



Charming Creek Tramway

milling | mining | walkway — a history

Jackie Breen and Amy Findlater

A report prepared for the Buller *Kawatiri* Area Office

Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

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Initially Jackie and Amy created this document as the

Charming Creek Walkway Historic Heritage Assessment and Baseline Inspection Report – some 250 pages of text and images.

After consideration it was decided to create three documents:

Charming Creek Tramway – milling | mining | walkway – a history

Charming Creek Walkway – baseline inspection report

Charming Creek Walkway – baseline inspection GPS identification data (a series of tables relating to the sections of the baseline inspection).

All three are available as related documents on the Department of Conservation website.

Cover image credit: WD 40 nudging down the gorge with a full load.
Alexander Turnbull Library, (NLPS) 34013½

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Executive Summary

The Charming Creek Walkway in the Buller Region of the South Island's West Coast, follows the lower Ngakawau Gorge and the Charming Creek Valley for approximately 9 km from Ngakawau to the abandoned Charming Creek Coal Mine (see Figure 1). Mostly the walkway follows the alignment of an historic bush and coal tramway and passes several associated historic sites, including Watson's Sawmill, Mumm's Sawmill, the Charming Creek Coal Mine and the Bins site at Ngakawau. The tramway and associated sites are of regional and national significance, and together form part of a broad heritage landscape.

The tramway operated from early in the 20th century, until 1958 when the coal mine switched to road transport. The walkway was subsequently formed, beginning in the 1970s, and the area has since been used for recreational purposes. It is recognised for its scenic and natural beauty as well as historic values and is managed as a historic place.¹

This report was written for the Buller *Kawatiti* Area Office to ensure all historic values in the walkway would be considered during future upgrade work. It presents the outcomes of historical research and a baseline inspection undertaken in 2008.

The main objective of the baseline inspection was to record historic fabric adjacent to, and on the walkway. This information was used to assess significance and identify threats. Actions and recommendations are made to ensure the continuity of these heritage values and mitigate the identified threats. During the course of our historical research we found that while there were some details available in various formats concerning sawmilling and the bush tramway at Charming Creek, there were significant gaps in the understanding of the Charming Creek Coal Mine.

Other authors have previously emphasised that 'contextual material is not available for coal mining'² and that 'the coal mining fabric value is less well understood'³. This report seeks to fill these gaps. The main threats at Charming Creek derive from management decisions, informal staff actions, natural processes such as landslides and decay, and visitor impacts. The continuity of historic values, articulating an appreciation of this historic place and appropriate management strategies are the most important ways to reduce or eliminate these threats. The Charming Creek Walkway and its associated historic sites, are front country sites and relatively accessible, from Ngakawau off State Highway 67.

The other end of the walkway is accessible via Charming Creek Road, a gravel road from Seddonville. The track is well used, and is promoted as a 'walking track' suitable for people of moderate fitness. It transverses some steep country but due to the tramway alignment the walkway is relatively well formed and of an easy grade.

From Ngakawau the landscape is open with a mild coastal climate. After moving about a kilometre inland the Lower Ngakawau Gorge is reached, through which the Ngakawau River flows. Carved through steep coastal ranges, the gorge is deep with many bluffs. It has been identified as 'the most confined and dramatic gorge in Kawatiri',⁴ cutting a 300 m deep narrow trench through the Stockton coal plateau. The assemblage of basement rocks and outcrops visible along the walkway include Constant Gneiss, Kaiata Mudstone, and sandstones containing the coal measures

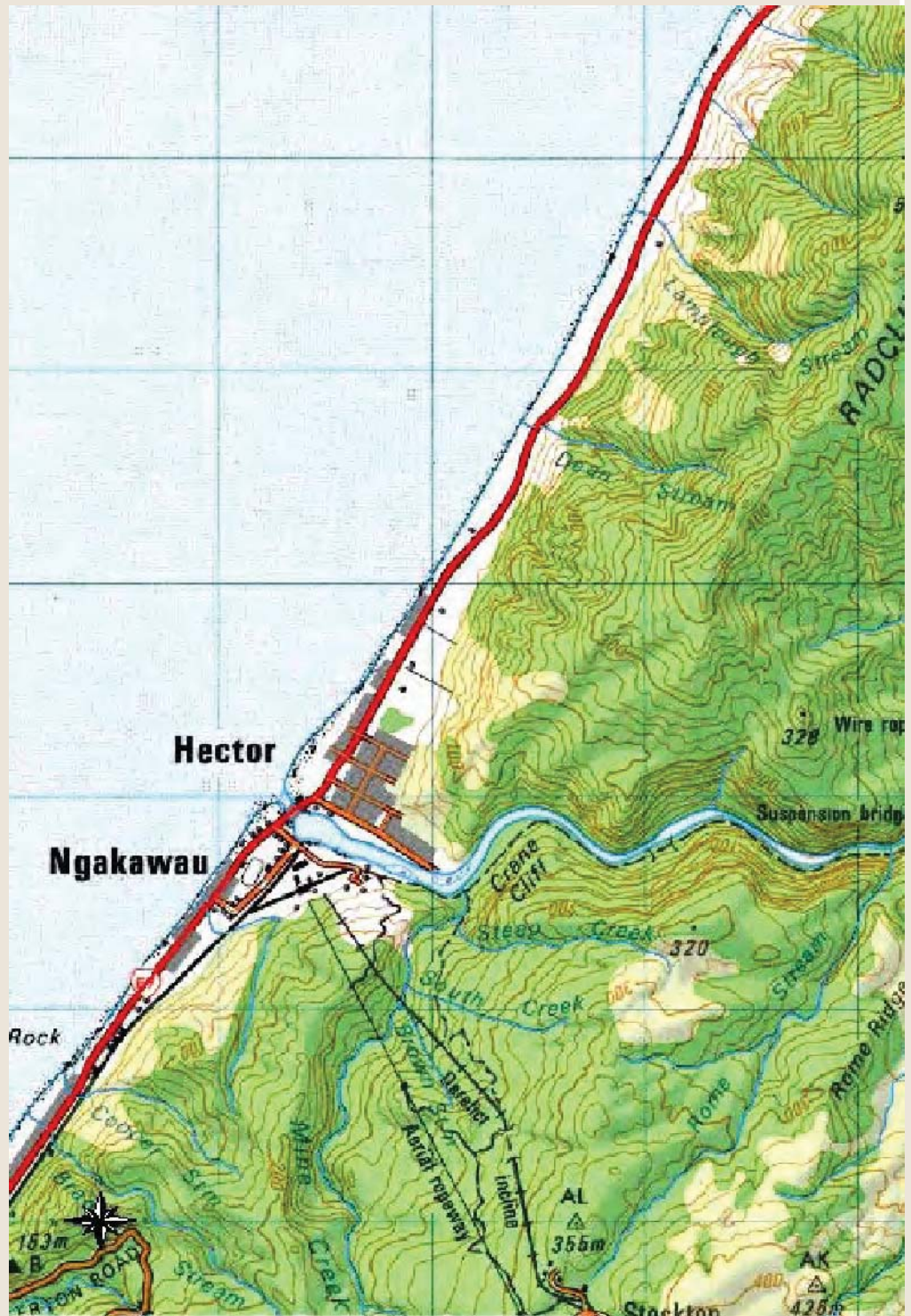
¹ Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai 2007: 200

² Mahoney 2003 (1985).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai 2007 op cit: 367

Figure 1: Charming Creek Walkway: Ngakawau to Charming Creek Road end.



Coal Mine – northern end of the walkway

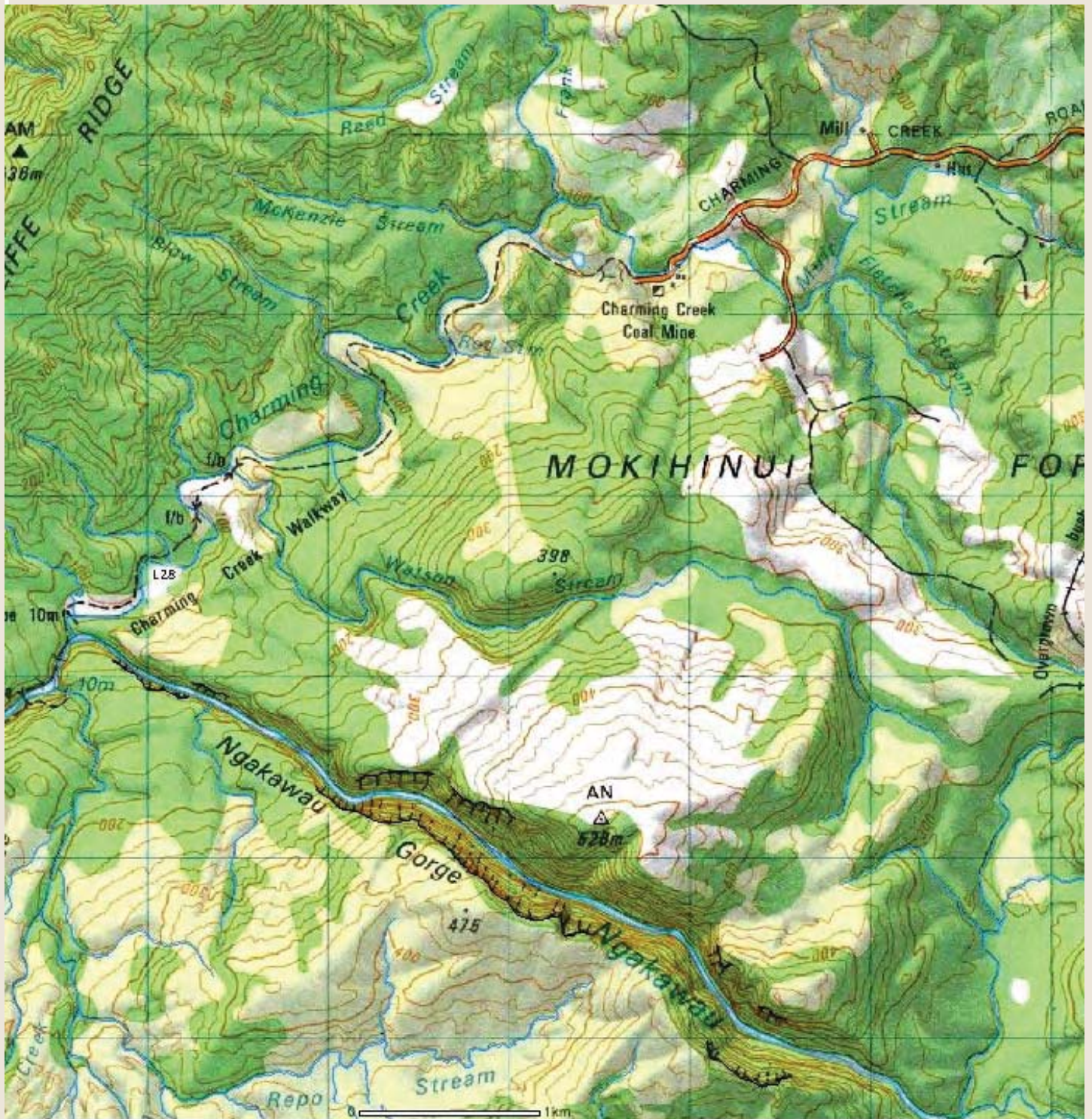




Photo 1: Watson's Mill, with the incline in the background c. 1920.



Figure 2: Geological Map 1914. Note the location of Watson's Mill, the old Watson's Tramway on the north bank of the Ngakawau River and Watson's New Tramway on the south bank running from Ngakawau past Watson's Mill and up the Charming Creek Valley. Branch lines are also visible.

which were exploited by the Charming Creek Coal Mine. After about four kilometres the walkway branches off the true right of the Ngakawau River to follow Charming Creek through a wider valley. The geology of the gorge and the steepness has affected the stability of the land and of the tramway and walkway. The geological landscape in the gorge region is especially dynamic and prone to erosion and landslides, especially during high rainfall. Landslides and rock falls have been recorded historically and are clearly evident on the walkway today.⁵

⁵ Please refer to the pamphlet produced by the Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai 2005. Buller. *Charming Creek Walkway*; Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai 2007 op cit.: 366-370

History

1 Early History

Early European history at Charming Creek is intimately bound with the timber and coal industries in the first quarter of the 20th century. After the first European forays into the area with the 1860s gold rush, colonial focus in the Buller quickly turned to exploiting the rich seams of high grade bituminous coal first identified by early explorers, such as Brunner, Heaphy and Haast. Some of the first coal mines were established near the Mokihinui, Ngakawau and Waimangaroa rivers, with small coastal vessels providing the means of transport.⁶ Sea transport for this coal was initially the only link between the West Coast, the rest of New Zealand and Australia. It was recognised that expansion of the industry needed good transport infrastructure and a decent port. The obvious choice of port was at Westport, and developing a network of railway lines deemed the most efficient means of transport. Construction of a rail line began in 1874 and by 1876 was completed as far as Waimangaroa to service the mines on the Denniston Plateau. The line to Ngakawau opened on 26th September, 1877.⁷

Coal was king in Buller in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Output from the great mines of Denniston saw it become New Zealand's largest coal producer by 1895.⁸ The Westport Coal Company, who owned these mines were actively seeking further areas to develop, and began opening up mines around Millerton in 1891. In 1893 the Westport-Cardiff Coal Company began operations further north, near what is now Seddonville. The rail line was pushed on, extending from Ngakawau to Seddonville, in 1894, and to the Mokihinui Coal Mine in 1895. By 1908 a mine was also opened at Stockton.⁹

Along the thin strip of coast between the coal plateau and the sea, a series of small towns blossomed, straddling the rail line and providing service towns for railway stations and mines. Ngakawau, which had been a service town since the gold rush and early coal mining days, grew larger with mining at Stockton. Hector, on the north bank of the Ngakawau River, became a mine worker settlement, and Granity, further south, sprang up along the rail line at the site of the bins, screening plant and repair shop for the Millerton mine.¹⁰

2 The beginning of sawmilling in Charming Creek Valley

As with all large scale industrial endeavours, support industries such as timber milling were required. One of these ventures was the Granity Creek Sawmill established by George Watson and his brother Robert in 1896, replete with an eight horse power Ruston Proctor engine driving a vertical saw. The timber mainly supplied the local market. The brothers also ran a flax mill on the site. In August 1898, Robert Watson met with a serious accident at the sawmill losing the thumb and three fingers from his left hand. In 1899 it was reported that the brothers hoped to expand into the export market with their white pine as there was 'plenty' on their freehold land and adjacent leases.¹¹ Disaster struck in 1900, when the sawmill at Granity Creek was burnt down in suspicious circumstances. It was doubly disastrous as the complex was uninsured.¹² Whether the fire

⁶ Spencer, W.E. 1962. *A History of the Buller District*: 138-139. Morgan and Bartrum 1915 *The Geology and Mineral Resources of the Buller-Mokihinui Subdivision*, Westport Division: 8, 32.

⁷ Meyer, R.J. *Coaling from the Clouds*. 1971:25-27; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand 1897-1908*. *The Cyclopedia of New Zealand*: industrial, descriptive, historical, biographical facts, figures, illustrations. Section One. Westland: 95.

⁸ Munro, W.A. 1979. *The Denniston Affair*: 13

⁹ Morgan and Bartrum op. cit.:33-36.

¹⁰ Spencer W.E. 1962:158-164.

¹¹ *Cyclopedia of New Zealand* 1899:109. Whether this early mill was at Granity, or at another site on the tops above the Ngakawau River, it is hard to determine definitively. See Figure 1 - 1914 Geological Map where an old mill site is noted but this is at Ngakawau. The *Cyclopedia of New Zealand* 1906 notes that there was a sawmill at Granity, with George Watson being in charge; *Grey River Argus* (GRA) 26/8/1898; GRA 17/7/1900.

¹² GRA 17/7/1900. This article also mentions a flaxmill associated with the sawmill, that was also burnt in the fire.

was the prompt to shift the mill site is not clear and there is conflicting information about when their second sawmilling venture, the Watson's mill at Ngakawau, first started – some stating 1903, others 1905.¹³ What is known from boiler records is that an 8 hp Ruston Proctor engine (boiler #9698) was inspected in 1897 which ties in with the start of the Watson Bros. milling operations at Granity Creek. It was inspected again in Granity in 1905. When inspected subsequently in 1906, the boiler was working on an incline at Ngakawau. By this time, *Cyclopedia of New Zealand* notes, there were two sawmills in the Ngakawau area, and by 1908, Robert Watson was noted as a sawmiller at both Granity and Ngakawau.

All that can be said with certainty is that by 1906, Robert Watson had established a new mill located by a small creek above the confluence of Charming Creek with the Ngakawau River. While this site provided abundant bush for logging, and an established rail line for transport close at hand, there were topographical issues to deal with to establish effective transportation of timber to the rail head. To avoid problems posed by the steep Ngakawau gorge, a tramway was constructed from the mill on the north side of the Ngakawau River to Hector. It featured a steep incline that dropped down to the mill and an 8 hp steam winch located at the brow of the hill (see photo 1).

Whether or not the first tramway was uneconomic or inefficient, a second tramway was later constructed from the mill through the steep lower Ngakawau gorge to the rail line at Ngakawau. Again there is contention about exactly when this line was opened with various reports giving dates from between 1907-1912. Certainly by the time a Geological Survey team was working in the area in 1913, the tram had been built, and was noted on maps accompanying the survey as 'Watson's Tramway (new)' (figure 2).¹⁴ Whatever the case may be there is no question that this tramway was an engineering feat that pushed bush tram construction to its limits. Compared with other bush tramways, Charming Creek was unusual with its extensive sections of earthworks, tunnels and bridges (photos 2 and 4). One of the tunnels was named 'Irishmans' tunnel, constructed with an interesting S-shaped bend revealing an error in bearings made by two groups of tunnellers excavating from either end. To cope with the steep topography of the lower Ngakawau Gorge, this section of tram had many tight curves and a section of line with a very steep grade of 1 in 7.¹⁵

At first the line had wooden rails. These were replaced in the 1920s with steel when the use of rail tractors became common. The gauge of the tram matched the New Zealand Rail (NZR) standard of 3ft 6in (1067mm).¹⁶ Steep sections of tram had a centre brake, which enabled controlled negotiation of the line. Bush tramways like the Watson Bros. at Charming Creek enabled the exploitation of timber resources in difficult locations where more accessible stands had already been felled.

Trams were expensive to build, and as was the case more often than not at Charming Creek, necessity became the mother of invention. Through the skills of the Watson's innovative engineer George MacDonald, an overhead hauler was designed and built locally, to haul logs to the main branch trams, cutting down the need to build new spur tramlines (see photo 3).¹⁸

Horses initially provided the motive power for all log and timber transportation.¹⁹ They were eventually replaced on the mill tram, again due to the skill of George MacDonald. Between 1917-18 he constructed a steam lokey from a Ruston Proctor portable engine, to run on the logging lines (the lokey can be seen at the head of a rake of bogies in photo 1).²⁰

¹³ Mahoney 2003 (1985). op cit.; See the DOC West Coast Conservancy Sawmill Register.

¹⁴ Date of 1905 in DOC West Coast Conservancy Sawmill Register, 1909 or 1912 in Mahoney 2003 (1985). See copy of 'Map of the Buller Coalfield showing coal-bearing areas and general geology' 1914 (in WC CO Archives).

¹⁵ Sinclair 1991.

¹⁶ See Mahoney 1998 op cit.: 17 for gauge size. Mahoney 2003 (1985): 'The Railway'.

¹⁷ Mahoney 2003 (1985) op cit.

¹⁸ Mahoney 2003 (1985).

¹⁹ Refer to the DOC West Coast CO Sawmill Register.

²⁰ See the DOC West Coast CO Sawmill Register: Watson, R. T. Charming Creek: Boiler #15288, inspected at Charming Creek in 1918; Mahoney op cit.

Photo 2: A stunning example of a cutting and tramline with wooden rails.



Photo 3: Watson's Mill. The boiler adjacent to the track operated the aerial logging system. The stables are on the far left.

With horse power superseded in the bush by steam haulers and around the mill by a bush lokey, it was not long before they were replaced on the tram to Ngakawau. During the 1920s low cost, internal combustion engine Fordson farm tractors began to enter New Zealand. Modifications to make these tractors run on bush trams were very successful. They caused less wear on the track, were cheaper to run and faster at hauling logs. In 1924 Trail's tractor from Southland became the first commercially available model.²¹ Watson's Mill at Charming Creek was quick to make the most of this innovation, and by the mid-1920s had replaced horse power with a Fordson Lokey (see photo 5). The era of the horse tram at Charming Creek was at an end.

Early in the 20th century the rise of union participation by coal workers was paralleled by timber workers when, in 1918, the West Coast Timber Workers Union was formed. From December 1919, the Union Secretary began an extended trip around the West Coast visiting all sawmills and reporting back on accommodation conditions and safety at mills in an official 'Timber Workers' column in the *Grey River Argus*. In early 1920 he visited Buller and Watson's Mill at Ngakawau. The commentary on the mill was not flattering, and he states:

*... the accommodation is not good and needs a lot of attention at once, before it could be made satisfactory, and the Labour Department would do well to see that improvements are carried out. While dealing with this mill I must also mention that it is practically the only nonunion mill on the West Coast and all unionists are requested to communicate with the Secretary before engaging for work at this mill.*²²

The mill was situated over a small creek which ran into the larger Charming Creek (photo 1), sawdust waste fell through the floor and was washed down stream. The log skids were immediately adjacent to the southern branch of the tramway to the east of the mill. The mill was powered by steam boilers, fuelled by wood. George Watson occupied a manager's house to the north east of the mill and seen in photo 3, there was a range of other buildings at the site, including a boarding house, cook house, huts for workers, stables and sand sheds. Sand sheds were used to dry sand or crushed rock which, when dried, was applied to the rails to improve grip. This was also an area where small tractors were exchanged for large ones before the timber was taken down to Ngakawau. Later, with the advent of the coal mine (see section 3.3), a diversion line was built around the sawmill for the coal tram. The northern branch was for coal, and the southern one for timber.²³

3 Charming Creek Coal Company— early years from 1919

Coal reserves at the head of Charming Creek piqued interest as early as 1910, when the Government sponsored boring, shaft sinking and coal analysis to test the field. The coal proved to be relatively extensive, and of a hard bituminous type, ideally suited for steam engines. The 1914 *Geological Bulletin* discussed at length options for opening the field, suggesting that an endless rope tramway and tunnels from the State owned Seddonville mine could be pushed through, or alternatively a rail line up the Ngakawau River and Charming Creek, which was deemed 'exceedingly expensive to construct.' Prospects for the mine were again investigated in 1917 by the Government, but while interest seemed serious, the coal industry was

²¹ Mahoney 1998:14; ch3.

²² Sinclair 1985:7, 20; GRA 7/2/1920.

²³ Mahoney op cit.



Photo 4: The first Ngakawau River suspension bridge showing timber being hauled by a horse tram.



Photo 5: The first lokey at Charming Creek on its first run down the gorge in mid-1920s. Bob Watson stands at the far right.

not flourishing, and costs to transport the coal were deemed prohibitive. Consequently the proposed works were never undertaken.²⁴

On 3rd of April 1919 Robert Watson signed a coal lease for an area of 242 acres, 1 rood and 28 perches, in what was formerly part of the Seddonville State Colliery Reserve. By mid-1919 Watson entered negotiations with the Public Works Department over access to and ownership of the siding on the south bank of the Ngakawau River. This news hit the press, with favourable reports being commonly made. Such plaudits were not surprising post WWI where continuing coal shortages on the domestic market still prevailed. An article in the *Greymouth Evening Star* (29 July 1919) mentioned Watson had been to Christchurch in relation to forming a company for working a coal mine. It was reported that he had already had spent time test shafting, and had engaged the services of Reefton civil and mining engineer Tom Learmont. The article speaks highly of prospects for the mine stating:

“... there is no doubt that the proposition placed before the public is one of the best in the dominion. ... [and] the cost of the constructing a railway and opening the mine will be low.”²⁵

There was an expectation that coal from the venture would be on the market within two years.

While the potential for success could not be denied, the fact the Crown had spent substantial sum proving the worth of the field, only to sell the lease to a private company, raised the ire of the left leaning *Grey River Argus*. A lengthy editorial in January 1920, lambasted the State for not considering the public good of retaining the Charming Creek coal field in State ownership where the profits would be beneficial to all, rather than having it sold to profit a few.²⁶ In spite of the mainly glowing reports of the proposed mine venture, Watson was not successful in raising enough capital to construct a railway to the field.²⁷

This was only a temporary set back for Watson. He began to explore opening the mine once more in late 1925, again engaging Learmont to produce a report on the potential for transporting coal by flume from Charming Creek to the Ngakawau Railway siding. This cheap form of transportation had already been proven by other mines in the district such as the Cascade Mine. Another report was obtained in early 1926, this time from Walter Leitch, former mine manager of the Blackball Mine and Mine Engineer from Dobson. He concurred with the idea of fluming the coal from the mine, provided estimates of setup costs and assumed profit, and noted the proximity of the sawmill and established tramline as all positive features of the proposal.²⁸

On 24th May 1926 Robert Watson and six others established the Charming Creek-Westport Coal Company (CCWCC). Development plans were to follow the advice of Learmont to construct a fluming coal transport system, as well as install coal cutting machinery to hew the coal. Once again, the closeness of the sawmill replete with tram and ‘motor tractor and trucks’, was noted as a selling point for the new mine. Machinery and materials for the mine could be conveyed with ease, and as mine workers could use the tram to travel to homes at Ngakawau, it would obviate the need to have extensive worker accommodation on site.²⁹

²⁴ *Evening Post* 2/11/1910 p.2; *Evening Post* 8/10/1913 p.10 (copies in DOC West Coast CO Archive); Morgan and Bartrum 1914: 147-150; Lands and Survey Department File 8/7/4/4/1 Charming Creek Walkway Historical Research - copies of reports on file.

²⁵ *Grey River Argus* 6/5/1919 pp 2&3; see Richardson 1995 chapter 6 &7; *Greymouth Evening Star* 29/7/1919; Public Works Department file: Charming Creek Coal Company Siding 1919 to 1953

²⁶ *Grey River Argus* 31/1/1920.

²⁷ Lands and Survey Department File 8/7/4/4/1 Charming Creek Walkway Historical Research - copies of reports on file.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

4 Death of R.T. Watson and the fate of the sawmill

On 9th of September 1928, Robert Watson and another director of the CCWCC, S.J. Akinson, were killed in a motor accident in the Buller Gorge, en route home after attending to company business in Christchurch.³⁰ Robert Watson's estate had interests in both the mill and the coal mine through his widow, but both enterprises became distinct entities after Watson's death. The mill was subsequently leased to Levy, Hay and Stack around 1928-9 who ran it until 1937.³¹ During the depression years the mill employed five to six people, with three or four living on site. The mill worked for two or three days, and the rest of the time workers were in the bush, either logging or broad axing sleepers. Most of the timber was rimu used for the building industry, with some white pine for butter boxes, and black beech for bridge construction at the big mines at Millerton and Stockton.

The mill huts and houses were occupied by a number of families, and workers from the coal mine. One such family was Bob Calvert, his wife and in-laws the Adams'. They ran cows and pigs on the cleared area around the mill. They sold milk to the miners who lived at Charming Creek, and made butter which they sold at Ngakawau. Others who lived on site were Jack Cornes (married to another daughter of the Adams'), and the mine ostler Mr Martin, who also had a wife and family. The rest were mostly mine workers and lokey drivers who lived on site in huts during the working week and went home for weekends. The Ngakawau gorge was quite popular with tourists and visitors, many from overseas arrived at the mill by tram, and then headed to a track opposite the mill that led to a lookout. Bob Calvert often made money acting as a guide.³²

Mumm's Mill

In 1937 W.J. Mumm took over the mill intending to re-furbish the plant. When this turned out to be too expensive he moved the mill 1.5 km towards the coal mine. This site became known as Mumm's Mill.

Mumm's Mill processed logs at this location from 1940 until about 1957.³³ At the site were a feed shed and stables, and a water race that carried sawdust from the mill into Charming Creek. Logs were transported to the mill using an overhead cable system powered by a steam hauler, and then transferred to a bush tramway, where they were hauled by horse or rail tractor. A wood fired boiler provided steam to power the mill and logs were taken through a breaking down saw and then a breast bench to be cut to size. This site also had a planer providing dressed timber to frame mine trucks to supply the local Buller coalfields market. Bogies were used to take the timber down the line to Ngakawau. A Fordson rail tractor and a Union Foundries rail tractor were used by Mumm to haul timber.³⁴ Timber was supplied to the Charming Creek Mine and also the Westport - Stockton Coal Company. The timber came down from the mill twice a day on a separate tram and bogies. It was then loaded by hand onto railway wagons and taken down to the Ngakawau Railway Station with the coal. The transfer to railway wagons occurred at a 'timber loading bank' at the junction between the Charming Creek tram and the company's private siding at Ngakawau.³⁵

There was a hut on site at Mumm's Mill, but due to its remote location the four to five men who worked at the site chose to travel to work each day up the tramway from Ngakawau in a 'stylish converted Ford Model A car'.³⁶

²⁹ See copies of the Memorandum of Association of the Charming Creek-Westport Coal Company Ltd, and The Charming Creek-Westport Coal Company Ltd Prospectus, both issued 24/5/1926 - in Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai West Coast *Tai Poutini* (DOC West Coast Conservancy) Archives.

³⁰ The Charming Creek-Westport Coal Company Limited, Directors Report and Balance Sheet, October 1928, in DOC West Coast Conservancy Archives

³¹ See Mahoney *op cit.*; and refer to the DOC West Coast Conservancy Sawmill Register

³² Mahoney 2003 (1985); Interview with Robert Calvert c.1980 in Lands and Survey Department File 8/7/4/4/1 Charming Creek Walkway Historical Research. Oral history interview with Bob Calvert 4/3/1993 by Les Wright DOC West Coast Conservancy Oral History Archive; file HHA-11-02-04 WCB-1. For an account of a tourist trip see article by Elsie Thompson September 1934, reproduced in Mahoney 2003 (1985).

³³ Oral history interview with Bill Mumm, 3/2/1981 by K. Johnson, NZFS. DOC West Coast Conservancy Oral History Archive.

³⁴ Mahoney 1998. *op cit.*: 159; Mahoney 2003 (1985). *Op cit.*; and refer to the DOC West Coast Conservancy Sawmill Register

³⁵ See New Zealand Railways Corporation file 22832 pt1.

³⁶ Mahoney 2003 (1985). *op cit.*

Operations at Mumm's Mill ceased when the tramline closed in 1958. The mill moved further north with access off the road from Seddonville. This mill cut until 1971, which was around the time the New Zealand Forest Service (NZFS) were encouraging sawmills to operate outside of state forests because of the fire risk. It shifted again to a site at Waimangaroa.³⁷

5 Developing the first mine—1927 to 1929

The focus of work during the development phase of the Charming Creek Coal Mine was setting up surface facilities at the mine entrance, beginning the drive to the coal seam, and upgrading the tramline.

By the end of 1927 huts for the workmen and a blacksmith's shop had been built. The haulage tunnel to reach the coal seam was also underway.

In 1928 a seam of hard coal 12 ft thick was reached by a level stone-drive, 8ft by 7.5ft and 10 chains in length. By the end of this year a small quantity of coal had been mined.³⁸

Contrary to initial plans, a tram was decided on as the means to transport coal (as opposed to water and fluming). It was completed to the mine by 1929, and was used for both timber and coal transport. During the extension of the tram from Watson's Mill to the coal mine entrance, the whole tram was reconstructed with grades and curves being reduced.³⁹

The tramline went directly into the mine. Coal was blasted off the face using the board and pillar method of extraction and shovelled into 1.7 tonne coal trucks. These were brought to the surface using horses and then taken by lokey along the line to Ngakawau.⁴⁰

A temporary loading chute was erected at Ngakawau and 1.7 tonne trucks brought the coal between the mine to the loading chute.⁴¹ The large unbraked trucks used to transport the coal to Ngakawau necessitated installing an upgraded centre brake, and the addition of a special brake car as a back up system on each load.⁴²

6 Unionism and the tribute system

After the death of Watson in September 1928, the organisation of the network of business interests of his estate was seen to by Mr. W.T. Slee and Walter Leitch who were appointed trustees of the probate. The leases and licences were officially transferred by way of sale to the Charming Creek Westport Coal Company Limited 4th December 1929.⁴³

If the death of Watson was not enough, on 17th June 1929 an earthquake centred on Murchison, and measuring 7.8 on the Richter scale, shook the northern part of the South Island. While in towns, chimneys toppled and water mains burst, remoter regions such as Charming Creek also suffered damage. While not significant, the quake held up improvement work on the siding at Ngakawau.⁴⁴

The realities of the Great Depression (1928-1935 were the worst years), began to hit West Coast coal mines hard. Not only was there a lack of work but the shipping trade, a significant user of high grade bituminous coal, was gradually switching its fleet to oil. In the late 1920s tensions between miners fighting to keep their jobs and mine managers struggling to stay in business began to emerge as co-operative mining or tributism surfaced. Tributism was a system whereby miners took responsibility for working a designated area and then sold the coal to the owner at an agreed price per ton. It was a scheme especially favoured by coal owners who were in financial trouble. Unionists voiced opposition to tributism, seeing it as

³⁷ Oral history interview with Bill Mumm, 3/2/1981 by K. Johnson, NZFS. DOC West Coast Conservancy Oral History Archive. Mahoney *op cit.*; Mahoney reported that in 1985 logging in Charming Creek was still occurring and the logs were being transported to the Waimangaroa site that was operated by the Mumm family until 1982.

³⁸ See AHJR 1927, 1928; Mines Department file MD 1 20/7/106 1 Royalty Westport - Charming Creek Coal Co - 05 July 1929 to 22 March 1946.

³⁹ See AJHR 1928; AJHR 1929.

⁴⁰ Mahoney *op cit.*

⁴¹ AJHR 1929

⁴² Mahoney *op cit.*

⁴³ Legislative Department file 1930/113 144.

⁴⁴ Public Works Department file: Charming Creek Coal Company Siding 1919 to 1953.

undermining collective agreements miners had spent years agitating for, and also because often it led to unsafe working environments as coal was obtained as quickly and cheaply as possible.⁴⁵

With belts being tightened and threats of mine closure, in December 1930 the struggling Charming Creek-Westport Coal Company (CCWCC) informed the union that the company would be unable to resume work under the 'old conditions' after Christmas, implying that the tribute system was favoured. Accordingly, in the New Year a group of tribute miners began to work at the mine. This group, and a second one, gave up before long, with the CCWCC citing union intimidation as the cause.⁴⁶ It seemed the CCWCC was not going to succeed in their attempt to introduce tributism to the area. An article in the newspaper during April in 1931, reported that the mine had opened but was only being worked by the mine manager and the underviewer.⁴⁷ Looks were deceiving. In May, CCWCC once again tried to work the mine by tribute with a party of 15 single men from Reefton.

This triggered a swift response from other miners in the Buller, in what was later called the '*first concerted effort by the miners to rid the coalfields of tributism*',⁴⁸ and at 4pm 26th May, about 200 miners and union officials from the Stockton and Millerton Mines began a trek up the Charming Creek tramway to meet the tributors and to persuade them to go home. They encountered the tribute miners as they were getting ready to leave for work. After some 'very plain speaking', the tribute workers were given 'ten minutes to clear out'. The tributors were escorted back to McNarn's Hotel at Ngakawau where a meeting between the union officials, the mine manager and directors was quickly arranged under the watchful eye of local police. No agreement could be reached and a riot almost broke out outside the hotel. Beating a hasty retreat, the tributors were escorted to Westport by the police, in cars provided by the CCWCC under a hail of 'Irish confetti' (i.e. stones).⁴⁹

These actions prompted the CCWCC owners to express concerns for their business, property and lives. The police too, feared further unrest. The Government was also concerned that the incident would spark widespread union backlash with coal miners, watersiders and seamen, especially on the back of the recently approved Finance Act which sanctioned a 10% reduction in wages. Rumours regarding the unrest flew with the West Coast described as on the brink of mob rule. On the strength of this forty policemen were sent to Westport and multiple charges were laid against the union leaders and four miners accused of being 'disorderly' after the Ngakawau meeting at McNarn's Hotel.⁵⁰

The only active union support came from the Westport watersiders who refused to handle Charming Creek coal declaring it 'black'.⁵¹ The matter continued to bubble away as late as July 1931. In response to a request from the United Mine Workers, the New Zealand Alliance of Labour placed an embargo on coal from both Charming Creek and the Cascade mine at Denniston. Both mines were working on a tribute system. The Prime Minister became involved and said that the watersiders' refusal to load the coal was a challenge to constitutional government. There was a lot of conflicting news about these events, and lengthy discussions took place over the matter, but eventually the embargo was lifted.⁵²

However the efforts of miners at Charming Creek are viewed – be they a hailed victory, or scorned as 'an example of bully boy tactics' – within days of the protest the tribute men were back at work at Charming Creek, and tributism spread rapidly to other parts of the West Coast.⁵³

⁴⁵ Richardson, L. 1995 *Coal, Class and Community*: 225-226

⁴⁶ Richardson op cit.: 226-227

⁴⁷ Crawshaw, N.1996. *From Clouds to Sea. 100 years of Coal from Millerton and Stockton*: 59

⁴⁸ Richardson op cit.: 226

⁴⁹ Crawshaw op cit.: 60; Richardson op cit.: 227-228

⁵⁰ Crawshaw op cit.; Richardson op cit.: 228-229

⁵¹ Crawshaw op cit

Stoppages caused by the change to tribute mining did not help the financial state of the CCWCC. They had numerous problems paying the required royalty to the Mines Department for their coal lease and the rent for their private siding rights was frequently in arrears. From late 1931 until 1934 the company was in continual negotiations with creditors and the Crown over the payment of debt, on a number of occasions mentioning voluntary liquidation as a possible way out of the situation.⁵⁴

Throughout this period, correspondence shows that the Mines Department still wanted to retain their asset (Charming Creek-Westport Coal Company's debt), threatening numerous times that they would take legal action. On 17th April 1934 CCWCC director, Wilfred T. Slee, applied for relief for the monies owed under the Coal Mines Act and the Finance Act. The Government finally agreed to defer payment for five years from 1st of April 1934. While relief was at hand on one front, there was a further set back in July 1934, when the Stockton Company placed a restriction on the sale of Charming Creek coal nuts, complaining that Charming Creek Mine was price cutting. Later in October, another disaster of a more sombre note occurred when the suspension bridge over the Ngakawau River collapsed as the lokey and a rake of coal trucks were crossing it. The mine manager, who was riding on the trucks, was killed. To maintain operations, the bridge needed to be rebuilt and necessitating further requests for rent suspension.⁵⁵

When 1939 came around and the deferred payment was due, once again disaster struck and an extension was requested. On 24th March a lokey and rake of trucks had jumped the line and went over into the creek. The locomotive was a complete wreck at loss of £1150. It was essential to replace the engine to maintain their coal output and a replacement was cited at a cost of between £1700 and £2000. They were fortunate to have the deferred payment postponed until September 1940 (along with payment to State Coal Mines of £1580:10:7). While the debt was not cleared until 7th March 1941, it stands testament to the eventual success of the venture.⁵⁶

7 Consolidation of the first mine—1930 to 1942

By 1930 it seemed that coal production was finally beginning to increase. Developments were going ahead with wooden bins, as part of a screening plant, constructed at the junction between the tramway and the siding which linked to the New Zealand Railways (NZR) system at Ngakawau (see photos 7 and 9). Coal was brought down from Charming Creek and tipped into the bins which held 580 tons of coal. The bins had rotating screens which sorted the coal into slack and nuts. A boiler drove the screens and also showers which were established there later.

Coal was loaded from the bins into 'Q' and 'L' type NZR wagons, each holding about 6-8 tons of coal. Coal in the Q wagons went to Westport and most was shipped to Wellington.⁵⁷ In 1930 the CCWCC appeared confident of producing a profitable output in the near future in spite of some difficulties. One difficulty was the necessity of using the big 1.7 ton mine trucks working right up to the coal face. Ventilation was a problem so a small sirocco fan was installed. Trouble with the internal-combustion rail tractors was also reported and other transport was considered.⁵⁸ In response to the difficulties with the rail tractors, an F-class loco (F839 built in 1885) was purchased from the Railways Department.⁵⁹

The dispute over tribute mining at the start of 1931 reduced coal output for the first part of the year.⁶⁰ Due to the gradients in the mine they were

⁵² See Bollinger Papers, Bollinger, Conrad Vickers Irvine, 1929-1975: MS-Papers-2151-316 Cascade and Charming Creek Tribute Dispute; *Dominion Press* 17/7/31. Miners Dispute. Move for Settlement. Tribute System. Conflicting News

⁵³ Richardson op cit.: 230; Crawshaw op cit: 60; A large amount of material about this period of dispute has come to light during the course of this research (see the Bollinger papers), and could not be detailed here.

⁵⁴ See Mines Department file, MD 1 20/7/106 1 op cit.

⁵⁵ Public Works Department file: Charming Creek Coal Company Siding 1919 to 1953

⁵⁶ See Mines Department file, MD 1 20/7/106 1 op cit.

having trouble using the 1.7 ton. capacity trucks, an alternative to use two different sized trucks in the mine was unprofitable. Above ground an improvement in transport was achieved using the steam lokey on the tramway from the mine to the timber mill.⁶¹ In 1932 and 1933 work involved developing dip areas, pillar extraction and improvements in ventilation.⁶²

In 1934 further difficulties hindered development. There was no power for pumping in the mine and the suspension bridge over the Ngakawau River was swept away in a flood. Campbell F. Schadick, Buller County Engineer, designed a replacement. Construction began in January of 1935 and was completed by 3rd of February. Three shifts of workers operated every 24 hours to complete it.⁶³ Another F-class locomotive (F155 built in 1886) was bought from NZR.⁶⁴ Also in 1935 a workshop for the maintenance of locomotives was built opposite the bins on the other side of the line CCWCC (see photo 8). This workshop had a lathe, boring machine, blacksmith's forge and a small steam engine.⁶⁵ Also during this year the 'Fordson' tractor that worked on the upper portion of the tramway near the mine entrance was replaced by a steam lokey.

In 1936 a new Ruston & Hornsby 42 horse power diesel lokey was installed on the lower line between the Ngakawau bins and Watson's Mill. This required three bridges on this section of track to be strengthened and all the metal parts of the suspension bridge were treated with anti-corrosive solution.⁶⁶ This locomotive notoriously had numerous crashes while working on the tramway.⁶⁷

In around 1938 the CCWCC purchased a Union Foundry rail tractor. Different from the standard design it was painted bright red and came to be known on the bush tram as the 'red terror'.⁶⁸ Underground a 'main and tail' haulage system was installed to haul coal from the head of the old dip to the surface (see photo 6). Longer distance underground haulage made the large trucks difficult to handle and at the end of the year preparations were made to alter the gauge underground from 3ft 6in to 2ft (0.6m gauge line) to use small trucks (700 kilograms [1.5 tons]) underground and the large trucks were used on the surface tramline. Coal was brought to the surface in the small trucks by a rope haulage system powered by steam winches (using a coal fired boiler). The small trucks ran along a high level siding, and coal was tipped into a set of bins, a similar system to that seen at Ngakawau.⁶⁹

In 1940 extensive boring operations revealed an additional 15 acres of coal on the southern side of the property.⁷⁰ A new design of rail tractor was ordered from the Union Foundry, and the manager of the foundry, Mr Vosseler, made a special trip to Charming Creek to see it in action. This double-bogie unit would have been the fourth Union Foundry tractor at Charming Creek. However it was too slow on the line and had transmission problems and was returned without payment.⁷¹ Developmental work began in 1941 to open up the southeast part of the lease and in 1942 a new dip drive to provide an additional access road to the mine was commenced.⁷²

8 Charming Creek—'a hell-hole of a place'

Working in a mine may seem an unpleasant prospect on its own, but working conditions at Charming Creek were uniquely uncomfortable and hazardous. This was not necessarily to do with mining per se, but with the infamous tramline down the gorge. Both surface-men who worked the trams and maintained the lines, such as those in photo 11, and miners, the tram's morning and evening human cargo, suffered buffets of all types

⁵⁷ Mahoney op cit.

⁵⁸ AJHR 1930

⁵⁹ Lands and Survey Department File 8/7/4/4/1 Charming Creek Walkway Historical Research.

⁶⁰ See Table 1

⁶¹ AJHR 1931

⁶² AJHR 1932, 1933

⁶³ AJHR 1934, 1935; Sinclair 1991 op cit.: 69

⁶⁴ Lands and Survey Department File 8/7/4/4/1 Charming Creek Walkway Historical Research.

⁶⁵ See Figure 16; AJHR 1935; Mahoney 2003 (1985) op cit.

⁶⁶ AJHR 1936

⁶⁷ Mahoney op cit.

⁶⁸ Mahoney 1998 op cit.: 159

⁶⁹ From AJHR 1938; Mahoney 2003 (1985).

⁷⁰ AJHR 1940

⁷¹ Mahoney op cit.

⁷² AJHR 1941, 1942



Photo 6: From left: Jack Rogers, Eddie Nicholson, Charlie Turnbull, seated and Jimmy Jones, leaning on tractor. At the entrance to the first mine some time after 1938. BUIST COLLECTION



Photo 7:
The bins at Ngakawau in 1945, showing coal bins and the high level siding. Note the trestles leading to the tipper at the top of the bins. NZR Q-wagons were shunted underneath the bins for loading and then hauled to the mainline at Ngakawau. The workshop is to the right.
ATL PASCOE COLLN 1356¹/₄,
WAR EFFORT COLLECTION

weather, and the ever present threat of an accident. There were many recorded accidents on the tramline (photo 10 is an example).

One of the worst occurred 1st October 1934. A suspension bridge collapsed when anchors holding the cable pulled out of the rock as the coal trucks crossed. The mine manager Sandy Marshall was riding the buffer on the last coal truck, usually the safest place to be because you could step off easily. The lokey and most of the rake of tubs were across the bridge when the accident happened, all except the last few where Sandy Marshall was. He fell to his death into the river and was swept away. George Hunter, who was driving the lokey at the time recalled some years later:

*The mine manager never had a show. The whole anchorage came in from behind him. I was hooked onto one of the pylons and was lucky not to be cut in half by the cables. I still have the marks on my body from that day.*⁷³

During the construction of Irishman's Tunnel workers were carrying out blasting using a car battery to set off the shots. One of them was connecting wires to the second shot, not realising that the wires were still connected to the battery, and the shot blew up in his face. He survived but was disfigured for life.⁷⁴ Another story, this time about a runaway on the line in 1939, is recounted about a miner who woke up with his mate in the coal train on their way back to Ngakawau to find that no-one was on board. They managed to jump off into the gorge below the suspension bridge just before the train slammed up against the cliff after failing to take a bend at the 'twin bridges'.⁷⁵ It is likely that this is the same accident that the CCWCC reported to the Mines Department. The company said on 24th March 1939, that a locomotive and rake of trucks had left the line and went over into the creek. The locomotive was a complete wreck with a loss of £1150.⁷⁶

In 1946 another fatal accident happened when a slab of rock fell on a train as it was taking workers back to Ngakawau at the end of the day. Eddie Nicholson was killed and Bill Meek severely injured after being thrown onto rocks down the bank, just before the swing bridge.⁷⁷ For all the accidents there were also many near misses. George Hunter, who drove the Fordson lokey on the tram, said that on one occasion he encountered a huge rock in the middle of the line. Luckily it was sandstone and the tram had enough momentum and so the rock was smashed straight through the centre as the lokey went through.⁷⁸

Down in the mine there were also risks, especially related to rock falls at the face, poor ventilation and fires. In 1948 work on a new stone drive was stopped due to an accident to both men working in the drive.⁷⁹ If it wasn't the general problems caused by operating a bush tram in a difficult environment, or the common-place mining hazards, miners at Charming Creek also had to contend with travelling to and from work via the coal tram.

Some miners lived in huts down the valley in 'hut straight', but most travelled on the tramway each day in coal trains from Ngakawau. (For an example of accommodation see photo 12.) During this journey miners were exposed to all weather conditions for about an hour and a 'huge suspension bridge that sagged down as the [rail] tractor went across'. They sometimes had to lie on top of the coal and move onto the buffers between the trucks to go through tunnels.⁸⁰ Men from Seddonville who worked the mine had to leave home in the dark to travel to Ngakawau by car and for a while, until the road was formed, they simply walked over the hills.⁸¹ Bill Crawford

⁷³ Sinclair 1991: 69.

⁷⁴ Oral history interview with Bob Calvert 4/3/1993 by Les Wright - DOC file HHA-11-02-04 WCB-1. Calvert states this was in 1938, but the construction of the tunnel did not take place until 1945.

⁷⁵ Mahoney op cit.; Sinclair op cit.

⁷⁶ See Mines Department file, MD 1 20/7/106 1.

⁷⁷ Harmon op cit.: 12

⁷⁸ Sinclair op cit.: 70

⁷⁹ AJHR 1948

⁸⁰ Mahoney 203 (1985): Copy of newspaper article "Recollections of Charming Creek".

⁸¹ Harmon op cit.: 12.



Photo 8: Inside the workshop at Ngakawau. WCC 487/8, NO DATE



Photo 9: View of the tipper at the top of the Ngakawau bins.

worked at the mine from 1933 to 1947. He describes travelling to work in the coal tubs:

*In those days Charming Creek was a hell-hole. If it was raining in the morning you were soon wet through from water pouring down the bluffs. It was like going through a waterfall. There was no bath house at the mine and you rode home filthy. If a truck had a bent axle you really got the judders. You can't imagine what that was like unless you'd been on one.*⁸²

It seems that walking over the hills in some instances was the best option. In 1945, J.D. Pascoe visited the mine in his capacity as war photographer, and commented:

*I met miners who travelled over bush ranges on foot to avoid the risk of pneumonia after working in a warm mine and riding through a gorge on an open truck in which waterfalls spray wet the ones who used it.*⁸³



Photo 10a
Coal miners being transported from the Charming Creek mine at the end of a working day. Photograph taken in 1945 by John Pascoe. ATL 1/4-001229-F

Living near the coal mine appeared a much safer and more convenient option. However, for young men this was not desirable because of the lack of opportunities to socialise and participate in sports teams. Because the men were transported from the mine in coal trucks at the end of the work day and the long travel distances it seemed futile to provide the men with a bath house at the mine site, which was common at other mines. A shower was eventually established at the bins at Ngakawau. In 1948 after the road from Seddonville was formed, a bathhouse was installed at the second mine site which must have greatly improved working conditions.⁸⁴ Originally the bath house had an attendant who lived on site in a hut during the week and went home in the weekend. By 1960 there was no attendant; probably relating to the reduction of staff due to the change in mining methods.⁸⁵

⁸² Sinclair 1991: 69.

⁸³ J. D. Pascoe 1952 *Land Uplifted High* p.72 in Maclean, C. 2003 John Pascoe p.155.

⁸⁴ AJHR 1948

⁸⁵ Harmon op cit.



Photo 10: Recovering gear after an accident on the Charming Creek Tramway. A bogey hangs precariously off the edge of the tram, behind the waving figure.

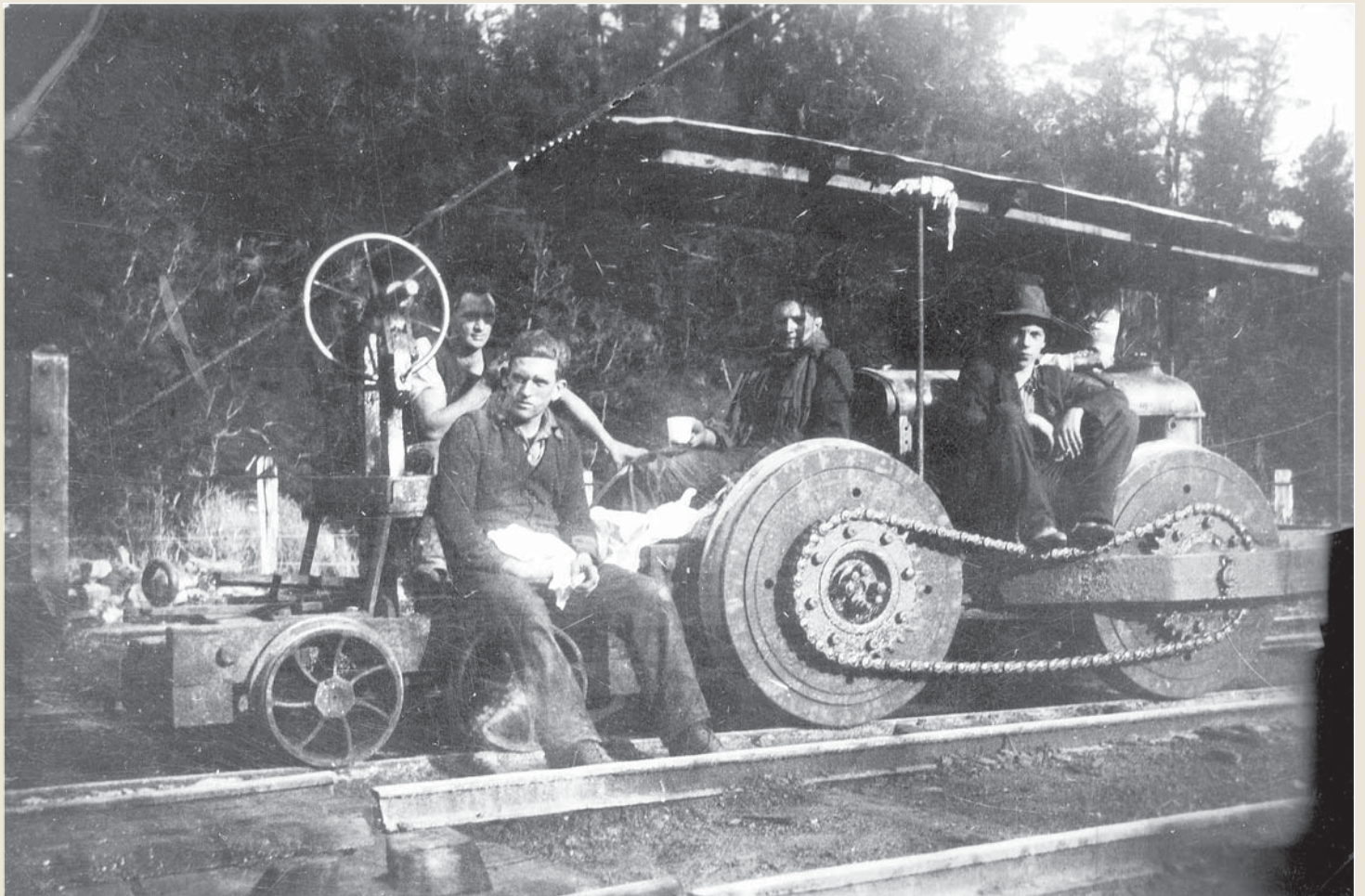


Photo 11: Lokey crews stop at the sand sheds for lunch

When proposals surfaced to introduce hydraulic mining the union was opposed, in spite of the vast improvement in safety and working conditions the new techniques offered. Union concerns hinged around potential jobs losses and whether coal production could be sustained or increased by fewer men. When in 1952, hydraulic mining was officially established at Charming Creek the company reported that it should have been introduced long before this. According to management the scheme was unable to be expanded earlier due to the industrial troubles with the miners union over working conditions.⁸⁶

9 Agitation for a road and the demise of the tram—1943 to 1958

In the Charming Creek Valley there always seemed to be an issue of contention simmering away. The construction of a road linking Seddonville with the mine proved to be one such issue, and turned into a lengthy battle for both miners and the company.

The matter of a road to the mine was mooted as early as 1931, with the Goldfields Estimates/Public Works Fund listing an item titled *Track, Seddonville to Charming Creek Mine*. In response to the proposal, E.J. Scoble, Inspector of Mines, wrote to the District Engineer of the Greymouth Public Works Department voicing his opposition to the road:

*This is another new item for which the County Council is asking for £300. The construction of the track referred to is not warranted, as there already exists a locomotive road leading from the township of Hector to the mine. The track, if constructed, would only be used by persons living at Seddonville, who may, in the future, be employed in the Charming Creek Mine.*⁸⁷

The road idea was dropped during the 1930s only to resurface in the 1940s where debate revolved around the health and safety of workers who had to travel to and from work in coal tubs.⁸⁸ At one stage it was touted as a good idea because if workers used the road instead of the tram, it would free up the tramline to cart more coal in the evenings. When the mine portal and surface plant was shifted in 1943 it made a longer journey to get miners and coal to and from the mine. All this added weight to the call for a road.

Support for the idea gained momentum, and by 1943 debate centred over the road's route. Commencing at Nikau was suggested as a more central and shorter option but it was also felt that Seddonville was a better for the miners with sections available and a school that had just opened. In December 1943 the Minister of Mines was informed that the Seddonville route had been agreed upon and was asked to approve a grant of £120 to the Buller County Council to survey it. The Buller County Council approved the grant and by February the line for the first one and a half miles had been pegged and graded.⁸⁹

Further survey work was delayed by weather, but a proposal to continue the road was eventually made in August 1944. It detailed a road starting one and a half miles from the Seddonville Railway Station to a point approximately five chains from the CCWCC's Bins. The cost was estimated at £25,500. Positive spin-offs were emphasised such as it would also open up large tracts of timber. This line of argument proved fruitless—the Director of Forestry wrote in January 1945, that he believed 'so far as forestry potential was concerned, the standing timber was not of sufficient value to warrant the expenditure on road access'. Potential for the road to be used by other mines in the area was also quashed.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ AJHR 1952

⁸⁷ Mines Department file MD 1 21/8/118 1.

⁸⁸ Harmon 1976:12.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

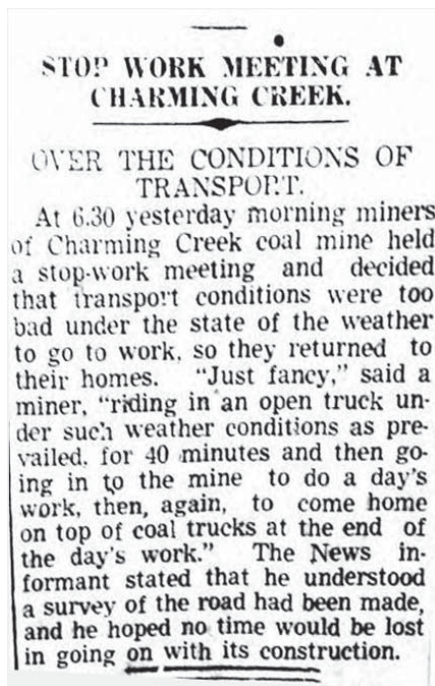


Figure 3: *Westport News* 12th of April 1945

Stalemate. On one side, the nay-sayers emphasised that opening up the road would have little economic value for the public. On the other, the idea of providing miners with safe transport continued to exert pressure on the Government. The United Mine Workers of New Zealand strongly favoured the road citing it as a ‘moral obligation’. The Charming Creek miners stopped work on a number of occasions in protest (see table 1 and figure 3). Local residents, other mining interests, sawmilling, farming industries and other businesses all added their support for the proposal. It was also argued that the Charming Creek Mine had at least another 29 years productive life, which was double a previous estimate, and so justified the construction of the road.⁹¹

Meanwhile the Public Works Department estimated the cost of the road closer to £31,730. After much pressure in October 1945, Cabinet finally approved the grant to be taken from the Public Works Fund. By January 1946 a workers camp was being erected at Seddonville and several men were engaged in preliminary road work. Throughout pressure was still directed at the Government⁹² and the rock fall on the tramway that killed E. Nicholson moved the coroner to request that construction of the road be expedited.⁹³

Progress was often held up by machinery breakdowns, lack of workers and wet weather.⁹⁴ Further construction difficulties included outbreaks of fire along the route, wet weather causing the black rock of the road bench to become greasy and unworkable, and the need to construct two new bridges to cross Chasm and Charming Creeks.

There were approximately 35 men who worked long days and weeks on the road and lived in huts at the Mokihinui Mine. At the Charming Creek end of the road there was a large swampy area with trees that needed clearing and 30 chains of 3ft wide and 4-5ft deep drains were required.⁹⁵ In June 1947, a new estimate of the cost of the road reached £64,327.⁹⁶

Table 1: Transcript of telegrams concerning industrial problems caused by the delay in constructing the Charming Creek Road 1945-1946. Mines Department file, 1931-1947.

DATE	TELEGRAM MESSAGE
11 April 1945	CHARMING CREEK IDLE STOP WORK MEETING TO PROTEST AGAINST INACTION RE PROPOSED ROAD SEDDONVILLE TO MINE + SLEE ++
26 April 1945	CHARMING CREEK MINERS IDLE AGAIN AS A PROTEST RE ROAD STOP THIS WILL BE A REGULAR OCCURANCE UNTIL ROAD CONSTRUCTION IS COMMENCED + SLEE ++
7 June 1945	CHARMING CREEK IDLE AGAIN TO PROTEST AGAINST INACTION RE NEW ROAD + SLEE ++
9 July 1945	CHARMING CREEK IDLE AS PROTEST RE ROAD + SLEE ++
7 August 1945	CHARMING CREEK MINERS REFUSE TO RESUME WORK UNTIL THEY HAVE FAVOURABLE DECISION REGARDING NEW ROAD STOP PLEASE EXPEDITE AND REPLY + SLEE+
7 August 1945	AT A MEETING THIS MORNING CHARMING CREEK MINERS DECIDED TO CEASE WORK UNTIL SOME DEFINITE ASSURANCE IS GIVEN ABOUT THE ROAD TO THE MINE + TYLER++
16 August 1946	CHARMING CREEK IDLE BECAUSE OF CONDITION OF ROADWAY BETWEEN NGAKAWAU YARD AND CHARMING CREEK BINS STOP BUS DRIVERS REFUSE TO RUN BUS AND MEN REFUSE TO WALK 200 YDS STOP PLEASE PUSH COUNTY COUNCIL

⁹¹ Mines Department file MD 1 21/8/118 1

⁹² See Table 3

⁹³ See Mines Department file MD 1 21/8/118 1.

⁹⁴ See Table 3 and Figure 1.

⁹⁵ See Harmon 1976 op cit.: 55.

⁹⁶ See Mines Department file MD 1 21/8/118 1.

Subsequently, CCWCC engaged the services of T.O. Bishop of the New Zealand Coal Mine Owners' Association, to write to A. McLagan, Minister of Mines, conveying a proposal for the State to purchase the mine. The Minister replied that the purchase price was unreasonable and requested the Mines Department to make a detailed evaluation of the property which took place in September. The valuation report is a significant document not only for highlighting challenges faced by the CCWCC, but because it records the extent and type of infrastructure of the plant, and also details the working of the mine (see Appendix 3, photo 13 shows the surface workings of the mine at the time).

Whether mooting the proposal was forced by the strength of the miners unions, the nationalism of the coal mining industry in most other mines, or as a piece of calculated speculation as the road was near completion, it is hard to say. After a visit to the mine, the Minister made an offer of £44,000 which was turned down by CCWCC who began to explore other options to deal with their aging transport system.⁹⁷ The road was finally completed in 1948, with metalling finished by September. With estimates of a £1000 per annum bill (from 1949) to maintain the road, the option of imposing a road user levy was investigated by the Mines Division of the Department of Energy. Even though the CCWCC had advocated for the road, and probably had designs to utilise it for transporting coal, they refused to pay stating that they already paid £82 in rates and they couldn't afford any more. An employee of the Mines Division recounted:

At an interview with Mr. W.T. Slee, representing the Charming Creek Coal Company, I was told his company did not use the road, although the NZ Road Services transported Charming Creek workmen to and from the mine. This was usually done by two 29 seater buses and a light car to transport the wet-time men. Mr Slee said he would also call a meeting of the company members to consider contributing towards road maintenance.⁹⁸

It was expected that once the road was completed coal would be trucked out. In 1950 the tramway was reported to be in a very poor state with rails out of level and alignment. CCWCC stated that they planned to address this by changing a few of the rail joins every weekend.⁹⁹

In July of 1953 a rumour spread that the Charming Creek Coal Company would soon cancel their sidings at Ngakawau and transfer their loading point to the Mokihinui mine station yard, five miles away. Concerns were raised over the capacity and costs of the Mokihinui mine yard, and it was suggested that coal loading could more economically be done at or near Seddonville where a loop for 50 wagons could easily be provided. The Resident Engineer recommended to NZR that the Mokihinui site was not to be extended and Charming Creek management was advised. CCWCC did not favour the Seddonville option, and offered to make a significant capital expenditure on the Mokihinui site to construct a siding. This was turned down. After mulling over the matter, the CCWCC replied to the NZR in 1953:

After a complete review of all the facts for and against, it has now been decided to retain and use our present transport system to Ngakawau. We wish to thank you for your assistance in regard to proposed arrangements at Seddonville. Time alone will decide whether our decision is a correct one but on all the facts now available a change would not be beneficial.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ See Appendix 3; and Mines Department file, MD IC 11/35 1 Purchase of Charming Creek Coal Mine, 11/8/47 - 13/3/58; see Richardson 1995: 256-257 for national context on the state of the coal industry at the time.

⁹⁸ See Ministry of Energy Mines Division file 21/8/118 2 Track Seddonville to Charming Creek Mine, 1948-1958.

⁹⁹ See Mines Department op cit.

¹⁰⁰ See correspondence in New Zealand Government Railways Corporation file 22832 1.



Photo 12: Hut at Charming Creek, exact location unknown.



Photo 13: Buildings at the 2nd entrance to Charming Creek Coal Mine – pre 1956.

Despite this stance, later in the decade the poor repair of the siding at Ngakawau had CCWCC once again assessing their options. Three major slips were thought to have occurred on the tramway in the lower Ngakawau Gorge at this time.¹⁰¹ So, in 1957 the CCWCC was openly on the hunt for another siding location to get their coal to the rail line. By August 1958 the tramway from the mine to the bins at Ngakawau had deteriorated further, leaving road transport with a siding at Seddonville as the only option.¹⁰² The tramway probably stopped being used at this time.

10 Second mine entrance—1943 to 1958

While debates over alternative access raged, improvements were made at the mine itself. In 1943 in order to reduce the amount of underground haulage, the mine site was moved and the tramway extended above ground to the mouth of the new second mine entrance. This included moving surface installations. New bins were erected at the new site with two sidings running beneath them (see photos 14 to 17).¹⁰³ Transfer of all the surface equipment was finished in 1944.¹⁰⁴ Transport on the tramway was further improved when in 1945 a stone drive was completed in Ngakawau Gorge (a tunnel for the tram) and in 1946 when extensive repairs on the suspension bridge were undertaken.¹⁰⁵ An F-class locomotive (F154 built in 1880) was borrowed from the NZR. This was used at the Ngakawau bins end of the tram.¹⁰⁶

During the 1940s, John Pascoe, author, mountaineer, and later inaugural secretary of the Historic Places Trust, and Chief Archivist, had a posting as an official Department of Internal Affairs photographer taking images of New Zealanders at war. During 1944 he visited coal mines in the Buller taking some of his most memorable images.¹⁰⁷ One of the mines he visited was Charming Creek and the photos he took are amongst the more iconic images that survive of the mine from that time. Photos 7 and 53 in this report are part of this collection.

Many companies tried sourcing second hand lokeys after the Depression. In 1947 CCWCC followed this trend when it bought a fourth hand Price 16-wheeler, modified with small wheels for steep grades. Too worn out it was abandoned after their experienced staff could not fix it.¹⁰⁸

The Mines Department 1947 valuation report (see Appendix 3) of the Charming Creek mine described the tramway in a very matter of fact way:

The line throughout is very badly aligned, and the curves in particular, are not on a standard radius, most of them being put in by eye. In addition, the line has been laid with an assortment of 20 lb. to 56 lb. rails, and most of them are old rails from bush trams. These rails are bent over at the end and a large number are not perfectly straight, with the result that the mine trucks bump and jerk at every joint crossed, and also bump from side to side. A number of curves require to be altered to a true radius and super elevated. Owing to these difficulties, speed has to be reduced considerably. The grades are severe in places, ranging from up to 1 in 16. On the steeper grades, a wooden centre rail is used and the load braked by centre rail trolleys. For the first half mile from the Ngakawau bins, the grade is fairly good but requires regrading to obviate a steep pinch on to the bin top. The alignment could be improved with advantage. The next mile is through the gorge and would entail expensive rock work to improve it. The line crosses over the Ngakawau River on a 116 ft span suspension bridge, and then proceeds through a tunnel 8 ft wide and 9 ft high and

¹⁰¹ See report in Nature Conservation Council file 26/4/80 Walkways - Charming Creek, 1979-1980.

¹⁰² See New Zealand Government Railways Corporation file 22832 1 op cit.

¹⁰³ Mahoney op cit.

¹⁰⁴ AJHR 1944, 1943

¹⁰⁵ AJHA 1945, 1944

¹⁰⁶ Lands and Survey Department File 8/7/4/4/1 Charming Creek Walkway Historical Research. 1980-1987.

¹⁰⁷ Maclean 2003:155-159.

¹⁰⁸ Mahoney 1998. op cit.: 173; The boiler from this lokey was used at the second mine site to heat water for the miners bath house. The chassis sat at the Ngakawau bins for years until it was carted away for scrap - J. Staton pers. comm. 2008.

around precipitous country to Watson's old mill. From this point, the grade is fairly good, but as stated before, the line should be realigned and the curves trued up. There are several bridges on this line, most of which require repairs.

The report also furnishes a very complete list of plant, buildings and general gear associated with the operation. For example all underground haulage was carried out by seven horses. There were two McCormack & Deering diesel lokeys, one Ruston, one Ruston & McCormack, and one 20 hp steam engine. Mine buildings included an office and attached compressor shed, one hut, one cottage (for the fan attendant), the blacksmith and tub repairer's workshop, stables, a stone dust shed, a fan house shed, a feed shed and a newly built magazine. Special note was made of the fact that there was no bathhouse on site (see Appendix 3 for the full report).¹⁰⁹ The first and only bathhouse was built in 1948 after the road from Seddonville was completed.¹¹⁰

It was proposed to develop the east side of the coal lease by the hydraulic sluicing method.¹¹¹ Work began on the new hydraulic mining system in 1950 and a dam to store water was built at the head of Charming Creek. Electricity was also introduced to the mine in this year by a diesel engine to drive an electric pump in the dip workings.

In 1951 the surface dam was completed, a shaft sunk and underground flume and bins were installed.¹¹² Production at the mine was affected by the Waterfront Strike, which limited space on coastal shipping vessels. Coal was transported by rail to Canterbury. The strike also caused a delay in the development of the hydraulic mining system. There were also problems with the water supply dam.¹¹³ It was soon apparent that dry spells would affect feasibility of the operation, and it was decided that water would need to be diverted from Chasm Creek as soon as possible to sustain the supply.

Hydraulic mining was officially introduced into the mine on the 14th April 1952. It replaced 'old' methods of trucking coal to the surface by using water, a hydraulic lift, underground flume, and pressure pipelines fed by two storage dams (see figure 4 for how the system worked in the 1980s).¹¹⁴ Development of the new scheme was delayed by disputes with the Miners' Union who wanted clarity over working conditions.

More catastrophe beset the mine when a fire broke out on 29th August destroying most of the mine buildings including a small generator which provided power for an underground pump.¹¹⁵

By 1953, hydraulic mining was being seen as very successful especially for reducing production costs and enabling the extraction of a higher coal tonnage per worker. However there were problems separating the sandstone from the coal. Also during this year pipes were installed and water races were cut to divert water from Chasm Creek in a combined scheme with the Cardiff Coal Company.¹¹⁶

The Chasm Creek water scheme was completed in 1954 and hydraulic mining was extended. A settling pond was constructed at the old mine mouth to recover fine coal, and a sludge pump was installed to pump the fines into a 30 ton bin also built at the old mine site.

One significant development was planning the installation of a hydraulic hoist or lift which began in 1954. The hoist was designed to solve problems transporting the coal from the mine to the surface. A Dunedin company was engaged to assist in its development specifically for CCWCC and it was thought to be the first of its kind for use in a coal mine in New Zealand.

¹⁰⁹ See Mines Department file MD IC 11/35 1 Purchase of Charming Creek Coal Mine, 11/8/47 - 13/3/58

¹¹⁰ AJHR 1948.

¹¹¹ AJHR 1950.

¹¹² AJHR 1951.

¹¹³ CCWCC Annual Return to Shareholders 1951, copy in DOC West Coast CO Archives.

¹¹⁴ Mahoney 2003 (1985). op cit.

¹¹⁵ AJHR 1952; Harmon 1976. op cit: 11-12.

¹¹⁶ AJHR 1953

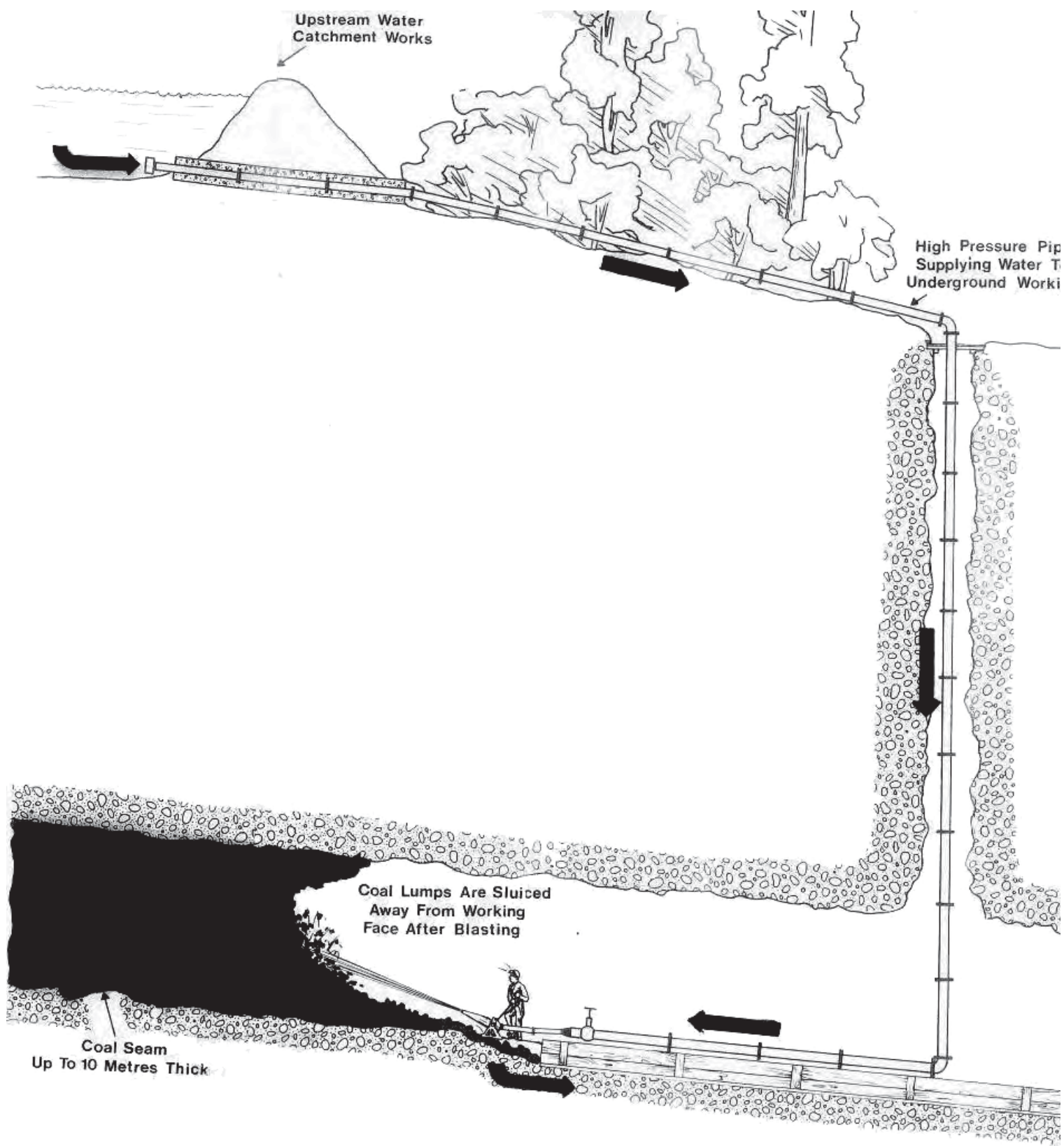


Figure 4: Diagram of the way the hydraulic mining at Charming Creek worked (NZFS).

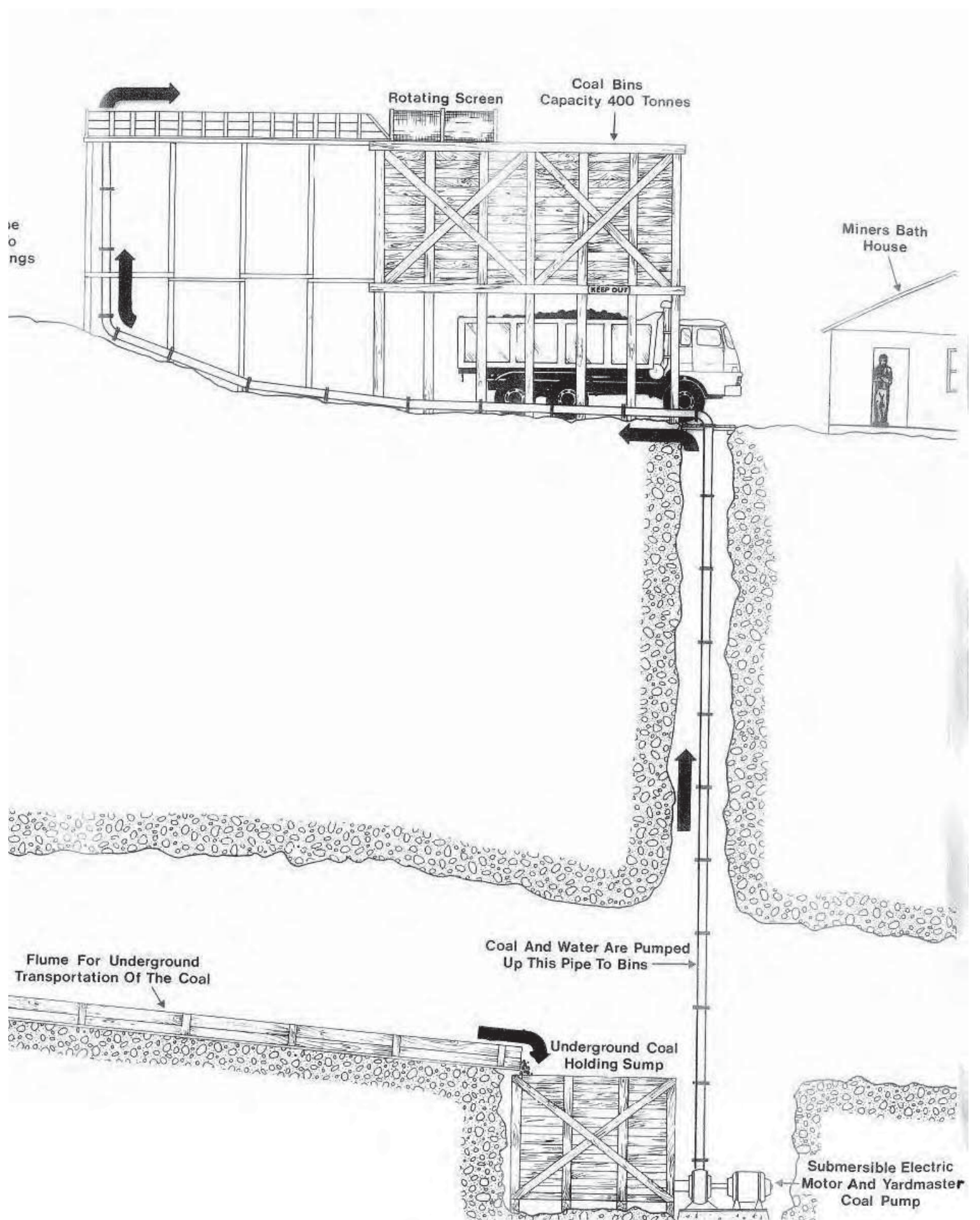




Photo 14: Another view of the second mine site from across Charming Creek. The mine portal is to the left of the image, out of shot. The workshop/blacksmith is obscured behind the tall tree in the centre. The bins are at the right of the complex of buildings.



Photo 15: Danny Laurie with Speedy hauling a rake of trucks back to the mine from the bins at the 2nd Mine in 1948. The workshops are on the right, the winch shed is behind the tubs in the middle of the image. NATIONAL PUBLICITY STUDIOS

It worked by lifting coal from underground by water to a bin at the surface via a vertical shaft about 100 ft high (see photo 15 and 16 for views of the operations). An F-class locomotive (F2, built in 1876) was bought from NZR for use at the Ngakawau end of the tramline.¹¹⁷

In 1955 the settling pond was upgraded to a settling dam which was put in a few chains west of the drive for the hoist. The dam was to hold the coal fines that drained out of the mine along with any excess water.

A gravel pump, driven by a Ford V8 engine, was installed to pump the coal into newly built 50 ton bins.¹¹⁸ The hydraulic hoist was installed in 1956 and it was said that excellent results were obtained. In 1957 a 15in water pipe was installed to assist with mining pillars in the old north section. An Atlas diesel compressed air plant was installed on the surface of the mine and, at the face, seven Victory air rotary boring machines were being used. It was reported that the company had “decided to scrap locomotive road haulage and adopt truck and road haulage from the mine bin to the railway siding at Seddonville”.¹¹⁹



Photo 16: Second mine portal some time after 1943. Note the trucks being hauled out by a winch and wire rope.

¹¹⁷ Lands and Survey Department File 8/7/4/4/1 Charming Creek Walkway Historical Research. 1980-1987. Most of the F class engines worked the Ngakawau bins end of the line.

¹¹⁸ AJHR 1956, 1955, 1954

¹¹⁹ AHJR 1957

¹²⁰ The New Zealand Railway Observer 1987.

¹²¹ Mahoney op cit.

¹²² AJHR 1958, 1957

On the final day that the tramway was used, in 1958, the two shunting tractors were taken for joy rides and the top shunter used at the mine was left at the bins end, and vice versa.¹²⁰ After the tramway closed the screening equipment at the bins at Ngakawau was transferred to the Charming Creek mine. The bins themselves and the workshop were left to become derelict until they were demolished in 1968.¹²¹ Surface staff was reduced when the conversion to road transport was made.¹²²



Photo 17: Coal being loaded into trucks from bins at second mine in 1956



Photo 18: Bob Philp opening the pressure valves on the hydraulic hoist.

11 Closure of the mine—1959 to 1986

Although the late 1940s proposal to nationalise the Charming Creek mine was never realised, the idea was still seen as viable. On the 4th of March 1958 Charming Creek miners made a deputation to C.F. Skinner, Minister of Lands & Agriculture and F. Hackett, Minister of Mines & Labour. It said that under the previous Labour Government the policy had been to nationalise the larger coal mines of New Zealand, and Charming Creek was one of the few large privately owned mines left in the Buller. It also said:

...workers of the Charming Creek mine hoped the new Government would continue the policy of nationalisation and give consideration to the taking over of the Charming Creek colliery.¹²³

No agreement was ever reached, but this proposal seems to signal concerns over the ongoing stability of the enterprise. Beyond a few problems with stopping sandstone from blocking the main flume, the mine steadily continued with production through the 1960s, extracting pillars left by earlier mining.¹²⁴

In 1970, eight staff were employed at the mine. Reports of the operations stated that over 1 million gallons of water were used each day to transport

Photo 19:

View of the surface installations at the mine, post 1956. The men in the picture are walking along the water pipeline that fed into the underground hydro system. The hoist and the flume to the bins are seen above the stables in the top left of the image.



the coal about 1 mile under ground to the hoist, from where the coal is lifted 100ft to the surface (see figure 4, p.28).¹²⁵

Over the years it is clear that transport was the biggest challenge for the Charming Creek Westport Coal Company mine at Charming Creek. After all of the troubles the company had with its own rail system and with establishing sidings it was a decision beyond their control that eventually closed the rail line. From the 11th of June 1974 the CCWCC's private siding rights at Seddonville were renewed for another 10 years. But they were foiled again in April 1976 they learnt Cabinet had approved closure of the Ngakawau-Seddonville section of the Seddonville branch of the rail line.

¹²³ See Mines Department file MD IC 11/35 1 Purchase of Charming Creek Coal Mine, 11/8/47 - 13/3/58

¹²⁴ AJHR 1959 to 1965.

¹²⁵ New Zealand Coal (Autumn) 1970: 15-17.

Recognising CCWCC's private siding restricted them from closing the line without three months notice or negotiation, Cabinet informed the company they would like to close the line from July. In May, CCWCC made their case, asking for a five year reprieve to extract all the coal, as they believed it could be worked out in six years. They stated it would cost about \$50,000 to relocate their facility to another siding and that Ngakawau had no facilities to accommodate their operation. They continued:

*The Charming Creek Mine is the last privately operated under ground mine in the Buller, it has in recent years had the highest production per man in New Zealand. As we have had to sell on the same market as State coal mines, but without their subsidy on production, (approximately \$5 per tonne last September) ours has always been marginal operation from a profit aspect. This year, our best for the last seven, our margin is less than \$2 a tonne although our miners are the lowest paid in the Buller at \$24.70 per day total, some \$8-\$10 below their counterparts in State coal mines. The extra road haulage and double handling of our coal to Ngakawau will cost more than our margin and make our operation uneconomical and force the closure of the only unit in the Buller producing coal at no cost to the tax payer. If our tonnage has to be produced from State Coal Mines to fill these orders, the cost to the taxpayer would be in excess of \$60,000 per annum. All reserves of coal available to this mine are proven and developed and at the present rate of production the mine will be worked out and closed in six years, in fact if the rail link could be given a five year reprieve we would endeavour to extract all the coal in this period.*¹²⁶

CCWCC was formally advised again on the 11th of June 1976 about the closure. The CCWCC informed the NZR that it would require them to construct a high level loading bank at Ngakawau¹²⁷ and alter the yards to enable clearance to load wagons using road transport. Dumping facilities for 500 tonnes of coal would also be needed near the loading bank.

A stay of execution was forthcoming, and official records show that the Ngakawau - Seddonville rail line was closed on 1 May 1981. The Charming Creek Mine persisted however, struggling on into the early 1980s (views of mine and surface workings see photos 20 to 22). Since the 1970s the market for the coal had contracted. In 1976 about 6000 tonnes of coal was going to Westport, 3000 to Christchurch, 1000 to Dunedin and 200 to Wellington.¹²⁸

In 1985 the coal was mostly being used by the Karamea Dairy Factory and the Tarakohe Cement Works. In October 1985, the mine's parent company Coal & Energy NZ Ltd, went into receivership.¹²⁹ The Westport receiver said he had been trying to find a buyer for the mine, licences and coal stockpiles for some time. The distance from markets and the high sulphur content of the coal prevented this opportunity. Eventually the Karamea Dairy Company bought the coal stock pile, and the rest of the plant and licenses were put up for sale separately. By this stage the mine only employed four staff. On the 1st of May 1986 the Charming Creek Mine officially closed.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ From file New Zealand Government Railways Corporation file 22832 1 op cit.

¹²⁷ Which would enable 6 Q wagons to be accommodated alongside the bank at any one time, and with facilities to hold a further 20 wagons.

¹²⁸ New Zealand Government Railways Corporation file 22832 1 op cit.

¹²⁹ See newspaper articles dated early May 1986 in Lands and Survey Department File 8/7/4/4/1 Charming Creek Walkway Historical Research. 1980-1987. Coal and Energy N.Z. Ltd formed in August 1981 as a result of restructuring from its parent company, Bridgevale Mining - a company that would later change its name to Brigdecorp in 1987. The Charming Creek-Westport Coal Company Ltd was the founding company for the Brigdevale Group in 1965. Bridgevale Mining Ltd was formed in 1981.

¹³⁰ See newspaper articles dated early May 1986 in Lands and Survey Department File 8/7/4/4/1 Charming Creek Walkway Historical Research, 1980-1987.



Photo 20: The Charming Creek Coal mine in the mid-1980s before it closed.



Photo 21: A coal truck leaving the mine, late 1984



Photo 22: Crushing coal before pumping it to the surface, August 1985

12 Formation of the Charming Creek Walkway and ongoing management

As the Charming Creek Coal Mine entered its last decade, plans surfaced that would see it develop in a totally different direction.

The tramway at Charming Creek had lain abandoned for about 16 years until 1974 when the Department of Lands and Survey were approached by the Westport Lions Club with an interest to create a walkway.

Recommendations were made to allow the Lions to do this and for Lands and Survey to provide them with funds (especially for bridging). It also was noted that Crown land on either side of the Ngakawau should be made a Scenic Reserve. Lands and Survey soon realised that to open up the Charming Creek track would be costly and the project became a long-term plan.

Initially the focus was to open up the track in the Lower Ngakawau Gorge as far as the suspension bridge. By the 11th of September the Lions Club had cleared the track to the first tunnel and by the 3rd of October they were within half a mile of the bridge. On the 19th the Club had cleared to the bridge and requested a bridge inspection by the Ministry of Works (see photo 23 for state of the bridge at this time).¹³¹

Recognition of the scenic beauty along the walkway prompted discussions about making the area a scenic reserve. As with much of what happened at Charming Creek this proposition was not straight forward. During discussions in 1975, a different proposal surfaced for a thermal and hydro power scheme at Charming Creek. The impacts of this idea were debated with regards to the proposed Charming Creek Scenic Reserve. The power station proposal was seen by some as 'disastrous' and, concurrently, the Mines Division opposed the creation of a scenic reserve due to their interest in the coal measures in the area. Further up Charming Creek the land was designated as State Forest, bringing it under the control of the NZFS, and it was discussed whether this should be included in the scenic reserve as well.¹³² While all this debate was happening a New Zealand Forest Service scheme - 'the Beech Project', a visionary initiative to record historic sites in areas of beech forest tagged for logging - was taking place

The project was lead by NZFS Technician Jim Staton, and assisted by Bruce Hamilton, and included a survey of the State Forest in the headwaters of Charming Creek. The rudimentary inventory, history and photographic record of features at Charming Creek provided the first recognition of it's historic values. Charming Creek was given a rank of '1' which meant it was deemed worthy of development for recreation and historic interest. Photos 23 and 25 were taken as part of this inventory work.¹³³

A photographic inventory of the track was made in about 1978, this time by the Lands and Survey Department. The inventory consisted of around 30 images of bridges, (most in a bad state of repair), diversions around slips and some historic machinery.¹³⁴

Support and enthusiasm for the walkway came from the Buller County Council and the Westport Borough Council, lending weight to the New Zealand Walkway Commission's official proposal to develop a walkway which was submitted in October 1979. This proposal involved four main deviations from the alignment of the tramway. Three deviations negotiated around slips in the Lower Ngakawau Gorge and the fourth around the coal mine (which was still operating) and tunnel, in order to lead walkers safely to the road at the Seddonville end of the track.

¹³¹ See Department of Lands and Survey file 13/132 WC- Charming Creek Scenic Reserve, 16/10/1974-7/10/87.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ See Section 6, Photos, Historic Resource, Description and Ranking, Beech Project, 1975; Jim Staton personal comment 26/5/2008.

¹³⁴ Charming Creek Box held in Department of Conservation, West Coast Conservancy Archives.



Photo 23: Looking across the bridge over the Ngakawau River, around 1975/76. J. Staton



Photo 24: Remains of boiler at Watson's sawmill, Beech Project 1975.



Photo 25: Bridge west of tunnel (probably Irishman's Tunnel), showing lack of stringers and concrete foundations in ca 1978.



Photo 26: Rock slip over tramway (between 'bridges 3 and 4'. Walkway follows stone steps over slip ca 1978

There were concerns about the impact of the walkway on the area's natural values, and the Nature Conservation Council prepared a report identifying at risk species with recommendations about how to mitigate impacting them. Constructing boardwalks over some of the plant species was suggested as a way to not disturb them while still providing them with the right moisture and light conditions they required. With this advice taken into consideration, the proposal for the walkway was then resubmitted in February of 1980.¹³⁵

From 1980, Lands and Survey and the NZFS took over walkway development, each taking responsibility for different sections—the NZFS to the north, from the Seddonville end, Lands and Survey to the south from Ngakawau. The boundary was the first swing bridge at the northern end of the track.¹³⁶

It was proposed to get the first phase of the project completed by December 1980 and historical research was conducted to provide information to interpret the area and walkway to the public.¹³⁷ Much of the initial work involved track clearance (manuka cutting), as walking space on the track was only shoulder width at the time. The track was cleared to the original formed tram width (from 2m to 4m depending on the section of tram).¹³⁸ By September 1980 all of the materials had been lifted in to complete the bridging, board walks, overhead shelter and a viewing stand.¹³⁹

Most of the work on bridges involved re-decking, using the stringers of the existing bridges, which originally had only sleepers and rails on them.¹⁴⁰

In 1981 the suspension bridge over the Ngakawau River was replaced by Fijian Army recruits in the NZ Army as an engineering exercise. This was a significant development on the walkway as it previously was a safety and financial barrier to the opening of access to the entire track.¹⁴¹

Lands and Survey and NZFS inspected the work in September 1982 to look at the development required to finish the second phase. Design ideas for shelters, walkway entrances and for interpretation signs were submitted. Paul Mahoney, employed by the NZFS did a lot of significant contextual work and spent a lot of time on historical research and in working out methods of interpretation (photos 27 and 28 are images from such trips to the area). An interpretation plan was devised and proposed. The proposal prompted a debate as some were opposed to walkway money contributing to the costly reconstruction of machinery to use as an interpretative display stating that historical photographs would provide visitors with the same information. While finalisation of the interpretative plan was pending, work commenced on track formation and bridging.

A compromise was reached where NZFS supplied the text for the pamphlet and the material for interpretation displays. Lands and Survey manufactured all the signs and assisted with the interpretation panels. In September the Ministry of Works were holding all of the materials for the Charming Creek Bridge, which appeared to be the last major barrier to safely opening the walkway to the coal mine.¹⁴²

The second phase of the walkway was officially approved in August 1983, and \$4000 was allocated to a joint project with Lands and Survey and the NZFS to construct a bridge over Charming Creek, which was completed in the first part of the following year. While all seemed to be progressing well, trouble was brewing with access through the coal mine at the Seddonville end. It was hoped that this would be resolved and the walkway would be able to be marketed by Christmas 1984.¹⁴³ However, with no resolution

¹³⁵ Nature Conservation Council op cit.

¹³⁶ John Green personal comment
27/5/2008.

¹³⁷ See Department of Lands and Survey file
8/7/4/4/2 WC- Charming Creek Walkway
Historical Research, 1980-1987

¹³⁸ John Green pers.comm. 27/5/2008

¹³⁹ See Department of Lands and Survey file,
8/7/4/4/1 WC- Series: 649 Acc/Box/Item:
CH750/11d Charming Creek Walkway -
Historical Research, 3/7/80-7/10/87

¹⁴⁰ John Green pers.comm. 27/5/2008.

¹⁴¹ Sinclair, 1991 op cit.: 69

¹⁴² See Department of Lands and Survey file,
8/7/4/4/1 WC- op cit.

¹⁴³ Ibid.



Photo 27: NZFS staff and others inspect the Union Foundries rail tractor on a field day at Charming Creek, January 1983.



Photo 28: Hayward Bridge 1st January 1984, prior to upgrade.

forthcoming, a new section of track from the car-park at the Seddonville end was constructed along the true right of Charming Creek, to a point opposite Papa Tunnel. Here a bridge, designed by NZFS staff, was built to cross the creek and join up with walkway. Unfortunately the bridge was not sited to take into account periods of flood, and consequently it was swept away during a flood some time in the mid-1980s (see photo 29 and 30).

Not long after this, a change in mine management produced a turn around in attitude towards the public accessing the walkway through the above ground part of the coal mine, so the track through this area was reinstated.¹⁴⁴ The focus of work during this period was to open the track for public access, and the first historic preservation works were also being carried out. A 1984 NZFS track prescription provides information on some of the modifications that occurred and the care that was taken with the historic fabric. Along the track, old sleepers were left in place and a surface of coal fines was filled in flush to cut down on wear and tear on them from pedestrian traffic. Dog spikes were hammered flush instead of being pulled out.¹⁴⁵

Late in 1984 shelters at Watson's Mill and the walkway entrance were under construction at the northern end, but interpretation panels still remained to be erected. Three display panels were designed in 1985 and a number of recommendations were made to keep vegetation clear of the main historic sites and features. A significant project of relic restoration and reinstating was approved, but most of it does not seem to have occurred.¹⁴⁶

On the NZFS part of the track, major works were carried out at the Mumms Mill. The site was generally cleaned up and a lot of debris was pushed off to side of the clearing, beyond the old mill site. The fly wheels from the stationary steam engine were retrieved from the mine and replaced on the engine which was then mounted on a concrete pad. NZFS carpenters from Reefton were brought to the site to construct the shelter over the steam engine and a log bogey display was also set up (see photos 31 and 32).¹⁴⁷

After the mine closed down in 1986, safety issues around the site were addressed, shafts were sealed (such as that near the bridge to the mine), and two portals into the mine were closed over to prevent visitor access.¹⁴⁸ The Department of Conservation (DOC) took over managing the whole site in 1987. In the years since, the vagaries of nature have at times played havoc with infrastructure. In April 1989 DOC received reports in Westport that the footbridge to Mumm's Mill and a section of track had been washed away. While the track had been washed away, the bridge was still intact, and was shifted and the track was realigned and repaired to access it's new site.

Over the following weekend, it rained heavily and workers found the bridge washed out and a further 40m of track destroyed. While on site DOC workers noticed that Charming Creek, in the vicinity of the old mine, was running un-naturally low. They discovered the area around the old settling ponds was badly flooded, with water pouring out of the mine drain. The cause of the problem was underground workings which had been breached from the surface by a cave in below Charming Creek, and the creek was pouring into the mine and out the drain. A mines inspector was contacted to advise about the problem, but the damage had already been done. A whole section of original tram, structures at the settling ponds, the old mine site and walkway that had once crossed the area was destroyed. The track was closed for a number of months while the mine drainage was repaired and track re-routed.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ John Green pers.comm. 27/5/2008.

¹⁴⁵ See Charming Creek Box held in Department of Conservation, West Coast Conservancy Archives; John Green pers. comm. 27/5/2008.

¹⁴⁶ See Department of Lands and Survey file 8/7/4/4/2 WC- op cit.

¹⁴⁷ Jim Staton pers.comm. 6/5/2008 - Jim designed the shelter; John Green pers. comm 27/5/2008.

¹⁴⁸ John Green pers.comm. 27/5/2008.

¹⁴⁹ John Green pers.comm. 27/5/2008; DOC file RVA-09-07-11-06 vol. WCB-1- Report to the Conservator 19/4/1989.



Photo 29: The mine entrance in 1984 during problems over accessing the Seddonville end of the walkway – a gate has been put up and a sign on the shed on the left reads: “You are now trespassing SCRAM” .



Photo 30: The ill-fated NZFS bridge built over Charming Creek on the diversion track from the Seddonville end car park. Photo taken from where the track joins the tramline.

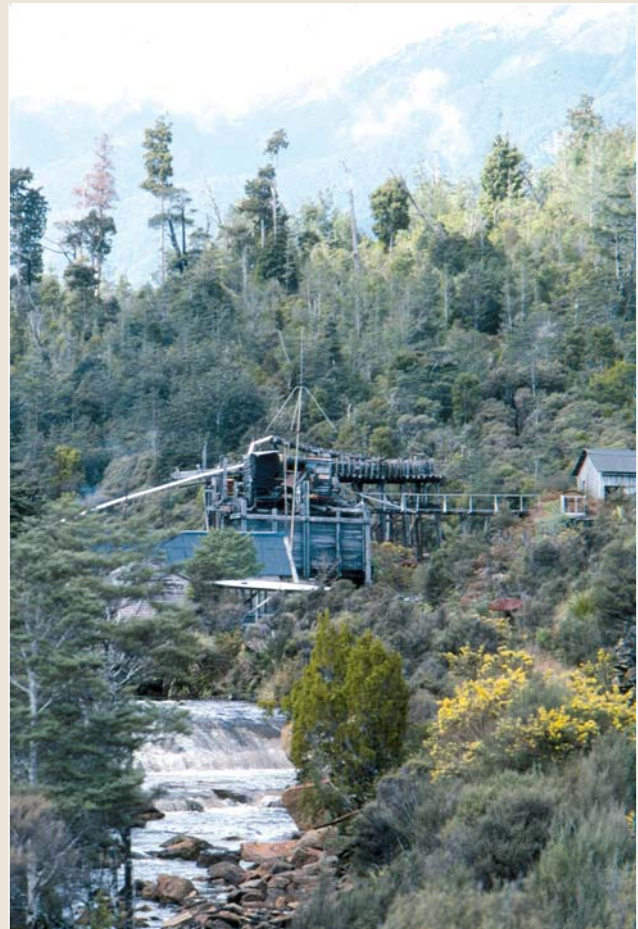


Photo 33: View of the Mine from the bridge on the diversion track, 1984/85.



Photos 31 and 32: Before and after shots of the Mumm's Mill site during the construction of the shelter over the mille steam engine.

In 1999, in response to a serious mishap to a young boy on one of the bridges near Mangatini Falls, a significant amount of work (funded through the Green Package) was undertaken on number of structures along the walkway.¹⁵⁰ In more recent years, numerous flood events and landslips have dogged the southern end of the track, leading to track closures on many occasions. Visitor safety issues closed visitor access through Papa Tunnel in 2006.

Most of the work in the recent past has been upgrading safety barriers, and replacing structures (such as the last original bridge in 2007), and building a shelter over the Ruston Lokey at the Ngakawau Bins end of the track (2006). There are now over 60 structures on the walkway.¹⁵¹

Today DOC manages the Charming Creek Walkway for its historic values and as a recreational visitor asset. An number of features in the vicinity are managed for their historic value,¹⁵² including three tunnels and one bridge no longer used by visitors. Nineteen other walkway bridges are managed by DOC including the Ngakawau Suspension bridge, which is recognised as utilising the old historic abutments and concrete anchor blocks.

Mumm's Sawmill as a whole is managed but Watson's Sawmill is not. Watson's Mill Shelter, Mine Creek Shelter and the Water Shelter are not managed but work has been done to maintain historic issues. The Water Shelter is recognised for having historic anchors and tie downs. The Watson's Mill Turntable is recognised as a 'tramway feature'.

Six interpretation signs are currently managed on the walkway. None are erected at the Coal Mine sites or car park at the Seddonville end as originally proposed. The Charming Creek Coal Mine is actively managed for its historic values and so is the Fan House as a separate asset. Information on the coal industry at Charming Creek is provided at the Ngakawau end of the track.

Table 2: Charming Creek Walkway features which are managed for their historic value.

TECH ID NO.	NAME	NOTES
095153	Charming Creek Walkway	
098608	Tramway Features	Other historic structure (includes middle brake rail and Watson's Mill turntable)
045787	Bike Squeeze Bridge	Rotten historic bridge (no visitor use now)
024936	Northern Tunnel	
024937	Mangatini Tunnel	
024938	Irishmans Tunnel	
013664	Bins Shelter	Protective Shelter (Historic)
041397	Ruston and Hornsby Loco Shelter	Ngakawau end
042710	Ruston and Hornsby Loco	Ngakawau end
042713	Watson's Sawmill Boilers	
014111	Mumm's Mill Shelter	Protective Shelter (Historic)
024924	Union Foundries Shelter	Protective Shelter, near Mumm's Mill
042709	Union Foundries Loco	Near Mumm's Mill
042714	Mumm's Sawmill	Other historic machinery
042719	Old Hauler	Mumm's Mill
042717	Vertical Boiler (from mine)	Charming Creek Coal Mine
042720	Charming Creek Coal Mine Fan-house	Charming Creek Coal Mine
101557	Charming Creek Coal Mine	Charming Creek Coal Mine

¹⁵⁰ See DOC files, West Coast Conservancy QCM-0067 Charming Creek Walkway 16/12/97 to 11/12/98 and QCM-0100 Charming Creek Walkway, 28/9/98 to 8/4/99; Katrina Lett personal comment 28/5/2008.

¹⁵¹ RVA-09-07-11-06 vol. WCB-1, and RVA-09-07-11-06 vol. WCB-2, DOC.

¹⁵² See Table 2.

Assessment of Historic Heritage Values

Most historic places in New Zealand are assessed using a recognised heritage values system. It is proposed to assess the significance of this place using the criteria contained within the Historic Places Act 1993. The Historic Places Trust is the national authority in the assessment of the significance of historic places. The current Trust assessment criteria are used in its Registration Proposal form.

These criteria are:

Historical, cultural, aesthetic, archaeological, architectural, scientific, social, spiritual, technological and traditional significance or value.

For the purposes of this report these criteria have been amalgamated under three headings: Historical (historical, social); Physical (archaeological, architectural, scientific, technological); and Cultural (aesthetic, spiritual, traditional).¹

1. Historic Significance

The Charming Creek Tramway and associated industrial sites are of both national and regional significance. These historic features and sites represent two very important industries in New Zealand history which are linked to the development of West Coast communities and the economy. These industries are sawmilling and coal mining.

1.1 Sawmilling

The timber industry in New Zealand initially grew out of the need to clear land for settlement, but on the West Coast it became an integral support industry for all manner of mining operations. Accessible forest on the coast was targeted first, followed by forest in more difficult terrain after the turn of the century. The period of 1866-1914 is seen as the first phase of the timber industry on the West Coast. At this stage it was focussed on small locally based sawmill operations with a mainly locally targeted market. Later, from 1915 to 1932, the focus shifted and the West Coast became a major timber producing region with a large export orientated focus.

The West Coast has traditionally made a significant contribution to New Zealand's timber industry and at its peak from the 1920s to 1930s Westland production was about 20% of New Zealand's total production.² Like other mills of its time, the beginning of sawmilling at Charming Creek was fostered by the construction of railways, enabling ease of timber transportation, but also stimulating a demand for sleepers and construction products.³ In this context sawmilling at Charming Creek, was representative of the earlier relatively common type of sawmilling operation—concentrating on supplying sawn timber for the local domestic building market, and mining industry.

1.2 Coal mining

By the early 20th century coal mining was ubiquitous in Buller, with many settlements and most infrastructure being built to support the coal mining industry. In 1901 the State Coal Mines Act saw the establishment

¹ Copied from Egerton, R. 1998. Dumpling Hut, Milford Track, Fiordland National Park : Assessment of effects on heritage values of future management actions. Department of Conservation , Southland Conservancy.

² Sinclair, B. 1984. The West Coast Timber Industry 1915-1932; Town and Country Planning Branch Ministry of Works 1959. op cit.:101-122

³ See Roche, M. 1990. The History of Forestry: 127.

⁴ Morgan and Bartrum 1915 op cit.: 2, 31.

of large nationally owned coal mines, effectively doubling New Zealand's coal market by 1909.⁴ At the time when most coal mines were owned by the State, Watson and his fellow investors took a punt on opening what would become one of the Buller area's largest and longest lived private coalmines. The position of the mine, at the head of Charming Creek, posed numerous difficulties with transporting the coal. As with similar problems with sawmilling in the area, the Charming Creek-Westport Coal Company (CCWCC) was never shy of proposing and trying new methods to improve efficiency (and thus maximise profit). From the outset the CCWCC's ethos was made clear, as their first prospectus highlights, noting their intention to use water and fluming to transport coal from the mine.⁵ Over the years, the boundaries of tram construction were pushed, new systems of employment were initiated (tribute system of mining in the 1930s) and new technology implemented (hydro-mining and the hoist in the 1950s). The company were never totally wedded to remaining in control of the mine, and often sought to interest the State in taking it over, but with little success. It is clear that, as with any business venture, the coal mine for the company owners was always a means to an end – a way to make money. Ultimately, the ongoing success of the mine was not halted by the challenging topography that had challenged the venture since its early tram days. By the mid-1980s coal was no longer king. Oil had a definite pre-eminence, and the market for the high sulphur type of coal mined at Charming Creek, had shrunk markedly. Share markets were also weakening, with the cards being stacked for what would become 'Black Monday' with the 1987 stock market crash. Having survived the Great Depression, the Charming Creek coal mine could in the end, not overcome its isolation from markets, the closure of the nearby rail line, growing environmental concerns over the use of coal, and investors who wanted to put their money elsewhere.

While the mine may have been profitable for the company owners over the years, this was in no small part due to the efforts of the men employed to hew the coal and transport it down the tramway to Ngakawau. There has not been extensive research undertaken for this report on the minutiae of the relations between workers and mine owners, but from what has been done, it is apparent that dealings were not always the best. The reaction of miners to the tribute system and the actions taken by miners at the Charming Creek Mine in response to this system and working conditions (such as travelling to work on the tramway) were important events in the context of national union movements. The events of the 26th of May 1931 made newspaper headlines, prompting the expression of strong concerns, and stimulating a cascade of correspondence between mine owners, miners, water-siders and the government. As stated earlier, the Charming Creek Mine was the first site where New Zealand miners voiced their concerns with the tribute system of mining. While this is an important aspect in New Zealand labour and union history, the actions really had little impact on the spread of tributism through the coal mining industry. In later years, stop work action taken by Charming Creek mine workers to urge the completion of the road from Seddonville was seemingly more effective. The backing of the United Mine Workers of New Zealand union and local support no doubt helped their cause, but contrary to the situation during the Depression years, the scarcity of manpower in a period where the wartime effort to maintain coal production was important, almost certainly strengthened their arm. It probably also forced the hand of the mine owners leading them lobby the directly Government for the road completion.⁶

⁵ Although this never eventuated – See copy of the Memorandum of Association of the Charming Creek-Westport Coal Company Ltd, and The Charming Creek-Westport Coal Company Ltd Prospectus, both issued 24/5/1926 – in DOC West Coast CO Archives.

⁶ See section 3.9; Richardson 1987: chapter 9

1.3 The People

Robert T. Watson was a key figure in the development of the first sawmill, and later the coal mine. Watson is a good example of a local entrepreneur and was responsible for industry at Charming Creek becoming a notable member of the local community. The bush tramway originally developed by Watson is an excellent example of local innovation and engineering feats to cope with a harsh environment and reduce costs.

Two West Coast families were largely connected with the Charming Creek. Sawmilling was started by the Watson brothers and the tradition was carried on by the Mumm family. Other notable associations with the coal mine are Walter Leitch, former mine manager at Blackball during the 1908 strike, who was an investor in the company, and at one time a director. There were also numerous local identities who worked and lived in the area, both associated with the sawmill and the mine.

1.4 The Walkway

The formation of the Charming Creek Walkway represents one of the more ambitious endeavours embarked upon by Lands and Survey (later DOSLI from 1987 and LINZ [Land Information New Zealand] from 1996) and NZFS on the West Coast during the 1970s and 1980s. Separately these agencies tackled complex historic / recreation projects during the 1980s, such as the formation of the Ross Goldfields Historic Reserve and Walkway at Ross (DOSLI) and all the research, publication, interpretation and visitor infrastructure at Waiuta (NZFS). Charming Creek Walkway stands alone as a complex and significant joint project.

2. Physical Significance

2.1 Sawmills

The physical remains of the mills at Charming Creek are fairly representative of the timber industry mill on the West Coast. Compared to other actively managed sawmill sites, such as the Big River Sawmill, or the Waitahu water powered sawmill, they are not as intact. It must be stated however, that these two examples are among the most complete examples of sawmill sites in the country. When the sawmills at Charming Creek are compared with other sites in New Zealand, such as those listed in table 3, it becomes clear that there is still a reasonable amount of fabric left, especially at Mumm's Mill. While other mill sites, such as other West Coast examples, are much more intact, they are more remote, and the remains at Charming Creek provide more opportunity for public appreciation.

2.2 Coalmine

Generally most historic coal mine sites on the West Coast have few mine buildings remaining intact. (Table 3.) In the case of Charming Creek, there are two dilapidated huts, one hut in good condition, the chimney from the workshop, and the shell of the bathhouse. While other sites have better examples of some features (such as the fan house at Coalbrookdale), compared with other mine sites on public conservation land, Charming Creek has a one of the more complete range of mine remnants left. The range of mine sites in table 3 extends from small scale private mines such as Alborns, and Lankeys, to the larger mines like Denniston and Millerton, which were state owned in the latter part of their use. Charming Creek is the only medium scale mine managed for historic values.

There are very few other examples of once privately owned coal mines on public conservation land that are managed for their historic values, or sites that are so accessible. The sidings and bins site at the Ngakawau end of the track are still impressive and distinct in the landscape today. The coal mine remains at Charming Creek are representative of medium sized coal mine sites, but what makes the Charming Creek mine unique and significant is that it has one of the more complete assortments of mine features left on any coal mine site.

Table 3: Comparison of remaining features at coal mine sites on the West Coast

MINE	FAN HOUSE	BATH HOUSE	WORKSHOP	OTHER STRUCTURES	OTHER FEATURES
Denniston – Coalbrookdale	Y - brick, Sirocco Fan	X - only concrete floor	X	Y - chimneys from house sites	Rope road, portals, incline, coal tubs
Denniston	-	Y -not DOC land	-	-	-
Blackball	Y - concrete, poor condition	Y - shell, not DOC	X	X	Mine ventilation chimneys
Brunner	Y- brick housing only	X	X	2 Coke ovens, bridge	Brick and coke making remnants
Millerton	X	Y - shell - concrete and mortar (boilers in situ)	X	Town still remains, many house sites - privately owned	Rope road, portals, incline, haulers and jig
Charming Creek	Y - small Sirocco fan, shed that housed it has gone	Y - concrete walls remain	Y - chimney (at mine) chimney, inspection pit (at bins)	Chimneys, one mine building left (small hut), hut sites	Tram, 2 bins sites, portals, magazine
Alborns	X	X	X	X	Portals, tram, Leyland truck (winch)
Lankeys	X	X	X	Hut sites	Tram, mine portals, incline, and horse tram.

2.3 The Tramway

Timber trams

The establishment of sawmills and associated infrastructure such as trams, were influenced by a range of factors. These included:

- 1) THE RESOURCE - the amount of timber in the block.
- 2) DURATION OF ACCESS - Access to timber resources varied. Most cutting rights were issued by the Crown for a certain number of years, or negotiated with a private land owner. These often necessitated the payment of a royalty relative to the amount of timber produced. Sometimes larger companies had private land that could be logged when they desired.
- 3) CAPITAL INVESTMENT - what funds were available to set up a sawmilling venture. This influenced what plant and rolling stock was purchased, and what haulage and extraction systems were used.
- 4) AVAILABLE TECHNOLOGY - innovations and changes in technology, or up to date equipment often enabled efficiency gains. An example is the introduction of the geared lokey which could haul more over steeper grades than steam trains or horses.

- 5) TOPOGRAPHY – the lie of the land, in terms of access to the standing timber, and also to the market (usually a rail head or wharf). This impacted on how much trams would cost to establish and maintain.

New Zealand bush trams were in use by the 1850s, constructed with wooden rails and using horses as motive power. By the 1870s, as the sawmilling industry became more established, trams lengthened and steam engines were introduced providing more pulling power. At the turn of the 20th century geared bogie locos were developed in the United States which coped better with steep grades and sharp curves. The new technology was eagerly taken up in New Zealand, and local engineering companies began to produce distinct and original New Zealand designs. However, horse trams still continued in many places due to the costs involved and the restrictions derived from the landscape.⁷

It is an understatement to say that the transportation of logs to the mill and sawn timber to market were key aspects to the success of any sawmilling venture. In the early years sawmills were built close to timber stands to keep transportation costs down—trams were expensive to construct and maintain. From the 1870s when the railway network expanded into more remote parts of the country, sawmills shifted to be closer to the rail line. Railway construction also became a stimulus to expand the timber industry.⁸

By the time the 20th century dawned most of the easily accessible stands of timber had been felled and saw millers moved into more remote and rugged terrain. This often necessitated forming long stretches of bush tram to bring logs to the mill. The 45km of tram that serviced the Ellis and Burnard sawmill at Ongarue is a good example.⁹

In 1921 another technological innovation fostered a sawmilling revolution—the worlds first low cost farm tractors began to enter the market. Once again New Zealand built tractors were soon competing with imported models, and the success of rail tractors brought the era of the horse tram to an end. Rail tractors were easier on the track in terms of maintenance—as opposed to steam lokeys, cheaper and faster to run—compared to horses. One of the most successful, simple four wheel rail tractors was the Union Foundries Tractor made in Taranaki. With this new machinery some bush trams were constructed to the upper limits of tram technology, with tight curves and steep formations as extreme as a grade of 1 in 5. Braking was a critical and brake cars were common. Alternatively, on steeper sections of tram a centre brake rail was installed.¹⁰

It is often stated that as bush trams were usually only required for a short period of time they were characterised as having few earthworks (e.g. tunnels, cuttings, embankments); being of a rough and ready nature with regards to workmanship; rough, poorer quality materials were used; and steep grades were common.¹¹ While there were areas where the ‘rough and ready’ type of tram prevailed, especially trams associated with small short term milling operations, (such as the Catlins), this was not necessarily the case in other areas of New Zealand.

Consideration of trams on the West Coast challenges the idea that the rough and ready type of tram was ubiquitous. The trams constructed in the Grey Valley and near Moana, during the days of the ‘tram wars’, were substantial, lengthy pieces of infrastructure that included viaducts, cuttings and embankments. It is reported that one sawmill company employed a gang of 50 men to work solely on tram construction, and purchased steam

⁷ See Mahoney, P. 1998.

⁸ Guerin, Phil and Mahoney, Paul 1987. Tautuku Bad Luck Internal report, Department of Conservation, Central Office:11-12; Roche, M. 1990. *A History of Forestry*:127.

⁹ Mahoney, Paul 2004. Heritage Inventory: Ongarue Bush Tramway 1904. Internal DOC report, OLDDM-725001.

¹⁰ See Mahoney, P. 1998 for extensive information on this.

¹¹ Mahoney, P. 1991:79; Guerin, Phil and Mahoney, Paul 1987:33.

shovels to build trams.¹² A study of DOC managed sawmill sites reinforces the idea that the 'rough and ready bush tram' thesis should be challenged (see table 3).¹³

Rather than a generalised temporary form, trams from more substantial sawmill ventures fall into two types:

- 1) Mainline – this was the central arterial route through the block to be felled that serviced the saw mill. If the sawmill was in a relatively isolated situation, it also extended from the mill to the rail head, road or wharf. Mainlines were usually well built and engineered to a high standard, and it is common today to still see evidence of the tramway formation (cuttings and bridges) and even sleepers.
- 2) Spur lines or branch lines – branched off the main line and these facilitated access to stands of timber. In most cases these were temporary in nature with rails simply laid on top of logs with the tops squared.¹⁴

Constructing a well engineered mainline tram was a large scale investment in the future of a sawmilling enterprise. Such an outlay in capital expenditure was only justified if there was sufficient timber available. In many situations building a substantial mainline tram proved a sound investment, such as at More's Mill in Southland, and Ongarue in Waikato, which were used for 60 and 35 years respectively. Others, such as the splendid NZR standard tram and viaducts built at Port Craig proved to be wasted effort, as it soon became apparent that the extent of available timber had been greatly exaggerated. This mill (which was the largest and most technologically up to date of its day) only ran for 13 years.

From the survey of DOC managed bush trams around New Zealand (table 4), the tram at Charming Creek is the best in terms of the amount of fabric remaining on the tramway. There are considerable sections of rail, sleepers, sets of points, and more significantly, centre brake rail. The Charming Creek tram is one of the few that remain intact from mine and mill to the rail head. The presence of spur trams, branch lines, sidings and loading banks at Ngakawau and the original timber incline, all add to the completeness of the archaeological landscape.

While it is not rare for a bush tram mainline to be constructed to a high specification with extensive sections of earthworks (as demonstrated in table 4) the Charming Creek tramway still stands out as a significant technical accomplishment. For example there are many different kinds of tramway features visible, such as cuttings and tunnels. The tram itself pushed the limits of tram construction with sections with a grade of 1 in 7. Such steep sections are rare for mainline bush trams, and it demonstrates how the application of available technology (rail tractors and centre brake system) combined with engineering nous and ingenuity succeeded to overcome resource access issues in a challenging environment.

The integrity of physical remains and engineering on the tramway are both outstanding and rare. The tram, and associated mills and mines at Charming Creek, are also one of the best industrial archaeological landscapes of its type in New Zealand. It has a relatively complete suite of machinery from both the mill and mine eras, as well more importantly, the remains of lokeys and rolling stock.

¹² Guerin, Phil & Mahoney, Paul 1987; Mahoney, Paul n.d. 'Westland's Sawmilling History: Lake Brunner Sawmilling Company'; Staton, Jim n.d., 'Haupiri Steam Shovel Heritage Assessment'. Les Wright pers. comm.

¹³ Information obtained from following DOC reports: Mahoney, Paul 2004. 'Heritage Inventory: Ongarue Bush Tramway 1904'; Ritchie, Neville 2008. 'Central North Island (Ongarue) Rail Trail: A summary of the proposal'; Ritchie, Neville 2008. 'Heritage Inventory: Waitawheta Mill Site, Upper Waitawheta Valley'; Ritchie, N. 2008 personal comment; Mahoney, P. 2001. 'Sheridan Creek Timber Milling Sites' – Sheridan Creek <http://www.doc.govt.nz/templates/page.aspx?id=34147>; Bradley, K. & Egerton, R. 1994. 'Maori Beach Sawmill and Steam Haulers', Conservation Plan; Egerton, R. & Staton, J. 2006. 'Management Alternatives Analysis 1902 Johnston 'A' Class Locomotive and Mores' Top Mill site'; Breen, J. 1996. 'An Archaeological Site Survey of Port Craig, Waitutu State Forest'. Report to the Historic Places Trust, Wellington. Mahoney, P. 1990. 'A Report on the Port Craig Sawmill Wooden Viaducts'.

¹⁴ Breen & Nelson, 2006, part 2:8; For comparison, the branch trams on Ongarue tram were substantially engineered in their own right – N. Ritchie pers. comm. 24/7/2008.

Table 4: Comparison of DOC managed tram and sawmill sites from around New Zealand.

(For references see sources cited in footnote 13)

NAME	LOCATION	DATE (TRAM)	TRAM FEATURES	SAWMILL FEATURES	OTHER FEATURES
Ongarue Tramway and Spiral	Waikato CO	1922 to 1957	Earthworks: spiral cutting, spiral tunnel, cuttings, embankment; gentle grade. Long length: large network of trams; viaduct sites; bridge sites		Bush camps; branch trams.
Waitawheta Bush Tramway	Bay of Plenty CO	1898 to 1928	Sleepers; gentle grade; cuttings, bridge sites; turntable.	Demolished -foundations and building sites remain	Kauri dams, inclines; hut sites, bush camps; branch trams. Haulers in bush. Associated with Waihi GMC.
Sheridan Creek, Otaki Forks	Wellington CO	1930 to 1936	Cuttings; short piece of rail on corner; steep grade in places (1 in 5)	Foundation; steam boiler; steam engine; fly wheel.	Log hauler
Charming Creek, Ngakawau	West Coast CO	1912 to 1958	Earthworks: tunnels, embankment, cuttings; steep grade in places (1 in 7), rail, sleepers, centre brake rail; bridge sites. Sets of points, check rail. Turntables, sand sheds. At bins end: sidings, run off line, loading bank.	Watson's Mill: Steam boilers; Mumm's Mill: Hauler; Steam plant; timber bogies. Some timbers from building left. Stables.	Incline (pre-tram formation). Hut and house sites at mill. Sidings: workshops. Coal mines and associated infrastructure. Remains of 4 lokeys. Rolling stock – bogies. Horse paddocks. Branch trams.
Mananui Sawmill and tram, near Hokitika	West Coast CO	1920 to 1952	Earthworks: cuttings, embankment, fill, bridge sites, sleepers.	Foundations; fly wheel. Reservoir.	Inspection pit.
Maori Beach, Stewart Island	Southland CO	1913 to 1931	Steep grade negotiated with inclines. Bridge sites;	Boiler and steam engine (incomplete)	Wharf remains, tram to wharf. 2 steam haulers
More's Mill tram, Longwood Forest.	Southland CO	1900 to 1960	Bridge sites; concrete arch bridge; embankments; cuttings. Gentle grade.	More's Top Mill –boiler; concrete foundations	Johnston 'A' class lokey. Branch trams: main tram serviced many mills in the area.
Port Craig Sawmill	Southland CO	1917 to 1930	Sleepers; tram built to NZR standard;viaducts; embankment; cuttings; gentle grade.	Old mill: boiler house;skids; New mill: concrete foundations	Town site; Pt Craig School house; wharf; sorting tables on beach; workshop, blacksmith. Lidgerwood hauler; wharf crane; bogies;

Coal Trams

There seem to be relatively few coal trams remaining. This could be due to the fact that trams were not a form of transportation usually used in coal mining or alternatively that there is a lack of information as there has been no detailed historic study of the use of coal trams.

Many of the mines on the West Coast used endless rope haulage lines (Denniston and Milleton), aerial ropeways (Denniston, Stockton, Blackball) and self acting inclines (Denniston, Millerton, Koranui, Brunner mines) to transport coal. Or, coal was transported from the mine by railway, such as at Roa (near Blackball) and at Brunner. Some mines, such as the Cascade Mine (Buller), used water and extensive systems of fluming to move coal from the mine to the main road.

The West Coast has three other managed sites on public conservation land where trams were used to transport coal. One at Big River, where a coal tram ran from a small coal mine to the quartz mine (this line also supplied timber from a sawmill), another at Lankey's Creek, where a series of small mines extracted coal for the steam plants of the large quartz mines on Globe Hill, and later the Energetic Quartz Mine, and Alborns Coal Mine near Reefton.¹⁵ All of these trams were narrow gauge (around 2 foot), and relatively short in length. Big River and Lankeys were both horse trams, and very little remains of either beyond the tram formation, and a short piece of rail at Big River. While sections on these trams were bridged, both were constructed on a bench that sidled around the slope, so the grade of the tram was very gentle—not surprising since they were horse trams. Alborns had a level tram where coal was trucked by hand to the foot of a small incline. There are other coal trams noted at small mines in the Reefton area—Burke's Creek Coal Mine¹⁶ and Loughnan's Coal Mine,¹⁷ in the early years of the 20th century, replete with iron rails, but little is known about haulage on these lines, or the current condition of these sites.

The only other known coal tram comparable to Charming Creek was the electric tram at Stockton, situated on land now owned by Solid Energy New Zealand. Construction on this tram began in 1906. It had an optimal average working grade of 1 in 21.4 for the loads being hauled, and a brake car and a Fell centre braking system were employed. Tram features included tunnels, cuttings, embankment, and by the end of its life the tram was 4½ miles long. Four USA electric lokeys hauled coal on the tram to an incline in 25cwt (1200kg) trucks. Unlike Charming Creek this tram had a 3ft gauge.¹⁸ On the whole bridges were avoided and much of the tram formation was made on the embankment.¹⁹ A recent survey of the Stockton electric tram reveals that in spite of the haul load and other modern mine operations damaging the tram formation in 6 or 7 places, it is still relatively complete. There are a few bridges, and some impressive abutments still remaining. There are no sections of in situ rail, and very few sleepers left on the tram. The tram is relatively level, with cuttings, embankments and tunnels all constructed in an effort to maintain an easy grade.²⁰

Like the case with the timber trams, it is clear that the Charming Creek tram stands out as unique compared to coal trams on the West Coast. The in situ preservation of tram features, and associated infrastructure and the engineering feats of the steep tram construction all mark the Charming Creek tram as one of the best in the country.

6. Cultural

Within the West Coast community there is a strong association with the coal mining and timber industries. The struggles faced, especially by coal miners have become part of a strong sense of local identity. Coal mining is still a major industry on the West Coast and mines like Charming Creek have a special cultural significance for local communities. The Charming Creek Walkway also has value as a recreational asset. It is noted as a major front country attraction in the Kawatiri Place in the CMS.²¹

7. Summary of Significance

The industrial struggles at Charming Creek mark it as something different from other mine sites. The action taken by miners regarding tributism are an important aspect of New Zealand's industrial labour history. The struggles of workers to get better working conditions were not rare, but

¹⁵ Wright, Les 1993 Big River Quartz Mine:83-84; Watson. K. 2007 Murray Creek: an archaeological landscape:57-58.

¹⁶ AJHR 1910 C-3A:10.

¹⁷ AJHR 1909 C-3A:13.

¹⁸ Sumner, S. and T. Sumner 1983. Coalfields Park Report.:285-298; Morgan and Bartum 1915:39

¹⁹ AJHR 1908 C-3A p10.

²⁰ K. Watson pers. comm. July 2008.

²¹ Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai 2007:371; Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai 2005. op cit.

industrial action to get the road built and obviate the need for a wet and coal tram ride to Ngakawau, stands out as distinctive. As a privately owned mine, the history of Charming Creek coal mine provides an important example for comparison against the larger State owned mines such as Denniston and Stockton. The endeavours that took place in the Charming Creek valley, as exemplified by Robert Watson, are good examples of local entrepreneurial spirit. The historic values at Charming Creek are of high regional importance.

The physical values of Charming Creek are exceptional from the point of view of the extant fabric remaining on site, and of the engineering feats undertaken to construct it in challenging topography. It is one of the most complete and intact historic sawmill / coal mine / tram line landscapes in New Zealand. The physical significance is nationally high.

The Charming Creek Walkway is an important part of the spectrum of recreation opportunities maintained in the Buller Area. and is also of high regional importance.

See the linked document [Charming Creek Baseline Inspection and Maintenance](#) for more information

Appendix 2: Charming Creek Chronology

1877	The Westport- Ngakawau Railway was opened for traffic on the 26th September 1877
1896	George and Robert Watson established a sawmill at Granity Creek
1899	Sawmill at Granity Creek was burnt down in suspicious circumstances.
Ca. 1903	Sawmilling in the Charming Creek Valley began under Mr Robert Tannahill Watson of Granity, and his brother George H. Watson .
1909	A second tramway between the Watsons' Mill and Ngakawau through the gorge reportedly was opened in 1909 or completed to their mill in 1912
1910	The Crown test coal reserves at the head of Charming Creek. Good reserves of a good quality coal reported.
1917	The Crown once again investigate the potential of the Charming Creek coal reserve. Depressed coal industry, and costs of transporting coal seen as too prohibitive.
1917/18	Mil engineer George McDonald designs and builds a steam lokey to work the bush trams from the bush to the mill.
1919	April – Robert Watson signs a coal lease for 242 acres of State Coal Reserve at the head of Charming Creek.
1919	July – Robert Watson travels to Christchurch to solicit potential investors for his new coal company. He is not successful and development of the coal mine languishes.
1919	December – A visit to Watson's Mill by the Secretary of the Timber workers union reports that the accommodation for workers at the mill is unsatisfactory, and that the workers at the mill, contrary to the rest of the West Coast, are not unionised.
1921	Worlds first low cost farm tractor, the Fordson, entered the market and rail tractors became common in the 1920s.
Mid 1920s	Watson's Sawmill purchase a rail tractor to transport timber.
1925	Watson engages various mining experts to report on the potential of the coal field and begins seeking potential investors.
1926	May – Watson and 6 others established the Charming Creek Westport Coal Company.
1927	Huts were established for the workmen and a blacksmith's shop at Charming Creek Coal mine. The haulage tunnel to reach the seam was also begun. First entrance to Charming Creek Mine created in 1927.
1928	In 1928 at Charming Creek Coal Mine a seam of hard coal 12 ft thick was reached by a level stone-drive, 8ft by 7.5ft and 10 chains in length. By the end of this year a small quantity of coal was gained. This amounted to 57 tonnes, not including mine consumption, local sales, waste or stock held. September – R.T. Watson and fellow CCWCC director are killed in a motor vehicle accident in the Buller Gorge.
1929	The tramway, through Ngakawau Gorge, was extended to reach the Charming Creek Coal Mine and utilised to transport both coal and timber. Otto Levy, Hay and Stack lease Watson's mill.
1929	A temporary loading chute was erected at Charming Creek Coal Mine. 1.7 tonne trucks brought the coal between the mine to the loading chute. June – 17th June the Murchison earthquake causes delays with work on the tram line.
1930	In 1930 the coal output picked up at Charming Creek Coal Mine and wooden bins, as part of a screening plant, were also constructed at the junction between the Charming Creek tramway and the siding which linked up to the NZR system at Ngakawau. A small Sirocco fan installed to combat ventilation problems in the mine. In response to difficulties with rail tractors an F-class loco was purchased from the Railways Department. December – Ignoring conventional measures to prevent job losses such as work sharing, the struggling Charming Creek Coal Company informed the union that they would be unable to resume on the 'old conditions' after Christmas indicating the intention to work the mine under the tribute system.
1931	January – A group of tribute miners start at working at the mine. This group did not last long. The second group hired suffered the same fate. Mine owners cite union intimidation as cause. April – The mine had opened but was only being worked by the mine manager and the underviewer.

- May – A third attempt at tributism came in of 1931 when the mine owners bought in 15 single men from Reefton.
- 6th May – 200 miners marched from Millerton and Stockton to Charming Creek Mine confronting the tributors as they got ready for the days work. After a heated meeting at a hotel in Ngakawau, tributors were escorted to Westport by police under a shower of ‘Irish confetti’.
- July – Coal from Charming Creek and Cascade mines declared ‘black’ with watersiders at Westport refusing to load the coal.
- Reported that the dispute at the start of 1931 at Charming Creek Coal Mine reduced coal output for the first part of the year. Later work commenced under the tribute system.
- An improvement was made in transport from the Charming Creek Coal Company when as a steam lokey replaced a petrol tractor on the tramway from the mine to the timber mill.
- 1932 – 1933 Mine improvements include developing the dip area, pillar extraction and improving ventilation.
- 1934 No power in the mine to run pumps hindering development work.
- October – On the 1st of October the suspension bridge over the Ngakawau River collapsed causing a fatal accident The mine manager fell to his death into the river and was swept away.
- 1935 January – Construction of a new suspension bridge began in January and was completed by the 3rd of February. Three shifts of workers operated every 24 hours to complete it
- Another F-class loco purchased from the Railway Department.
- In 1935 a workshop where locomotives and maintained was built opposite the bins on the other side of the line by the Charming Creek Coal Company. This workshop had a lathe, boring machine, blacksmith’s forge and a small steam engine
- Also during this year the ‘Fordson’ Tractor that worked on the upper portion of the tramway near the mine entrance was replaced by a steam lokey.
- 1936 In 1936 a new Ruston and Hornsby 42 h.p. diesel lokey was installed on the tramway between the bins and Watson’s Mill. Three of the bridges on this section of the track were strengthened and all the metal parts of the suspension bridge were treated with anti-corrosive solution.
- 1937 In 1937 W.J. Mumm took over Watson’s mill intending to do it up. When this turned out to be too expensive the mill was moved to the site currently known as Mumm’s Mill.
- 1938 In 1938 at Charming Creek Coal Mine a main and tail haulage system was installed to haul coal from the head of the old dip to the surface. Operations at the mine utilised a new mine entrance and loaded into new coal bins at the mine site
- At the end of the year preparations were being made to alter the gauge underground from 3ft. 6 in. to 2ft (0.6m gauge line) to use small trucks (700 kilogram).
- A new rail tractor left Union Foundries’ in Taranaki destined for Charming Creek. It was different from the standard design and was painted bright red and came to be known on the bush tram as the “Red Terror”.
- 1939 March – 24th March accident occurred when a runaway train slammed up against the cliff after failing to take a bend at the ‘Twin Bridges’. The lokey was a complete right off.
- 1940 The manager of the Union Foundry, Mr Vosseler, travelled to Charming Creek to sell a new design of rail tractor. This double-bogie unit would have been the forth Union Foundry’s tractor at Charming Creek. However it was too slow on the line and had transmission problems and Mr Vosseler had to return it to Taranaki without payment.
- In 1940 extensive boring operations were undertaken which proved an additional 15 acres of coal on the southern side of the property.
- 1941 Developmental work began in 1941 to open up a new area.
- 1942 In 1942 repairs to the tramway were made and 12 men replaced rails and sleepers, renewed the centre brake rails, repaired bridges, packed ballast and cleared slips.
- In 1942 a new dip drive to provide an additional access road to the mine was commenced (AJHR 1942).
- 1943 The Charming Creek Coal Mine relocated to a new position further up the valley. The tramway was extended to reach this site.
- New bins and associated sidings erected at the 2nd mine site.
- 1944 January – The survey of the line for Charming Creek Road from Seddonville commences.
- John Pascoe (official war photographer for the Internal Affairs) visits charming Creek Mine taking some iconic images of miners and operations.
- 1945 April – 2 stop work meetings held by the miners at Charming Creek protesting against inaction over the Seddonville Road, forcing stoppages of work at the mine.
- June to August – Further stop work protests regarding the road.

- Transport on the tramway was again improved when in 1945 a stone drive was completed in Ngakawau River Gorge. An accident where a shot blew up on the face of a worker, during the construction of the tunnel on left him disfigured for life.
- On the 10th of October grant approved for Charming Creek Road construction {see /Mines Department, 1931-1947 #79}.
- 1946 Extensive repairs on the suspension bridge were undertaken.
- 1946 A fatal accident happened when a slab of rock fell on the tram as it was taking workers back to Ngakawau at the end of the day. Eddie Nicolson was killed.
- An F-class loco was borrowed from the Railways Department to work at the Ngakawau bins.
- 1946 August – Charming Creek mine idle due to protests over condition of the road from Seddonville.
- 1947 Charming Creek bought a fourth hand Price 16-wheeler, modified with small wheels for steep grades in 1947. However it was too worn out and abandoned after it couldn't be fixed.
- August – An official proposal made to the government to take over Charming Creek Coal Mine was made to the mines Department.
- September – The Mines Department undertake a valuation of the Charming Creek Coal Mine.
- 1948 Work on a new stone drive was stopped due to an unfortunate accident to both men working in the drive.
- A bathhouse was built at the second mine site.
- September – Charming Creek to Seddonville Road completed.
- 1950 Work on the hydraulic system at Charming Creek Coal Mine appears to have begun in 1950 when a dam was built across Charming Creek for water storage.
- Electricity was introduced to the mine by a diesel to drive an electric pump in the dip workings.
- 1951 In 1951 a surface dam was completed and a shaft was sunk from the surface. An underground flume and bin were installed. Delays to development caused by the Waterfront Strike.
- Production at the mine affected by the Waterfront Strike, with limited space on coastal shipping vessels.
- 1952 April – Hydro mining began to be used at Charming Creek, as did the so called 'blow-up' system.
- Development of the new hydro-mining system interrupted by industrial disputes. The Miners' Union wanted clarity over the working conditions that would apply under the new system.
- August – A fire on the 29th of August destroyed most of the mine buildings including a small generating set which provided power for an underground pump.
- 1953 The installation of pipes and cutting of water races was being undertaken in 1953 to divert water from Chasm Creek in a combined scheme with the Cardiff Coal Company.
- 1954 Water scheme was completed in 1954 and hydraulic mining was expanded.
- A settling pond was made at the old mine mouth for recovering fine coal and a sledge pump was installed to pump the fine coal into a 30 ton bin built at the old mine site.
- A hydraulic hoist for mined coal was being developed to solve mine to surface transport problems.
- An F-class loco was purchased from the Railways Department.
- 1955 A settling dam was put in a few chains west of the drive for the hoist to hold the coal that drains out of the mine. A gravel pump, driven by a Ford V8 engine, was installed to pump the coal into the 50 ton bins newly built.
- 1956 The hydraulic hoist was introduced. Reported that excellent results were obtained.
- 1957 In 1957 a 15 in. water pipe was installed to mine pillars in the old North section.
- An Atlas diesel compressed air plant was installed on the surface of the mine and at the face seven Victory air rotary boring machines were being used.
- 1957 Work at the Charming Creek Coal Mine in 1957 involved prospecting and some preliminary work for identifying a site for bins and a tramline, however due to transport difficulties the Company allowed their licence for the siding to lapse.
- 1958 January – The rights for the siding at Ngakawau were terminated.
- March – A deputation from miners at Charming Creek presented to the Minister of Lands and Agriculture and the Minister of Mines asking that the Charming Creek Mine be nationalised (i.e. taken over by the State).
- Tram line ceased to operate and road transport used to transport coal. Equipment from the Ngakawau bins transferred to new bins at the 2nd Mine site.

	The numbers of surface staff were reduced in 1958 after the conversion to road transport was made.
	After tram ceased working, operations at Mumm's Mill cease and mill shifted to a site further north, accessed off the Seddonville / Charming Creek road.
1959	The Private Siding at Seddonville (no. 522) was approved from the 11th of June 1959 at £50 per annum.
1960s	Most mine work focused on pillar extraction. Some issues with preventing sandstone from entering and blocking the main flume.
1970	8 men employed at the mine. 1 million gallons of water per day used to transport coal 1 mile underground to the hoist, then 100ft to the surface.
1971	Mumm's second mill shifted to Waimangaroa.
1974	Last bush tram in New Zealand went out of use. Westport Lions approach the Department of Lands and Surveys (DOSLI) who were interested in opening up the tramline for a walkway.
1974	September – Lions Club cleared the tramway in the Lower Ngakawau Gorge.
1975	Thermal and hydro scheme proposed for Charming Creek. Impacts on the proposed Scenic Reserve debated. Charming Creek recognised for its important historic values in the New Zealand Forest Service's (NZFS) Beech Project historic site recording.
1976	April – Cabinet approved closure as soon as practicable of the Ngakawau-Seddonville section of the Seddonville branch railway. The Charming Creek directors informed of this.
1979	October – New Zealand Walkway Commission submitted an official proposal for the development of the walkway in October 1979. Phase One: Ngakawau to Ngakawau River Suspension Bridge/Mangatini Falls, Phase Two: Ngakawau River Suspension Bridge to Charming Creek Coal Mine.
1980	February – New Zealand Walkway Commission resubmitted their walkway proposal after addressing environmental concerns. DOSLI and NZFS take over development plans for the Walkway. Plans to have phase one completed by December. September – All materials for structures, boardwalks and viewing stand air lifted on site.
1981	May – Officially records show that the Ngakawau – Seddonville line was closed on 1 May 1981. The suspension bridge over the Ngakawau River was replaced by Fijian Army recruits in the NZ Army as an engineering exercise.
1983	August – The second phase of the walkway was officially approved in August. \$4000 was allocated for the construction of the bridge over Charming Creek.
1984	Problems with accessing the Walkway through the Coal mine at the Seddonville end of the track. A new diversion track was built by the NZFS to avoid the mine.
1984	A flood event washed away the bridge on the diversion track. A new mine manager relented allowing access to the Walkway through the mine site. DOSLI install interpretation shelters and interpretation at the Ngakawau bins and Watson's Mill.
1984/85	Mumm's Mill site clear, machinery re-instated on site and a shelter built over the steam plant.
1985	Logging in Charming Creek was still occurring with the logs being transported to at Waimangaroa. October – The parent company of the Charming Creek-Westport Coal Company (Coal and Energy N.Z. Ltd) went into receivership. Mine plant, licenses and coal stockpile up for sale.
1986	May – The Charming Creek Coal Mine closed 1st May, 1986. Management of the area reverted to the NZFS. Mine portals were closed up, and shafts sealed.
1987	DOC took over the management of the Charming Creek Walkway
1989	April – A cave in between the bed of Charming Creek and the underground mine workings, caused a massive flood in the vicinity of the 1st mine portal. A foot bridge, a section of track, the settling ponds, and an original piece of the tram were destroyed. Track around the settling ponds re-routed and the bridge over Charming Creek near Mumm's Mill re-sited.
1999	Major upgrade of structures on the Walkway.
2006	Visitor access through Papa Tunnel was stopped due to safety concerns.

Appendix 3: Valuation Report of the Charming Creek Coal Mine 1947

NEW ZEALAND STATE COAL MINES.

GREYMOOUTH, N.Z. 18th September, 1947.

G.46/13

MEMORANDUM FOR:

The Under-Secretary,
Mines Department,
WELLINGTON.

Charming Creek Coal Mine - Valuation and Report.

In accordance with the instructions set out in your memorandum N.10/3/55 of the 19th August, I submit as requested, my report and valuation of the plant, buildings and construction work of the Charming Creek Mine.

Situation: The Charming Creek Mine, to which there is no direct access, is situated inland among the hills about one mile East of the Main Highway, and approximately midway between Ngakawau and Seddonville.

Access: At the present time, access is gained by approximately 5½ miles of rail and tramway from Ngakawau, and this is the only access to the mine. However, a motor road is being constructed by the Buller County Council for the conveying of personnel only. This road is being constructed from the Seddonville or Northern end of the District.

Coal-Haulage: Coal is hauled throughout the mine by horse haulage. The mine is water free, i.e. all water is conveyed therefrom by gravity to the old mine entrance, and except for the dip drive into the mine, all haulage roads slope towards the foot of the dip drive which is 6 chains from the mine mouth. Hence, neither winch nor pump are used in the mine.

The coal is hauled to the mine bins up the 6 chains dip by steam winch situated in the buildings adjacent to the mine mouth. The coal is conveyed in 16 cwt. wooden mine tube over the weighbridge and tipped into a small bin. The coal is loaded from the bin into 30 cwt. 3' 6" gauge loco trucks and hauled approximately 5½ miles by diesel locomotive to the screening plant.

The screening plant is situated about one mile up the Ngakawau River from the Stockton Mine bins, and is connected to what is called the engine limit on the Stockton railway siding backshunt by a 3' 6" gauge single line of 56 lb. rails. Coal is hauled to the Ngakawau Railway Siding by steam engine. The Company pay a royalty of 2d. per ton to the State Coal Mines for the right to traverse the backshunt.

The Company are at present overhauling their own steam geared locomotive and this engine, when in commission, will replace the one hired from the Harbour Board.

Title to Railway Line and Tramway to Mine: The railway line from the engine limit on the Stockton backshunt to the screens, and the tram line from the screens to the old Charming Creek mine mouth, a distance of approximately 5½ miles, are owned by a Mr. Watson who built the line and tramway as a bush tram to give him access to his sawmills. Mr. Watson charges the Charming Creek Coal Company 2d. per ton wayleave for every ton conveyed over the line, and in addition, the Company have to keep the line in repair and provide all material for the purpose. At the same time, Mr. Watson has reserved the right to cart his timber over the line.

The line throughout is very badly aligned, and the curves in particular, are not on a standard radius, most of them being put in by eye. In addition, the line has been laid with an assortment of 20 lb. to 56 lb. rails, and most of them are old rails from bush trams. These rails are bent over at the end and a large number are not perfectly straight, with the result that the mine trucks bump and jerk at every joint crossed, and also bump from side to side. A number of curves require to be altered to a true radius and super-elevated. Owing to these difficulties, speed has to be reduced considerably. The grades are severe in places, ranging ~~from~~ up to 1 in 16. On the steeper grades, a wooden centre rail is used and the load braked by centre rail trolleys.

For the first half mile from the Ngakawau bins, the grade is fairly good but requires regrading to obviate a steep pinch on to the bin top.. The alignment could be improved with advantage.

The next mile is through the gorge and would entail expensive rock work to improve it. The line crosses over the Ngakawau River on a 116 ft. span suspension bridge, and then proceeds through a tunnel 8 ft. wide and 9 ft. high and around precipitous country to Watson's old mill. From this point, the grade is fairly good, but as stated before, the line should be re-aligned and the curves trued up. There are several bridges on this line, most of which require repairs. To improve the line to provide faster transport and larger carrying capacity, it will be necessary to relay the line with new and heavier rails throughout, and at the same time taking out the kinks and laying true and super-elevated curves.

Tram Extension: The tram was extended by the Charming Creek Company for a distance of approximately 26 chains from the old mine mouth to the existing mine bin, the Company paying for the cost of construction and for the driving of a 230 ft. tunnel. As far as I can ascertain, half of this work is outside the Company's lease, and apparently the Company does not hold a Tramway License over the portion outside their lease, which, I understand, is on Crown land.

Messrs. W.T. Sles & Sons of Westport, who act as Accountants for the Charming Creek Company, informed me that the Railway and tramline are owned by Mr. Watson, although there is a proviso that the Company may purchase the lines.

The Charming Creek Company do not hold a Title to the piece of ground on which their screening plant, fitting shops etc., are situated, and when this was pointed out to Mr. Sles, he informed me that he would take immediate steps to acquire a Title.

Buildings - The following buildings are owned by the Company:-

Mine Manager's House: This house consists of three bedrooms, sitting room, dining room, kitchen, bathroom, washhouse and front verandah. Hot water is laid on but there is only an earth closet. There is also, adjacent to the house, a 16' X 12' hut complete with chimney and lined throughout with maxwell board. The front part of the house is approximately 20 years' old while the back portion is about 8 years' old. Part of the roof has been re-newed, and the whole of the roof requires painting. Some of the rooms also require re-papering. Generally, the house is in good order. The house is situated on Sections 38, 39 and 40, Town of Hector, each section being 1 rood in area.

Buildings at Railway Siding, Ngakawau:

Workshops: Size 56' X 30'. Constructed with an iron roof and timber sides. Part of the building is new and part is fairly old.

Store: Size 31' X 20'. Is practically new and is constructed of rough weatherboards with a malthoid roof. The floor is of 2" rough decking on silver pine piles. The walls are not lined. The building has not been primed or painted.

Oil Store: Size 12' X 12'. Is a lean-to and is of rough weatherboard walls and corrugated iron roof. Is lined with matchlining but is in a dilapidated condition.

Engine Repair Shed: This building is used when repairing locomotives, and has a concrete engine pit. The side walls are framed only, and one full side and half the other side are covered with corrugated iron. The roof is corrugated iron. The ends are not covered in at all.

Bins, Gantry and Boiler House: This building consists of bins 56 ft. across the railway line by 26 ft. long and approximately 26 ft. above rail level, an approach gantry 80 ft. long and a roughly constructed building attached to house the boiler and steam engine which drive the screens. The bins appear to be about 20 years' old and show signs of considerable decay. good deal of repair work will be required in the next year or two.

S. org. (Engine Limit). This is an old tumble down building which is used to house some D.C. electrical equipment purchased when the Otira Tunnel was completed.

Buildings at Mine:

Hut and Compressor Shed: This building consists of an unpainted hut 12' X 10', lined with pinax and having a brick chimney. It is used as a mine office. Attached is a roofed in structure, very rough, covering the compressor. It has a corrugated iron roof and brattice on one side.

Hut: 12' X 9'. This building has corrugated iron roof and sides, brick chimney, and is lined with pinax.

Cottage: Two rooms. This two-roomed cottage 24' X 9' was constructed for the use of the Fan Attendant. It has a concrete chimney and is lined with pinax. There is a built in cupboard. The outside is of rough weatherboards neither primed or painted. Half of the roof is of old corrugated iron and half of malthoid.

Coal Bin: The coal bin and tippler house, size 20' X 14', is constructed of heavy timbers, and is in fairly good order.

Mine Building over Boiler, Winch, Blacksmith's Shop and Tub Repair Shop: This building, in general, is a shell consisting of corrugated iron walls and roof, attached to the bins and providing housing for the tub repair shop, the Blacksmith's shop, the boiler and steam winch, and the weighbridge. It is not painted.

Stables: 42' X 12'. This building is of quite good construction, built of rough weatherboards with malthoid roof. The floor is constructed of 2" thick planking. The building has not been painted.

Stone Dust Shed: Size 11' X 10'. Roof corrugated iron, sides of rough timber. Not painted.

Fan House Shed: This building is roughly constructed of corrugated iron and is practically an unpainted shell.

Feed Shed: 25' X 17'. Is built of bush posts, sheathed with old rough weatherboards, and has a corrugated iron roof. Has not been painted.

Magazine: 12' X 10'. This building is at present nearing completion and will have walls and roof of corrugated iron.

Generally, the buildings do not give the appearance of a neat and tidy layout, and are not up to our State Mines standard.

Bathhouse: The mine is without a bathhouse at present, but when the road from Seddonville is constructed, one will have to be built near the mine mouth.

PLANT: The plant, generally, is similar to that found at most of the mines purchased by the Government, and is not up to State Mine standard.

Winch & Boiler House: The winch at the mine mouth is driven from steam obtained from a 16 H.P. Boiler, a "Dryback" boiler carrying a pressure of 140 lbs. per square inch. There is also at standby steam engine at the Fan House which can be driven with steam from this boiler if required.

Compressor: The compressor is a 2 cylinder Reavell of approximately 150 cub. ft. capacity, and is driven by a 32 H.P. Ruston 3 cylinder Diesel Engine. The compressor is at present being used in conjunction with two C.P. Jackhammers for driving a new stone drive into a new section of coal. (No doubt, the reasons for the construction of the stone drive will be reported on by Mr. McGhie).

Fan: The fan is a 42 Sirocco, and is driven by a 37 H.P. Ailea Craig, 3 Cylinder Diesel Engine, fitted with a battery starter. As mentioned above, there is also a standby of a 14 H.P. Tangye Vertical Steam Engine which can be used in the event of the failure of the diesel engine.

The fan drift is about 20 ft. long and 7 ft. wide, has concrete sides approximately 3 feet high and is covered with a semi-circular roof constructed out of steel plates.

Weightbridge: The weightbridge is of 2 ton capacity and is made by the well known firm of Peole & Sons. It has been repaired recently by J.W. Wood & Co.

Screening Plant: The screening plant is situated at the Ngakawan Railway extension and consists of a dilapidated end tippler capable of tipping the 30 cwt. coal trucks, and a 6 ft. wide Double Deck screen chain slung, driven off a 3" eccentric shaft. The screen plates are cyclone mesh and the screens themselves are driven by a Davy Compound Twin Cylinder steam engine serviced by a 25 H.P. Semi-tubular Boiler.

There is a small home made steam winch situated on the top of the gantry which is used for hauling the loco trucks up to the tippler.

Installed in the bins, is a bucket elevator, the buckets of which are badly corroded.

Fitting Shop: Installed in the fitting shop is a lathe, drilling machine, power driven emery wheel, power hack saw, circular saw etc., in reasonable order. The power unit consists of a 17 H.P. Ruston Diesel Engine which has been repaired and appears to be in good order. There is also a 20 H.P. Tangye Vertical Steam Engine installed as a standby.

Old Mine Mouth: In position at the old mine mouth, is a double drum main and tail hauler, a twin cylinder steam engine and a steam haulage winch, which, are not at present in use, but could be used where and when required.

Locomotives: The coal is hauled from mine to screens by means of Diesel Locomotives, and these units have individually been in service for different periods of years. They are all of well known makes and are giving good service.

Steam Locomotive: At the present time, the Company haul the coal from the screens to the Railway Station by means of a Steam Locomotive on hire from the Westport Harbour Board at a rate of 15/- per day. However, they own a geared steam locomotive which is being overhauled and will soon be in service.

Water Supply: There are two water supplies, one to the bins at Ngakawan, and one at the mine bins. Both have intakes inbye streams, and the water is piped in 2" and 1" pipes where required, generally for boiler use.

Horses: As pointed out previously, all the haulage in the mine is carried out by horses, and the Company have seven horses for this work.

Stores: Stores in hand have not been valued as it is proposed to have a check made on transfer date when an inventory and valuation can be made.

Stone Drives: There are two existing stone drives in the mine and a new one being driven. They consist of the old mine entrance, now a drainage adit, which is 20 chains in length, and the present mine entrance which is 6 chains in length. As they are primarily a factor in the underground workings, their cost is also a factor in calculating the profit from the coal extracted, and their construction cost is therefore not included in the list of assets.

Existing Tramway and Railway: As pointed out previously, this line belongs to Mr. Watson and can, by agreement, be purchased by the Company. In valuing this line, the formation, bridges etc., as in the case of the stone drive, is a factor in the cost of coal production, and will no doubt, be assessed accordingly by the officer dealing with the value of the unextracted coal. There is however, a recovery value on rails and I value these as follows:-

<u>Railway Line - Engine Limit to Screens</u>	40 tons Rails @ £10	£400- 0- 0
<u>Tram Line - Screens to Old Mine Mouth -</u>		
2½ Miles of 40 Lb. rails	141 tons	
3 " " 30 Lb. "	141 "	
	<hr/>	
	282 tons @ £10	2820- 0- 0
	<hr/>	
		<u>£3220- 0- 0d.</u>

Note: The value of rails from old mine mouth to the bins at Charming Creek is already allowed for in the valuation of plant.

Tramway Licenses: I enclose a copy of the agreement between the Trustees of the Watson Estate and the Charming Creek- Westport Coal Company Ltd. The first Clause on page 1 provides for the transfer to the Company of the licenses held in respect of the tramway, but no provision is made regarding the transfer value of the line. Page 2, Paragraph 4, provides for the continued use of the tramline by the Watson Estate for the cartage of timber, machinery etc., presumably free of charge, but at such times as not to interfere with coal carting operations.

Page 2, Clause 5 prevents the cartage of logs or timber by any other party, What would the position be if the State were to start a sawmill?

Page 2, Clause 6 provides for the payment of 2d. per ton royalty in respect of all coal carted. Mr. Wearne, the Manager, informed me that the Company proposed to exercise their option and purchase the line before selling to the Government. The agreement does not specify whether or not the 2d. per ton has to be paid irrespective of ownership. Presumably, the purchase of the line would do away with the royalty payment.

Until negotiations for purchase of the mine by the Government are completed, it may be advisable to request the Charming Creek Company to leave in abeyance, the question of purchasing the rights in the tramline.

Mr. W.T. Slee is the Secretary of the Charming Creek Company and is also a Trustee in the Watson Estate, and it may be that he will have an exaggerated idea of the value of the tramline, and may wish to pass this on to the Government.

The output from the mine, during the last few years, taken from returns, is as follows:-

1940	33,928 tons
1941	36,445 "
1942	42,686 "
1943	39,104 "
1944	35,831 "
1945	35,132 "
1946	34,564 "

From these figures, it can be seen that the output has been dropping steadily since 1942. The average coal production over the period 1940 to 1946 is therefore 36,800 tons.

Using this figure, and the royalty paid for the use of the tramline at 2d. per ton, and converting to a capital investment at 5%, the value of the line would be £6122 including value of rails which has been assessed at £3220- 0- 0d.

It must be remembered that the first part of the line has been formed since 1908 or thereabouts, while the remainder was formed about 1914.

Normally, the line would have been written off over a period of say 20 years, so that it can be realised that its present value is not very great.

Terms of Licenses: I have not sighted the tramway licenses which are held in the Warden's Court, but Mr. Wearne advised me that the licenses had been recently re-pegged and renewed.

Alternative System of Haulage: The Charming Creek Company have given some thought to an alternative system of haulage. I understand that last year, Mr. Hope was requested to submit a report and estimate on the suitability and cost of an aerial for transporting the coal in lieu of the tramway. This fact may be of importance when placing a value on the tram line.

Extractable Coal: My instructions did not include an assessment of the quantities and value of coal in the ground, but the profit on the estimated quantity of extractable coal will form part of the valuation of the property..

In my opinion, the value of the coal in the ground should be arrived at by taking the profit per ton multiplied by the estimated quantity of extractable coal, and a definite rate of interest for a period of years, such period determined by dividing the quantity of extractable coal by the estimated annual output, and calculating the present value of the amount. This figure will vary between 2d. and 3d. per ton. This method of arriving at the value was used by Mr. Strongman in valuing the coal at Paparoa.

Electricity: I understand the question of supplying Charming Creek with electricity, by linking up with Stockton, and also Denniston when that colliery has been acquired by the State, is being considered at the present time. A supply of electricity will entail electric driving units at the workshops, screening plant and a new winch with an electric drive at the mine.

S U M M A R Y.

To summarise the following requires investigation.

- (1) Verify Title to Screening Plant and Workshop Site.
- (2) Check up on Charming Creek Company's Title to tramway between the old mine mouth and the lease boundary.
- (3) Search tramway licenses to see if they are still in force.
- (4) Request, if considered desirable, the Charming Creek Company to refrain from procuring Title to the tramlines, while at the same time taking over their right to do so.
- (5) Stores to be checked and valued at date set for taking over the mine.
- (6) The value of the coal in the ground to be assessed.
- (7) The Title to all coal leases to be verified.

V A L U A T I O N.

I value the buildings and plant, as per attached list, at £19,073-15-0d.

Enclosed please find a plan on a scale of one mile to an inch showing locality of screening plant, railway and loco lines, mine mouth and mine bins etc.

H. Hutchinson

M.N.Z.I.S. A.M.N.Z.I.E. A.N.Z.I.V.
Mine Surveyor & Engineer.

Encl:

VALUATION OF BUILDINGS, PLANT ETC.

CHARMING CREEK COAL COMPANY,

BUILDINGS:

Mine Manager's House situated on Sections 38, 39 & 40
town of Hector.

\$1030- 0- 0

Buildings at Railway Siding.

Workshop 56' X 30'
Store 31' X 20'
Oil Store (lean-to) 12' X 12'
Engine Repair Shed 24' X 16' (Roof and sides only)
Bins 56' X 26', 80' Gantry and Boiler House
Store (Engine Limit), Storing Otis Electrical Equipment

180- 0- 0
250- 0- 0
10- 0- 0
80- 0- 0
620- 0- 0
1- 0- 0

Buildings at Mine.

Hut (Office), ^{12' x 14'} lined, and compressor shed, roof attached,
Hut 12' X 9'
Cottage, 2 roomed, 24' X 9', (Fan Attendant)
Coal Bins 20' X 14'
Mine building over boiler, winch, Blacksmith
and Tub Repairer
Stables 42' X 12'
Stone Dust Shed 11' X 10'
Fan House Shed
Feed Shed 25' X 17'
Magazine. (Corrugated Iron).

100- 0- 0
90- 0- 0
190- 0- 0
250- 0- 0
200- 0- 0
200- 0- 0
20- 0- 0
40- 0- 0
30- 0- 0
80- 0- 0

PLANT:

Railway Siding.

Bins & Boiler House.

Steam Engine Davy Compound Twin Cylinder
25 H.P. Steam Boiler semi-tubular
Screen Double Deck 6' wide, Chain Slung,
3" Eccentric Shaft
Bucket Elevator Scrap
Coal Chute 6' wide
Spare Cyclone Screen
2 ton End Tippler 2 1/2" plain bearings
Winch on Bins for hauling trucks (Home made).
Sand Drier Kiln

80- 0- 0
250- 0- 0
80- 0- 0
10- 0- 0
5- 0- 0
3- 0- 0
30- 0- 0
10- 0- 0
10- 0- 0

Fitting Shop.

17 H.P. Huston Diesel Engine
20 H.P. Tangye Engine (Standby)
Griffiths Belt Driven Drilling Machine to 1 1/2"
Emery wheel belt driven 8" X 6"
Acetone Welding gauges, cutting torches & trolley
Blacksmith's Vice 5"
Lathe - 14' bed 11" circle
Power Hack Saw, belt driven
Circular saw 26", home made bench
Blacksmith's Vice 8"
Anvil, 3 1/2 cwt.
Blacksmith's forge
" tools
" fan (home made).
" cast iron block
" hammer (heavy sledge)
" 7 pulleys, 5 split, 2 solid. lot
Shafting 30 ft. 2 1/2", 10 ft. 2", 6 2 1/2" Plummer Blocks lot

100- 0- 0
60- 0- 0
60- 0- 0
8- 0- 0
20- 0- 0
4- 0- 0
120- 0- 0
15- 0- 0
10- 0- 0
6- 0- 0
8- 0- 0
10- 0- 0
30- 0- 0
3- 0- 0
3- 0- 0
2- 0- 0
3 1/2- 0- 0
7- 0- 0

1, Treshells Jack C.P.	
6, Loco Springs @ £5	30-
1, 10" jig wheel with hand brake	30-
1 set Stocks & Dies 1" - 1/2"	10-
1, 2" diam. Deflection wheel	10-
3, 15" " " " @ £4	12-
1, 4" diam. C.I. Terminal Wheel 4" throat	10-
1, Hydraulic Atomiser tester	5-
1, Tellite Ball Bearing 2 ton hoist	5-
1 pair Steam Loco wheels, 3 1/2" axle and 3 Nitro wheels, lot	60-

General.

8 canvas truck covers and iron frames	14-
520 ft. 1" galv. pipe	26-
660 ft. 1 1/2" " "	52-
25 H.P. P Type Steam Locomotive	} Scrap value
7 H.P. Barclay Locomotive	

Mine.

1 set spiral spring greasers	10-
1 set Plunger greasers	15-
4 magnet shot firing batteries @ £5	20-
2 jim crows 2 1/2" @ £15	30-
35 tons of 30 lb. rails @ £10	350-
8 tons, 14 lb. rails @ £12	96-
8 sets of points and crossings @ £10	80-
10 " " " " " squares iron @ £5	50-
2 Treshells jacks C.P. @ £5	10-
2, 24" jig wheels @ £5	10-
20 flat sheets, lot	20-
1, 3' 6" jig wheel with bearing and brake band, lever etc.	30-

Mine Mouth, Mine and Workshops.

2 cylinder Heavell compressor, approximately 150 cub. ft.	300-
32 H.P. 3 cylinder Ruston Diesel Engine	600-
2 only, C.P. jack hammers @ £50	100-
50 ft. air hose 1"	5-
40 ft. water hose 1/2"	2-
120 ft. 1/2" Mex. Drill Steel	15-
26 ft. 5" Bolt	2-
1 set hand horse clippers	2-
1 Galvanometer Detonator tester	10-
1, 6' crosscut saw	20-
1 steam winch, 2 cylinder	300-
3 face jig wheels @ 30/-	90-
1 Sylvester	5-
1 handsaw, 1 docking saw, lot	10-
2 hammers, sledge, lot	10-
1 set bolt cutters	10-
Blacksmith's tools, lot	20-
2 anvils, lot	15-
1 Blacksmith's forge and fan	10-
1 Blacksmith's vice, 5"	5-
16 H.P. Boiler, 140 lb. pressure	250-
12 chains 1/2" rope	20-
1 Pulley, 2 ton, weighbridge	25-
1 end tippler	15-
1 cast iron winch drum	5-
7 sets harness, comprising collar, boxes, bridle, spider, trace chains, spring trees and tail chain @ £7	49-
2 collars @ £2	4-
2 sets stocks & dies lot	12-

Fan.

Fan drift and steel top	200-
42" Sirocco Fan	200-
14 H.P. Tangye Vertical Steam engine. (standby).	60-

37 H.P. 3 cylinder, Ailsa Craig Diesel Engine complete with starter and battery	700- 0- 0
1 Barograph	2- 0- 0
35 ft., 5" Balting	8- 0- 0

General.

70 ft., 1½" Steam Pipe	5- 0- 0
Telephone Line	20- 0- 0
2 Telephones @ £3	6- 0- 0
640 ft. 1" galv. pipe	24- 0- 0
1250 ft. 2" " "	125- 0- 0
460 ft. ½" " "	15- 0- 0

Old Mine Mouth.

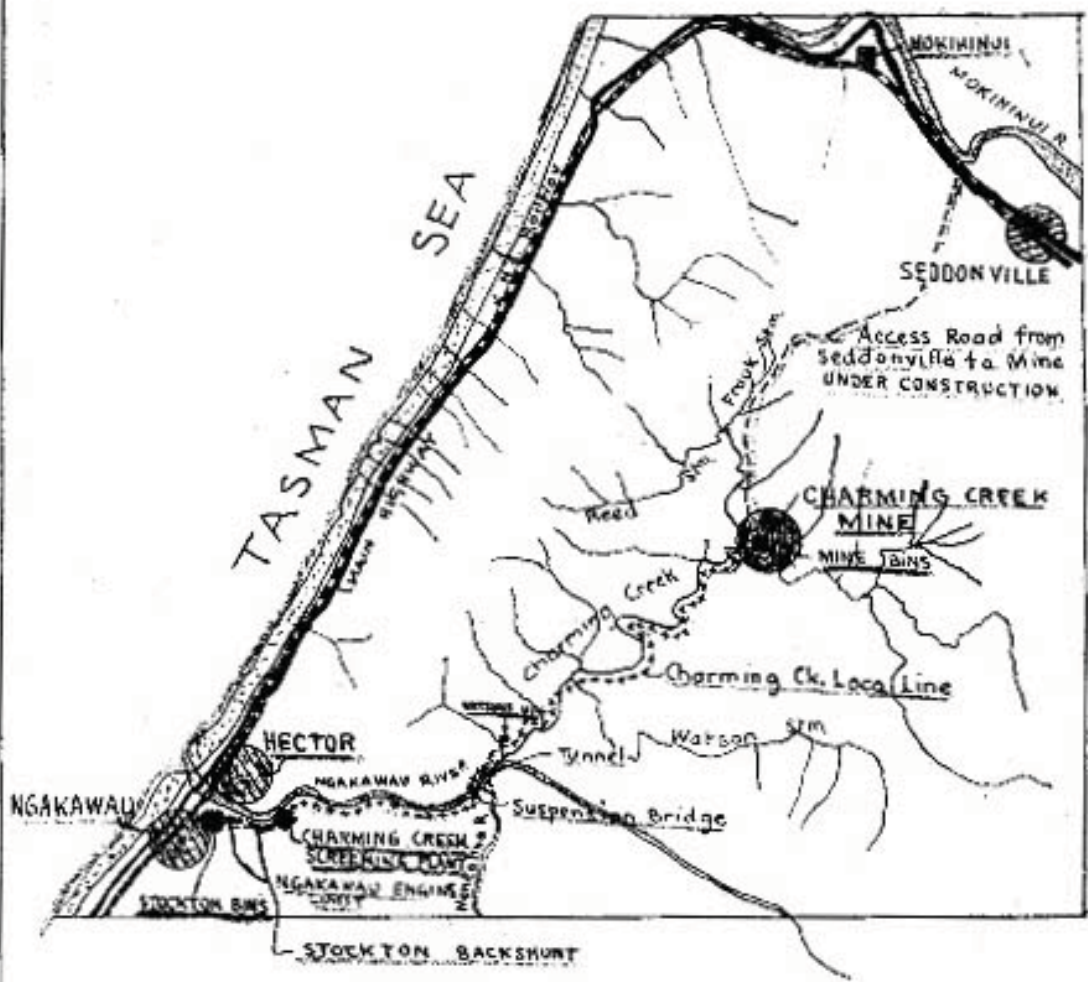
Double drum main & tail hauler	70- 0- 0
Twin cylinder steam engine	40- 0- 0
Steam haulage winch single drum	90- 0- 0

General.

Locomotives. 1 McCormack Deering (Diesel) W.D. 9	2500- 0- 0
1 " " " " W.D.40	1500- 0- 0
1 Ruston	1500- 0- 0
1 " McCormack	800- 0- 0
1, 20 H.P. steam locomotive	800- 0- 0
2 centre rail brake cars @ £40	80- 0- 0
3 Trehwella Jacks D.P. on Loco.	24- 0- 0
1 Platelayers Trehwella Jack S.P.	5- 0- 0
86 only, 16 cwt. wood mine tubs @ £10	860- 0- 0
1 water barrel trolley (mine)	5- 0- 0
2 timber trolleys lot	14- 0- 0
64 Loco Line trucks @ £25	1600- 0- 0
Quantity Electrical Equipment including 25 H.P. D.O. motor, 1 Roots Blower and quantity cast iron ex Otira. (Situated in old shed near Engine limit on Stockton-Charming Creek Line). lot	50- 0- 0
Loco line from old mine mouth to mine bins. (Owned by Company). 15 tons @ £10 Rail	150- 0- 0

Mine Horses:

Captain	40- 0- 0
Peter	40- 0- 0
Sammy	30- 0- 0
Bill	30- 0- 0
Hobby	30- 0- 0
Speedy	30- 0- 0
Paddy	20- 0- 0



— CHARMING CREEK MINE —
 — LOCALITY PLAN —
 Scale: One Mile to an Inch.

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Ritchie, Neville, 2008. Neville is the TSO Historic for Waikato Conservancy and provided extra information on the Waitawheta and Ongarue trams and sawmills.

Staton, Jim, 2008 Personal communication with the authors while on the Charming Creek Walkway 06/05/2008. Jim was involved with the walkway in the 1980s, mainly from as a technical, rail and sawmill heritage specialist. He currently works for DOC in Greymouth.

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DOC West Coast Conservancy Photographic Archives, Hokitika – numerous historic photos in the historic photo collection, both of the sawmill and coal mining eras. Only some of these images are included in this report.

DOC West Coast Conservancy Slide Collection, Hokitika – hundreds of colour slides dating back to the 1980s document the work of the NZ Forest Service and DOSLI on the opening of the Charming Creek Walkway.

Maps and Plans – various copies of old maps and plans held at DOC West Coast Conservancy, Hokitika.

Recollections of Charming Creek

(By "Tom Thumb")

At six in the mornings there was always an awful cold wind blowing down river as we walked across the railway bridge to Ngakawau and around the branch line to our assembly point, the Charming Greek bins, writes an ex-Bullerite now domiciled in the Nelson area who wishes to remain anonymous but says he was always known locally as "Tom Thumb".

The walk was a good half-hour and most of the year it was made in darkness and rain.

The Charming Creek coal bins were built about a mile up the Ngakawau river from the sea, where the river emerged from its chasm-like gorge, and joined the coastal flat.

At these bins the coal from the mine was screened into various sizes loaded into eight-ton 'Q' railway wagons, and towed about one mile to the Ngakawati railway station.

One of the small steam locomotives which once towed these wagons proudly displayed a plaque, which stated — "Designed and manufactured by Robert Louis Stevenson 1907" — which gives an idea of its vintage, and I often wonder today if this very small locomotive is still in the vicinity of Charming Creek.

The driver of this locomotive, was the well-known leader of a very popular local dance band.

The coal bins had sets of shaker screens and these were driven by a stationary steam engine as were the engineering workshops nearby. It was in these workshops that many engineering wonders were performed, bulldozers were converted to railway locomotives by removing their tracks, and fitting four large railway driving wheels. The rear wheels becoming the driving wheels but the front ones being connected to drive as well, by means of sprockets and a large chain from one wheel to another. Also converted to run on the rails, was a Model A car and a very early model Fordson Tractor, which were owned by a local sawmiller, who owned and operated a sawmill close to the Charming Creek mine and; in those days he had to bring his timber out via the gorge to Ngakawau.

PICTURESQUE

Anyway, it was here at the bins that the miners would all assemble for the hour journey up the picturesque gorge and onwards, through the beautiful open valley to

the mine. Once the diesel motors were started we would climb into the empty coal trucks. These trucks were built of hardwood and had a capacity of two tons. Eighteen of these trucks made tip a race, towed in front by the rail-dozer-tractor, and at the rear of the race was the brake car.

The brake car had a hand operated wheel, which would clamp up a set of cast iron brake shoes onto a wooden centre rail, thus preventing the race of trucks (in the event of a coupling breaking) from running away backwards down the gorge, which in places, had some fairly steep grades.

The principle was good, but it was not too good in practice as, if the race had gathered much speed, it became a matter of courage and good judgment by the operator to line up the brakeshoes to clamp onto the sides of the centre rail; if the shoes rode up on top of the rail, the brake car would be thrown into the air and derailed which — in turn — would derail the trucks, and at times they would tumble down into the rocky river fifty feet below. This type of accident frequently occurred taking tractor and both operators with them, sometimes with serious consequences.

Crouched down amidst jerking, bumping and rattling noises, we were towed up through the gorge, through beautiful tunnels of native scrub arching in over the line, over a breathtakingly high viaduct, wobbling through a snake-like tunnel, where a well intended survey went wrong, slowly up a grade and around onto a huge suspension bridge, which sagged down as the tractor went across. Here we would raise our heads and feel the spray on our faces from our right. The spray came from the beautiful Mangatini waterfall. Sand would be fed onto the rails from boxes on the front of the tractor as it slowly towed us up a fairly steep grade, through a rather forbidding looking tunnel before flattening out again. Then we went around a sheer

cliff face over a hundred feet up from the river as we emerged from the gorge into a beautiful open valley, which was closed in by the surrounding hills covered with rimu and beech, and the flats and lower slopes clothed in native grasses, and small scrub, amongst which dry run cattle and deer wandered.

On emerging from the gorge the race of trucks stopped at what was known as the sand-sheds. This was where the sand was dried in special furnaces to be used on the rails under the tractors to give the traction needed on the wet steep grades.

Tractors were also changed at the sandsheds. From here to the mine a different type of tractor, a Ruston Hornsby, shunting engine, was used as the grades from the sandshed to the mine were not as steep as the gorge. This tractor was started by fitting a "fizzer" or igniter into the engine, and a great burst of strength by two men on the crankhandle.

Near the sandsheds was the site of a huge sawmill of bygone days, and the remnants of the small township originally known as Charming Creek, the sawmill being Watsons Mill.

JOURNEY TO MINE

Rattling along at a greater speed we used to stand up in the trucks for this part of the journey, as this was the chance to see a deer and work out where we would go for the weekend venison. The hilly slopes towards Mt Glasgow, in the east, were crowned with hundreds of acres of pakihī clearings, stretching in patches from Seddonville to the Mackley River in the south towards the Buller River, and it was these pakihīs that were our weekend haunts with our trusty old service rifles. It was also here in our youth, by crossing roaring rivers, exploring chasm-like gorges, tramping endless pakihīs, stumbling through miles of heavy bush with a mass of lawyer and supplejack vines, that we gained a reasonable amount of West Coast bushcraft.

DEER

On our journey to the mine, around a corner and across a bridge, the trucks rattled past the "phew, stinkhole." This was a test bore for coal which emitted strong sulphur fumes and the tractor driver would always deliberately slow down, gradually gaining speed again around another corner.

One particular morning two deer were running in the same direction, but veering away from the trucks., when up jumped Ginger, who had been dozing in the bottom of the truck ahead. "Bang" went the old .303. "What the blazes was that?" "some of us shouted, then realisation dawned as Reg sang out, "Next time, Ginger, remember to take the cleaning rod out of your rifle." But Ginger, by this time was down and out of sight in his truck. Whether it was as a result of the extra kick of the rifle or not, no one ever knew.

The two deer stopped at the bush edge and gazed back at us as we rattled out of sight, on around through manuka, which grew in close along the side of the line.

This manuka, with its profusion of beautiful small white flowers, was distinctly marked two feet up from the ground for a distance of half a mile by a large black band of diesel carbon emitted from the horizontal exhausts of the tractor, which several times a day for some years had been blowing black smoke into the foliage. The manuka which was dominant on the pakihīs still bloomed profusely every year despite the pollution.

MINE DEPUTIES

Further on up the valley on a small flat we passed the cluster of small baches, where the mine deputies lived during the week. It was the duty of the deputy to inspect the mine, with his canary and wind gauge, for gas and ventilation . etc, every morning prior to the miners descending the mine. As a result he and the winch

driver (who had to have steam up in the winch boiler) were required to live on the job.

The train continued on past the sawmill, which by then was already working, its men having travelled ahead of us in their far more comfortable Model A Rail Car. Then past an old house on the right slowly up a grade through a short tunnel and we came to the two hundred ton capacity bins at the coal mine itself.

Climbing stiffly from the trucks we try not to think of the trip back home at night. Lying on top of the coal in the trucks, climbing down over the ends, to ride precariously on the buffers at the approach of every tunnel, wondering whose truck would jump a bad joint in the line and derail, thereby making us late home.

Never mind, we were here now, this was where we worked, so we hung up the lunch bags and got cracking.

ONE OF FIRST JOBS

One of my first jobs as a lad outside of the mine, was to assist in the starting of the ventilation fan engine, and periodically check and oil the bearings, which were drip fed on this huge single cylinder diesel engine.

The huge fan was needed to draw the bad fumes out of the mine and create a suction that drew in fresh air, through a shaft nearer the head workings of the mine.

Another job I had was to grease the axle bearings on 18 trucks five or six times a day. In one hand you carried a bucket of No. 2 skip grease, and you held about half a pound in the other hand, which you rubbed hard up on to the axle on the underside of the truck. This was a rather awkward job and after a week of this you generally found that your trousers could stand up on their own; no matter how you tried you always got covered in grease. After completing this task you washed your arms and hands in a kerosene tin of diesel, then were required to assist in the task on top of the bins tipping the smaller 15cwt trucks, which were drawn up full, and lowered empty by the steam winch from down in the mine.

PIT PONY

Every new lad thought it was great to work on top of the bin as here was the chance to have a go at riding that half-size crossbred brown and white pit pony that looked and acted like a real cowboy's horse. (I am ashamed that to this day I cannot recall his name).

"Yes," the chaps eagerly shouted at my request.

"We'll give you a lift on," as they practically threw me on to the pony's back.

Before I could grab the harness on the collar, I didn't have time to make out just exactly what was happening, only that I was high in the air, and that there was a six by two rafter at my belt level which I landed on, on my stomach, and hung suspended over like a bag of chaff.

Just below my feet the "so-imagined" quiet looking cowboy horse had turned into a rearing, kicking and snorting devil, and the chaps who had assisted me on to its back were roaring with laughter.

Initiation to the job was a bit hard on my pride and stomach. It had its compensation when I found later that this horse could be ridden sidesaddle fairly quietly.

My interest and trust of horses greatly deepened in later years in this mine, when I worked underground with a large Clydesdale named Bill. Apart from his temper on being taken down the drive into the mine on a Monday morning, Bill proved to be my eyes in the dark when I ran out of carbide for my lamp. He also sensed danger, was a great definer of human character, and a day-long companion on a lonely job.

This horse, believe it or not, could actually count by sound as could the small horse that worked at the bins.

The task of the horse at the bins was to tow sixteen of these empty, small rail trucks (commonly called skips, tubs or boxes) up a slight rise out of the bins, over a brow, to where they would hang suspended by the steam winch ready to be lowered down a fairly steep grade into the mine.

At times, for some reason or other, there would be an extra skip to be added to the race, making seventeen in all. Normally, when the sixteenth coupling was dropped onto the drawbar hooks this shrewd little horse, with no coaching, would immediately take up the strain and pull away.

In the event of an extra coupling dropping onto another skip, he just would not move, no matter how much coaching or abuse was slung at him. He would not even try!

To counteract this we would rattle the last coupling (making out we were removing it) and push back the skip, taking up the slack in the coupling so that the last two skips would jerk as one.

This trick almost worked at times but as he reached the top of the grade with the race of skips he would realise he was pulling the added weight, and he would stop, and allow the whole race to run hack into the bins.

With his stubby legs and powerful shoulders it was not beyond his means to pull two or three extra skips, but it just seemed to be beyond his every day normal routine and he refused to do it.

LIFE OUTSIDE THE MINE

Life outside the mine held great interest to me as a lad. The early morning flights of the squaking kakas winging their way high overhead from the slopes of Mt Glasgow to their feeding trees on the Radcliffe Range in the west, returning in the late afternoon, flying faster and quieter, apparently intent on reaching their nesting places, high on the mountain before darkness fell.

The native bush at Charming Creek held an abundance of birdlife.

Native pigeons were very plentiful in parts of the bush where the Miro trees grew.

Riflemen, tuis, and the mocking bird, were prominent throughout the whole valley, and the occasional pair of black swan was sometimes seen on some swamp-like clearings.

In later years, with the population spread of the opossum, I wonder what effect the use of poisons in the control of the possum has had on the birdlife, especially compound 1080, which I have seen the effects of over the past few years in other places.

BUSH SECRETS

The bush in Charming Creek Valley holds many intriguing secrets. Miles of old rotting, wooden tram lines, split slab huts, small bush clearings with old rusting boilers and broken cog wheels, chasm like creeks, with old abandoned coal mines with winches and skips rusting and rotting.

The old wooden tram rails were apparently from a very early settler's sawmill in the vicinity of Seddonville, which worked throughout the head waters of Charming Creek, solely for the extraction of kahikatea. The kahikatea's taintless timber, was used for the then most important manufacture of Butter Boxes.

BLACKSMITH

One of my duties at times at the mine was to assist the Blacksmith. Here was the opportunity of learning some of the mechanical wonders of bygone days; the magical white hot seamless weld; the art of tempering the miners pick; drawing out, re-shaping sharpening and tempering the coal twist and stone drills.

Manufacturing horse-shoes, and fitting them was an everyday job for this seemingly tireless man, who could swing a hammer all day, and, in the evenings, would happily play a musical saw at dances and functions.

Here was a man who, with no educational qualifications, could manufacture by hand a sack needle to prove his finesse, sets of railway points, and large parts, heat welded for steam driven machinery, which today can only be equalled by electric welding, gas torches and qualified personnel.

WEKAS

Woodhens or "wekas" were widespread in the valley. Their inquisitiveness and daring ways were often the highlights of our days when working outside the mine.

One such bird made three or four visits a day to the engineering shop, bravely strutting in straight to the base of the large lathe. Here, without wasting a second, it would pick the shiniest piece of metal turning that had just dropped from the lathe bit, in its beak and partly flapping its short stubby type wings, would quickly dart out of the workshops, across the railway lines, and disappear into the bush.

Curiosity got the better of us one day, and we decided to follow the bird and not far in the bush, we came across this weka's nest in a birch tree, partly rotten lying in a pool of water. Where a broken branch forked from the main trunk this weka had built a perfectly round nest, entirely of lathe turnings. It appeared that as the metal turnings became rusty, they were tossed out of the interior of the nest into the water, forming a quite large rusting ring in the water.

Their curiosity for shiny objects was often to prove their downfall, such as the aluminium detonator.

These detonators were at times accidentally and at times purposely, dropped on the ground, and were always found by the poking, prising, poor innocent woodhen who would poke his beak into the hollow end, and then on the nearest stone or rail, would continually tap, tap, tap, to its ultimate disaster!

On some hunting trips, when we were camped far into the head-waters of the Mackley — Orikaka River, we would hear strange bird-like calls, at night — and always believed them to be the call of the kiwi. Whether kiwis were ever found in this area of unsurveyed wilderness I do not know, for we ourselves never saw one.

DESCENT INTO MINE

The descent into the Charming Creek mine was down a fairly steep grade through shale and sandstone rock, which required, very little timber support, round a slight corner and suddenly flattening out into what was called the (foot of the dip). Here we had descended into the level seam of coal, from brilliant daylight to complete darkness, and an eerie silence, a distance of several chains.

The darkness and cool atmosphere took quite some time to adjust to, but, after a few minutes, with adjustments to our carbide lamps, we find that the single set of railway lines; we had walked between from outside, had now split into two sets of lines in this large chamber-like tunnel, known as 'the foot of the dip' layby.

This double-width tunnel, with its two sets of railway lines, allowed the race of skips that were empty, and had just been lowered down into the mine by the winch, to pass the full race of skips that were waiting to be hauled up the drive out to the bins to be emptied.

The signalling device to the winch outside consisted of two wires bared at the ends, when touched together they rang a battery-powered bell in the winch-house.

At times the winch rope became worn and broke and sixteen, fifteen-hundred-weight skips, full of coal, would come roaring back down the steep tunnel. Fortunately they generally jumped the rails of the curve at the foot of the dip, but this would completely block the outlet from the mine. On these occasions our signaling bell would be our only means of communication with the outside world. Morse type signal directions were passed to assist in clearing the blocked entrance, which we had to clear before we could leave the mine.

Whenever this happened we would be well on our way into the mine, the horse trotting steadily along ahead easily towing the race of empty skips, with myself standing up, riding on the buffers to assist in clearing the blocked entrance, which we had to clear before we could leave the mine.

These side tunnels were the old workings, and, with their partly collapsed chambers and flooded floor levels, they were declared by the mines underviewer to me, to be out of bounds, and, as he was known as NZs' oldest experienced coal miner his declaration was strictly observed.

Some parts of the main drive had been tunnelled through short sections of solid sandstone rock, some parts had a smooth rock ceiling with coal j sides and floor, whereas most i parts of the journey was 1 through solid coal, sides, top, and floor.

At one place a large crack or fissure crossed through the tunnel at right angles and water, with a strong sulphur smell, gushed through it under the rails.

Apart from one or two very wet floor and dripping roof sections, the majority of the main drive tunnel had very little timber or props to support the roof, indicating that the coal was of good mining quality.

MAINLAYBY

Eventually we reached the main layby, this was another double-width section of tunnel with two sets of rails.

We stopped here with the empty skips, disconnected the horse and led him over to his feed box, where he and I waited until a full race of skips had, been assembled.

Assembly of the race was done by several other horses bringing out two skips at a time from deeper in the mine, where the skips had been filled with coal by the pairs of miners.

LUNCH IN THE MINE

Lunch was generally eaten in the main layby, and, sitting with our backs to the coal wall, we would toss our bread crusts to the outer perimeter of light that our carbide lamps show. These thrown scraps would never touch the ground, they would be caught in the air, on the run, by rustling, squeaking rats.

There were rats of all sizes and colour, one in particular being a large white albino, whose pink eyes were always seen, watching us intently from the very edge of the outer circle of light.

It was pity on the new chum who unknowingly brought his lunch to work in a brown paper bag and left it in the main layby while he went about, his morning's work. A well-sealed, tin was the only way to protect your food from these ugly rodents.

DIRTY TRICKS

It was pity also on some miners wives who would open their husbands lunch tins to prepare their

lunch and find one of these ugly monsters inside-dead, placed there by some hooligan.

Many a time in the last minute rush to knock off, chaps would rush up to the wooden seat bench, grab the lunch tin by the leather handle, and rush off, only to find that all they had was the handle — the inside bottom of the tin being lead-head nailed to the bench, a well tried trick that worked time and time again.

ON THE WAY OUT

Once the full skips of coal were assembled I coupled the horse up to the first skip, and off we went on the put ward trip. I again rode on the buffers of the first skip.

Not far on the way I would come to the whitewash mark on the sides of the tunnel. This was the signal for me to jump off the skip, run on ahead of the horse and open up a large wooden door. Once the horse and the race of skips had passed through I had to close this door and run like blazes alongside the skips to regain my position on the first skip.

These large doors, there being two to open and shut in the main drive, were known as stoppings. Their main function was to regulate, in some devised way, the flow of fresh air throughout the mine.

Once we reached the layby at the foot of the dip, I unhooked the horse from the full race of skips. He would then walk back to the rear of the full race and go into a side tunnel where he was clear and safe from the empty race of skips that came rattling down the drive at quite a speed to level out and stop in the layby.

Seconds after they had stopped the horse would walk out of his safety tunnel and place himself in front of the first empty skip ready for the trip back into the mine.

After changing .the winch rope from the rear of the empty skips to the front of the full ones, I touched the two bare wires together, giving the raise signal to the winch outside.

By the time I reached the horse and dropped his tow chain onto the empty skip, the full skips were being

jerked away on their haul to the outside world.

The instant I dropped the horse's tow chain onto the skips we were also on our way, back into the mine for another load, of black diamonds.

END OF DAY

At the end of the day the horse was stripped of his harness in his safety tunnel at, the foot of the dip, and was left to wander up the drive, outside the mine, to where someone was always waiting to take him and the other horses to their stables. They were then watered, fed and cared for in a very meticulous way.

All of the other horses worked in this mine were half breeds, which, in some way, reduced their overall size, making them ideal for working in the far reaches of the mine in the smaller tunnels. But the horse required to tow sixteen tubs in and out of the main drive had to be very strong, and the Clydesdale full draught proved its worth in this job.

If I remember correctly there was one other Clydesdale full draught at the mine, which was kept as a reserve to relieve Bill, but lacked the intelligence of Bill.

Many years later, much to my grief, I learned that old Bill, on being retired from working in the mine, had been turned out free in the valley, and, owing to near blindness, had fallen down a deep shaft, not far from the mine entrance, and died.

Yet, after working out in the sun for the past twenty-five years, away from the mines, although some of my workmates lost their lives in the mines and some of us received injuries that we cannot ever forget, I am still proud to say.

"Yes, I worked at Charming Creek."

It was reported that already he had spent time test shafting and engaged the services of Reefton engineer Tom Learmont. The article speaks highly of prospects for the mine stating:

...there is no doubt that the proposition placed before the public is one of the best in the Dominion. ... [and] the cost of the constructing a railway and opening the mine will be low.²⁵

While the potential for success of the venture could not be denied, the fact the Crown had spent a substantial sum proving the worth of the field, only to sell the lease to a private company, raised the ire of the left leaning *Grey River Argus*.

