

Takitimu Heritage Trail

(Te Ara Ki Raro Te Maru O Te Maunga Takitimu)

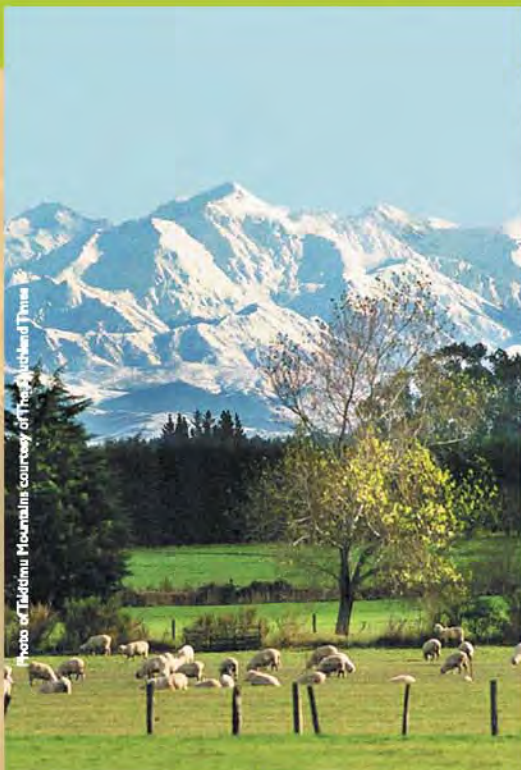


Photo of Takitimu Mountains courtesy of The Southland Times



Takitimu Heritage Trail

Welcome to the Takitimu Heritage Trail. The route is dominated by the spectacular Takitimu Mountains and foothills. Twelve sites marked with Heritage Trail signs are situated between Wreys Bush in the east and Birchwood in the west. The 40 km route may be travelled in either direction. This brochure contains a map and site information that will add to your experience.

The earliest European settlers in the area sweated both above and below the ground. Above ground farmers tamed the land from wilderness to its present agricultural bounty. Beneath the surface coalminers contributed much to the nation's wealth extracting millions of tonnes of high quality coal.

Both agriculture and mining produced a strong community spirit that was, and remains, characteristic of the district.

Enjoy the journey and drive safely!

1. Wreys Bush

Once known as Run 153 and described as "wastelands of the Crown", Wreys Bush is a permanent memorial to Walter Wrey. In June 1857 he and Herbert Seymour relocated 2500 sheep on the ship *Taranaki* from Nelson to stock run 153. Naturally the terrain looked much different from what we see today. Pioneer diaries described "desolate bush" and "spurs more holey than righteous". Walter Wrey built a sod and thatch hut on the site of the future *Annandale* homestead. He lived there for only about two weeks before he died in the infant settlement of Invercargill.

The founder of Riverton, Captain Howell, acquired Run 153 and other land as a dowry in 1838 when he married the Maori chieftainess *Kohi Kohi Patu*. William Johnston followed as the owner of *Annandale* which became the run's name from 1869. It was a popular stopover for wagoners, drovers and gold miners. Later *Annandale* was broken up into farms and settled predominantly by Irish farmers, mostly Catholic.

By 1901 there was a population of 289. The village had two pubs, two stores, a blacksmith, a saddler, a bootmaker and other services. Once viewed as a major centre for the district, today surveyed but empty streets mock the planners, for as Nightcaps grew with the discovery of coal, Wreys Bush declined.

When St Peter's convent school, run by the Sisters of Mercy, opened in 1899, the Wreys Bush Public School, which had one non-Catholic pupil, closed and "the Bush" became the only school district in New Zealand without a state school. After the growth of mining the Sisters opened a new school, St Patricks, in Nightcaps in 1917.

In 1936 St Peter's closed. The convent is still used as a dwelling. But the dormitories that housed boarders are gone.



Wreys Bush Convent and Boarding School

2. Wreys Bush Cemetery

This, the first official cemetery in the district, has two sections. Catholics, reflecting the predominantly Irish settlement, are buried in the eastern side. "The rest" in smaller numbers, lie in the west.

While divided in death, the settlers were united in life - having worked together, socialised together and played together.

3. Nightcaps Coal Company

Coal made Nightcaps. Its discovery gave the southern region a major and timely economic boost. Outcrops were discovered by Maori. By the 1870s wagoners began to cart coal. William Johnston of *Annandale* employed the Moncrieff Brothers to search more systematically. The Nightcaps Coal Company was established in 1880. At the same time the site for the town was surveyed.

A rail connection from Wairio was made on 2 March 1882. Nightcaps coal was used by international steamers and for domestic use. Smaller companies mined other pits nearby. In 1915, 108 men produced a record output of 63,651 tonnes. Production stopped in 1923. The company had produced 1.37 million tonnes.

Nightcaps was typical of mining communities in the prolific use of nicknames by the miners. Many a miner's full name was only ever discovered on his wedding day or at his funeral!

Until recently Ohai Coal Ltd had resumed mining the old Nightcaps seams using modern recovery and conservation techniques.



Photo: Vince Boyle



High Street Nightcaps c 1912

4. Sinclair Miner's Cottage

Built about 1905 and owned by the Sinclair family from 1930, this miner's cottage was gifted by that family to the Takitimu Heritage Trust for restoration in 1998.

Typically miners would wash away the grime from the day in a tin tub using water heated in the kitchen on a coal-fired range. For all its smallness early mining families would have been thankful to live in such a cottage. The first pioneering families were housed in tents and sod huts in a rather "bracing" climate.

Residents in the cottage had a regular reminder of why the town got its internationally unique name. (It is the only town named Nightcaps in the world). Apparently an early visitor saw prominent hills to the north topped with snow and remarked that they had their "night caps" on.

Directly to the west of this cottage is the former St Columba's Presbyterian Church. Opened in 1899, it was converted into a temporary hospital to cope with the many Nightcaps people who fell ill during the 1918 Spanish influenza epidemic. Over 50 people died - more than the number of deaths from local mine accidents. Nearby is the former Winton courthouse. It was shifted to Nightcaps in 1959 and first used as the Anglican Church and now as a museum.



Modern day coal miners roof bolting
Photo: Liz Marnane



5. Wairio and the Ohai Railway Board

Settled after the break up of the huge *Annandale* run, Wairio was formerly a busy farming centre with a school, store, blacksmith, hall, hotel and racecourse. From 1882-1992 Wairio was in the unique position of having twin termini to service two separate railway lines. A private line constructed by the Nightcaps Coal Company transported coal to the government line from 1882 - 1926.

From 1916 the option of another private railway company was pursued by the Ohai Railway Board after the state declined to extend its line from Wairio to the new coalfields at Ohai. Farsseeing local landowners funded the extension through mortgages against their properties. Approval for the railway was achieved after two commissions of enquiry by central government. The first building at the Wairio terminus was a single rail locomotive shed. The Board office was built about 1924.

The Ohai Railway Board was the only independent railway in New Zealand to have run at a profit throughout its existence. Included was a free passenger service for miners travelling daily on the 'Piecart' carriage to Ohai. Twelve million tonnes of coal were railed over the twin termini in the first 50 years of the Board's existence. It was hauled by locomotives - steam, petrol, diesel - to Wairio. From here the "black diamonds" were hauled on the extensive government system. Wairio became so busy that a bypass road was built in the 1950s to overcome the frustrations of motorists halted by wagons parked across the main road.



In 1992, New Zealand Railways bought the Ohai Railway Board for \$1.2 million. This sum now forms the basis for a trust, the Ohai Railway Fund, that provides grant funding for local community projects.

The Ohai Railway Board Heritage Trust is establishing a railway museum at Wairio.

Ohai c. 1934

6. Takitimu (Maunga) Mountains

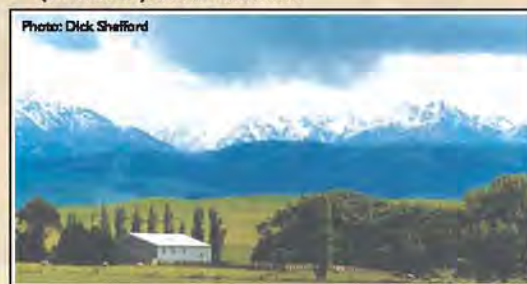
A dominant Southland feature visible from all points of the *Muribiku* (Southland) landscape, these provide a point of reference to unify this district and Heritage Trail.

Named by *Tamatea*, (one of the greatest explorers in the history of New Zealand), after the *Takitimu waka* (canoe) was wrecked near *Tē Waewae Bay*, these *maunga* add lustre to the Western Southland landscape and continue to inspire stories, songs, poetry and art.

Legend has it that during the overland journey past the *Takitimu Maunga*, *Tamatea* lost one of his party, a woman named *Nanaea Kaiheraki* (*Kaheeraki*) who strayed away from the others and was captured by the *maeroero* (spirits of the mountain). She was betrothed to *Tamatea's* son *Kahungunu*, but was never found again. However, over the continuing generations it is said some have had the privilege of seeing her shadowy form on the misty mountains in foggy weather.

For *Ngai Tahu* the *Takitimu Maunga* have significant cultural and spiritual importance – and are symbolic reminders of:

- The famous exploits of *Tamatea* in the South
- The crew of the *Takitimu* struggling to control the *waka* in adverse conditions
- The petrified, upturned hull of the *tupuna* (ancestral) *waka Takitimu*.



So significant are these *maunga* to *Ngai Tahu* that they were granted Statutory Acknowledgement by the Crown as *TOPUNI* in the *Ngai Tahu* Claims Settlement Act 1998.

7. McGregor Park

The McGregor Family of Mount Linton donated this 80 ha park in the 1950s. Over many years it has catered for a wide range of local recreational and social pursuits. McGregor Park was the site of the Nightcaps Coal Company's first mine in 1880. Not surprisingly, the area's first swimming pool, built on site in the 1930s by damming the Wairio stream, had a bed of coal!

An award-winning community planting programme of native trees and plants is gradually being established.

8. Steam Driven Sawmill

John and Lallie Eaves have a

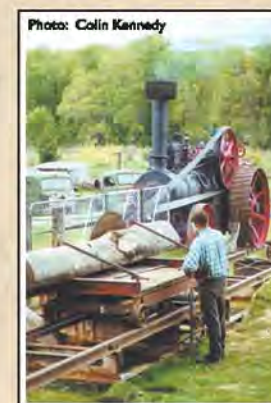


Photo: Colin Kennedy

rare collection of pioneering machinery on Benson Road. A working traction engine and sawmill provide a glimpse of early attempts to harness the power of steam. Machinery and vehicles of more recent vintages show the gradual changes over the 20th century.

Please respect their privacy and property by strictly following the directional signage.

Benson Road is named after Sam Benson who knew that mining was a thirsty business! His beer, home brewed without a licence, was popular in the early 1900s. A local doggerel sets the scene:

*Sam Benson brews good beer
Its wholesome and its rich
Its brewed from the water
That flows down our ditch!*



9. Tinkertown

William Tinker and his five sons started the first coal mine in the area in 1916. Aptly named Black Diamond it was located on their farm. A little village of about 25 families grew up near the mine. The Tinkers built a swimming pool and a hall adapted from an old barn.

Enthusiastic Tinkertowners constructed a live hare coursing ground, named Plumptre, probably the only one in Southland. It lasted a few years and closed when the sport was declared illegal.

Tinkertown coal screens. Photo: Vince Boyle



10. Ohai

First inhabited by farmers on land carved from Birchwood Station in 1912, Ohai mushroomed when coal mining got under way soon after World War I. Several coal screens lined the Ohai Railway Board track along Birchwood Road. Immigrant miners poured in. Most were "Geordies" from Newcastle, England, who were joined by Nightcaps miners made redundant when the seams there were worked out.

Services came - the Post Office in 1921, the school in 1926, the school of mines in 1934 and Mines Rescue Station in 1943. There was no pub until 1953! Ohai quickly surpassed Nightcaps in population and government officials like police were relocated there. Sporting clubs flourished. Rivalry with Nightcaps in any sport, especially rugby, was famously intense. This was put aside at work where teamwork underground was essential! The workers were united in union activities, in rescue work after explosions, in strikes, in voting ...

In the 1950s the local school was moved two kilometres to

the west because the Wairaki mine underground workings made the building unstable and potentially dangerous. Those conditions also upset one "underwhelmed" miner who was contemplating nature through his longdrop's door on a sunny Sunday. Without warning his prized garden disappeared into the mine leaving a wire fence jangling without supports!

11. Mount Linton Station

Mount Linton Station is one of New Zealand's largest privately owned pastoral agricultural businesses.

The original property was purchased in 1903 by WJA McGregor, grandfather of the present Managing Director, Alastair McGregor. At that time the run was 60,000 acres and was reduced to 30,000 acres at the end of WWI.

Mount Linton's activities are vertically integrated from genetics through to production and marketing. The main income base is sheep, lambs being the major earner.

Romney is the predominant breed, 40,000 ewes, with a Romney and Texel flock of 20,000 ewes. 1,900 Angus cows supply steers to the Five Star Beef feedlot and bulls are also sold.

The station has a well balanced land base from breeding to finishing properties including leased land in Canterbury.

A total of 100,000 stock units are farmed by the company.

Over the years international visitors have been hosted at Mount Linton. The tradition of hospitality continues with horse trekking, hunting and endurance riding, shooting, car rallies, dog trials, school parties, agricultural students, tour parties and field days.



12. Birchwood Station

Nestled in and around the Twinlaw Ranges in the southeast and the Takitimu Mountains in the north, Birchwood Station covers over 1,800 ha. A modern sheep and cattle production unit, it annually produces 1,500 head of Hereford cattle and its 20,000 sheep shear 67,000 kg of wool. Four generations of Edies have farmed the property since the 1920s.

First owned by Captain James Gardner, Birchwood gained a reputation as the social centre for the district from earliest times of settlement. Contemporary accounts painted vivid pictures of parties that lasted days. Arrangements for one such event, a race meeting in 1885, included a special train for guests from Invercargill to Nightcaps. Buggies and wagonettes took the travellers from the rail terminus to Birchwood. *"By noon 400 had assembled... amongst whom were a considerable number of ladies."*

A year later the Birchwood Hunt was formed and so named as a tribute to the generous host Captain Gardner. Right from the start in 1886 women followed the hounds - riding side-saddle of course! Some hunts were held over two days. The hunt remains a thriving activity to this day.

A co-operative dairy factory operated from 1917 to 1936. It was the dream of the then station owner Alexander Wyllie Rodger, an enterprising Scottish engineer, who financed the venture. He subdivided some station land into small blocks averaging 120 hectares. Farmers supplied the factory that produced cheese for export to Britain. Sadly production could not be sustained to keep it viable.

Rodger also had a major impact on the district through his work in coal mining and the Ohai Railway Board. For a short time that Board had a terminus at Birchwood. A school was built on former station land but closed in 1943.



Nightcaps 1934