



FAMOUS ALPINISTS.—Three of the most prominent alpinists in the South Island photographed at the Franz Josef Glacier Hotel. From left: Dr. Teichleman, of Hokitika, with Guides Peter Graham (who is leaving for England this week) and Alec Graham.

EARLY WESTLAND

TOURIST RESORT DEVELOPMENT

If any one man more than another has contributed to the development of the West Coast, and Westland in particular, as a tourist resort, it was Mr G. J. Roberts, Commissioner of Crown Lands for this district from 1902 to 1909. He was instrumental in bringing out the Westland section of a Government publication, "Tours and excursions in New Zealand."

He took the tourist from Christchurch over the Otira Gorge to Hokitika, and from there on as far as Jackson's Bay, describing the scenery as he went along. The pamphlets contained numerous illustrations of the lakes, mountains, glaciers and forest scenery, which, at that time, were very difficult of access. Now, however, thanks to the great advancement of transport service—motor-car, train, and aeroplane, and the amenities resulting from settlement, it is easy of approach.

In these early days the Southern mountains and glaciers were visited principally by scientists and explorers, and a few daring mountaineers. This of course, was apart from the prospector, who was to be found now and again in the most out-of-the-way and almost inaccessible places.

Mr Roberts was instrumental in getting iron huts erected at the terminal faces of the Franz Josef and Fox Glaciers for the convenience of the mountaineer tourist, and it was not until much later that accommodation was provided.

In 1899 a party of three, two Englishmen and an Australian, engaged Mr P. Graham and Mr Arthur Woodham to prospect the Callery Valley for gold reefs. They joined the prospectors in their search, and although unsuccessful in finding reefs of any importance, they succumbed to the lure of the mountains.

Year after year they visited the alpine regions for alpine work, or exploration, accompanied by one or both the Grahams who enjoyed these expeditions equally as much as did the other three.

Thus it came about that Messrs Peter and Alex Graham assumed the roles of alpine guides, and eventually took over the (then) small accommodation house at the Waiho, three rooms built of fern logs since which they have developed it into one of the principal tourist resorts in New Zealand.

It will therefore be seen that from small beginnings an evergrowing industry has been created, the south road ever extending south, and wayside accommodation houses, growing up for the convenience of travellers.

The next major development was the construction of the Hostel at Weheka built for the Sullivan brothers and which enjoys equal popularity as a tourist resort with its neighbour the Franz Josef Hostel.

These are not simply country accommodation houses, but are commodious mansions, with all modern appointments and comforts, comparing favourably with first class hotels in the cities.

The fame of South Westland has been bruited abroad, and overseas tourists are among the regular visitors. This district with its varied scenic wealth is ever-increasing in its popularity, and apart from proving an irresistible attraction itself, provides a wonderful climax to a motor tour through the glorious West Coast from the northern centres of the South Island.

An important part in this district's development was also played by the late Mr. C. Douglas, accompanied by Mr A. P. Harper, whose labours and observations have been recorded by the Westland Survey Department records which have proved of inestimable value to those who subsequently visited this region for high alpine work.

Among those noted for their alpine exploits in the early days are Dr. E. Teichelmann, and Canon Newton, formerly of Ross, who was recently a visitor here from the Old Country.

Joining the staff of James Chesney and Coy., merchants, as a junior clerk, Mr Ritchie spent two years here. At that time the firm became shipping agents for nearly half the sailing vessels entering Hokitika, carrying mixed general cargoes, from Melbourne, Sydney, and Tasmania. It was Mr Ritchie's work in the office to enter the vessels at the Customs Office after making out the manifests from the bills of lading. The Collector was Mr E. Patten, who was also the local body auditor, when local government took shape.

Among the incidents recalled, Mr Ritchie remembers when Sullivan of the Burgess, Levy and Kelly gang of bush rangers, was brought to Hokitika. A great crowd was at the wharf thinking the prisoner would be brought there, but he had been landed at the South Spit, where the flag-staff was situated at the time. That was done to avoid the crowd. Sullivan was taken in a cart with a police escort along the beach, there being two mounted constables with drawn swords leading the way. The Police Camp (as then called) was near where the Drill Hall is now, and the prisoner was driven off the beach by way of the old Empire Hotel right-o'-waw. The crowd endeavoured to rush the dray, and the police had their work to keep the menacing crowd back.

AN EARLY PIONEER

Mr Ritchie also recalls a racing experience. He was present at the first race meeting at Clapcott's paddock, January 1, 1867. He remembers Mr Cassidy's grey horse Archy winning the Packer's Purse. The race was run in heats over a distance of three quarters of a mile, weight for age. Archy was beaten the first heat, but won the two succeeding heats and the race.

During the years between, Mr Ritchie fulfilled the work of a worthy pioneer. He went to South Westland, and was established at Jacobs river where there was a Maori settlement. He became the friend of the natives and was much trusted by them. Mr Ritchie was the local shopkeeper, postmaster, and later appointed a Justice of the Peace. The Bruce Bay district owes much to Mr Ritchie's advocacy of the wants of the people. In later years he was a member of the Westland County Council and his knowledge of the south country was very valuable. On returning to Hokitika, he took an active interest in local affairs, and now spends the evening of his days in the southern district where so many years of a busy and active life were passed.

Mr Ritchie was among the early arrivals, coming to Hokitika in 1865. He was a passenger to the Hokitika roadstead in the s.s. Lady Darling, arriving November 9, from Dunedin, after a record stormy trip. The s.s. Bruce brought the passengers over the bar into the river. The trip was the following one to the drowning fatalities when eager passengers from the Lady Darling, attempted to cross the bar in an open boat, which was swamped and six souls lost.

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J. Ritchie died July 1935

pp. 127-134

Hokitika Jubilee (1860-1935)

pp. Ch. Ch. Owen & Hokitika Garden

127