

March / April 2024

Greetings.. There is so much happening that It seems that in the last few years we start each newsletter breathlessly detailing developments just gone or of a new success in one of many prospective ways. This time we look forwards we look to the present and, appropriately to the past. Topmost in our minds of course, was the very successful opening of the renovated Jos Divis Cottage by the relatives of his who made a special journey from Czech Republic. From the moment they arrived in NZ they were royally treated with conducted tours of the places in which he lived, first in Waihi where Jos worked as a miner 1919-24 and again in 1930, and then to an exposition of his photographic works at the National Library in Wellington. Unfortunately the at Somes Island visit, where he was interned during WWII was cancelled due to wharf restorations. Later they visited Blackball, the town at which he first was employed in mining coal and from where his first photographs, for post cards, were taken.

However it was in Waiuta that most of his work was conducted leaving us with an exquisite and valuable record of the people and events in this small gold mining town. His work, in no small way has contributed to the current historic recognition of Waiuta as a place that holds the status of 'Tohu Whenua' - a place that contributes to and tells NZ's story.

On Thursday evening FoW welcomed them with a quintessential NZ meal of 'Fish n Chips' at Dave and Maree Grantham's lodgings followed by a Blackboy Peach crumble dessert with hokey pokey ice-cream and custard, this prepared by Maree.

Friday was the opening of the Cottage event. After assembling at the Shinbone Alley Corner the entire party was lead by rousing and indeed stirring music from the Westport Pipe Band. What an inspirational debut. This was followed after the welcome by the speeches from the following:

Chris Hickford: Operations Manager at DOC Greymouth - welcome, site safety, general house keeping. and Master of Ceremonies

Nic Jackson: Deputy Chief Executive. Heritage NZ

Jamie Cline: Mayor of Buller District Council

Margaret Sadler: President of FoW

Mark Davies; Director of Operations at DOC Hokitika.

In conclusion Dominika Schmidtova, Jos' great great niece, spoke on behalf of her family thanking everyone for warm welcome and the events of the day.



Margaret with our honoured guests at the cutting of the cake ceremony.

They are L - R: Jiri (George) Nesi at rear and at front Veronika Schmidtova, Dominika Schmidtova, Nelly Neslova. Martin Hudec. Veronika is Jos's great niece.

After these the family after cut the ribbon opening the cottage followed by a guided tour around the cottage before departing for the Lodge for light lunch, the cutting of the cake.

That evening they were taken to a very enjoyable meal at Dawson's Hotel.

The whole event had been closely planned and orchestrated for by DOC, taking care that every eventuality would be accommodated for. There are innumerable ways this was called upon, chief amongst them was that it rained. Two large marquee tents solved this - to the extent that one of our guests remarked that it added to the ambience and spirit of the proceedings by saying that '*rain made the day*'. This was a reference to Jos' writing to his mother of the Waiuta weather.



A much enhanced and an appropriate headstone now graces Jos' gravesite

Saturday, saw them at the unveiling of the refreshed Jos Divis headstone at Reefton Cemetery, from whence they departed for Blackball, where Jos was first a coal miner, and where an exhibition of Jos' photos was on show at Blackball's Inn.

On Sunday they were experience of visiting the Snowy River Mine. As four of the family are engineers they found it an extra special experience asking asking many penetrating questions. Monika described the tour as 'humbling'.

Enter this address into your browser for photos of their experience. Note the prominent Birthday Reef they are now working at.

<https://www.icloud.com/sharedalbum/#B0sGAfJVYGf8pIZ>



At the working face - with the Birthday Reef clearly seen behind them

From there they were released to become simple tourists, travelling south to sample other aspects of our wonderful country before returning home at the end of March.

Arising from our Annual Meeting on the day following the Opening of the Cottage

First - our AGM

The results for the election of officers were:

President: Margaret Sadler - re-elected

Vice President: Peter Kerridge / Alan Stephens

Acting Secretary: Margaret Sadler, P Kerridge,

Acting Treasurer: Peter Kerridge

Newsletter: Graeme Farrant

Management Committee Members:

Graeme Farrant, Dave Grantham, John Melville, Simon Nathan, Hank Scott, Oliver Young and our DOC representative Casey Rhodes.

And then from our General Meeting..

Margaret reported:

- on the huge success of the Cottage opening.
- that work on the restoration of the Police Station was underway with repiling and levelling nearly finished and the replacement the weatherboards only days away.
- that the book 'Friends In Chains' which we are having reprinted and made more visually attractive with many additional photos is almost complete and will soon be available in the selection of books FoW have for sale.

Three new life members, all richly deserved, have been issued with Life Membership Certificates. The first was to Elaine Bolitho at the National Library Wellington Jos Divis exhibition a week earlier. The other two were awarded to Simon Nathan and Jim Staton after the luncheon for the Divis house opening the day previous.



Between Margaret Sadler and Peter Kerridge are two of our new Life Members - L to R are Jim Staton and Simon Nathan

DOC News

There was no-one present to address this but then this wasn't needed as it was very evident from the outstanding preparation of the town for our Divis celebration and the professional manner in which it was run. Waiuta looked superb, a credit to all concerned.

Federation Mining

Matt Mengel, Federation Mining Engineer, reported excitedly on progress at the Snowy River Mine. Dramatic progress has been made. A month ago they intercepted the Birthday Reef at a depth of 880

metres below the surface. To date they have have extracted over 1000 tonnes of ore now on the surface for processing and from some of that he was able to see easily visible gold. He reports that they are now over 50 metres below the old workings which presents the problem of neutralising and the removal of 'black, stinky, dirty dishwasher like water' that has been accumulating since the mine's closure in 1951 in the old workings 5-600 metres above them.

He further reported that a feasibility study was being done with the aim of attract new investors. The initial interest looks very promising.

iCloud Photos - Enter this address for a range of pictures taken on the day showing the diversity of happenings.

Noted too were the presence of many families with deep Waiuta connections who used this event not only to partake in this celebration and to renew historic acquaintances with the town and former townfolk.

<https://www.icloud.com/sharedalbum/#B0sGKQPy6dgO2L>

Click on each photo for a full screen image.

Professional Photos

You will have noticed the acclaimed professional photographer in attendance at the opening ceremony organizing attendees into family or interest groups. You can contact him at photos@stewartnimmo.co.nz

Meetings for the coming year - note these in your diary although a reminder will be sent out a week or two earlier...

- 13 July at 1pm at St John's Hall, Reefton
- 9 November 2024 at 2pm at Waiuta.
- 15 March 2025 at 2 pm at Waiuta.
- Refreshments will follow each meeting.

Christchurch Gatherings: all to be held at Paul McGirr's residence at 9A Witty's Road Avonhead. Normal rules apply – cuppa at 10.30am, and bring some food to share for lunch.

- Sunday 21st July at 10.00 am
- Sunday 9 December, This is also our annual Christmas Lunch. Christmas Dinner will probably be \$20.00 – inflation – but will let you know closer to the time.
- 23rd March 2025 at 10.00 am

An Old Waiuta Identity

Dave Grantham sent this remarkable narrative regarding his father in law Jack Chapman.

- Jack Chapman, at 96, is now probably the oldest surviving former resident of Waiuta. He lived there from 1932 to 1941. His father, also Jack, was awarded the contract to show the talkies in the

miners' hall, which he did for two or three nights a week. He supplemented his income by fixing radios. The hall burnt down in April 1941 ending his livelihood and the family moved away soon after. Jack junior completed his primary schooling in 1940 and was sent to board at Boys' High School in Christchurch. He ran away twice in the first six weeks, walking to Springfield along the Old West Coast Road (to avoid suspicion) and then catching the train to Ikamatua. On both occasions, NZ Railways sent the bill to his parents. After the second time, he was not sent back to school telling his mother he would never be a burden on her. He got a part-time job with storekeeper, Fred Thorn, delivering groceries, selling ice creams, etc. He now lives in Brisbane with his son Stuart and daughter-in-law Bernie.



Jack on a recent one-day cruise visit to Lyttelton. He is with his daughter, Maree Grantham

And finally Simon Nathan alerts us of the exhibition of Jos Divis photos currently showing at the National Library in Wellington until July. They are well worth viewing for anyone visiting or those living in Wellington.

<https://natlib.govt.nz/visiting/wellington/cast-in-light-life-in-a-mining-town-exhibition>

But for those who can't go and see the exhibition, you can also the images online - just click on the button "Start your online visit".

Requiescat in Pacem

We remember Edith Bannan, nee Waters who died recently aged 91.

We also remember Judith Henry, nee McKane, (of McKane's donkey fame) who died in Christchurch on April 5 aged 80. Others who have passed are Rex Crook of Mawheraiti has passed unexpectedly aged 84 in Christchurch in April. Rex donated to FoW the old horse cart we are having renovated. We also remember Doreen Lindley, a recent FoW member who passed away in March.