



FOLLOW THE

CANVASTOWN GOLD TRAIL



Drive or cycle the Wakamarina Valley Road.

Read the signs which share some of the historic facts of the 1864 Wakamarina Gold Rush.

This booklet has been compiled as part of the:

"Canvastown/Wakamarina 150th Celebrations 2014."

A MILLENIUM AGO.

Origin of the mineralisation=GOLD.

The gold and other minerals (scheelite, stibnite) found in the Richmond Range is derived from the Marlborough schist. The schist resulted when large masses of quartz and feldspar rich sediment collided. The quartz flowed into tension fissures forming reefs. The larger reefs contained fine gold whereas the smaller reefs were extremely rich but not very extensive. Erosion of the schist, north of the fault over the past half million years, has exposed numerous small quartz veins, giving rise to alluvial gold deposits. In the rock bound Wakamarina River the gold became concentrated, sometimes forming deposits that were phenomenally rich.

Precis of "Notes on the Geology and Mining History of the Wakamarina Valley" Author: Mike Johnston.

First European Discovery of Gold in the Wakamarina.

Mrs Elizabeth Catherine Pope, nee Climo, is credited as the discoverer of gold found while washing clothes in the river opposite the campsite near the present Trout Hotel.

Passing miners were encouraged to try in the same area but were unsuccessful.

During Easter 1864, local farmers Joshua and George Rutland, their relative, Hiram Harris, and the local hotelier John Wilson, armed with swags, tools, and sluice box ventured to approximately 5 miles above Canvastown. By 4 p.m. on April 4th 1864 they had washed up 2 ½ ounces of gold and within three days had won 18 ½ ounces.

A dispute arose between the Rutlands and a party led by W. Bown as to who discovered the new field. A court case attributed the find and the reward of £1375 to the Rutland party. The goldfield was proclaimed on 15th June 1864.

Historical Background

By May of 1864 the population of the Wakamarina was about 4500. This population over the years went up and down depending on the weather, the finds and the opening up of other fields. Soon after the discovery, the whole of the more promising upper river had been claimed and was being worked. Mining equipment and gear was spread all along the riverbanks and terraces.

Initially the beds of the river and the tributaries were intensively worked using simple methods such as fossicking, sluice boxes and redirecting the river to access the alluvium on the river bed. The adjacent river terraces and old channels were also worked more especially in the winter when the river and streams were flooded. Shafts were sunk, drives driven and gravel sluiced in an attempt to find gold bearing leads.

Small settlements grew up but many miners lived in tents or slab huts adjacent to their claims. During the early period, individual miners or small co-operatives worked small claims. There was a small but constant group of miners at the Wakamarina who were earning a living from the alluvial gravels.

By the 1870's it was realised that the easily accessible areas had been mined out, leaving the river terraces and leads which needed intensive labour and often expensive technology to work, i.e. water races, dams, trams and pumps.



Dried out Wakamarina Gorge 1890 after the river was diverted by miners

(Dyson collection, Alexander Turnbull Library)

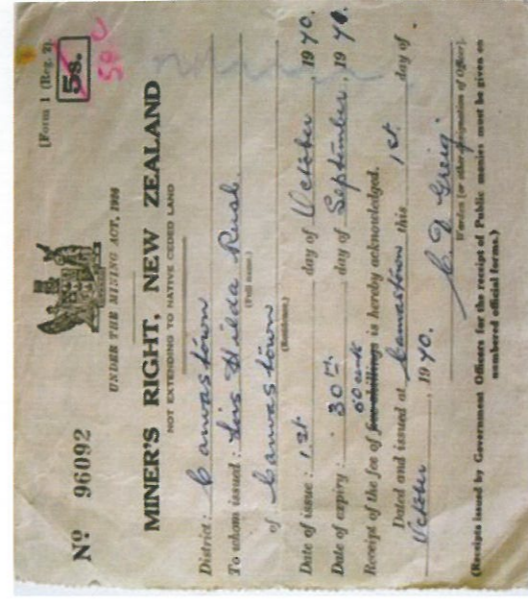
Capital was needed to develop the terraces which stretched almost continually from Canvastown to Dead Horse Creek. Particularly rich was the old buried Wakamarina River channel which was mostly on the East side of its present channel. The capital was provided by local commercial interests wanting to keep the miners in the area or by speculative companies. They were encouraged by the Goldfields Act of 1866 which allowed larger claims. All this combined to produce a modest expansion.

A number of extensive claims were developed in the bed of the Wakamarina river working previously un-worked sections such as the Wakamarina Gorge. Large claims on the river terraces were established with extensive systems of races and hydraulic sluicings. Exploratory quartz mining was occurring and the Golden Bar Reef was being worked and gold processed by a Stamp Battery.

Dredging of the riverbed in the middle and lower reaches was also attempted but proved to be unprofitable. By the 1890's the field was again declining. Individual miners were still active as were the large companies i.e. at the Golden Bar Battery Reef mine.

However, other economic endeavours were becoming more important in the valley and the first leases for farming were granted in 1892. Logging also became important with several companies operating in the Wakamarina from 1899. The reserve status was lifted off most of the valley's timber in 1911 opening up the area for extensive logging and settlement. Sluicing continued up until 1910's. The Golden Bar quartz mine was operating until 1934. Scheelite mining was also occurring, particularly during the First World War. Government subsidised prospecting during the 1930's depression and claims were again worked along the Wakamarina and its tributaries. This was the last period of major activity although sporadic activity occurs to this day. (Excerpt from "Archaeological Assessment for Weyerhaeuser New Zealand, Inc. : Amanda Young, M.A. (Hons))

Also with thanks to Nelson Forrest Inc and Mike Johnston.



A **Miners Right** or Claim covered 20 feet by 30 feet [6m by 9m] either way. It protected the owner from claim jumping by other prospectors and gave back claims access to the all important river water needed to work sluices etc. It allowed miners to take up claims which had been abandoned for more than three days without good reason. It also provided an organised dispute resolution process with any disputes being decided by 12 elected diggers from the field concerned.

The discoverers of a new gold field were entitled to a double or 'prospectors' claim and a bonus. This initially went to Bown/Clyne and associates. The dispute was resolved when the Superintendent of Marlborough, Thomas Carter, visited the new field on the 18th April 1864. He ruled in the Rutland party's favour. The Bown/Clyne party did not miss out altogether as his group of five were awarded an area for a group of six.