

A precious place – easily damaged

This significant scenic reserve shows many of the gold extraction technologies of the 19th century. It became known as the Serpentine, after the winding path of nearby Waimonga Creek.

The discovery of gold in 1863 transformed this remote area into a vibrant gold-mining town. A settlement quickly sprang up, with two store-hotels, a church, blacksmiths, a cemetery, and huts of sod, wood and thatch with gardens and potato-storage pits. The formed road you came in on follows part of the original dray track used by miners. The Serpentine reached its peak population (150 Chinese and 80 Europeans) around 1873.



The sod huts built here may have looked like this one. Reverend Alexander Don and an unidentified Chinese miner outside a sod house, Mitchells Flat, Otago. Photo: McNeur Collection : Photographs of Chinese goldminers who worked in Otago and Southland goldfields. Ref: 1/2-019163-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

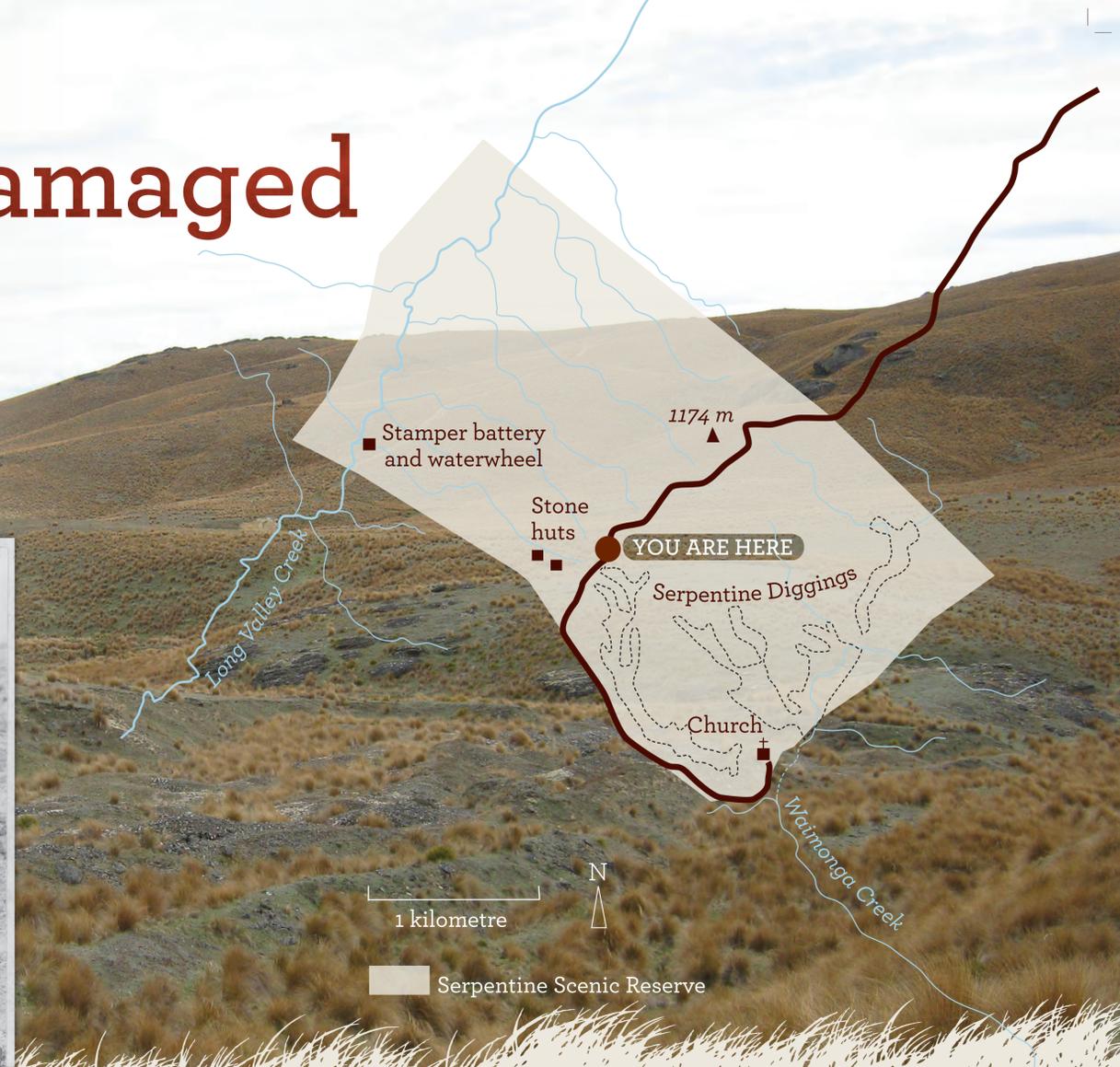
A restless history

The Serpentine stamper battery, used to crush ore from the local mines, has had a nomadic existence. It was erected in 1878 at German Jacks (15 km to the north), then moved in 1882 to the head of Deep Creek (7.5 km south of here) where it was enlarged from five to ten stamps. This immense structure was moved again in 1890 just off this ridge, where it now resides in excellent condition.



The stamper battery, waterwheel and shed in 1931. Photo: Battery Shed and waterwheel, Serpentine, 1931, L.G. Penfold photograph, Box-178-002, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hakena, University of Otago.

Remember that all rocks, historic artefacts (including earth and stone works), native plants and animals are protected on public land. Tread carefully and take only photographs.



Above: Mounds of tailings and other historic remains are found throughout this area. Photo: Heather Bauchop, Heritage New Zealand

Over 1,000 m above sea level, the Serpentine church was the most elevated in New Zealand when it opened in 1873. Today it is the only remnant of a once-bustling village. Much of the town's rich heritage is hidden beneath the tussock: tailings, water races, dams, sod pits and the remains of buildings.

Historic areas like this are easily destroyed – so please keep your vehicles on the formed road.



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