



Gold Fever

You and your friends are bushwalking in the notorious Rincewind Mountains. Each year, several bush walkers vanish without a trace. Locals say the hikers are eaten by the bunyip rumoured to inhabit the river. As students of science, you all think this is an absurd notion. You know that, back in the 1850's, the Rincewind Mountains were central to the Australian Gold Rush. It's more likely, you all agree, that the missing hikers fell into sinkholes or mine shafts. You're all experienced bush walkers and, with five of you on the trip, there will be plenty of eyes to watch out for suspicious looking holes.

Unfortunately, five sets of eyes just weren't enough. As you walk ahead of the group, you see some interesting rocks off to one side of the path. You head towards them but as you take your next step, you realise that the bit of ground you were expecting to tread on isn't there. You wheel your arms wildly and try to recover your balance but it's no good. With a despairing shriek, you disappear down a dark hole. Your friends rush to the point where you vanished. They look carefully over the edge...but not carefully enough! The edge crumbles and, before anyone can react, your friends join you in the darkness.



Luckily, the hole you have all fallen in isn't very deep but the sides are very smooth. A tunnel stretches away and you notice a light breeze coming from the left. You all feel this is your best hope of escape and start to walk, very, very carefully, towards the source of the breeze. Before long, you come around a corner and see the mouth of the tunnel in the distance. You all shout for joy and start to move faster...and then stop short. Just ahead of you lies a deep chasm, too wide to jump. You throw a rock over the edge and listen. It's a long time before you hear the faint "plink" as it hits the bottom. It's time to go to plan b...except that the group hasn't come up with it yet!

As you look around, you notice a side tunnel and wander over to have a look. Inside is an old mine truck filled with dust and rubble. Although...some of the rubble looks interestingly shiny! You pick up one of the shiny rocks and give it a rub then stare at it in disbelief. You grab another one and do the same thing, then another and another. The wagon is filled with gold! You're rich! You yell out to your friends, who all come running. After you dance around excitedly for a while, some total pessimist throws a wet blanket on the celebration. "How", they ask gloomily, "are we going to get this out of here? How are WE going to get out of here? There's no point having all this gold if we're going to die from starvation, dehydration and other words ending in *ation*."

The group's optimist points to a large pile of old timber hidden behind the wagon. On top of the timber is a pile of old tools. "We build a bridge!" announces the optimist. "We can send the gold across a bit at a time. All we have to do is come up with a design and work together to build it. Remember, though, we need to keep the bridge light WITHOUT compromising on strength. The stronger the bridge, the more gold we'll get!"