

Folk & Traditional Song Lyrics

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With My Swag Upon My Shoulder

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When first I left Old England's shore
Such yarns as we were told
As how folks in Australia
Could pick up lumps of gold
So, when we got to Melbourne town
We were ready soon to slip
And get even with the captain
All hands scuttled from the ship

cho: With my swag all on my shoulder
Black billy in my hand
I travelled the bush of Australia
Like a true-born native man

We steered our course for Geelong town
Then north west to Ballarat
Where some of us got mighty thin
And some got sleek and fat
Some tried their luck at Bendigo
And some at Fiery Creek
I made a fortune in a day
And spent it in a week

For many years I wandered round
As each new rush broke out
And always had of gold a pound
Till alluvial petered out
'Twas then we took the bush to cruise
Glad to get a bite to eat
The squatters treated us so well
We made a regular beat

So round the lighthouse now I tramp
Nor leave it out of sight
I take it on my left shoulder
And then upon my right
And then I take it on my back
And oft upon it lie
It is the best of tucker tracks
So I'll stay here till I die

Notes

From Paterson's Old Bush Songs . Paterson has the Lighthouse as a landmark station in Victoria. Eric Partridge in his Dictionary of Slang gives "lighthouse - a tramp acquainted with the police or their methods". The meaning here may be that the swaggie spends much of his time in jail. In the bush the Southern Cross constellation is also known as The Lighthouse, so tramping round this continent is in effect tramping round the lighthouse. This song, the tune of which is a variant of 'The Boys of Wexford', was collected by John Manifold from Father P.P.Kehoe of Kyabram, Victoria in the 1950's. Compare with 'Dennis O'Reilly' in this collection.

MG

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