

Sofala

Historic Walking Tour

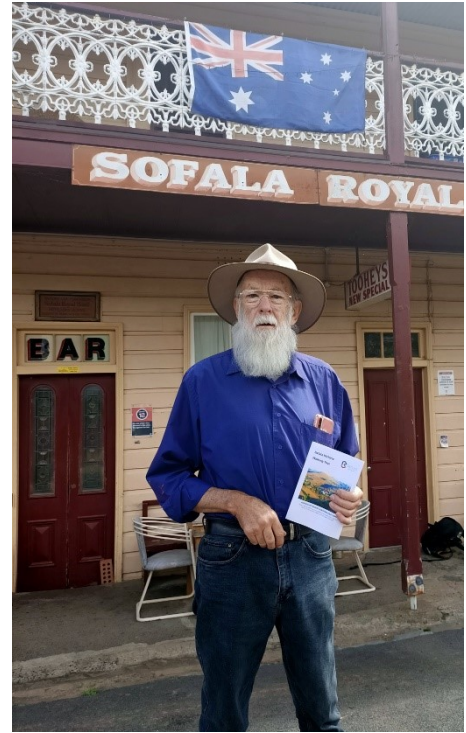


AUSTRALIA'S OLDEST SURVIVING GOLD-RUSH TOWN

Take a self guided tour around Sofala,
and learn about the rich history of
Australia's oldest surviving gold rush town.

A special thanks to Ken Webb

This guide was written with the consultation of local Sofala History expert Ken Webb. A resident of Sofala for over 40 years, Ken moved to Sofala in his 30's taking up a job in the local pub to earn some money for his travels. His time in the pub however would turn out to be more than just a job, listening to the stories of the old fellows, who knew the stories of those before. Ken found a passion in learning the history of Sofala from the first hand and second hand accounts of the locals. Through a lifetime spent in Sofala, panning for gold, learning stories and writing books on the history of Sofala, Ken has become one of the most knowledgeable people on Sofala and is a beloved local character.



Today he offers his services as a local tour guide, and through his assistance this guide was made possible. If you would like to contact Ken to organise a tour you can book him through the Sofala Collective General Store on **0400 406 551** or email sofalahistory@bigpond.com, you can also find his books: "**Sofala A Look Behind The Rush**" and "**Pubs & Publicans On the Turon Goldfields 1851 - 1900**" in the Bathurst Visitor Information Centre, Bathurst Historical Society Museum, and Books Plus.

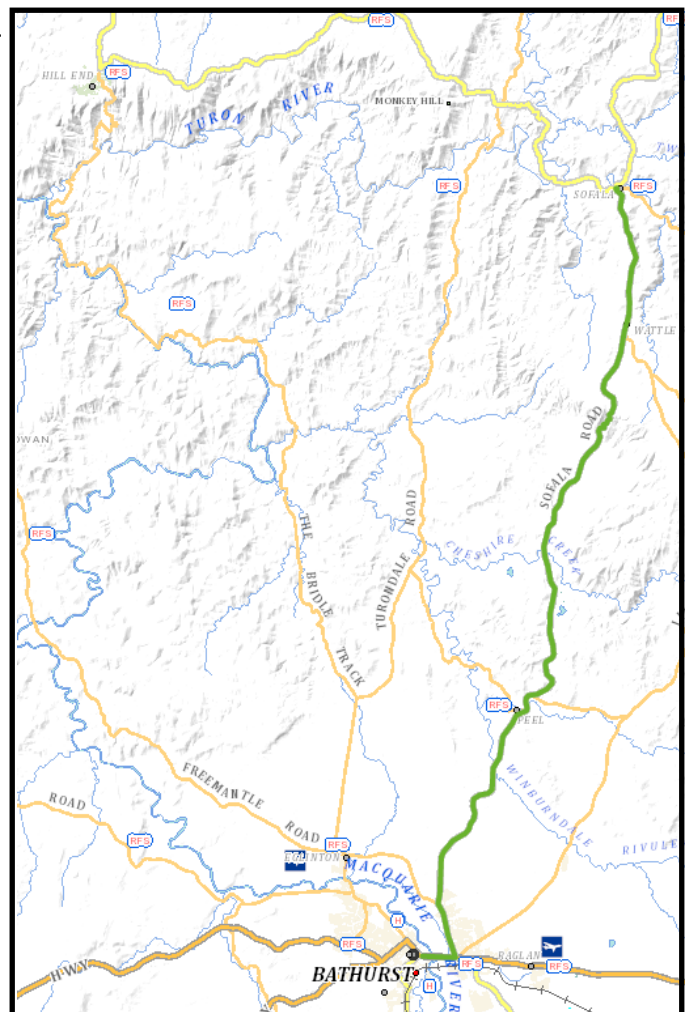
Getting to Sofala

From Bathurst to Sofala will take about 40 minutes by car.

Drive from the Bathurst Visitor Information Centre towards Lithgow, turn left at the second turn after the bridge onto Gilmour street and continue on to Sofala.



Scan here for google maps directions.



A Brief History of Sofala

The early days as the crossing place early settlement years pre gold Rush (1820's)

Before the Gold Rush Sofala did not exist. The town is a product of the gold rush and the immense migration of people who moved out to find their fortune. However the site that is now Sofala was used by local cattle farmers driving their stock from Bathurst to Mudgee and was known as the crossing place.

The Discovery of Gold 1823

Gold was first discovered in Bathurst at Fish River in 1823, by assistant surveyor James McBrien. Due to fears of a societal upheaval, the news was kept quiet by the local colonial government for 28 years.

The Start of the Gold Rush 1851

Gold in the region was kept secret until Edward Hargraves discovered payable gold in Ophir in 1851. Soon after the announcement was made, hundreds of hopeful miners rushed out to the countryside seeking their fortune. In the following months more gold was discovered within the region. With the Turon river being noted as particularly rich in alluvial gold, the rush soon moved to the Turon river. The township of Sofala being constructed on its riverbanks as a direct result of the gold rush. The population peaking at 26,000 people in 1851. At this time it was well known that the average gold found per pan was about 1 ounce (28.34 grams) per pan. An experienced panner could do about 40-50 pans per day which could bring in, up to 1.4kg of gold per day just from panning. Miners were able to sell their finds for about 3 pounds and 3 shillings per ounce, which could fetch £157 s10 per day. Adjusted for inflation this is worth about \$24,745 in today's money. However if you found the same amount of gold at today's gold rates it would be worth well over \$100,000.

Later Days of the Gold Rush

Just 3 years later in 1854 the bustling town that once held tens of thousands had steadied out to a population around 5,000-10,000. In the late 1850's the immigration of Chinese miners had begun, who called Australia the 'Second Gold Mountain' after the naming of California as 'Gold Mountain'. By 1861, a recorded population of 642 of the miners on the Turon goldfields were Chinese. Despite some xenophobia amongst the European miners, the gold commissioner noted that the Chinese miners caused much less trouble than the European miners and were well known for their determination and patience.

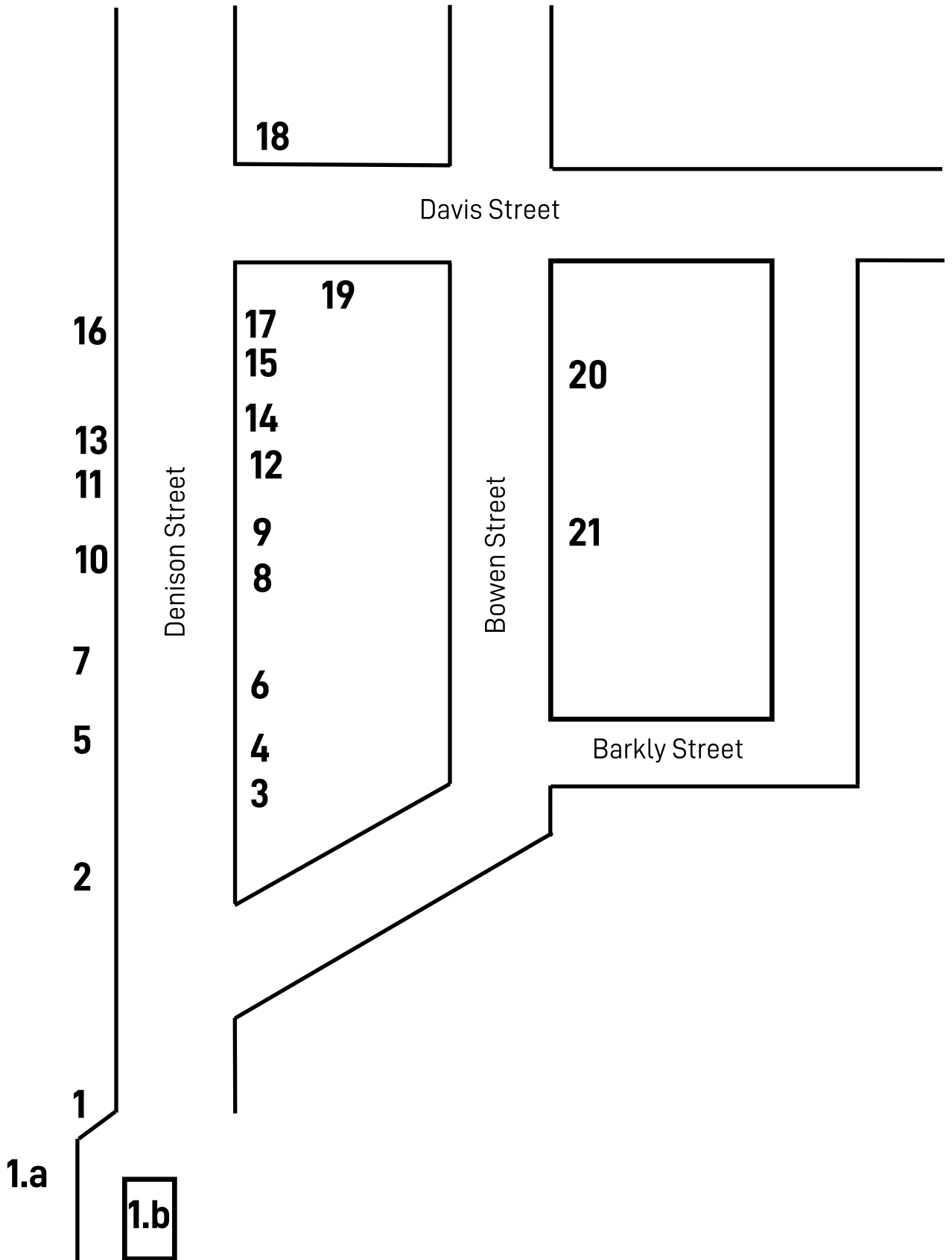
During 1871-1873 a resurgence in mining activity took place throughout the Sofala district and majorly in Hill End with the mining of quartz reefs.

In 1899 the Turon River Dredging Company started operations and over the next 15 years had 3 dredges running along the Turon bringing in an estimated annual haul of 5,000 ounces.

By 1948 all commercial gold mining in the district had finished, it had lasted 97 years.

Sofala Walking Tour CBD Mud Map

(Map not to scale)



1. Joyce Pearce Memorial Park

The park is dedicated to Joyce Pearce who was the driving force behind the restoration of the Sofala Foot Bridge. In the final years of her life she dedicated much of her time to running a craft store in Sofala, using the profits to fund the bridge restoration project. She also tended the grave of Wong Gee, the last Chinese miner on the goldfields, who in his time became a well known community figure. Today she is buried next to Wong Gee in the Sofala cemetery.



1a. The Sofala Foot Bridge

The Bridge originally was built in 1880 and led across the river to the industrial section of Sofala, which included the tannery, bakery, and police station. The bridge seen here is only a fraction, the full bridge being washed away in 1986. This section of the bridge was restored and officially dedicated in 2011, the restoration being largely lead by Joyce Pearce who unfortunately passed before the projects end.



1b. The Stamper Battery

This stamper battery was installed in 2001 as a part of the 150 year centenary celebrations. Stamper batteries like this were used during the reef mining boom of 1871-1873 to crush quartz mined from quartz reefs to extract gold.



2. The Original Site of the Sofala Foot Bridge

If you look to the left side of the road here you will see a small path to the river. This is the site of the original Sofala Foot Bridge. You can still see the foundation of the bridge on the riverbank.



3. Post Office Building

This building was the original post office of Sofala, built around 1879, which operated until 1988. The two story building is typical of the 1870s public building architecture, as is the court house and police station. Today the building is a private residence.



4. Telegraph Building

This building sitting to the side of the old post office was the Sofala telegraph office which opened in 1862 and operated until the adoption for the telephone. For a time after the decline of the telegraph the building also housed a lolly shop before eventually becoming a private residence.



5. Sofala Book Store

The book store was originally built 1868 as the doctors surgery, owned by Doctor Westby Walker.



6. Beech and Company Importers

Beech and Company Importers operated through the 1860s, and this building was a standard shopfront of the time. Selling gold panning equipment, fabrics, and day to day products. Today the building is a private residence.



7. Oddfellows Hall

The Sofala Oddfellows Hall was originally constructed as the Arms Hotel in 1852, during the early gold rush years. The hotel found new use as the local headquarters for the MUIOOF (Manchester Unity International Order of Odd Fellows) in 1892. The Oddfellows Organisation is one of the worlds oldest fraternal societies dating back to their founding in 1810. The Oddfellows were established to provide support and assistance to their members and communities. Hosting public spaces and raising funds for community projects and organising community sports events. The Sofala Oddfellows society is notable for hosting the Temperance society as well, which sought to educate communities about the negative effects of alcohol. As well as to legislate against alcohol and provide support to the community.



8. Sofala Stables

Originally built as stables, this building has served many roles over its lifetime including as a local café. However as of 7/05/25 it is no longer operating.



9. General Store

Right next to the Sofala Stables you will find the Sofala general store. The store was likely built in the 1860's as a general store providing food and gold panning equipment to hopeful miners and residents.



10. Royal Hotel

The Royal Hotel got its start in 1851 as the Barley Mow Hotel, owned by Larkin Foreman. Built as a single story hotel the Bayley Mow also hosted the booking office for the Sofala Cob & Co. After burning down in 1858 it was rebuilt in 1862. In 1870 it was renamed to the Royal Hotel after the closure of the previous Royal Hotel further down the street. It was only later in 1901 when the second story was added. However, many of the original fixtures can be seen on the first floor which are typical of an early gold fields hotel.



11. Sofala Souvenirs

This building became the post office in 1988 and until recently was still the local pickup point for mail.



12. Sofala Memorial Hall

The Sofala Memorial Hall sits next to the old Sofala Dance Hall which hosted community activities and events over the many years that it operated. The Mural on the side of the original hall depicts the Goldfields in the heyday of the gold rush and was painted in the 1980's by local artists Sharon Campbell & Julie Hanns.

The funds raised to build the new hall mostly came from fundraiser dances and events held in the old hall during the early 1960's.



13. Hyland's Hotel

First established as the Globe Hotel in 1851 by Charles Quayle. It was the second Hotel to open in Sofala. The building here is the original building from 1851 and still retains its original basement kitchen where food was served via a dumb waiter to the main dining room. While it was officially registered as the Globe Hotel, and later the Commercial, it has for a long time been referred to as the Hyland's as it was owned for a long period by Gorge Hyland. It is now a private residence.



14. Sofala Centenary Park

This park was once the site of the Gen Hotel. It is now the site of the Sofala Heritage Wall which was erected in 2001 as a part of the Sofala Centenary celebrations. You will find the names of all the residents of Sofala in 2001 on the Wall as well as a time capsule which is to be opened in 2030.



15. Bank of NSW

This building was originally established in the 1850's by the Australian Joint Stock Bank, which was bought out by the Bank of NSW in the 1870's and is now a private residence. The original bank incorporated the managers residence on site.



16. Café Sofala

Once a blacksmith shop then a service station. Today the site is managed as a licenced restaurant. Open Friday, Saturday and Sunday. 02 6337 7053



17. Town Bakery

This building was once the shopfront of the town bakery established in the late 1800's which operated into the early 1900's, before selling as a private residence. Today you can still see the bakehouse behind the main building where all the baking was done to sell in the shop front. Notably, Douglas Sealy, a sought after bush painter lived there for about 20 years, and captured many of the local landscapes in his art during his time in Sofala.



18. Sofala Courthouse

Established in 1869 the courthouse oversaw small claims and disputes in the Sofala area until 1917 when all court matters were directed to the Bathurst Courthouse. In 1932 the building was renovated, and reopened as the town hospital in 1934. Operating until 1966 until it closed due to funding issues. It continued to be the community health centre until 2000 and is now a private residence.



19. The Gold Commissioner's house

This two story house between Bowen and Denison streets was built in 1851. During the years of the gold rush it was the job of the Gold Commissioner to uphold the law, issue permits, register mining claims, as well as settle mining disputes, and collect dues.



20. The Gas Hotel

This building used to be the Gas Hotel which was the first licenced hotel in Sofala, established in November 1851 by William Davis. The building was originally built on timber stumps which have since sunk and shifted over the years, giving the building a crooked charm.



21. Joe Yates House

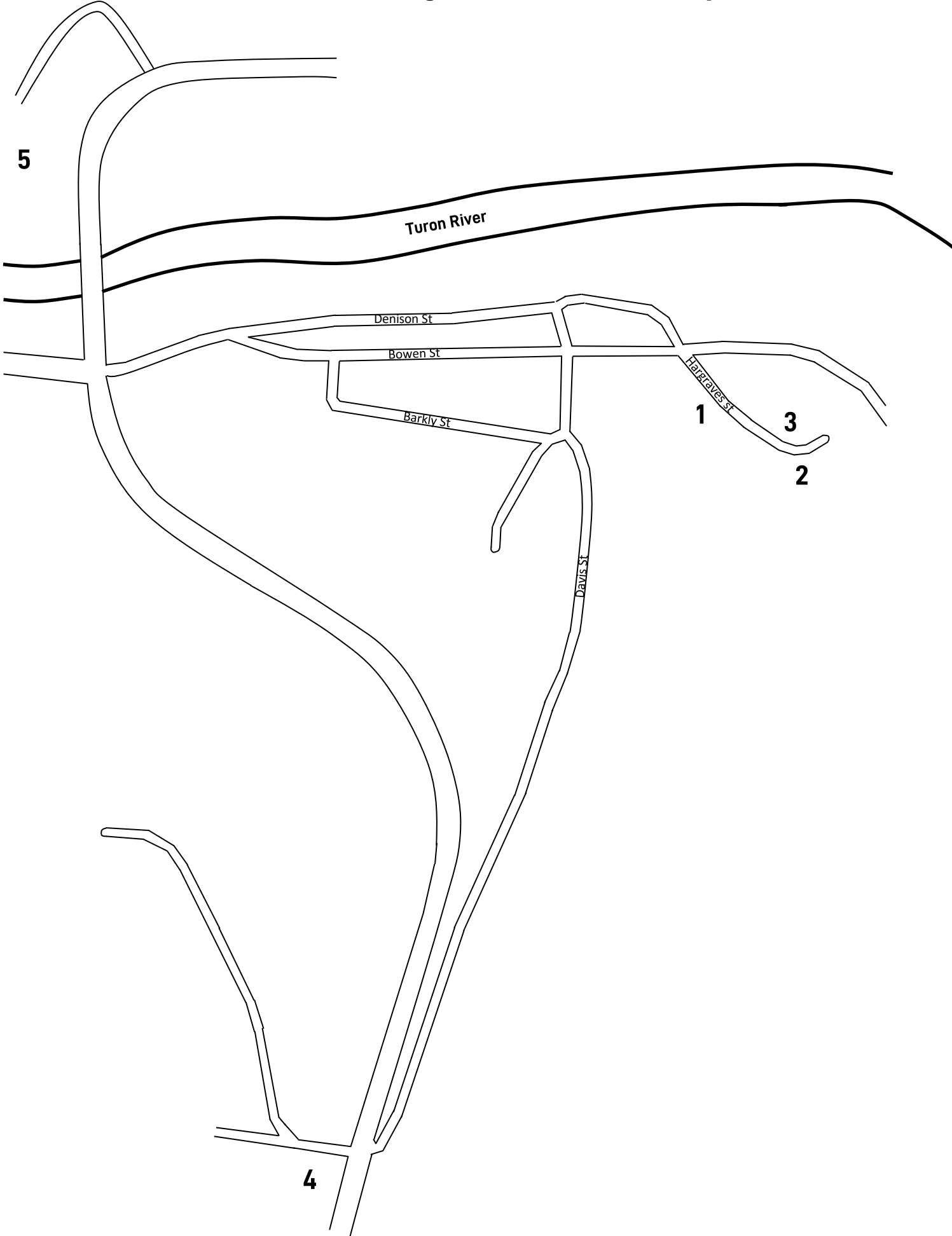
Best remembered as a bush musician Joe was born 1895 in Sunny Corner as one of 10 children in a very musical family. Growing up Joe learned the music of the goldrush from his grandfather who had moved from Yorkshire England to the Central West to seek his fortune as a miner in the early 1850's. It is believed that Joe remembered and could play over 150 songs and tunes from the colonial era with music stretching from 1850-1950. In the later years of his life retired in Sofala he was visited by several music collectors who sought to preserve the songs that at this time were almost lost to the ages except for the amazing memory of Joe Yates. Today many of his songs are recorded and preserved in the National Library of Australia. You can find out more about Joe Yates and hear some of his music in the Pillars of Bathurst Podcast.



Scan here to see the Bathurst Pillars podcast on Joe Yates.

Or visit Bathurstregion.com

Sofala Tour Driving Localities Mud Map



1. Convent

15 Hargraves Street

The two storey building sitting up on the hill at Hargraves Street was originally built as the Catholic Convent in 1860 and converted into the catholic presbytery 1914. Today the building is a private residence.

2. Old School

3 Turon Terrace

This building was originally constructed as the Church Of England School, founded around 1854. Over time the school was adapted to be the Sofala public school before becoming a private residence. Today the modern Sofala Public School resides right next to the original school building.

3. The Church of England Chapel and Cemetery

10 Hargraves Street

The Church of England Chapel was built in 1851. Its foundations were dug by a group of miners and so the story goes, the Chapel was erected in just 7 days. Over the years it has undergone works to keep it standing. The Cemetery has also been used for over 150 years with the oldest grave dated back to the year the chapel was built.

4. Sofala Cemetery

The Sofala Cemetery has been in use for over 150 years with many of the prominent names mentioned in this guide having been buried here. This is the Cemetery which was previously mentioned as the burial place of Wong Gee the last Chinese miner on the Sofala Goldfields who died in 1907. His grave is directly on the right after entering the cemetery gate. You can also find the grave of Joyce Pearce next to Wong Gee as she had been the one to care for his grave through much of her life in Sofala.

5. Sofala Free Campsite

Return to Sofala and cross the bridge over the Turon River and you will find the turn off for the Sofala Campsite on the left. Follow the dirt road down towards the river to access the camping area. This is a free crown lands camp. Please clean up all rubbish and put out any fires when you leave.

Bathurst Visitor Information Centre

1 Kendall Avenue

02 6332 1444 / 1800 68 1000

www.bathurstregion.com.au

visitors@bathurst.nsw.gov.au

Open 7 Days

9.30am-4.30pm



Visit Bathurst NSW



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All effort has gone into ensuring that the information in this guide is correct at the time of writing 10/02/2022.

During your stay in Sofala please be respectful of locals and please refrain for trespassing on any private residence.

Be wary of cars on the road while walking through town.

This guide was written with consultation from local Sofala historian Ken Webb.

