



# newsletter

## FRIENDS OF WAIUTA

PO Box 83, Reefton 7851 [www.waiuta.org.nz](http://www.waiuta.org.nz)

### December 2008

Greetings for the last time this year, with news of a drizzling but sizzling end-of-year meeting. That's brought about thoughts of a change which we'll look at later. Before that, let's look at a bit of other news.

#### DoC DOINGS

The Department of Conservation has been busy in and around town, with plenty more planned.

Following the fencing of the Prohibition ball mill site because of contamination, water samples from the creek that flows from there were analysed. They showed the water doesn't reach accepted drinking standards until it gets to the bridge just above Blackwater township. That's hardly surprising as a teaspoonful of the sand in the old re-tort up on the site would be enough to kill the average person. University of Otago scientists are working on solutions that could even involve using slime from the low-level adit where water from the mine workings runs out into the Snowy River - let's hope they can solve two problems in one go.

A better source of water would surely be the old horse trough at the hairpin bend on the Blackwater-Waiuta road. Pieces knocked off it in the past are being found and reattached, along with a few replacement bits, so water can be piped into it as in days of horses, drays and coaches.

Not so easily repaired are the B&M agitating tanks down at the Snowy. They've become so unsafe that cables are to be attached to them, not to hold them up but to ensure that they won't fall across the track

when the time comes. A gate will be put across the track at a safe distance, with a sign warning people to hurry past if they must go at all. The cyanide tanks will be fenced off too, and measures to clear contamination there will be investigated as well. Fortunately it will be possible to stabilise the stump of the Blackwater (south shaft) mine chimney.

#### VOLUNTARY HELP

Waiuta sites will also benefit from skills gathered from many parts of the world when Conservation Volunteers get to work in January. Tasks will range from ground clearing to painting and repairs, with Gills Cottage, the barber-shop, Lighthouse Hill and McGregors' store due for attention initially. This is to be an on-going programme, so suggestions for other things to be done around town and mines will always be welcome.

#### LANCE LOOKS BACK

News in our last letter of contamination around the ball mill site sparked this reminiscence from Lance Dean:

"I was 18 years old when I worked in the Battery. I stoked the furnace that roasted the concentrates plus any other duty when called upon. In the Ball Mill



*The sizzling side of our end-of-year get-together was around Graeme Hunter's trusty 'barbie' in a semi-sheltered position. Here Graeme Farrant prepares to plonk one more patties on the pan while renowned baker Tim White ensures everything is done to a turn.*

the noise was deafening but no one wore ear muffs. The cyanide came in steel drums and was packed like pineapple pieces; then when the time come to put the Cyanide in the vats using large tongs, no gloves or masks. We worked three shifts. The arsenic that was created by the roasted concentrates was flumed out into a gully - this did kill off trees and vegetation but today it has regenerated. A perk job for some of us was to fill the old empty cyanide drums with the arsenic solids that were deposited in a large holding tank.

These drums were then sent to Kempthorne Prossers; I understand it was used in fertilizer. We didn't wear masks, gloves or overalls, but I have never had any effects and don't know of anyone else that has. I am now 77 years and only suffer what everyone of this age does."

## BEREAVEMENTS

Again we must record the passing of former Waiuta people, this time teacher Ivy Wynne at 97 and assistant mine manager Alf Saunders at 98.

Mrs Wynne arrived at Waiuta in the 1940s when her husband, Joseph, worked at the mine. Her teaching skills were harnessed first as a relieving teacher and later full-time, right up until the school's closure at the end of 1951. Her children Elizabeth, Joseph and David were all pupils as well.

Alf Saunders, born at Blacks Point, was assistant mine manager-surveyor for Blackwater Mines, 1949-51. His numerous achievements before and after that period are best summarised by Reefton School of Mines book author, Elaine Bolitho, who has described him as one of the school's star students. Moving to Australia he served in five state divisions before becoming senior inspector of metalliferous mines for Queensland, adding registration as a chartered engineer to his many mining qualifications.

Our appreciation of Ivy and Alf's contributions to Waiuta is extended along with our deep sympathy to their families.

## ANOTHER 'DO' IN CHCH

Alva Morgan (Baran) and Dianna Calvert have another of their popular Christchurch get-togethers planned for



**Hot, sunny summers are recalled with these characters who still relax in the shade of the Empire Hotel back verandah at 'Little Earth' near Greymouth. Be sure to visit and share your reminiscences.**



**Alf Saunders was an honoured attendee at the 2006 centennial where he and Pat Stephens cut the celebratory cake. Graeme Farrant's camera caught him in the company of Jennie and Martin Cordes.**



**Postie Johnny Jones's proud Mum, Janet, sent this photo to family back in Newcastle upon Tyne many years ago - and now it's back via Margaret Sadler.**

21st March 2009 at the Hornby Community Hall. Space will be limited, so contact Alva (03 322 7326) if you'd like to go.

## KEEPING IN TOUCH

Emailing has become such a popular form of communication, and so many members now have it, that we thought it'd be good to publish a list of addresses in a future newsletter. We don't want to be publishing addresses without approval though, so if you'd like yours on it, contact the newsletter editor to give permission to publish - his address is [leswright@wota.co.nz](mailto:leswright@wota.co.nz)

## WEBSITES

While on the subject of electronic communications, don't forget the Jos Divis photo exhibition on [www.nzhistory.net.nz](http://www.nzhistory.net.nz) and news on the Waiuta village at Little Earth via [www.onyerbike.co.nz](http://www.onyerbike.co.nz). That will also link you to village builder Alan

Hunt's blogspot recording former Waiuta people who visit the attraction. Plus of course there's our site, [www.waiuta.org.nz](http://www.waiuta.org.nz) which is being upgraded.

## NEXT MEETING

After being drizzled out too often in November, we've decided that our annual get-togethers at Waiuta should be in March in future. The first will be in March 2010, but because that seems such a long time away, at least having our regular March meeting next year up there would be a good idea.

So 7.30pm on Thursday 26th March 2009, at Waiuta will be the time and place, with the idea of getting there as early as possible for a few rambles around, followed by picnic tea (bring your own) and the meeting at a time when it'll still be light - see you then!