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Alexandra & Immediate District Tour 2

Historic Sites

VIEWING & WALKING

An historical tour of old goldmining sites and places of interest from the golden days of the Lower Dunstan.

OTHER GENERAL WALKS - Alexandra & Immediate District Historic Tour 1, Alexandra Guide 1, Alexandra Guide 2 & Roxburgh Gorge Walk

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BACKED BY: Otago Goldfields Heritage Trust / Alexandra Museum / Department of Conservation (DoC).
APPRECIATION goes to DoC for the assembling and assistance with the erection of interpretation plaques.

Visitors are warned, that following this guide, you do so at your own risk.

Some of these sites are on private property and please respect the property owner's rights. Access may also be denied to some sites eg, times of stock movement, at lambing time.

Gates you come across should be left closed. Litter not to be left behind when you depart.

This Tour with all walk options could take one day. It starts from Rotary Park, bottom of Dunorling Street at the Clutha River just up from the Alexandra Bridge.

(Tour 1 starts from the Alexandra Museum Information Complex, Pioneer Park, Centennial Avenue)

18. ROTARY PARK Flood Pole. View

A pole, which was erected in 1998 with additions, marks the levels reached by the flood on 10 January 1994, a higher flood on 14 December 1995 and the even higher flood of 17 November 1999. The 1995 flood peaked at a height of 141.9 metres above mean sea level (msl) in Dunedin while the 1999 flood peaked at 142.3 metres msl. Both were higher than the big 1878 flood that reached 141.59 metres above msl **but is regarded as the largest volume flood ever recorded.** The higher levels of all three floods – the 1994, 1995 and 1999 floods are higher as a result of raising the lake bed level due to the accumulation of sediment in Lake Roxburgh. The floodbank behind was built 2001 to a height of 142.75 meters asl.

19. HESSONS BOARDING HOUSE. Corner of Limerick and Ennis Street. View only

James Simmonds erected this building in 1882, reputedly from dressed stone left over from the Alexandra bridge contract. It was designed initially as a temperance hotel and built as a speculation but did not sell. So Simmonds opened it as the "Vincent County Club" catering for weddings etc, but he also opened a general store and set up a sawmill and his contractor's yard on the same property.

In 1893 Simmonds moved out to Bald Hill Flat (Fruitlands) where he was in partnership with James Hesson in a large and successful sluicing claim - Last Chance Sluicing Co. Hesson then moved into Alexandra and took over the stone building, running it as a boarding house and store, which it remained for 60 years.

The building has been renovated and restored and is now the office of Macalister Todd Phillips Bodkins, Barristers & Solicitors.

20. OLD BRIDGE PIERS. View and walk

These two magnificent stone piers are all that remain of the first bridge built across the Clutha River at Alexandra. The bridge built by the partnership of Johnny Drummey, William Beresford and James Simmonds was opened in 1882. It was an elegant suspension bridge 552 feet (165.5m) long with the deck supported by four cables on each side. Each cable was a wire rope 3 inches (76.4mm) in diameter. The cables were supported by the two piers each standing then about (80 feet (24m) above the average river level. The pier on the Alexandra side is founded on a block of concrete 6m below the river. This was an innovative procedure for the time.

The schist rock for the Earnsclough pier came from a cutting towards Halfmile Gully and the rock for the Alexandra pier was from a quarry in what is now Taylor Place - the small hill behind the shopping centre overlooking the mouth of the Manuherikia River. Each stone (some weighed half a ton) was numbered before it left the quarry and was then matched to a number on the plan..

The construction of this bridge was a task of great magnitude considering the resources of the district at the time and the physical difficulties of dealing with a wild and powerful river. It was replaced with the present bridge in 1958. In 1962 the Borough Council requested the Ministry of Works to demolish the bridge but local pressure saved the piers.

A good view of the piers is obtained from the end of Old Bridge Road on the south side of the bridge. There is also a fence here that has been constructed from a piece of cable from the bridge.

Before the bridge was built, a ferry plied backwards and forwards across the river just below the old bridge. The first ferries were simple punts but the last one carried 30 tons. The punt is still in existence in private ownership and is used for carrying stock across the Clutha River near Clydevale.

21. THE 1878 PLAQUE. View

The plaque at the bottom of Tarbert Street alongside the road railing and now in the wrong place, records the highest point of the great 1878 spring flood. George Rivers, son of the well-known Alexandra pioneer storekeeper, James Rivers, presented the plaque and was originally on the footpath outside the site of Rivers' former store. This site is now covered by the Central Business District floodbank constructed 2001.

The 1995 and 1999 floods were once recorded on a lamppost next to the original 1878 plaque. This lamppost has now gone to make way for the floodbank construction. A marking on the pole recorded the level of the 1995 flood, which reached a level about 0.5m higher than the 1878 flood. The 1999 flood level was some 1.8m higher than the 1878 flood. This higher flood level is attributed to the massive some four metres of sediment built up on the bed of Lake Roxburgh. However, the 1878 flood is still regarded as the largest volume flood ever recorded. It caused great damage throughout Central Otago especially to the communications. Six major river bridges were lost, either swept away, or destroyed or left isolated.

22. JUNCTION LOOKOUT. Rivers Road. View

To the early Maori travellers, the junction of the Manuherikia and the Mataau (Clutha) at Alexandra was known as Ka Moana Haehae - The Split Waters or the joining of two waterways. However, since the Deed of Recognition in the 1998 Ngai Tahu Settlement, the bed of Lake Roxburgh is now known as Ka Moana Haehae.

From a point on Rivers Road along from the foot of Tarbert Street, and overlooking the junction of the Manuherikia and Clutha Rivers, there is a good view of a number of historic mining sites.

On the right bank of the Clutha River is the remains of Frenchman's Point. This was once a terrace of the same height at that on which Alexandra stands, but in 1863 gold was discovered. Within a few years the terrace was sluiced away and had yielded a fabulous amount of gold. The famous Frenchman's claim, owned by partners Jean Feraud and Bladier, and managed by Micheal Kett may have produced gold worth as much as \$3 million on present day values.

On the left bank of the Clutha below the junction is Prospectors Point, where Stebbing found gold in August 1862 but was forestalled in his claim as discoverer of the Dunstan Goldfield by only a few days.

Between these two points is the narrow entrance to the Roxburgh Gorge but known earlier as the Molyneux or the Alexandra Gorge and referred to by dredgemen as the 'Narrows' or 'Gates of the Gorge'.

At the bend of the Manuherikia River, above the junction, is Butlers Point where Bedford Butler took out rich gold in 1864. Immediately below the lookout was a terrace on which the first Alexandra settlement (Manuherikia Junction) was established. It was flooded in 1866 and the terrace was washed away in the 1878 August floods.

Across the Manuherikia River, at the foot of the orchard, the remains of the Clyde Dredging Co's dredge Moa No 1, lies buried in the mud with a few willow trees marking the site.

23. FRENCHMANS POINT WATER RACE. View and walk. Otago Regional Council (ORC) river walkway officially starts further upriver from the bridge.

Above the bridge, on the Earnsclough side, can be seen the stonewalls of a water race. This was the first race to deliver water to Frenchmans Point and was built by James Coleman in 1864. It was known as the Junction Race because it delivered water to the junction of the rivers. The race came out of Chapmans Gully but the water came from far up Conroy's Creek by the Mountain Race, which delivered it then to the head of the Gully. Later water from Oemo Creek (Blackmans Creek) and the Fraser River was also fed into the Junction Race.

24. GOLDEN BEACH TAILINGS. View and walk

Permission required on private land

Stretching upstream for about a kilometer from the mouth of Chapmans Gully are the tailings from the two dredges operated by the Golden Beach Dredging Company. One of the dredges was converted to waterpower but had to be reconverted back to steam when water became scarce.

In the midst of these tailings is the land that was once occupied by W. M. Noble, a pioneer orchardist.

It became the scene of a famous confrontation in 1911-1912 between mining and agriculture. Noble had occupied the land for 40 years with the permission of Earnsclough Station but unfortunately had no proper title. When the Warden gave the Golden Beach Co. a licence to mine the land he included conditions that required Noble to be compensated for his improvements. J. P. Lane, owner of the Golden Beach Co. refused to pay and many court battles were fought. Lane began to mine the orchard and then dredged right around it leaving it as an island in a sea of tailings.

Lane did pay eventually, but public pressure caused a special Clause to be inserted in a 'washing up' Act giving Noble a

pension of 30s a week for life. When Mr. Noble died, another Clause was required to pay the pension to his wife. The point where Earnscleugh Road crosses Chapmans Gully is still known locally as Dry Gully as when the water was taken for mining purposes, the gully dried up.

25. EARNSCLEUGH FLAT DREDGE TAILINGS. View from the Fraser River crossing at Marshall Rd to McPherson Rd either using the tailing tracks or the ORC river walk track.

A Historic Reserve now protects a large area of spectacular dredge tailings stretching down the right side of the Clutha River from a point above Sandy Point to the mouth of the Fraser River. These also extend for some distance into the Earnscleugh Flat. They were formed mainly by the activities of five dredges during the periods between 1896 to 1924 and again between 1951 to 1963.

Earnscleugh No 1 dredge worked on some 33 acres of the low terrace below Sandy Point from late 1896 until 1906. The early tailings have been mainly covered with silt and are overgrown with willow trees while the tailings near the big pond are more even – the result of being scattered from a centrifugal drum.

Earnscleugh No 2 dredge when launched in early 1898 was the largest dredge in New Zealand. It worked on a 93 acre claim, which partly surrounded the Earnscleugh No 1 claim, working until 1909. The principle shareholders of these first two Earnscleugh dredges were Charles Weaver and James Kelman of Alexandra who in 1901 formed themselves into a new company.

At about the same time the Earnscleugh No 2 started working, the Sandy Point Gold Dredging Company's Glasgow dredge also began working on a claim above and adjacent to Earnscleugh No 2 and worked until the company went into liquidation in 1913. (These tailings lie outside the Reserve and the tailings and are now in a gravel quarry area.)

In March 1899, a party of Dunedin businessman registered the Earnscleugh No 3 Gold Dredging and Electric power Company so as to acquire the 100-acre claim from Weaver and Kelman, as well as water right to the Fraser River, in return for 3500 fully paid up shares.

The company planned to build a large electric dredge, powered by electricity from a small hydro electric station on the Fraser River. Construction work started on the dredge in 1900 and still was not completed by 1902. The company decided to go into liquidation and the dredge then became the property of the Earnscleugh Gold Dredging Company with its shareholders being Weaver, Kelman, their immediate family and Alexandra Black of Dunedin.

The Earnscleugh No 3 dredge eventually went into service 1903. It was a huge machine for the time, designed to dredge into the terraces. It was very successful and stayed in service till the Company went into liquidation in 1924. In 1926 the dredge was dismantled and shifted to the Upper Nevis and was back working in 1927 but here the conditions were not suitable for such a large dredge.

The extensive tailings, which stretch from the Fraser River to McPherson Road, are those of the Clutha River Dredging Company's large electric-powered dredge the Alexandra, which is often referred to as the Clutha dredge. It started in 1937 as a river dredge and worked its way down into the gorge below Alexandra, but in 1943 it was fitted with an elevator so as to convert it into a paddock dredge. Dredging now commenced on the terraces on the east side of the Clutha River adjacent to Alexandra. Later crossed the river and dredged the Earnscleugh Flats from 1951 until 1963 when increasing maintenance, lack of dredging land and shortage of water forced it to close. It was put up for tender in 1963-1964. The successful tenderer dismantled the dredge in 1964 for scrap.

26. CONROYS REEF. View only from the road-side. The site is all on private property.

When the rich alluvial gold began to run out in Conroys Gully, Andreas Iversen (refer No 29) turned his attention to a gold-bearing quartz reef on the eastern side of the gully in 1866. In 1869 he discovered that the reef was even more prominent on the western side of Conroys Gully. Iversen led many attempts to exploit this reef and finally gave up in 1874/75 and turned his attention to growing fruit.

Following on other the years, a number of companies were formed over the years and stamper batteries installed up until 1912 but bad management, high water levels, tunnels driven too high or too low, or some other factor always seemed to prevent the miners from gaining the bonanza that they felt should be within their grasp.

The reef cuts across the Conroys-Earnscleugh Road 380 metres north of the Chapman Road intersection and can be traced as a series of trenches and deep shafts (care required) for at least 450 metres in a westerly direction on the western side of the gully. The position of one battery is marked by stonework on the western side of the creek some 620 metres downstream from the Chapman Road intersection.

27. FOXWELLS COTTAGE - Early home of "Lord Lockie". View only

Stephen Foxwell, a miner, built this stone cottage at the intersection of Chapman and Conroys Road in 1867 or shortly afterwards, and then rented it to a young English couple named 'Lock' (the correct spelling is not known). The man was called 'Lord Lock' by the miners. The story is told that he returned to England to collect an inheritance.

There is no evidence that he was a member of aristocracy although he may have been a son of 'Landed gentry'. The name 'Lord Lockie' on the cottage is a recent innovation and is not based on fact.

28. CHAPMAN ROAD SCIENTIFIC RESERVE. View and walk

The Department of Conservation purchased this area of 8.4 hectares in 1994 as it has immense historical and biological importance. The white soils that characterise this area are of tertiary age and have been recently exposed by the search for gold.

The soils are highly saline, with strong concentrations of sodium and calcium, derived from the deeply weathering schist parent material. The area supports a diverse suite of halophytic (salt tolerant) vegetation and some of these species are extremely rare. Some of the unique plants found here such as sea primrose – *Samolus repens*, are common near the coast and rarely found inland. Others such as the rare native cress – *Lepidium kirkii*, are only found now at a small number of inland sites such as this. This unique collection of plants supports an equally important and unique invertebrate fauna, of which, some moths are especially interesting.

Stephen Foxwell sluiced the quartz sands and gravels in the gully beyond the Reserve and exposed the underlying white, weathered schist. The ponds, also outside the Reserve, were made by small-scale hydraulic elevation sluicing in the early 1900's.

29. CONROYS GULLY - CONROYS FLAT. View only from the road-side. The site is all on private property.

The discovery of gold in Conroys gully by Conroy Dick in October 1862 brought hundreds of miners to what proved to be the richest gully in Central Otago at that time. Some made fortunes but many were disappointed before moving onto the next rush. Two who stayed and continue to prosper, were Richard Dawson and Andreas Iversen. After the gold run out both planted fruit trees and became very successful orchardists.

The very large tree on Matheson's property on the right of Conroys Road, south of Chapman Road intersection is reputed to be the largest walnut tree in the Southern Hemisphere. Mrs. Iversen planted the tree in 1865.

30. CONROYS DAM, View and Walk

Conroys Dam was completed in 1935 for the Last Chance Irrigation Scheme to provide irrigation water for the orchards on the Conroys Flats and to some of the orchards on Earnsclough Flats closest to the Alexandra Township. Flooding of the dam destroyed the early workings on Muirs Flat.

It is only above the Dam that some evidence of early mining can be seen. Sadly, there remains little evidence of the early miners – now only some old races, some small dams and sluice workings. Later, large numbers of Chinese miners come to the gully and worked the area over again. It is likely that the stone remains of buildings found by walking up the gully and the tributaries, are those that the Chinese built and lived in between about 1870 and 1900. One of these cottages featured in the film "Illustrious Energy" about the Chinese era of goldmining in Central Otago

The land surrounding Conroys Dam is conservation land as well as some of Conroys Creek area above the dam – the Aldinga Conservation Area.

31. BUTCHERS DAM AND FLAT TOP RESERVE. View and walk. The dam is used to access the Reserve.

Construction of Butchers Dam began in 1935 and was completed in late 1937. It is a concrete arch structure 27 metres high and 32 metres long. A noteworthy feature is the outlet, which is by way of a tunnel 700 metres long through solid rock. From 1938 until 1973, the dam's water supplied Alexandra with its but is now used solely for irrigation and as a recreation area.

Though the dam flooded the flats destroying some of the early mining evidence, there is on the eastern slopes still significant evidence of sluicing carried out in the 1860's. The early mining operations sluiced away the sedimentary soils exposing ancient soils known as paleosols, which were formed 20-25 million years ago. The normal characteristic grey and brown shades of earth are now of vivid colour - red, orange, yellow and dazzling white.

The Department of Conservation purchased 813 hectares Of Flat Top Hill in 1993 for its dryland natural values as Central Otago has very few protected low altitude grassland / shrubland reserves. From the shores of the dam to the flats at the summit, the area contains a range of habitat including salty ground, short tussock grassland, shrubland, cushion fields and an occasional seepage land. Some 180 native species have survived 140 years of pastoral grazing, burn-offs and as well it has been extensively over-run by rabbits. DoC has now been improving walking tracks and erecting interpretation panels through the Conservation Area.

A short walk across the dam access to the Conservation Area and on down the western side of the gorge below the dam, provides for a spectacular view of the gorge and the remains of fluming still attached to anchors in the sheer rock face. The fluming was part of the water race built in 1909 to supply water to Alexandra from Butchers Creek.

Extreme care required when walking on this track, especially after rain.

32. HALFMILE DAM. (Lane's Big Dam) View and walk. Permission required.

Between the highway at the top of Halfmile Hill and the Clutha River lie the remains of a very large reservoir. It was began in 1870 by Michael Kett who was operating a large sluicing claim in Ketts Gully. It had a succession of owners but was bought, together with the Caledonian Race from Butchers Creek, by Olaf Magnus in 1895. Magnus leased the race to the Golden Beach Company (of which he and his brothers were founding members), which had just started to mine at Poverty Beach (later renamed Golden Beach) on the banks of the Clutha River upstream from Chapmans Gully. To provide sufficient water for hydraulic elevating, the old dam was renovated and enlarged until it was about one mile in circumference. Because the site was on a broad saddle between the two gullies, dams were required across both gullies. In 1919 the Alexandra Borough Council bought the dam, the Caledonian race and its water rights from J.P. Lane who now owned the defunct Golden Beach Company. The Council used the dam for storage but it was a constant source of trouble with leaks and erosion of the walls. The dam was abandoned in 1938 when water from Butchers Dam became available.

33. BOROUGH RESERVOIR - Top of Aronui Road. View and walk – access is from Jolendale Park.

The Magnus brothers built the reservoir under contract in 1909 as part of the new town supply from Butchers Creek. Like the Halfmile Dam, it was built on a saddle between two gullies so required two dams. The southwest wall threatened to collapse soon after it was built and required urgent buttressing. A few years later in 1914, the northwest wall nearly collapsed when the earth core was washed away. The reservoir was supplied via a race from Butcher's Creek, which traversed the Butchers Creek gorge by way of a spectacular line of fluming. This race was abandoned in 1938 when water was supplied to the reservoir from Butchers Dam.

34. LANE'S DAM - Blackmore Park, Aronui Road. View and walk

Joseph P Lane, owner of the Golden Beach Co, built this small dam in 1909 when he agreed to move the intake of his pipeline to make room for the building of the new Borough Reservoir. The Borough Council acquired the dam in 1919 when they purchased from Joseph Lane all his water rights, the races from Butchers Creek, Conroys Gully and the Fraser River, and the two dams.

In the early 1980's, the Alexandra Borough made Lane's dam a reserve as well as a bird sanctuary. There is a walking track around the reserve, which is now the centrepiece of Blackmore Park.