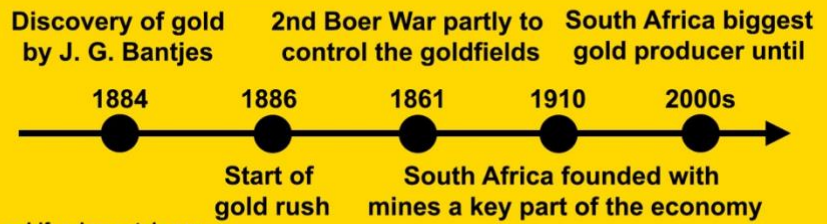


Witwatersrand Gold Rush – Timeline



© goldfundamentals.org

The Witwatersrand Gold Rush 1886

*The Birth of Johannesburg and
the Golden Legacy of South Africa*

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	2
2. THE DISCOVERY AND EARLY DAYS.....	4
3. THE IMPACT OF THE GOLD RUSH.....	6
4. THE GOLD DEPOSITS AND MINING.....	7
5. CONCLUSION AND LEGACY.....	9
6. FAQs.....	10

Explore the historical journey of the Witwatersrand Gold Rush, which led to the establishment of Johannesburg and initiated South Africa's domination of world gold production. The first recorded discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand was made by Jan Gerrit Bantjes in June 1884. Bantjes, a prospector from the Eastern Cape, discovered a minor gold reef in Witwatersrand. Two years later, in 1886, George Harrison, found a major gold reef, leading to the *Witwatersrand Gold Rush*.

1. Introduction

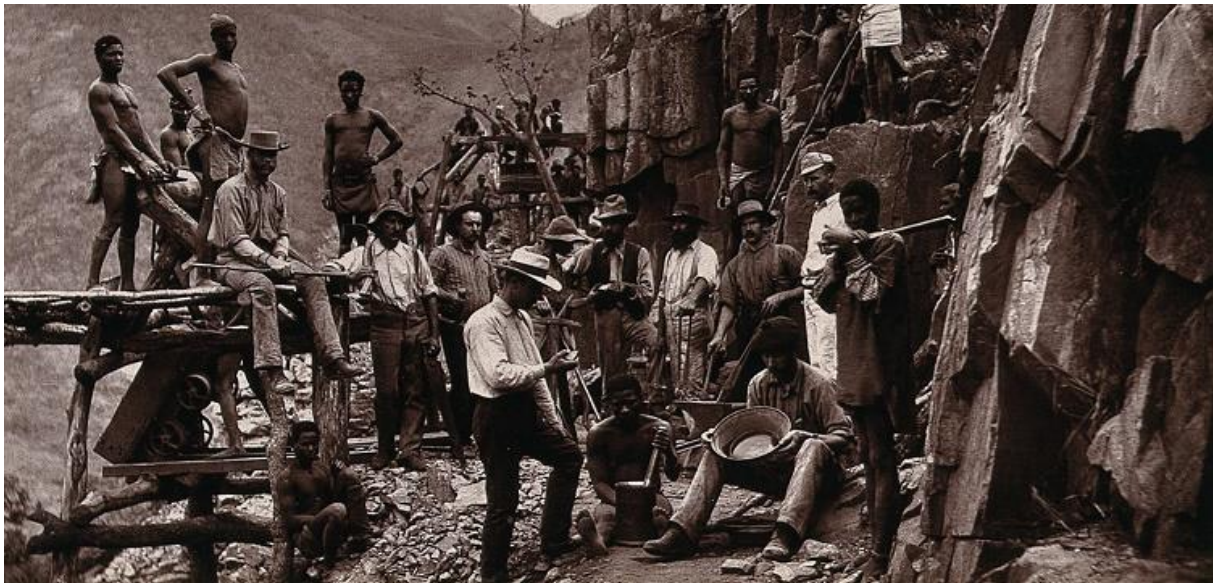


Image 1: De Kaap Gold Fields, South Africa: miners of the Republic Gold Mining Company 1888 (Wellcome Library, London, CC BY 4.0).

The *Witwatersrand Gold Rush* was a monumental event that shaped the course of history, not just for South Africa. This gold rush, which began in 1886, led to the establishment of Johannesburg, a city that would grow to become the largest in South Africa and one of the 50 largest urban areas in the world. The gold rush was also a key part of the Mineral Revolution, a period of mineral discovery and exploitation that drastically altered the economic and demographic structure of South Africa.

The *Witwatersrand Gold Rush* wasn't just about the discovery of gold. It was about the dreams and aspirations of thousands of prospectors who hoped to strike it rich. It was about the transformation of a region from a largely agricultural society to a globally significant industrial and mining powerhouse. And it was about the profound social and political changes that were triggered by this economic revolution.

In this article, we will delve into the history of the *Witwatersrand Gold Rush*, exploring its origins, its impact, and its legacy. We will look at the early days of gold mining in the region, the establishment of Johannesburg, and the transformation of the community. We will also examine the gold deposits in the Witwatersrand Basin and the techniques used to mine them. By the end of this article, you will have a comprehensive understanding of the *Witwatersrand Gold Rush* and its significance in world history. See also [South Africa gold mining \(britannica\)](#)

1.1. Ten Facts of the Witwatersrand Gold Rush

The Witwatersrand Gold Rush was a significant event in the history of South Africa and marked the beginning of the country as the world's biggest gold producer. Here are some key facts about this gold rush:

Discovery of Gold: The Witwatersrand Gold Rush began after the discovery of the world's largest gold deposit in the Witwatersrand Basin of South Africa in 1886.

Creation of Johannesburg: The discovery of gold led to the establishment of Johannesburg, which is now South Africa's largest city. Johannesburg is often referred to as "Egoli," which means "City of Gold."

Global Significance: The Witwatersrand Gold Rush was one of the biggest in history, with the Witwatersrand Basin providing over 40% of all gold ever mined on Earth.

Migrant Labour: The gold mining industry relied heavily on labor from neighboring countries, including Lesotho, Swaziland, and Mozambique. This created a large, primarily male, migrant labor force which had significant social implications.

Influx of Foreign Miners: The Gold Rush attracted miners from Britain, Australia, and the United States, among other countries, contributing to the area's diverse population.

Longevity of the Mines: Unlike other gold rushes, the gold deposits in the Witwatersrand Basin were so large that mining continues to this day, albeit on a smaller scale due to the depletion of reserves.

Economic Impact: The Gold Rush contributed to the growth of South Africa's economy, transforming it into the most industrialized country in Africa.

Consequences for Indigenous People: The Gold Rush led to displacement and dispossession of local African communities from their ancestral lands.

Anglo-Boer War: The wealth and strategic importance of the Witwatersrand gold mines contributed to the outbreak of the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), as the British sought control over the independent Boer republics.

Apartheid: The wealth from the Gold Rush, and the labor practices it introduced, contributed to the establishment and maintenance of the system of apartheid, a policy of institutionalized racial segregation that existed in South Africa from 1948 until the early 1990s.

1.2. Main Events of the Witwatersrand Gold Rush in South Africa

Year	Event
1884	Jan Gerrit Bantjes makes the first recorded discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand.
1886	The Witwatersrand Gold Rush officially begins, attracting prospectors from around the world.
1886	The city of Johannesburg is established as a result of the gold rush.
1895	The Second Boer War begins, partly fueled by tensions over control of the Witwatersrand gold mines.
1910	The Union of South Africa is established, with the Witwatersrand gold mines playing a key role in its economy.
1961	South Africa becomes a republic, with the Witwatersrand continuing to be a major hub for gold production.

2. The Discovery and Early Days

2.1. The First Recorded Discovery of Gold

The *Witwatersrand Gold Rush* traces its origins back to June 1884, when Jan Gerrit Bantjes made the first recorded discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand. Bantjes, a prospector from the Eastern Cape, had been lured to the region by stories of a South African “El Dorado”. Two years later, in 1886, George Harrison, found a major gold reef, leading to the *Witwatersrand Gold Rush*.

The Witwatersrand Basin, where the gold was found, is a large sedimentary basin that holds the world’s largest known gold reserves. This discovery marked the beginning of the *Witwatersrand Gold Rush* and set the stage for South Africa’s domination of world gold production well into the 2000s.

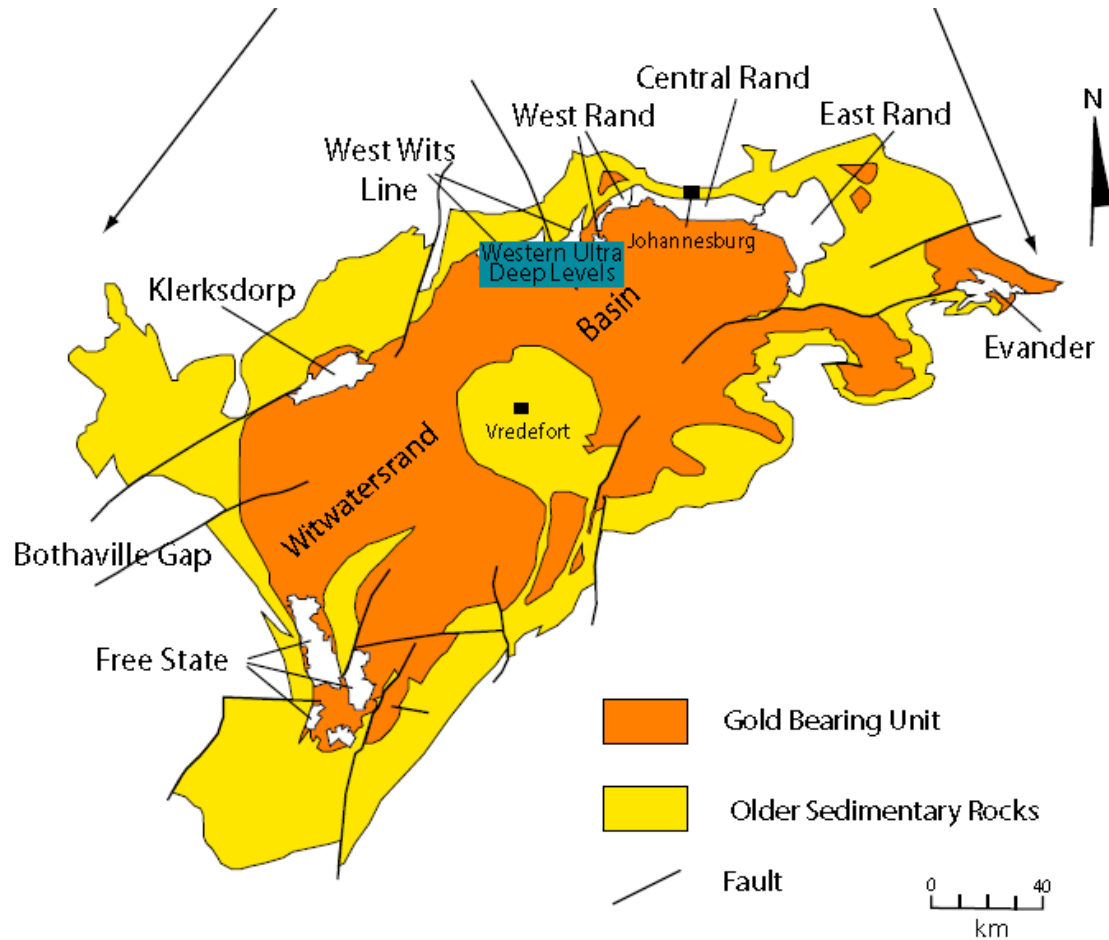


Image 2: Map of Witwatersrand and location of gold deposits (2009).

2.2. Early Days of Johannesburg and Witwatersrand Gold Mining

The discovery of gold led to the rapid development of the area. Within a few short years, the once sparsely populated region was transformed into a bustling mining community. The city of Johannesburg was established as a direct result of the gold rush. Named after two officials of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR), Johannes Meyer and Johannes Rissik, Johannesburg quickly grew into the largest city in South Africa.

In the early days of Johannesburg and Witwatersrand gold mining, prospectors established a belt of gold-bearing reefs 40 miles wide centered on present-day Johannesburg. The mining was hard work, with miners facing numerous challenges, including the depth of the gold deposits and the hard, quartzite rock in which the gold was embedded.

Despite these challenges, the prospectors were undeterred. The promise of wealth and the allure of gold drove them to persevere. The Witwatersrand deposits have produced almost 40% of all the gold produced on earth since the beginning of time, over 1.5 billion ounces. This staggering amount of gold has earned the Witwatersrand the title of the greatest goldfield in the world. See also [Witwatersrand \(wiki\)](#)

The early days of the *Witwatersrand Gold Rush* were a time of excitement, hardship, and transformation. The discovery of gold brought people from all over the world to the Witwatersrand, forever changing the landscape and the future of the region.

3. The Impact of the Gold Rush

3.1. The Establishment of Johannesburg



COMMISSIONER STREET, JOHANNESBURG.

Image 3: Johannesburg, Commissioner Street 1899 (British Library).

The *Witwatersrand Gold Rush* had a profound impact on the region, most notably leading to the establishment of Johannesburg. This city, which sprang up almost overnight, became the epicenter of the gold rush. Prospectors, miners, and fortune seekers flocked to Johannesburg, transforming it from a small mining camp into the largest city in South Africa. Today, Johannesburg is not only the economic hub of South Africa but also one of the 50 largest urban areas in the world. The city's origins are deeply rooted in the gold rush, and its history and development are inextricably linked to the fortunes of the Witwatersrand goldfields.

3.2. South Africa's Domination of World Gold Production

The *Witwatersrand Gold Rush* also marked the beginning of South Africa's domination of world gold production. The vast gold reserves found in the Witwatersrand Basin propelled South Africa to the forefront of global gold production. Even today, South Africa remains one of the world's top gold-producing countries, thanks in large part to the rich deposits found in the Witwatersrand. The gold rush not only brought wealth and prosperity to the region but also cemented South Africa's place in the global mining industry.

3.3. The Transformation of the Community

Perhaps the most significant impact of the *Witwatersrand Gold Rush* was the transformation of the community. The influx of prospectors and miners led to a population boom and the rapid development of infrastructure and services. The once sparsely populated region quickly became a bustling mining community, complete with shops, bars, and other amenities.

The gold rush also brought about significant social and political changes. The wealth generated by the gold rush attracted immigrants from all over the world, creating a diverse and multicultural society. However, it also led to social tensions and conflicts, particularly between the local African population and the incoming prospectors and miners.

Despite these challenges, the community continued to grow and thrive. Today, the Witwatersrand is a vibrant and dynamic region, home to a diverse population and a thriving economy. The legacy of the *Witwatersrand Gold Rush* is still evident in the region's rich mining heritage and its status as a major global hub for gold production

4. The Gold Deposits and Mining

4.1. The Witwatersrand Gold Deposits

The Witwatersrand Gold Rush was fueled by the discovery of the world's largest known gold reserves in the Witwatersrand Basin. This large sedimentary basin is a geological wonder, holding vast quantities of gold-bearing reefs. The gold in the Witwatersrand is found in a hard, erosion-resistant quartzite metamorphic rock, which forms a north-facing scarp known as the Witwatersrand.

The gold deposits in the Witwatersrand are not just large, but also incredibly rich. They have produced almost 40% of all the gold ever mined on Earth, amounting to over 1.5 billion ounces. This staggering amount of gold has earned the Witwatersrand the title of the greatest goldfield in the world.



Image 4: Gold Miners in South Africa at the Witwatersrand Goldfields ca. 1905 (Library of Congress).

4.2. Gold Mining Techniques and Challenges

Mining the gold in the Witwatersrand was no easy task. The gold deposits were deep underground, embedded in hard, quartzite rock. This presented significant challenges for the early miners, who had to develop innovative techniques and technologies to extract the gold.

One of the main techniques used in the Witwatersrand gold mines was deep-level mining. This involved digging deep shafts into the ground to reach the gold-bearing reefs. The miners would then use explosives to break up the rock and extract the gold. This was a dangerous and labor-intensive process, but the promise of gold made it worthwhile for many miners.

Despite the challenges, the miners of the Witwatersrand were undeterred. They persevered through the hard work and danger, driven by the promise of wealth and the allure of gold. Their efforts paid off, as the Witwatersrand gold mines became some of the most productive in the world.

The mining techniques and technologies developed in the Witwatersrand had a significant impact on the global mining industry. They set new standards for deep-level mining and paved the way for the development of modern mining techniques. The legacy of the Witwatersrand gold mines can still be seen today, in the advanced mining operations that continue to extract gold from the depths of the Earth.

5. Conclusion and Legacy

5.1. The Legacy of the Witwatersrand Gold Rush



Image 5: Ferreira's Gold Mine in 1886 in South Africa (Washington and Lee University). The End of the Gold Rushes

The *Witwatersrand Gold Rush* left an indelible mark on South Africa and the world. The discovery of gold transformed the region, leading to the establishment of Johannesburg and the rapid development of the mining industry. The wealth generated by the gold rush attracted immigrants from all over the world, creating a diverse and multicultural society.

The gold rush also cemented South Africa's place in the global mining industry. The vast gold reserves found in the Witwatersrand Basin propelled South Africa to the forefront of global gold production. Even today, South Africa remains one of the world's top gold-producing countries, thanks in large part to the rich deposits found in the Witwatersrand.

The legacy of the *Witwatersrand Gold Rush* is still evident today. The region's rich mining heritage is a testament to the perseverance and ingenuity of the early miners. The advanced mining techniques and technologies developed in the Witwatersrand continue to influence the global mining industry. And the city of Johannesburg, born out of the gold rush, continues to thrive as a vibrant and dynamic metropolis.

5.2. Conclusion

The *Witwatersrand Gold Rush* was a pivotal event in history, shaping the course of South Africa and influencing the global mining industry. The discovery of gold brought wealth and prosperity, but also challenges and conflicts. Yet through it all, the people of the Witwatersrand persevered, building a vibrant community and a thriving economy.

As we look back on the history of the *Witwatersrand Gold Rush*, we are reminded of the power of human ambition and ingenuity. The prospectors and miners who flocked to the Witwatersrand in search of gold were driven by a dream. They faced numerous challenges, but they never gave up. Their efforts transformed a region and left a lasting legacy.

Today, the Witwatersrand continues to be a major hub for gold production, a testament to the enduring allure of gold and the enduring spirit of the miners. The *Witwatersrand Gold Rush* may be a part of history, but its impact is still felt today, in the bustling city of Johannesburg, in the rich gold deposits of the Witwatersrand Basin, and in the vibrant community that calls this region home.

6. FAQs

6.1. What was Witwatersrand famous for?

The Witwatersrand is famous for being the site of the world's largest known gold reserves. The Witwatersrand Gold Rush that began in 1886 led to the establishment of Johannesburg and initiated South Africa's domination of world gold production. The region's vast gold reserves have produced almost 40% of all the gold ever mined on Earth.

6.2. Who discovered gold in Witwatersrand?

The first recorded discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand was made by Jan Gerrit Bantjes in June 1884. Bantjes, a prospector from the Eastern Cape, discovered a minor gold reef in Witwatersrand. Two years later, in 1886, George Harrison, found a major gold reef, leading to the Witwatersrand Gold Rush.

6.3. Why is there so much gold in the Witwatersrand?

The Witwatersrand Basin, where the gold was found, is a large sedimentary basin that holds the world's largest known gold reserves. The gold in the Witwatersrand is found in a hard, erosion-resistant quartzite metamorphic rock, which forms a north-facing scarp known as the Witwatersrand. The unique geological conditions of the basin have led to the accumulation of a vast amount of gold over millions of years.

6.4. Where is the location of the Witwatersrand gold?

The Witwatersrand gold is located in the Witwatersrand Basin, a large sedimentary basin in South Africa. The basin spans a large area that includes Johannesburg and its surrounding areas. The gold is found in a hard, erosion-resistant quartzite metamorphic rock, which forms a north-facing scarp known as the Witwatersrand. The unique geological conditions of the basin have led to the accumulation of a vast amount of gold over millions of years.

6.5. Is there still gold at Witwatersrand?

Yes, there is still gold in the Witwatersrand. Despite over a century of intensive mining, the Witwatersrand Basin still holds the world's largest known gold reserves. While the easiest gold to reach has been mined, there are still significant reserves deep underground. However, mining this gold is challenging due to the depth of the deposits and the hard, quartzite rock in which the gold is embedded. Despite these challenges, mining operations continue in the Witwatersrand, and the region remains a major hub for gold production.