

The Queenstown Courier

The Official Publication of the
Queenstown & District Historical Society

Forty-eighth Issue - May 1992

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Annual subscription \$6.00. Couriers included in subscription.

Casual rate for Couriers \$1.00 125th Supplement \$3.00

Back numbers of Couriers available.

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Police in the Wakatipu

Police in the Wakatipu

We have all read of the sterling work carried out by the Armed Police in the days of the gold rush. They were a crack force who lived hard and carried out their duties efficiently and honestly. Their job was a difficult one made harder by their being few in number. The following details extracted from the official reports submitted to the Provincial Government are interesting.

	Officers	Mt Sgt	Foot Sgt	Mt Const	Foot Const	Det.	Horse
22 June 1863							
Queenstown	1		1*	1	8	1	4
Arrow			1	1	4	1	1
Frankton				1			1
Arthurs Point					2		
Maori Point			1		1		
March 1864							
Queenstown	1	1	1*	1	6	1	2
Arrow				1	2	1	1
Arthurs Point					2		
Frankton		1					3
Maori Point			1		1		
Skippers Point (New)					2		
September 1865							
Queenstown	1				3		1
Arrow				1	1		1
Arthurs Point				1			1
Maori Point			1		1		
September 1866							
Queenstown	1		1		1		8
Arrow					1		
Maori Point					1		
1868							
Queenstown			1				
Arrow					1		
Maori Point					1		
* Water Police							

These figures do not include the gold escort who were a separate body.

The quick reduction in the numbers employed illustrate the brevity of the rush period. It also raises the question of what happened to the redundant policemen.

The following interesting article on local trees is by Bruce Hamilton. Bruce is a member of the committee of the society and with his wife Dorothy operates a commercial peony garden at Lake Hayes.

Historic Trees of the Queenstown Basin

How lucky the residents of the Queenstown basin are to live in such a tree growers paradise, where the exotic trees seem to grow better and faster than in their own native habitat. It seems strange to think of the early pioneers struggling through the matagouri and fern to find a virtually treeless wilderness, with only a few forest remnants in some shady gullies and on the lake edge.

These same remnants point out that in the past native forest flourished in much of the area. In fact, uncut totara logs have been located at various points, including 2,000 ft up The Remarkables. These have been carbon dated to 800-900 years old. What happened to these ancient forests? Were they burnt out by fires either natural, or lit by moa hunting Maoris? Has there been a climate change? Whatever the reason the fact remains that the harsh Central Otago climate does not suit our native species. Not so with many exotics. Many of the trees brought out from their homeland by the early settlers, have shown tremendous growth with many recorded specimens holding New Zealand records for height and volume, etc.

During the 1960s Mr Bob Burstall of F.R.I., travelled throughout New Zealand measuring and recording all notable trees and finally wrote the book 'Great Trees of New Zealand'. A must for all tree lovers. Unfortunately most of the data collected is now almost history itself, and to my knowledge, has never been updated. As a result, the figures I will be using will be up to 30 years old. What a marvellous exercise it would be to remeasure their present dimensions.

How fortunate we are that the early settler placed so much value on the planting of trees. Mr J W Robertson became the first Mayor of

Queenstown in 1866, and he, with his council, persuaded the government to make the peninsula - already known as 'The Park' - into a land endowment for Queenstown. The following year he, with nurseryman McConnochie, planted two oaks, one each side of the main entrance.

Within two years 550 trees had been planted and development has gone along steadily every since, and what a marvellous selection those early enthusiasts obtained.

Some of the notable trees are:

	Trunk Diameter	Height
Quercus velutina (Black Oak)	27ins	50ft
Quercus borealis (Red Oak)	31ins	69ft
Abies grandis (Grand Fir)	31ins	88ft
Abies nordmaniana (Algerian Fir)	34ins	86ft
Araucaria araucana (Monkey Puzzle)	29ins	58ft
Tsuga heterophylla (Western Hemlock)	39ins	150ft

One of the best known identities of the district was Bendix Hallenstein, a member of the first council and mayor from 1870-72. Being a great lover of trees, he was very instrumental in the laying out of the park and other early tree planting of the area, but best known for his home garden, Thurlby Domain. The giant Cedrus libani (Cedar of Lebanon) however was not planted by him. After selling his property in 1874, Hallenstein travelled extensively, and while in the Holy Land collected a cone from a Cedar of Lebanon. This he sent to the new owner of Thurlby Domain, Mrs Arndt. The resulting tree has grown to a record size, being the largest of its species in New Zealand - trunk diameter 56ins, height 102ft.

Other notable trees of Thurlby Domain are:

	Trunk Diameter	Height
Sequoiadendron giganteum (Wellingtonia)	112ins	130ft
Chamaecyparis lawsoniana	92ins	84ft
Juglans regia (Walnut)	55ins	70ft
Picea abies (Norway Spruce)	29ins	84ft
Quercus robur (English Oak)	33ins	100ft

As Queenstown matured, the work of beautifying it with trees progressed rapidly under the guidance and with the example of such public spirited citizens as JW Robertson, Dr James Douglas, McConnochie the nurseryman, Francis St Omer who planted many pines along the one mile, and Philip B Boulton. Mr Boulton, the County Clerk of the time, must be given credit for many of the fine trees, especially the Wellingtonias in and around Queenstown. He also planted the first oaks at Walter Peak Station, but his greatest achievement in tree planting was the establishment of the magnificent trees outside the Court House in Queenstown. In a letter to the town clerk in 1931, Boulton wrote, "Regarding the tree in front of the Law Office, Queenstown, I planted that in the seventies when Mr J Malaghan was Mayor (together with the other Sequoia at the library gate). I happened to have been reading about the American custom of planting trees in such situations so as to afford shelter and seating for attendant witnesses, or perhaps others ordered out of court pro. tem., and that the trees were then called "Trees of Justice". These trees were raised from seed by myself, given to me by Dr Hector who had imported them from California at the time."

Because it was thought that the tree was damaging the Court building, the Borough Council decided some years ago to fell it and one citizen to whom the work was assigned, even had his axe and saw in readiness. However, public opinion was so strong and so vocal that the Council speedily reviewed its decision and there has never since been any talk of removing the trees.

Bendemeer Station by Lake Hayes was settled in the very early days by a Mr BA Baird, a wealthy retired gentleman, who planted hundred of pine trees, ornamentals and shrubs. His garden was reputed to be one of the best in the area. Trees grow very well in this favoured site, and a *Tilia europa* (Lime) is now the tallest recorded in New Zealand. Trunk diameter 48ins, height 108ft.

Other notable trees are:

	Trunk Diameter	Height	Spread
<i>Fagus sylvatica</i> (Beech) (Second largest in New Zealand)	50ins	70ft	

	Trunk Diameter	Height	Spread
<i>Cornus capitata</i> (Strawberry Tree)	26ins	24ft	30ft
<i>Acer saccharum</i> (Sugar Maple)	21ins	83ft	33ft
<i>Pinus jefferii</i> (Jefferies Pine)	41ins	125ft	
<i>Sequoiadendron giganteum</i> (Wellingtonia)	63ins	132ft	

When Mr Hugh Mackenzie took over Walter Peak in 1882, it was in a very run down condition and plagued by large numbers of rabbits. It is therefore doubtful if any trees existed in the homestead area. What a marvellous transformation he must have made because here is one of the best collections of large exotic trees in the area. An *Acer pseudoplatanus* is the largest recorded in New Zealand - this Sycamore is situated on the waterfront, with the trunk diameter being 50ins and height 90ft.

A *Pseudotsuga menziesii* (Douglas Fir) is the tallest measured in New Zealand. Trunk diameter 70ins and a massive 166ft in height.

Other notable trees are *Quercus rubra* (English Oak) trunk diameter 49ins, height 94ft and *Populus nigra italica* (Lombardy Poplar) trunk diameter 70ins, height 127 ft.

In 1867 a public meeting was held in Arrowtown at which a Mr Alexander Innes proposed to obtain some English trees and plant them as an avenue. The first to be planted was at Cotters Corner, where two year old Mary Cotter was told to run round the tree and it would be named after her. Today the Mary Cotter tree, a wonderful Sycamore 66ft high still stands at the head of one of the best known avenues in the district. Other notable trees in Arrowtown are the two Wellingtonias at the Presbyterian church. A larger, but less known Wellingtonia is by the Wilfred Cotton home. Its dimensions are Trunk diameter 128ins, height 148ft. The Presbyterian Church, a much loved, old and beautiful building, was built in 1873 and it is thought the trees were planted about 1880. The larger of the two was measured at trunk diameter 128ins and height 143ft, but what a pity they are so close to the Church, and what a dilemma the

Life in Skippers

Each year the Society awards a prize to the Wakatipu High School for the best essay on local history contributed by a student. The competition is known as the William Rees Memorial Essay. The winner for 1991 was Brigitte Waibel.

We regret our inability to reproduce the photographs and sketches which made Brigitte's presentation an outstanding one.

The Gold Rush

In 1862 the presence of gold in the Shotover River was confirmed. It was dubbed the 'Richest River in the World'.

Diggers who worked the Shotover River in the first two years of the rush, might have obtained as much as ten ounces per hour. With such high rewards at stake it is not hard to believe that many miners literally raced to the area.

However, reports of the nature of the Shotover district began drifting out in January 1863. "Its extreme ruggedness, and sheer perpendicular walls of the gorges were in some instances ascribed to the fantasies of the imagination.' There was nothing fanciful, however in the authentic accounts of miners losing their lives through falling off cliffs.

Yet despite these and other similar facts, diggers flocked in, ill-prepared to meet the hardships of the mountainous terrain, even in summer.

By mid January 1863, just five months after Arthur and Redfern discovered gold at Arthurs Point, the Commissioner of the Wakatipu goldfield estimated that there were, "3,600 miners on the Shotover."

They were followed by those who came to get an income from providing services for the diggers. Storekeepers, packers, hotel keepers, blacksmiths, butchers and bakers established their settlements

church managers are in now that tree roots are lifting the foundations. However, engineers have come up with a scheme of underpinning the old stone walls with a metre depth of concrete. A very expensive exercise but at last we can be sure of keeping both church and trees.

Many of you will have noticed the huge English Oak overhanging the road near the marina at Frankton which was probably planted on the grounds of the 'Antrim Arms' hotel sometime in the 70s. Its recorded height is now measured at 100ft, with a spread also of 100ft. Other notable trees in the direct vicinity are a Sweet Chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) and two walnuts. The 'daddy' of them all however is seldom seen. It is a Wellingtonia tucked away at the top of Andrews Road, off Frankton Road. Although not very tall, 121 ft, its girth at breast height is a huge 142 ins. This makes it the largest exotic conifer in New Zealand. Its origin appears to be unknown, but it was probably planted by nurseryman McConnochie about 1870.

There must be few places in New Zealand that can boast such a heritage of beautification as we do in this area, and how favoured we are to have conditions where trees flourish so magnificently. I know the present generation cherish them and will continue with our tree planting tradition. We trust future generations will show the same enthusiasm.

Jottings

- The Committee is now receiving regular requests from the owners of Queenstown buildings for information about these. The latest is from the proprietors of the McNeill Cottage. We welcome these; we have also agreed to act as a link with the Historic Places Trust in Dunedin.
- If you are travelling just out of the district, visits to the Kawarau Mining Centre in the Gorge, and the Clyde Herb Factory Museum are well worth a stop. Our neighbouring Society at Cromwell also has a very interesting programme. The Secretary is Mrs Joy Chapman, Tarras

on the banks of the "Golden Canyon".

1862 not only marked the beginning of the gold rush, but also the birth of new mining towns along the Shotover Gully's rocky promontories.

Skippers

29 kilometres from the Queenstown Post Office and 1950 feet above sea level was a once thriving goldmining town called Skippers. "From the earliest days of the rush, Skippers was the principal settlement on the Shotover and the town developed as a centre to provide facilities for the miners." In later years the town had almost everything ranging from two stores, a library, a dance hall and hotel to a school.

Skippers is strategically placed on flat land surrounded by rich goldbearing streams such as Stony Creek, Pleasant Creek, Londonderry Creek, Skippers Creek and of course the Shotover River.

By the 1900s there were about 700 people at Skippers. Many of them lived some distance from the main settlement on Burkes Terrace. Despite the spread out nature of the town, all the people of Skippers faced the hardships inflicted upon them together.

Key Questions and Theme

As the topic of 'Skippers' includes many aspects, I have concentrated on developing the theme of 'hardship' due to many contributing factors.

The consequences of difficult access, rugged terrain, isolation and severity of the climate is reflected in the lifestyles of the people in Skippers.

To combat the hardships of the Upper Shotover region, they developed an element of self-sufficiency.

The Skippers Road

When the pioneers first came to the Shotover, they found it had been fired in places, "the snowgrass was waist high and the hills covered with olerias, wild irishmen, speargrass, native broom and other plants." This thick growth all over the hills no doubt made track-making very difficult.

Today we have an excellent, though narrow road to Skippers. The miners of 1863 however, had next to nothing, just a faint trail. Yet up and over that 3,000 foot pass they battled with their equipment, and then down through Long Gully to the rocky gorge of the Shotover.

They first met the obstacles of the mountains in the summer months, but later fought them in the winter.

Skippers is almost thirty kilometres from Queenstown, the major portion of the journey being up over a shoulder of Coronet Peak and then down into the wild gorges of the Shotover.

The Skippers Road was constructed in the 1880s and was a difficult undertaking due to the rugged terrain and the extreme cold in winter. One of the first roads to Skippers was little more than a bridle and walking track down Long Gully to the diggings. It was constructed under contract by Armstrong in 1863 and only went as far as Maori Point. Immediately after this track was opened, hotels were established along the route. McArthur's Hotel, for example, was opened in 1863.

The present route to Skippers was surveyed by J S Morrison in 1862-3. Almost immediately work began on the construction of the road from the Skippers Saddle.

Road building was slow and dangerous, but employees were not valued as highly as they are today. There was no workers' compensation in 1890, and the employers admitted to losing a "few" men.

The section of the road from Skippers Saddle to Pinchers Bluff was built by John Maher & Sons of Invercargill. Like other sections of the road, it remains today very much as it was in 1888.

Pinchers Bluff was certainly the most difficult section of the road to construct. Due to the twisting and precipitous nature of the route, it took more than two years to shape the 274 metres of road at the point of the bluff. The road runs 107 metres above the river, but still 91 metres from the top of the cliffs.

The finished production of the Skippers road was a narrow track almost thirty kilometres long, winding through the rugged, tussock and cliff bearing Upper Shotover gully. The road was completed in 1888.

Few would deny that the engineering of this road in the 1880s was a wonderful feat. In a sense, gold washed from the river paid for its construction. All gold was taxed and revenue from the Shotover was reinvested in road-building.

It was not uncommon for residents of Skippers to walk to Queenstown. As Duncan Macnichol recalls, "It was eighteen miles one way ... We did not go to Queenstown often!"

In the early decades of this century, horsedrawn coaches retained "pride of place" on the road to Skippers. At one stage, motor transport was considered too dangerous and was forbidden on this road. Nevertheless, most winters there was too much snow on the road for it to be accessible by anything but a packhorse.

However, the road was not to be taken for granted. After a heavy rain, parts of the road would be completely washed away. For example, "The Blue Slip, composed of shale and graphite, invariably slipped during the winter months," leaving the people of Skippers virtually cut off from civilisation and supplies. This increased the isolation of Skippers and the hardship that isolation induced.

It was a dangerous job clearing the road after a slip. One who worked on the road said "It could be real nasty work under rocks at times, if you were in the way when it came down you would get killed."

The perilous country of the Skippers outback claimed more than its fair share of lives.

The Winter Months

The hardship of winter months in Skippers affected all who lived and worked there. The conditions were so inhospitable that streams froze over, the ground froze solid and it was said to be so cold it would 'freeze a man's beard.'

The following descriptions of winter at Skippers illustrates the severity of the climate.

"We lived there all winter, sometimes there was heavy snow, three or four falls most winters. It lay on the ground for weeks sometimes."

"The snow sometimes came as early as May. From then on you would get frosts. We usually didn't get snow until June, but we used to think if you got a heavy snow then, it would last and it would be a real hard winter. Sometimes it would lay on the ground for weeks and freeze hard and would almost be ice."

"We seemed to survive all right. We didn't have much sun at Skippers for where we lived the sun seemed to strike at an angle. You would get it in the morning and again in the afternoon but there was little heat in it. The snow didn't have much chance of melting."

In winter Skippers was known to have as little as an hour's sunshine as well as a coldness that even froze the surrounding streams.

Even the Shotover was not exempt from the freezing climate and although the river did not freeze over at Skippers it quite often froze over at the top end of the Branches.

The most severe freezing is experienced at Gooseberry Gully and Deep Creek, which has been known to freeze up to a depth of 1.5 metres.

The frosts up at Skippers were notoriously cold and would freeze a bucket of water inside the house as there was no way of keeping the house warm at night.

It seemed there was no escape from its frostbiting reaches. Vegetables were buried from the cold to try to keep them edible. The frost still managed to affect their accessibility. If you needed vegetables in frosty weather it was very hard to get them for the ground was frozen for about a foot at times.

This display of extraordinary cold is yet another example of the unconditional hardships afflicted on the people of Skippers.

Mining and the Winter

Mining in itself is a tiresome and difficult occupation in any circumstances. The miners of the Shotover faced atrocious conditions. Not only was the isolation of the diggings a factor they had to contend with, but also the severity of the climate was something that they had not fully accounted for.

As a direct effect of the isolation of Skippers, miners could not work individually. "Groups of five or ten were necessary" half working on the claim while "the others would be laboriously engaged packing foodstuffs over the 20 miles or more of rough terrain."

The rough and perilous journey to and from the diggings was made even more dangerous by the winter conditions, "when the the trail became frozen, and man and beast inched their way around precipitous sidelings and bluffs, some of the horses slithered on the icy hard ground and hurtled over the edges, to drop hundreds of feet to the river below."

The hardship of such isolation and rugged terrain claimed many a life.

Miners predicted whether the Shotover would be able to be mined in winter, "Some suggested the severe cold might freeze the wash dirt. Others said it would be warm enough to wash."

So fabulous were the returns starting to come in, that it seem almost blasphemy to state that the climate in the Upper Shotover region would cause mining to cease during the winter.

As events proved, it was not only a question of severe frosts, but also torrential rains and melting snows to be contended with. Both took their toll, as the hardship of Skipper's winters tested the miners' stamina, endurance and resourcefulness to the limit.

Due to the adverse and dangerous conditions of the Skippers backcountry, a major disaster occurred in 1863 during the first winter the miners experienced on the Shotover. In July 1863, thick snow on the high country was suddenly melted by rain, and the Shotover rose 10.7 metres overnight. Miners were swept from their beds, engulfed in their tents or caught in landsides.

There is no record of the number of miners drowned on this July night but packers 'en route' to Skippers the next morning reported seeing, "numerous bodies and tents in the swollen, raging river."

To make matters worse, during this winter, the lack of fresh vegetables combined with the strain of working waist-deep in the river for long periods of time led to an outbreak of dysentery, as well as frostbite and pneumonia; direct results of the hardship in Skippers in winter.

Coupled to all these problems, and even before winter set in, the greatest enemy the miners had to face was scurvy. "Only the fittest could survive on a diet that consisted mainly of flour and tea, occasionally sugar. Scurvy was rife, and the weak went to the wall."

It was then when even the gold hungry miners gave up their pursuits, for the liquid ice of the Shotover was beyond human tolerance.

However, 'gold fever' was a powerful and obsessive thing, and although some miners did not know how hard their lives would be

in the Upper Shotover district, many others did. But the hope of 'striking it rich' continued to drive the men to the Shotover, and for some, their deathbed.

Farming and Winter

From 1867, the intensity of the first rush of miners having subsided, most of the country was taken up again by farmers or by miners-turned-farmers. Some of these farms, proving too small to be economic, were amalgamated to form runs that were "comparable in size to present holdings of not less than thirty thousand acres."

Farming was a difficult and very marginally profitable occupation at Skippers, due to the treacherous terrain, shallow soil and exceedingly cold climate.

The treacherous terrain made farming difficult as it was not only hard to keep the sheep off dangerous land, but also hard to breed the sheep successfully.

The shallow soil of the mountain sides also made farming in Skippers very difficult as it supported 'little more than tussock, brown top and other native grasses of only moderate nutritive value.'

Another problem with the high country at that time was that there were no fences to keep the sheep down off the dangerous highlands where they could be caught by an early snow. "The snow would be about three feet deep at times, more where the snow had drifted. Sometimes the sheep were covered over and still alive in a snow cavern."

After April, the farmers had to look after the sheep by living with them to watch that they didn't go too high up the dangerous slopes. When it snowed the shepherds had to do a painfully slow job called, 'snow raking.' It involved hours of work in the snow to enable the sheep to graze. They could not just throw out some hay for the sheep, as the few crops were used for horsefeed. Snow raking

involved making a track for the sheep to walk along to feed among the tussocks on a sunny face.

Despite the farmers' precautionary measures against sheep loss due to the weather, they inevitably suffered losses, sometimes great. These losses were reflected financially as their number of wool bales decreased.

The sheep they farmed were pure and half-bred merinos. This caused a few problems as their instinct is to go to the highest peaks and camp there. Duncan Macnicol recalls, "when it was spring they would come down and you would see them feed on the sunny faces, as evening came on you would find them moving back up to the higher places to camp the night. Sometimes this would be a mile or two up from where they feed." So the musterers had to be constantly aware of the sheep's travellings to keep them from the cliffs and possible snow.

This along with other unique tasks that the farmers and their shepherds had to do, made farming in Skippers an extraordinarily hard life indeed.

Homes

Because of the difficult access to Skippers, building materials were very simplistic. They had to 'make do' with only the limited resources available to them. 'Ben Rodgers' home was a wattle and daub house. The wattle was branches put in as uprights with interwoven long pieces, and tussock and mud rammed between the walls. It had a thatched roof from snow grass tussocks. Many other homes were made mostly out of corrugated iron, with a few exceptions. "The only convenience was an iron range fuelled with wood, providing all the cooking and water heating requirements." Also because of difficult access, the small amount of building materials that did come in meant that homes were very restricted in size. Although these size limitations did not matter in winter, as they could not heat much space anyway, cramped living quarters all year round was another hardship Skippers' people lived with.

Health

The isolation of Skippers, together with the absence of any doctor, meant that the Skippers' community had to preserve good health with only their knowledge and inadequate facilities. To an extent, they had to develop some self-sufficiency when it came to health care.

It was here where the women had a part of paramount importance. Not only did they make their own medicine, they also treated and stitched most burns, cuts and breaks.

Housewives dealt with the hardship of isolation by concocting Home Remedies to deal with minor ailments. Medicines such 'Scots Emulsion' was given as treatment of coughs and colds. It was said to be 'a disgusting thick white liquid made of Cods Liver Oil'. Then for pains in the stomach or such, Castor oil was given liberally.

Cuts and breaks were dealt with to the best of their knowledge. Cuts were "plugged with salt" to stop the blood poisoning and stitched, while broken bones were "set between shafts of wood."

Although the people of Skippers seemed to cope with most ailments, mining was a dangerous occupation and for some patients there was no alternative but to go to Queenstown. Due to difficult access to Skippers, especially before the road was completed in the late 1880s, getting a seriously sick or injured person to hospital was a major undertaking. Generally, the whole male population turned out and the patient was carried in relays to the nearest road. The rugged terrain, and in winter, the severe cold, took its toll many a time where the journey out was just too long

Many expectant mothers travelled to Queenstown to be close to medical assistance. In Skippers there was no doctor or midwife to attend the birth. More than one mother died during childbirth in this cold and isolated region.

Women

In the 1860s there was a scarcity of women at Skippers. This female shortage increased the hardship of isolation for the miners, as no doubt, a 'feminine touch' around the cold and desolate outback country would have made life more enjoyable!

There was a strong demand for women in Skippers. A hotel with barmaids would attract large numbers of miners. Packers were commissioned to transport barmaids to Skippers. One very portly subject, cost her employer a large sum of money to get her carried and placed on location; where, despite her generous size, she was married to a miner within a few days.

Another publican desperately trying to retain female barmaids, dancing partners or other female help for more than a few days, requested that his principals send him 'the ugliest woman they could find'. This they did. "Her single blessedness lasted two weeks."

When public dances were held, stag dancing was common, "with so few women available, the diggers danced with one another." Hence displaying an element of self-sufficiency.

By the 1900s there were about 700 people at Skippers, and in that number there were many mothers. These mothers were of a special breed. They not only coped with the hardships of living in such an area, but also ran the household and raised what were relatively big families under extraordinary circumstances.

Looking after a family, in the oppressing conditions of Skippers, with no certainty of supplies arriving over the long, perilous tracks was a constant struggle. Washing and sanitary arrangements were elementary.

One view of the women in Skippers simply states, "the wives and mothers, sisters, grandmothers and girlfriends of those early miners were a courageous, inventive and hard-working lot of women. They were fighters for and makers of homes where love and caring were of paramount importance."

The Short Arm of the Law: Law in the Outback

The early arrivals on the goldfields were generally a law-abiding and sober-minded group. However, upon the later arrivals from further afield, there came a rough element. With these arrivals came the Provincial Police, a para-military force created to maintain law and order in the goldfields.

Because of the inadequate size of their force, investigation of serious crime was often too late or neglected. An unknown number of people lost their treasures and sometimes their lives to thieves and murderers who roamed the goldfields, ever watchful for the opportunity to snatch up and make off with a miner's good fortune.

The crime that ran rampant through the goldfields was yet another contributing factor to the hardship of living in that era.

The Social Side of Skippers

Apart from the hall used for concerts, dances and card evenings, the centre of the settlement was the hotel. Alcohol, of which plenty could be had in exchange for gold produced oblivion rather than satisfaction. "Few joys went uncelebrated, few sorrows undrowned."

In the 1860s and for many years thereafter, the liquors consumed by miners were almost invariably spirits, because in relation to its potency, the cost of transporting beer was high.

Dances were popular in the town. "Ladies, elegant in long dresses and shawls, accompanied their husbands who were attired complete with stiff-front shirts. Fashions were never neglected at dances or at any other social event in the town."

Old photographs of the townsfolk show a noticeably smart standard of dress.

Due to isolation, consistency of entertainment was sadly lacking. On the rare occasions that dances were held they were well supported. The self-sufficiency the miners developed to combat

the boredom was predominantly drinking. They did however, occasionally hold horse races and athletics which were quite 'positive' pastimes in comparison to the drinking that was commonplace.

Socially the people of Skippers suffered. Although they had constant exposure to new people, making friends that were not going to move on and out of Skippers would have been difficult. Of those people who were 'there to stay', social groups would have formed, locking out new-comers to the area. This meant they had little exposure to new and diverse ideas.

Education and the Children

The children had numerous pastimes and although they felt the cold as much as anyone else, they had a lot of fun all year round. "In summer time there was cricket. In winter there was association football, skating and tobogganing. The children had a great time up there in winter."

Running a school in Skippers was a very difficult undertaking due to the fact that the location is so remote. This meant that supplies of textbooks and other materials had to be brought in and could not be easily restocked.

Another major difficulty of schooling administration was the hiring and retaining of teachers. This was because Skippers has an uninviting climate and inhospitable terrain. As well as the shortage of teachers there was a shortage of space with all the pupils in one room.

Although the children enjoyed their schooling, they were lacking in facilities and as result had less opportunities than children elsewhere.

Conclusion

The people of Skippers did not lead an easy life. Due to many contributing factors, hardship prevailed.

The consequence of difficult access, rugged terrain, isolation and severity of the climate led to extreme hardship. To counteract the effects of the hardship in Skippers, there stood before the residents, two alternatives:

1. To develop total self-sufficiency
or
2. To leave Skippers

Although some elements of self-sufficiency were present, total self-sufficiency is virtually impossible, therefore, the latter was the option that most chose.

Moreover, along with the predominant causes of hardship, there came other difficulties, and in the early days of this century, it had become increasingly awkward for the miners to depend entirely on gold to keep the wolf from the door.

The First World War brought mining on the Shotover practically to an end, as the price of commodities went rocketing upwards, while gold remained at the same level. This marked 'the end of the line' for many miners.

Others, despite poor returns persevered, their hopes continually buoyed up by a never ending hope of 'striking it rich'. Another main reason for the decline of Skippers was the severity of the winters. Much of the 838cm of rainfall recorded annually, comes in the form of winter snowfalls. Heavy snow can isolate the region for weeks on end making life in the area very hard.

Being unable to rely on supplies or access out of Skippers, the people had to develop as much self-sufficiency as possible with extremely limited resources.

A constant feature of life on the goldfields was its uncertainty. "Though neither fortune nor adversity was predictable, hardship was inevitable. Thousands who struggled from the coast to the interior, found only a life of toil and discomfort...."

Heavy falls of snow and severe frosts followed the Shotover floods, and to the hardships of flood and intense cold, sickness added its burden.

Ice has been known to cover the road completely for six weeks at a time. With such severe winter conditions as these, combined with increasing difficulty in obtaining profitable returns from mining, it is not surprising that the people began to drift away from Skippers. "One family at a time they left, until only the owners of the Mount Aurum station remained."

Now, only a few old fossickers remain, all of them subsisting on pensions rather than gold. They stay on, not because they are making a fortune, but because they have no wish to go elsewhere. "They like the life. They have come to terms with their harsh environment, and their needs are few and simple. As for wants, they have none."

It almost seemed inevitable that the hardships of living in Skippers would prove to be overwhelming. The inaccessibility of the area almost foreshadowed the sometimes grim outcome of venturing into the Upper Shotover Gorge. It may well be, that Skippers is a place that was never meant for anything but its natural inhabitants.

For only a few, were there pots of gold at the end of the rainbow.

Gates of Cherry Farm Jottings

Bill and Tilly Grant

- The newly refurbished gates of Cherry Farm, Frankton, switched from one side of Highway 6 to the other are the result of Tilly and Bill Grant's foresight and hard work. The very handsome iron work looks now as it did in the 1890s when it was commissioned by Frederick and Elizabeth Evans.

- Feel you could contribute to recording some of the past of our local history. The Federation of NZ Historical Societies runs an annual essay competition at Junior and Senior levels - 1500 or 3000 words respectively of original research, and the winner is rewarded and the material published.

- Have you seen the magazine of the NZ Historical Societies called "LEGACY" published twice yearly? It has excellent, well-researched articles recording lives of people and happenings in mainly local New Zealand history.