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MILESTONES ON THE ARTHUR'S PASS ROAD TO THE WEST COAST

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Milestones once lined the roads throughout the country but are now difficult to locate even in passing reference (for example, Hutton 1888: 257–259). Although once prolific, perhaps it is because they were so commonplace that now few remain. The old West Coast Road from Canterbury over Arthur's Pass is one of the very few roads in the country where milestones are still present along the roadside.

In 2005 Ivan Taylor (2005: 111–112) listed the approximate locations of twelve milestones identified as part of his research on the old West Coast Road (now State Highway 73). These twelve milestones comprised two at the Tawera Memorial Hall in Springfield forming part of a war memorial; two at the Arthur's Pass Visitor Centre of the Department of Conservation; and an additional eight on the side of the road.

This fieldwork was intended to follow up on Taylor's list, to see whether all of the milestones were still in place six years later and to provide more accurate descriptions of the locations. From recording the distances from Springfield and comparing those with the inscriptions on the milestones, it was possible to ascertain whether the milestones were in approximately the correct locations for their mileage or had been relocated. After some discussion, nine of the milestones have been added to the New Zealand Archaeological Association site recording scheme, as the milestones themselves are considered historic features.

The distances on the milestones were originally measured from the old Springfield Hall, the site of which is to the left of the existing Springfield Hotel (Taylor 2005: 111). For convenience, the distances given here are measured, east to west, from the Tawera Memorial Hall (the new Springfield Hall) and, west to east, from the Arthur's Pass Visitor Centre. While these measurements provide an approximation of the distances, State Highway 73 diverges in places from the route of the original West Coast Road so a degree of error is introduced in attempting to correlate distances.

	Location	Mileage	Material	Distance from Springfield	Distance from Arthur's Pass
1	Tawera Memorial Hall, Springfield	4 miles	Limestone	-	82.6 km
2	Tawera Memorial Hall, Springfield	5 miles	Limestone	-	82.6 km
3	west of Springfield	*	Limestone	1.6 km	81.0 km
4	Castle Hill Station	19 miles	Limestone	30.5 km	52.1 km
5	Lake Pearson	*	Limestone	49.7 km	32.9 km
6	Mt White Road	37 miles	Limestone	59.0 km	23.6 km
7	Greyney's Flat	47 miles	Concrete	75.7 km	6.8 km
8	south of Snow Creek	49 miles	Concrete	79.1 km	3.5 km
9	Arthur's Pass Visitor Centre	35 miles	Limestone	82.6 km	-
10	Arthur's Pass Visitor Centre	51(?) miles	Concrete	82.6 km	-
11	McGraths Creek (above "Daisy Flat")	58(?) miles	Concrete	83.9 km	1.4 km
12	opposite Jack's Hut	53 miles	Concrete	85.4 km	2.8 km

Table 1: Details of milestones and distances

Styles of milestones

The milestones remaining along the West Coast Road can be divided into three categories by the way in which they have been inscribed. Two of these styles have been chiselled from limestone and one cast from concrete.

On the first style, the carving of the inscription is simply the number above a capital 'M' and the milestone pictured, "37 M", is an example of these (Figure 1). The stone has been chiselled from limestone into a rough rectangular block, some of which are rounded at the top and others have been formed into triangular or trapezoidal shapes with two or three straight edges. Some of the stones are 'waisted' or curve inwards partway along the length. Five examples of these were located, numbered 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6.

The second style is also carved from limestone in a similar manner but the inscription is more complex. Only two milestones with this inscription have been located: one of them is incorporated into the War Memorial at Springfield Memorial Hall as pictured (Figure 2), it reads "5 MILES TO Springfield", and the other is on display inside the Arthur's Pass Visitor Centre.



Figure 1. '37 M' milestone on Mt White Road.

The third style of milestone has been cast from concrete and five examples of these were located – numbered 7, 8, 10, 11 and 12 below. The inscription on the exemplar pictured reads “SPRINGFIELD 53 MILES” (Figure 3).

Although the concrete milestones were presumably of later manufacture, no information has yet been located about the relative ages of the different styles of limestone milestones. One may predate the other or it is possible, but less likely, that different people may have been involved in sawing and chiselling the limestone blocks, resulting in different styles.

Descriptions of milestones

1–2 Tawera Memorial Hall, Springfield

Two milestones are located here, set into the war memorial at the Tawera Memorial Hall, Springfield, as part of a Year 2000 project supported by the Canterbury Community Trust. The milestones have been relocated for



Figure 2. ‘5 MILES TO Springfield’ milestone.

	Easting	Northing	Error
1	1513219	5201099	± 3 m
2	1513219	5201099	± 3 m
3	1511745	5201713	± 3 m
4	1496655	5214024	± 3 m
5	1500540	5228427	± 3 m
6	1497504	5237075	± 3 m
7	1484948	5238954	± 4 m
8	1484096	5241597	± 5 m
9	on display inside Visitor Centre		
10	1482712	5244676	± 5 m
11	1482455	5245929	± 6 m
12	1482350	5247146	± 6 m

Table 2: GPS locations (NZTM) of milestones.

inclusion in the monument and because of this have not been allocated site record numbers.

The limestone of the first [1] is much weathered, so that the “4 M” inscription is eroding but still legible. The inscription “5 miles to Springfield” is still visible in the second [2], pictured in Figure 2, but the limestone has been heavily graffitied.

3 West of Springfield

Located on the south of the road shortly after leaving Springfield is the most easterly of the roadside milestones. As it is 1.6 km from the Tawera Memorial Hall in Springfield, this should be the one mile marker but the limestone is heavily weathered and, although the “M” can still be read, the number of miles is illegible.

4 Castle Hill

The 19 mile (“19 M”) milestone is situated at Castle Hill by the fence line on the west of the road, just to the north of the homestead complex. It is at the correct distance from Springfield (19 miles = 30.6 km), although it has



Figure 3. 'SPRINGFIELD 53 MILES' concrete milestone.

almost certainly been moved further from the edge of the road. The limestone is spalling badly and has perhaps been used for target practice as there are a number of small dimples in the stone. The inscription is mostly clear, although the spalling has removed the right leg of the “M”. Various initials have been cut into the stone.

5 *Lake Pearson*

This milestone is located on the west of the road, west of Lake Pearson and approximately 5.3 kilometres west of the road junction turning off to Flock Hill. It has been relocated a short distance onto the wide verge and when it was set in the concrete pad has been placed facing away from the road. The main part of the milestone has broken from its base and has been placed back on it but not secured. While the “M” is clear, the distance in miles has been damaged and obscured.

6 *Mt White Road*

This limestone milestone is located approximately 2 kilometres west of Cass River, on the north of SH 73 and on the west side of the road turning off over the Mt White Bridge to the Hawdon Valley. It is in excellent condition (see Figure 1), and has some well executed graffiti, but has most likely been relocated to its prominent position in the junction of the two roads, although the distance recorded on the face is approximately accurate for its location today (37 miles = 59.6 km).

7 *Greyney's Flat*

This milestone is located on the east side of the road approximately 200 metres south of Greyney's Creek. This is the first of the milestones cast in concrete and, as with them all, it has a layer of moss on the top. The inscription is worn but legible and reads "Springfield 47 miles". Although on the opposite side of the road when compared to most of the other milestones, the mileage is correct for the location (47 miles = 75.6 km).

8 *South of Snow Creek*

This milestone, cast in concrete, is located on the west side of the road, to the south of Snow Creek. It has patches of moss and the inscription "Springfield 49 miles" has been defaced. The word "Springfield" has been badly scratched in what appears to have been an attempt to deepen the letters and the number "49" has been slightly scratched and filled with red paint. This milestone is in approximately the correct location as indicated by the mileage (49 miles = 78.9 km).

9–10 *Arthur's Pass Visitor Centre*

The upper half of a milestone [9], made of limestone and marked "35 miles to Springfield", is on display inside the Visitor Centre (see Figure 2).

Another [10] has been relocated to the roadside garden on the south side of the road in front of the Arthur's Pass Visitor Centre. It has been cast in concrete and has a layer of moss on the top. While the figures on the inscription are difficult to make out, it may read "Springfield 51 miles". If so, this milestone is in approximately the correct location for the mileage (51 miles = 82.1 km).

11 *McGraths Creek ("Daisy Flat")*

The milestone is on the east of the road, beside a path down to an area beside the Waimakariri River known locally as "Daisy Flat." It is approximately 100 metres south of the road bridge over McGraths Creek and

600 metres north of Wardens Creek. The concrete of the milestone is covered in some moss and the inscription has been defaced until it is almost illegible but possibly reads “Springfield 58 miles”. If this is correct, the milestone is approximately 10 kilometres removed from its original location (58 miles = 93.3 km).

It should be noted that the milestone identified as that at “Daisy Flat” in an illustration in *The Road to the West Coast* (Taylor 2005: 42) is incorrectly labelled and is actually the 47 mile stone near Greyney’s Flat.

12 *Jack’s Hut*

The milestone inscribed “Springfield 53 miles” is located to the north of the White Bridge over the Bealey River and across the road from Jack’s Hut, a Department of Conservation Historic Site. It has been placed on the west side of the road at the entrance to the car park of the Bealey Valley track. This is the most westerly of the milestones and is at approximately the correct distance from Springfield (53 miles = 85.3 km) but has most likely been relocated to its position in the centre of the island of bush in front of the track. The concrete is heavily covered with moss but this milestone is the best preserved of this style and the inscription is clear (Figure 3).

Discussion

Although Taylor (2005) listed 12 milestones and I have described 12 milestones above, it appears that we differ by one in our field surveying. Taylor did not list the milestone between Greyney’s Flat and the Arthur’s Pass Visitor Centre but he did describe a milestone away from the existing road, “cross road and down a slope, do not go past the bridge” (Taylor 2005: 112). As I surveyed only along the roadside, these instructions do not match any of the milestones I have recorded and there is, therefore, an additional milestone to record on my next trip over to the West Coast. From his descriptions, this milestone may be near the place where the old West Coast road originally crossed the Waimakariri.

It was, however, a pleasant surprise to have one more milestone than previously recorded, when I had anticipated there would perhaps be fewer. Anecdotal accounts indicate that the milestones have historically been taken as souvenirs and several are known to be acting as garden ornaments in various properties around Arthur’s Pass.

The other interesting outcome of the research is the number of milestones that are in the approximate location indicated by the mileage on their faces. Of the nine along the roadside (including the milestone in front of the Arthur’s Pass Visitor Centre), seven have legible distances in miles. Of these,

only one, that at McGraths Creek [11], is located at any distance from the face value inscribed on the milestone (Table 3). While this could be taken as substantiation that the milestones are more or less in the correct places, it is instead suspiciously accurate.

	Mileage	Equivalent in km	Actual location in km	Difference
1			Relocated	
2			Relocated	
3			Mileage not legible	
4	19 miles	30.6 km	30.5 km	± 100 m
5			Mileage not legible	
6	37 miles	59.6 km	59.0 km	± 600 m
7	47 miles	75.6 km	75.7 km	± 100 m
8	49 miles	78.9 km	79.1 km	± 200 m
9			Relocated	
10	51(?) miles	82.1 km	82.6 km	± 500 m
11	58(?) miles	93.3 km	83.9 km	± 9400 m
12	53 miles	85.3 km	85.4 km	± 100 m

Table 3: Difference between face value of milestones and actual location

State Highway 73 diverges from the old West Coast Road in several places (McLennan 1999, Taylor 2005) and that would presuppose a larger difference in the face value of miles over actual location. I was aware that some, if not all, of the milestones had been moved outward on to the roadside by government roading employees and contractors as the road has been widened over the years. From these results it appears likely that the milestones have also been moved from their original positions to a location that corresponds with the mileage inscribed. There is a possibility that the milestone with the greatest difference, rather than having been moved out of place, may be the only one that has not been moved some distance.

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