

Human History

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In this section there are many opportunities for creative expression, such as writing and drawing. Before you come to Arthur's Pass you could visit the Museum and the Robert McDougall Art Gallery to get a feeling for the early days.

There is a comprehensive display covering the natural and human history of the Arthur's Pass area in the Information Centre at Arthur's Pass. There is also an audiovisual presentation of the evolution of the road across Arthur's Pass.

Early Travellers in the Mountains

People have always looked for ways to cross the mountains. Many years ago the Maori people of the Ngai-Tahu tribe crossed the mountains to trade in greenstone, and for social gatherings. They did not usually use Arthur's Pass, but travelled by way of Hurunui Saddle, now known as Harpers Pass.

Can you imagine what it was like travelling across the mountains in those days? The Maori travellers did not have boots but wore flax sandals. The journey would take several days. How would they camp on their journey? They would have to collect fresh food such as fern roots and fruits, trap birds and maybe catch some eels. Do you know how they would cook their food? There were no tracks or roads or bridges, so the going was very tough through the thick bush. The Maori travellers crossed swift rivers, using the same technique trampers use today. Do you know how to cross a river?

Imagine that you are an explorer looking for a way to cross the mountains. What would you look for? What would be the easiest way to get right up into the heart of the mountains?

A low point in the mountain chain is called a pass. If you follow a river up into the mountains, the river will become smaller and smaller the further into the heart of the mountains you proceed. At the source of a river it is sometimes possible to find a way to cross the mountain chain, whether by a saddle, a pass or a col.

This is what the early pakeha explorers did. They spent days and weeks cutting through the bush looking for a pass over the mountains. They were looking for more land to graze sheep and hoping to find an easier, quicker way from the east coast to the west coast than the Hurunui Saddle (Harpers Pass).

The trip across the Hurunui Saddle was very long and arduous. When gold was discovered on the West Coast in 1863 the search for a better, more direct route across the mountains was on. Arthur Dobson was a surveyor in Westland. He wanted to find a shorter way back home to Christchurch. Tarapuhi, a Maori Chief, told him there was a crossing at the head of the Otira River. On their return to Westland from Christchurch, Arthur and his brother Edward travelled up the Waimakariri River to look for this pass. They left the Waimakariri and travelled up the Bealey River.

Dobson Crosses The Pass

Arthur and Edward Dobson found that they could cross the mountains by going up the Bealey Valley. Arthur Dobson describes the area and his first sighting of the Otira Gorge in March 1864, in his "Memoirs" -

"The rata was in full bloom and its red blossoms made a brilliant contrast to the dark foliage of the birch trees. We found the descent from the moraine for the first 500 feet exceedingly steep, but there was sufficient width in the valley to allow a zig-zag cutting to be made into the head of the gorge, beyond which a good deal of heavy rock cutting -would be required to make a dray road. In this respect it much resembled the Hurunui Saddle, where the eastern approach is comparatively easy, but the western side drops suddenly.

I was at once satisfied that it would be impossible to get horses down the gorge without road making, so I abandoned the idea of attempting to take horses through by this route, and decided to take them over the Hurunui Saddle. We now returned to Goldney's station. Mr Goldney was very anxious to know if there was any chance of finding sheep country, and said that he would be very pleased if I would go over the Saddle again, and see what the country was like down the river, and he would bring a man to help. Edward, having work to do with a survey party in the upper Waimakariri, left, and I agreed to return to this Saddle with Mr Goldney and a man named Marshall. We started the next morning, followed the route that I had taken before, riding as far as the horses could go, and then pushing on through the bush. In this way -we got down into the gorge, where the difficulties began. There was a drop of thirty feet with vertical sides; to go down it, we cut a number of light poles, and lashing them together with flax, made a sort of rough ladder, down which we climbed. Goldney's sheep dog could not manage the ladder, so we lowered him down with a flax line. The remainder of the gorge was very bad travelling, with deep holes and large rocks, and in several places we were nearly afloat. We reached the junction of the stream, coming in near the present tunnel mouth, and camped on the flat. Next day we spent on climbing the mountains on the west side of the stream, in the endeavour to see if there were any signs of open grass country. We did not see any, as none existed. It came on to rain . heavily during the night, and the next day we found that there was far too much water in the stream for us to return that day. The rain ceased in the night, and the next day we were able to go up the creek, though it was very difficult travelling. We found that our ladder was still in place, and we again helped the dog with a flax

line. We camped where we had left the horses, and the next day got back to the station by noon."

"Memoirs", A D Dobson.

Since gold had been discovered in Westland in 1863, more and more people crossed the mountains, going up the Hurunui River, over the Hurunui Saddle (Harper's Pass) and down the Taramakau River to the West Coast, a very long way. Imagine the stream of gold-diggers, pack-horse supply trains, and drovers with mobs of sheep and cattle. The pressure was on to find a more direct route than Harpers Pass that was suitable for reading.

Surveyors and explorers looked at different passes, but finally Arthur's brother Edward decided that - "Arthur's pass is the best route". This is how the Pass got its name. It could just have easily been Jenny's Pass or Daryl's Pass if one of you had discovered it first.

I am always surprised they chose Arthur's Pass, as the Otira Valley is so steep, and must have been almost impassable in those days.

Keeping Comfortable

Can you imagine what it was like to live for weeks on end in the bush carrying everything you need with you, having no tracks or maps to show you where you are. Read the extract from Dobson's "Memoirs" on living in the bush.

Dobson talks about being in the bush -

"I was for two years exploring the forests and mountains, and during all the time we were never short of food or had wet blankets to sleep in. I found the Maoris to be ideal bushmen, and they made very good chainmen, were quick to learn and worked splendidly; in fact I could not have done this work under the same conditions with white men. They were always jolly and pleasant, could catch birds and eels, and knew where to find mussels on the rocks at dead low water, spring tides. They could light fires and pitch tents under any conditions.

The blankets were always dry, as they were rolled tightly with a suit of flannels in a sheet of oiled silk, which kept them quite waterproof and dry. When the tent was pitched and filled with brushwood, and a fire-fly at the end of the tent, and a flax or brushwood breakwind round the windy side, a snug camp was made in a very short time. The brushwood was put down for the bedding, on top of that the oil silk sheet was spread, and then the blankets, so there was no chance of the damp coming through."

"Memoirs", A D Dobson.

"The rivers flowing through the Canterbury Plains were at all times somewhat dangerous to cross, and particularly so in the summer time, when they were subject to floods caused by the north-west winds. These winds meant that heavy rain was falling on the mountains. When in flood the water is always clouded and often thick with silt. The rivers were seldom fordable on foot, and then only when they were very low, as in winter. To ford safely great care had to be taken

to enter the water just above the ripple in the fall, following the shallow water and avoiding the deeper channels. Frequently a very shallow looking fall might have a deep gutter on the far side, in which a horse would have to swim. A ford such as this is very treacherous, and has been the cause of many deaths.

In crossing the broad rivers an experienced person would ride about and look for a place where the channels were most numerous and carefully seek out the most shallow. It might be necessary in some cases to spend a long time, and go a considerable distance up and down the banks to find a suitable place. In the early days, accommodation houses were built near every river, the owner keeping horses to take passengers across, and to pilot vehicles over the fords. Occasionally boats were kept, as channels would sometimes form which could not be crossed on horseback. Travellers would ride up to the deep channels, cross in the boat, and swim the horses over after the boat. There was always an element of danger in fording, as the horse might stumble, or in some places get into a quicksand. The horses brought up on the up-country runs, where they grazed in the riverbeds, and swam from island to island, were the safest to use, as they were so used to the water, they never got flurried, and they knew how to stand in a strong current.

I did a great deal of travelling, often crossing rivers by myself, and the more I saw of them the less I liked it; there was always a risk.

"Memoirs", A D Dobson

River crossing

The going must have been difficult for these early explorers, with thick bush and bluffs and gorges to traverse. River crossings were often dangerous and drowning was a hazard that often faced the pioneers.

Denis Glover has written a poem entitled "The River Crossing", and in Arthur Dobson's "Memoirs" he describes fording rivers.

The River Crossing

The river was announcing
An ominous crossing
With the boulders knocking.
You can do it and make a fight of it,
Always taking the hard way
For the hell and delight of it.

But there comes the day
When you watch the spate of it,

And camp till the moons down -
Then find the easy way
Across in the dawn,
Waiting till that swollen vein
Of a river subsides again.'

And Bill set up his camp and watched
His young self, river-cold and scratched,
Struggling across, and up the wrong ridge,
And turning back, temper on edge.

Denis Glover (from "Arawata Bill")

Imagine the stores and equipment the early explorers would have to carry on their backs ...

"A tent, two flies, clothing, blankets, pick, shovel, tin dish, frying pan, gun, 14lbs shot, 2lbs powder, caps, bacon, tea, sugar, 200lbs flour, salt, matches, candles, a few nails -nearly 1 cwt each!"

Taken from the Journal of William Smart, an early prospector. Life is certainly easier for travellers in the mountains these days!

The Road

Work began on the road from Christchurch to Hokitika in 1865. One thousand workers with axes, picks, shovels, crow bars and wheelbarrows, rock drills and explosives, were employed in the section from Porter's Pass to Otira. The winter was hard and the workers had to struggle with snow, severe frosts and bitter cold. Their shelter was poor and their food was inadequate. They had to cut through rock and bush, build embankments and bridges, using only hand tools. No bulldozers and D9's in those days! The road took a year to build, an outstanding achievement considering the tools used.

After the road was completed a few roadmen stayed on to maintain the road. Jack's Hut, opposite the Upper Bealey Valley track, is one of the roadmen's huts. Would you like to live there?

Denis Glover has written a poem dedicated to the road builders.

The Road Builders

"Rolling along far roads on holiday wheels
Now wonder at their constructions,
the infinite skill that balanced the road
to the gradient of the hill, the precision,
the planning, the labour it all reveals.

An unremembered legion of labourers
did this scarring the stubborn clay,
fighting the tangled bush, blasting the
adamant, stemming the unbridled rush
of the torrent in flood, bridging each
dark abyss.

Their tools were pitiful beside the obstinate strength of the land:

**Crosswire of the theodolite, pick-point, curved shovel
small tremor of a touched off charge; but above all
the skill and strength, admirable in patience, of the hand."**

Denis Glover (from "Enter without knocking")

The road was welcomed by the gold seekers going to the West Coast. Packhorses carrying supplies over the pass, and mobs of sheep and cattle to feed the gold diggers used the new road. In 1866 the Cobb & Co coach service was started for passengers and mail.

Coaching Days

When you come to Arthur's Pass you may have a chance to walk along the old coach road. Imagine what this was like almost 135 years ago when the road was first built. Can you hear the clatter of the horses' hooves, the rumble of the coach wheels as it jolts over the bumpy road and the shouts of the coach driver encouraging the horses. If you look hard you may find some of the old mile-stones. Why do you think they are called mile-stones? How do we show the distance from town to town these days?

The coach was drawn by five horses and there were changing places about every 24 km (15 miles) along the way, such as the one at Bealey. The Bealey settlement consisted of a group of cottages, the telegraph station, a police camp and the Bealey Glacier Hotel - a favourite stopping place. A ferry was available to cross the Waimakariri River near where the bridge now stands. The Bealey Hotel was destroyed by fire several times. The remains of the last hotel can be found at the entrance to the National Park.

At this time in history there was very little settlement at Arthur's Pass apart from a changing place for the horses, a store and a few roadmen's huts.

The journey must have been very rough and passengers would wonder if they would survive the journey. The trip took 36 hours. Imagine sitting on a high box seat as the coach careers down the steep, windy, bumpy roads, passengers clutching their hearts in dismay. At some very steep parts the passengers would have to get out and walk. Can you hear the snorting of the horses as they try to keep the coach in control? Runaway horses, broken brakes, drunken drivers and blinding snowstorms all caused difficulties. Forging flooded rivers was especially dangerous.

In The Coach

**For the coach is raising the rolling dust,
As hot as Sahara sand,
And the ford is wide, and the
Steep hill track is the gate of the western land.**

**It's onward, onward, onward and westward still. By the ferry
gully and hanging cliff. Where the turns are short and
climbing stiff. And the horses pull and sweat with a will.
Horse the pride of the western land A champion whip with the
ribbons in hand, Life is a jest from the top of the hill,
For the brakes are on and westward still.**

Author Unknown

The Railway And The Otira Tunnel

Do you know why Arthur's Pass township became established? One of the most important aspects of Arthur's Pass is the railway. Many people travel to Arthur's Pass, and on through to the West Coast on the train. You may arrive at Arthur's Pass yourselves on the train.

The building of the railway and the Otira Tunnel, through the Southern Alps, has provided some of the biggest changes to the area now known as Arthur's Pass township and its surroundings. When you come to Arthur's Pass some of these changes will be pointed out.

At the beginning of this century, Arthur's Pass was a tiny village with a few roadmen's huts, a store, and the coach road running through it. The railway from Springfield was being extended westwards, finally reaching Arthur's Pass in 1915. Meanwhile, the first blasting for the excavation of the Otira Tunnel was fired at the Otira end in 1908.

The building of the tunnel and the arrival of the railway had a huge impact on the area.

A Tunneller's Life

Hundreds of workers came to live in the high mountain valley. These people were accommodated in little tin huts and shacks. When you come to Arthur's Pass look around the village and see which huts may have been a tunneller's home. The Lodge itself is also part of this history. It was built as the dining room for the tunnel workers. What do you think life was like for the people in those days? Can you imagine the parties the tunnellers might have had in the dining room on a Saturday night after a hard week working underground? Someone would get out their harmonica or squeezebox, and before long everyone would be singing and dancing. People had to provide their own entertainment in those days, as there was no TV or Playstation 2.

Food and supplies mostly came from Christchurch, delivered by Cobb & Co coach. Other needs were supplied locally.

Environmental Effect of the Railway Construction

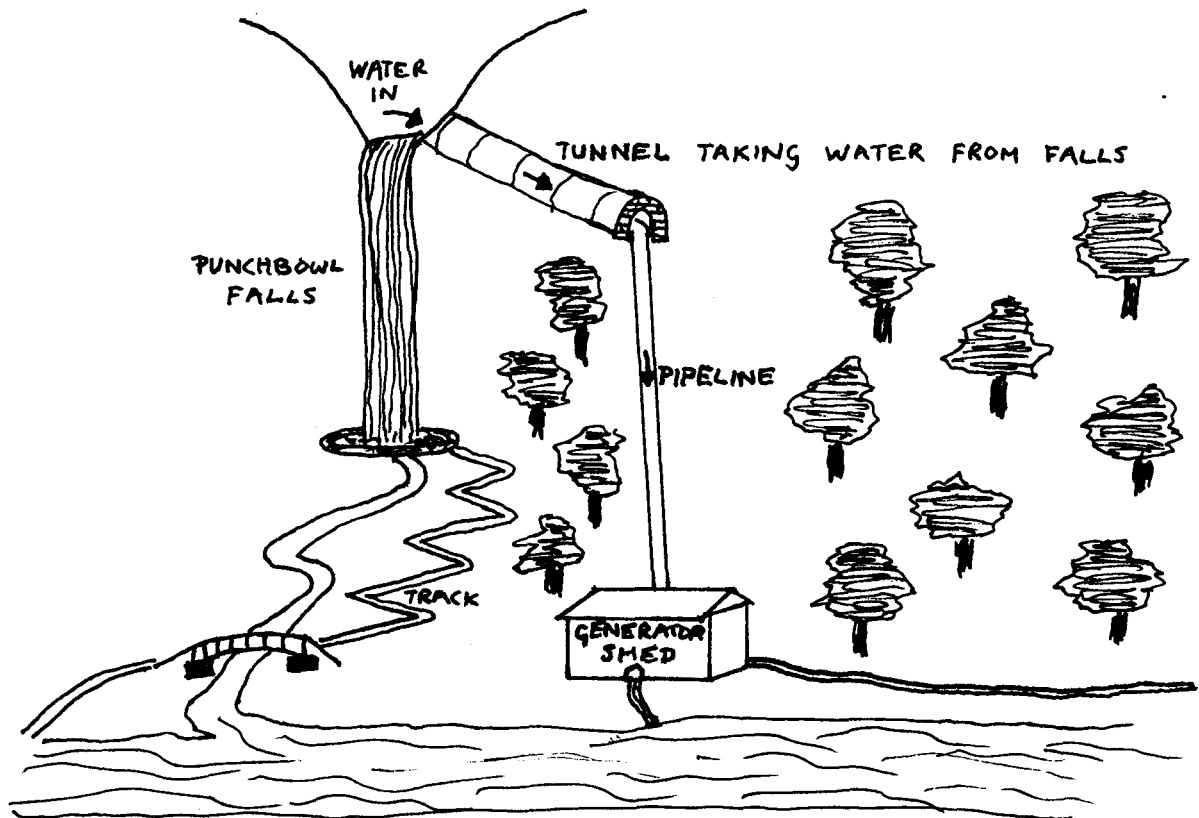
Trees were cut down to use for firewood, for building, and for shoring up the tunnel. You can see the places where beech forest was cleared for timber and firewood on the slopes near the Village. (See photographs in history section of gallery.) It is regenerating today as young beech trees. The forest looks quite different here because of the greater number of young trees all the same age.

Devils Punchbowl Waterfall and the hydro-electric scheme provided power for the tunnellers. Hydro-electric power was provided from the Punchbowl Waterfall. Water was taken in a tunnel from above the falls to lead into a pipeline running down the hill to the power station containing the turbines (see sketch). Electricity was generated here to provide power for the village and tunnel. The foundations of the generator can be found on the far side of the Bealey River near the track to the Punchbowl Waterfall. A line of young regenerating trees can be spotted leading down the hill to the power station remains. This is where trees were cut down to put the pipeline in. The entrance to the tunnel bringing water to feed this pipeline is found on the track up to Mount Aicken, which leads off the Punchbowl Waterfall track.

So, as a result of the Otira Tunnel construction, the township of Arthur's Pass then known as Bealey Flat, came into being.

Activities

Describe what the area was like before the Pakeha came to Arthur's Pass. How have European people affected the natural ecosystem? What changes in habits and feeding grounds of bush creatures do you think there have been? What were the effects on the natural environment of building the tunnel? Describe your life as a tunneller. Do you know how hydro-electric power is generated? Why did the steam trains need so much water? Describe how a steam train works.



Devils Punchbowl Waterfall and the hydro-electric scheme that provided power for the tunnellers.

Arthur's Pass National Park

The arrival of humans in the Bealey Valley had a large impact on the natural environment. Building the road, the railway and the tunnel caused a lot of damage. For example, many trees were felled for firewood during the building of the tunnel. Many of the habitats and feeding grounds of the bush creatures were affected as a result of changes brought about by humans. Can you see how?

Leonard Cockayne, a prominent ecologist in the 1890's, wrote enthusiastically about the beauties of the Arthur's Pass area and the need for its preservation. Cockayne realized that with the coming of the railroad many people would come to see the mountains, flowers, bush and to enjoy the rigours of the weather and the terrain. In 1901 the New Zealand Government reserved large areas in the Waimakariri and Otira Valleys. The construction of the tunnel would leave big scars on the landscape. The scars would heal but the new visitors were a threat. They would not necessarily stay in one small area. Some might have big ideas of fancy hotels, farming, logging or some other nasty development.

Arthur's Pass National Park was constituted in 1929 and in 1937 a ranger was employed full-time. The Park now included 98,400 hectares in Canterbury and Westland, including the Bealey Valley where the Arthur's Pass Village is situated.

Arthur's Pass is now easily accessible by road or rail, which is very fortunate. The National Park staff (Department Of Conservation, DOC) are kept busy helping people find suitable areas in the Park which will best suit their interest whether it be sunbathing, short strolls or climbing the highest mountains. They know the Park very well.

The DOC staff also encourage the public to use the park sensitively. All the plants, birds and insects which make up the forest ecosystem, live in harmony. This harmony or spirit the Maori people call Mauri. The story of Rata, the grandson of Tawhaku, talks of this spirit.

"Rata rushes to the forest and cuts down a giant totara tree to make a canoe. At night Te Tini, the many creatures of Tane, put the tree back together and stand it up as it was. Rata returns the next day and is astonished to see the tree standing up again. This happens three times but eventually Rata realises why Te Tini have stood the tree up, and he is ashamed because he did not approach the felling of the tree with proper respect. Te Tini then fell the tree and fashioned the tree into a great canoe."

When you come to Arthur's Pass you can show respect to Tane's garden, the forest. If you only take a little dead wood for a fire, carry your rubbish home and walk with care, you will be helping the DOC staff do their job. To take one small leaf from a large healthy tree will not endanger its life but if you pluck a leaf from a tiny seedling or tear down whole branches: you will enrage Tane, the conservation officers, and many others. Your respect will guarantee for hundreds of years the survival of your greatest heritage; for children and others like yourselves. John Muir the founder of National Parks in North America once said:

"Wilderness is a necessity Mountains, parks and reservations are useful, not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life."

A National Park is such a contrast to the rush and bustle of the busy city. Trees cannot be chopped down, there are no subdivisions and no industrial complexes. The quietness and beauty of mountains, forests, waterfalls, lakes and rivers are a source of inspiration for many visitors. Can you feel the difference?

Recreation

Arthur's Pass first became popular as a mountain resort when some of the tunneller's huts were sold to the public for use as baches. People come to Arthur's Pass to tramp, ski, hunt, botanise, walk, canoe and generally enjoy the mountain scenery.

Climbing and Tramping

The mountains of Arthur's Pass have always attracted people to climb and tramp in. **Mount Rolleston** had its first ascent in 1891. In the 1920's many climbers came to Arthur's Pass. Some would travel on horse back, bicycle, old car or on foot to get there.

Nowadays climbing is very popular, especially in summer. The mountains around Arthur's Pass offer a range of climbing varying from gentle snow plods to difficult ice climbs requiring ropes, crampons, ice axes and other special technical equipment. There is some rock climbing but the rock is generally crumbly and dangerous.

Many people come to Arthur's Pass to tramp in the bush filled river valleys and to cross the alpine passes. The **Department of Conservation**, who manage the park, have a number of huts throughout the park for trampers to stay in. People come for the weekend or for longer tramps, sometimes carrying their packs for 10 hours in a day. Tracks are maintained by the Department of Conservation staff. A tramper can get to very wild, isolated country or amble along short, easy tracks near the village.

Skiing

The Lodge has played an important part in the history of Arthur's Pass. Once the tunnel was finished and there was no longer any need for the Lodge as the dining room it was taken over and converted into Arthur's Pass Hotel. Material from an old school building, brought over from Otira, was added to the original dining room and the Lodge became the base for the first skiing at Arthur's Pass. The first skiing was done outside the Lodge by women guests on 7 foot Norwegian hickory skis, in the winter of 1927. They later graduated to the run down the road.