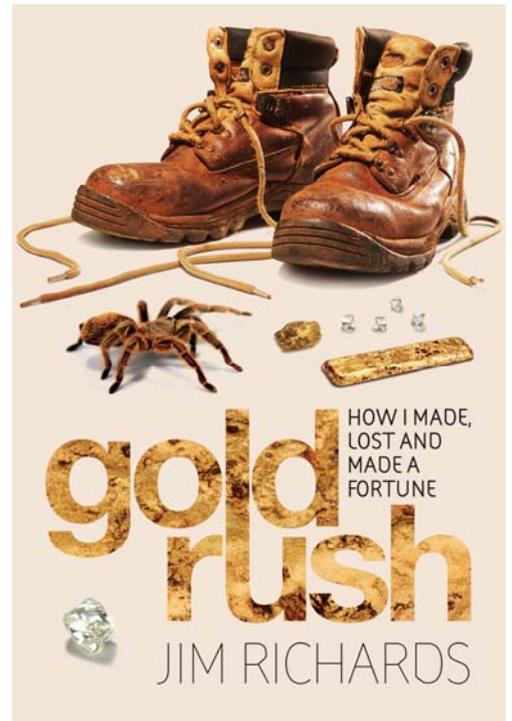
In the 1990s, a young man leaves the British army to join a modern-day gold rush; he has a geology degree and not much else. This is Jim Richards' story – a real life, funny, blood-and-guts treasure hunt that takes him from Central and South America to Australia, Laos, Pakistan and Indonesia. It is the story of how one man made, lost, and made his fortune looking for gold and diamonds.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jim Richards has dived for diamonds in the piranha-infested rivers of Guyana, discovered a fabulously rich goldmine in the Australian outback, got caught up in the world's biggest mining scam in Indonesia and started a gold rush in the war-torn jungles of Laos. He has founded a string of successful mining businesses and is today one of the mining industry's leading executives. *Gold Rush* is his first book.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Gold Rush* is a modern day adventure story about a young man who goes to seek his fortune. Did it surprise you that it is possible still for individuals to go on a gold rush in the present day?
2. What difference does it make to the reading experience knowing that these are events that all took place from the 1990s on (i.e. within our own lifetime)?
3. How do you think Jim Richards' story fits into the genre of other historical gold-rush stories, like those about the Californian 49ers, or rushes in Australia? What parallels and differences are there between old-timers' stories, and Jim's?
4. How do you think being in the army equipped Jim for what was to follow?
5. What does the author mean when he asks: *Would I own the gold, or would the gold own me?* (p. 12)
6. As far as the author is concerned, what do you think is the answer to this question?
7. At p. 13, the author observes: *How you react to chance, luck and random events is a defining factor in prospecting.* To what extent is he in charge of his own destiny? What choices do you think the older, wiser Jim might have made that the younger, inexperienced Jim did not?
8. Is it possible to gain experience without making mistakes?
9. What other life lessons might one take from Jim Richards' story?
10. What spectrum of morality do we see exhibited by the various individuals that Richards encounters on his journey? How might you define 'good' and 'bad' people in Jim's industry?
11. What does the author himself have to say about behaving honourably in the resources industry?



12. If just about anyone can go off to join a gold rush, what 'right' do they have to do so? What kinds of rights or claims might a modern prospector take into consideration as they enter someone else's territory, or begin to dig in an untouched environment? See for instance Jim's observations at p. 215: *It had not occurred to me that Ekereku actually belonged to anyone in particular*. Or Jim's conversation with Juan on p. 231: *But what about the Indians? What's happening to them doesn't look right to me*.
13. How does this book make you feel about our relationship to the planet? In what way does our reception of this story depend upon the kind of prism we view it through – such as historical, adventure story, memoir, environmental?
14. What aspect of Jim's own experience would you have found most difficult to deal with? Do you think that what he did is 'worth it'?

INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

At what point did you decide to write this book, and why did you decide to do it?

I actually started writing *Gold Rush* when I was in the jungles of Guyana all those years ago, but it was all too raw and intense back then and I lacked the perspective to write a good memoir.

Eventually I got back to it, in part because I got sick of reading books about the mining industry written by journalists who could not describe geology and that weren't funny.

There are some honourable exceptions to this, including *The Voisey Bay Hustle* by Jacquie McNish (an hilarious pastiche of mining entrepreneur Robert Friedland); *Barren Lands* by Kevin Krajick, which describes the race to discover diamond deposits in northern Canada in the 1990s; and my favourite, *Titan* by Ron Chernow, the biography of oil-tycoon John D. Rockefeller, the greatest resources magnate of all time and the incredible man who invented the modern corporation. Nobody compares to the great John D.

But the main reason I wrote this book was for my four boys. My aim was for them to appreciate that in real life, being all you can be involves risk taking, making mistakes and overcoming your fears; and that these experiences are not available through a computer. So get off those darned screens and get out there!

Why do you think that humans have a fascination with gold and gold rushes? Would you say that gold lust is something that attracts men more than women?

I have read many accounts of gold rushes from the nineteenth century and feel an eerie connection to those old timers. Their motivations and fears back then were the same as mine a century later.

Gold lust is just like any other kind of lust: it can grab anyone, anytime, but not everyone does something about it. In the nineteenth century, there was far less social mobility. If you lacked capital, you were virtually condemned to a life of drudgery. So a gold rush represented a dream, where robust men with practical skills could break free from the shackles of society and become wealthy and free.

Women were also attracted to historic gold rushes, but in small numbers and mainly assisting their miner husbands or as providers of hostelry services. There were also of course working girls, some of whom became quite notorious for being adept at 'mining' the miners.

Interestingly, the number of women in the mining industry in Australia now is at its highest proportion ever, reflecting the enormous social and technological changes where gold-rush muscle (in part) has been replaced by skills and knowledge. For instance, women now are generally considered better haul-pack (mining truck) drivers as they go easier on the equipment.

What would you say is the secret to happiness?

I am an outcomes-driven person and have never been especially interested in personal happiness. But the good counterpoint to that dour personal philosophy is that happiness is a side effect of following your dreams, and I am a big believer in following your dreams – that is how you generate significant outcomes.

An outcome that makes me happy is having the ability at any time, to tell anyone in the world to bugger off, but also having the wisdom to know who to say it to and when.

If one of your sons wanted to go on a gold rush, what advice would you give him?

Firstly, join the army for a few years so you know how to look out for yourself.

Read, a lot. Most people I know who have been successful in the mining industry are avid readers.

If you want to go on a gold rush, you cannot be naive about human nature, so wise-up. There were plenty of hazards that my adventures threw up, but the biggest dangers were always of the human kind. There are con artists, knaves and crooks at every turn in a modern gold rush, just like there were in the old days.

It may sound strange advice for someone heading to a gold rush, but if your values are purely built around getting rich, you are better off trying something else. It would be easy to get sucked into the criminal or drug-smuggling rings that are ubiquitous in some of these far flung places. A well-defined moral compass is your best protection.

But if after all your trials and tribulations, you do actually find something, be careful: gold can do strange things to you, as it did to me. It can magnify a weakness in your character; it can corrupt your values and it can persuade you to do terrible things. There is a deeply personal moral dimension to a gold rush. And you don't know until you are in that situation if you will own the gold or the gold will own you.

What's next for Jim Richards?

As far as my day job is concerned, I am currently the executive chairman of an Australian publicly listed mineral exploration company. I have a great team and spend my time running around exploring for gold and diamonds; it's hard to find more fun in life than that.

In my spare time, I'm working on a new book, *Diamond Rush*, which recounts my thrills and spills as a diamond explorer.

I also very much enjoy talking to people and persuading them to follow their own dreams, to back themselves to take risks and succeed. Everyone has their own gold-rush dream, whether that is literal or metaphorical. I hope my book inspires a few people to follow theirs.



@FremantlePress



Sign up for enews



fremantlepress.com.au