

WEST COAST HERITAGE



'A digger on the tramp'. From rambles on the Golden Coast by R.C. Reid, 1886.

West Coast gold rush

Prior to the Gold Rush few Europeans had visited the West Coast, largely due to the lack of any roads crossing the Southern Alps. Then in 1861, the Canterbury provincial government offered a reward of £1,000 to anyone who found gold on the West Coast. This began a gold rush on the West Coast.

There were few towns or shops on the West Coast when the first miners arrived, and they had to live off forest plants and birds. By 1866, however, Hokitika was a booming town with a population of more than 25,000 people and more than 100 pubs along Revell Street.

The gold rush was short-lived and in 1867 the rush began to decline, though gold prospecting and mining continues on the Coast today.

Passes through the Main Divide

Māori were the first people to pass over the Southern Alps. They extensively explored the South Island, discovering pounamu (a greenstone or jade) and forming 'greenstone trails', including over the Harper Pass, which connects the Hurunui and Taramakau River Valleys.

During the gold rush of the 1860s new routes across the Alps were explored. Browning Pass, not far from Lake Mahināpua, was explored as an option for the first road to connect Canterbury and the West Coast, but proved too difficult and hazardous. Eventually, Arthur Dobson found a route further north that was suitable for a road. This steep mountainous road is known as "Arthur's Pass".

Arthur's Pass has been subject to closures from landslides and avalanches. The most unstable section was replaced with the Ōtira Viaduct, a 440m long and 35m high viaduct that took 11 years to construct. Ōtira Viaduct opened in 1999.



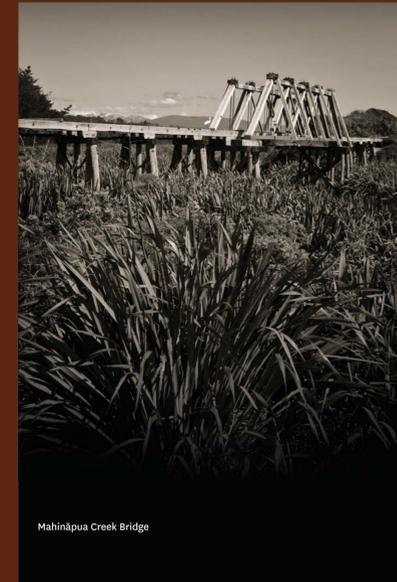
Ōtira Gorge Viaduct, Arthur's Pass.

Historic rail road

The historic Mahināpua Creek Bridge, next to State Highway 6, was built as part of the Hokitika-Ross railway line and is one of only three wooden truss bridges remaining on the West Coast. The railway was built to connect the growing timber and tourism industries of South Westland and Hokitika with the east coast, and to encourage further settlement on the West Coast. Once the railway opened, the lake was no longer required for commercial transport.



NZ Premier, Richard John Seddon, arrives at the opening of the first section of the Hokitika-Ross railway, 22 January 1906.



Mahināpua Creek Bridge

A history of logging

The railway opened up the dense timber stands on the coastal terraces to saw millers. By the early twentieth century the area near Hokitika had become an important sawmilling area, second only to the Arnold Valley near Greymouth. Although the stands of trees near the beach and railroad were felled early on, the remaining forest was designated a scenic reserve in 1907, conserving the important native wildlife and plants around the lake.



Davidson steam winch in West Coast bush. These winches were used to haul logs through the bush for the sawmilling industry.



▶ A coach leaving an unknown hotel. Coaches of this type were licenced to carry 11 passengers, and were pulled by four horses.

▶ Antique bottles discarded by the miners of the 1860s-70s. These were found on abandoned gold diggings near Hokitika.

