



## July 2021

### Remembrance of the Mine Closure 9-10 July

This was a heading in our last newsletter. That



**Then -**

has now past and congratulations and thanks continue to role in on a daily basis confirming for us the success with which it was regarded. The weather was



**- and now**

appropriately cold and overcast fitting the event of 70 years ago. Paul, on traffic control, counted 80 cars from which we conservatively estimated over 180 people attending. This showed when the speeches were on when about three quarters were inside the Lodge and the remainder on the verandah outside. However the company was warm and jovial which with the warm and congratulatory speeches from a range of dignitaries ensured the event to be highly successful.

The scene was superbly set with a large range of historic features that gently took us back to the artefacts of the 1950's and before. Photographs formerly seen black and white were before us in colour and sound.

Illustrative of these were:

- for those interested a series of conducted tours around the town were on offer. One was lead by John Taylor to the Birthday Reef and early exploratory investigations. Others of a more general nature were lead by Tony Fortune and myself. These widely taken up, to the degree that a most non 1950's medium in the form of a text was received urging us to return as formal speeches were about to begin.
- the sympathetic dress of waitresses who after the speeches served us delicious afternoon tea of West Coast proportions and who, typically, were donating the proceeds to St Vincent de Paul.



**Mayor, Tania Gibson with our wonderful waitresses**

- the wonderful lineup of pre-1950 cars reflecting the life of the mine.
- the stirring sound of the bagpipes played by Chris McKay who was followed by wonderful Toddles, Raelene Holden's donkey. This took us back to the days of McKane's donkey, minus of course, the then riders of the McDonnell and Cooper boys.

### Formal Speeches

Represented were a number of dignitaries.

First came Jamie Cline, Mayor of the Buller District Council. Lou Sanson, Director General of the Department of Conservation spoke next. These were followed by Nicola Jackson, Deputy CE at Heritage NZ Pouhere Taonga. who was followed by Shane Hall, Greymouth Operations Manager of DOC.

Margaret Sadler, President of FOW, then introduced Jim Staton who used the occasion to launch the book: '*Of Mice and Mining Men - the story of Alborns Coal Mine, Merrijigs Coalfield, Reefton*' a book largely written by Les Wright and which Jim offered to update and bring up to publication standard after Les' tragic demise. It was fitting that descendants of the Alborns family were there to witness this.

Of note within the speeches were:

- the announcement from Lou Sanson of a grant of a \$100,000 towards the restoration of Jos Divis' cottage.
- implicit within the Nicola Jackson's address was the recent announcement that Heritage NZ had confirmed Waiuta as a category 1 historic site. As Sam Symonds explained later, 'we now have obligations to maintain these sites.'

Also and fitting the occasion, Laura Mills of The Greymouth Star has produced a two page feature article titled: "**Hunting Ghosts - 70**

**years since Waiuta abandoned**" where after the mines closure almost the entire town was dismantled and trucked away. She has done a remarkable sleuthing job of locating existing buildings, including the sites of those that no longer exist. Basically they cover the whole of the West Coast. Attached find a PDF of this article. I particularly enjoyed the memory of Elaine Jolly (nee Lines) whose house (and cat) went with the family to Westport.

"She relates the peculiar feeling of entering a familiar house with all its memories but on leaving that same house entering a foreign environment."

### **DOC Developments - Sam Symonds**

Sam didn't have time for a report but evidence of considerable preparations were clearly apparent in the tidy appearance of the town reflected in the mown lawns and tracks - (some of this done in heavy rain) - that made it easy for visitors to visit former significant locations to reminisce of days past.

The clear informative new information signs were frequently commented upon too. Sam reports that our recognition as Tohu Whenua (*a place of historical importance*) has had the result of more people visiting Waiuta as indicated by tourists visiting to experience the town and more importantly by increased use of the Lodge.

Chris Cochran, a conservation architect has now been engaged to undertake remedial work specifications on Jos Divis' house, on Rimu Cottage and on the Police Station. After many years of concern this will start a process that will safeguard the cottages as important heritage structures with the history and significance of each identified and proper processes for safeguarding each prescribed. We have been concerned about the deterioration of these for some time and welcome this development.

### **General News - Meeting**

John Taylor using his extensive geological knowledge has been working on producing a book on the Progress Mine. It is coming on well and should be published next year.

The meeting expressed a feeling that it was time we reassessed where we expend our energy, that we return to more basic matters. Over the past few years we have produced two documentaries and several books which with associated efforts and costs of achieving these has meant that more basic matters such as opening and keeping open various tracks and sites of the town have been neglected.

There has been a steady erosion on their upkeep and expansion over the last few years and opinion was that more effort should be put into this type of work. This is, after all what many visitors want when exploring the town. Some cleared sites / tracks of a few years ago have effectively been 'lost' with the vigorous regrowth that occurs in Waiuta. To get these back and to even extend some sites would be beneficial to the overall Waiuta experience. Off hand I can think of four such potential improvements.

### **Jos Divis Documentary**

Progress on this documentary is well advanced. '*Just about there*' was the expression used regarding financing this. Applications for finance have largely been successful and Dave Kwant (Producer) has already done some initial filming with several interviews completed and produced an outline of Jos' story with possible filming locations. These include Waiuta, Blackball, Waihi, Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington, Museums in Hokitika and the Hocken Library in Dunedin, Matiu/Somes Island and the Czech Republic. These extensive locations arise from Jos being an immigrant and an extensive traveller. Already it looks exciting.

### **In Memoriam**

Our sympathies go to the family of Mike Casserly who died in June. Mike's parents were married in Waiuta and his wife's mother was Cath Beckwith, the Beckwith's being a prominent family in Waiuta.

We also remember Betty Mona Newman who passed away in March aged 95. Betty is the child in the Jos Divis photo (at far right) of the Jones' family taken as they were leaving for Auckland in 1931. Off hand

### **Future Waiuta Related Meetings**

Our Next Meeting is on Saturday 20 November At Waiuta Lodge at 2 pm

And looking ahead to 2022 pencil in our first meeting for 19 March at Waiuta at 2pm.

#### **Next Christchurch Gathering - it's Christmas!**

**When:** Sunday 5 December 2019

**Where:** Paul McGirr's house - 9a Wittys Road - Avonhead

**Time:** 10.30 am - finishing about 3 pm

**Bring:** \$15 and and Christmas good will Reminders and details will be sent out for both of these closer to the time.

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