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THE COME IN TIME QUARTZ BATTERY AREA AT BENDIGO, CENTRAL OTAGO

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A visit to the newly-restored Come in Time Battery near Bendigo is worth the time and effort, not to mention the dusty road and the eight gates you'll need to open, to get there. Besides the very substantial quartz battery, quite a bit of evidence of the mining which took place in the area remains. Generally speaking, as tangible relics of the Central Otago gold rush, quartz stamper batteries have not fared well; their timbers were far too useful for farm shed framing and their stamp heads were victims of the high price of scrap metal. Out of the seven stamper battery sites at Bendigo, only the Come in Time remains on its site in Rise and Shine Valley. But to say it stands on its 'own' site is confused by the fact that this battery is actually the second to stand on this site, and the one which may be viewed today contains parts of batteries previously erected at three other sites on Bendigo and at two other goldfields in Central Otago.

The Rise and Shine Valley proved to be a region strewn with faintly auriferous reefs offering hints of golden wealth in depth which never quite added up to a payable proposition. For over thirty years the Bendigo correspondents of both the *Cromwell Argus* and *Dunstan Times* celebrated finds on claims, offering up breathless descriptions of the likely future riches to emerge from claims, the stone from which would then prove remarkably effective at resisting all attempts to profit from its exploitation. Few ventures paid, but all left their mark on the landscape, with adits and shafts, tramways and water races, sluice faces and quartz stamper battery sites. At the Come in Time site all except sluice scarps may be seen (a kilometre further up the road these too are found all over the southern side of the Rise and Shine Basin).

The Come in Time had its genesis in mid 1880 when Bendigo resident and coal carrier John Kane was delivering coal from Bannockburn to the homes of the Rise and Shine Sluicing Syndicate miners. He stopped at

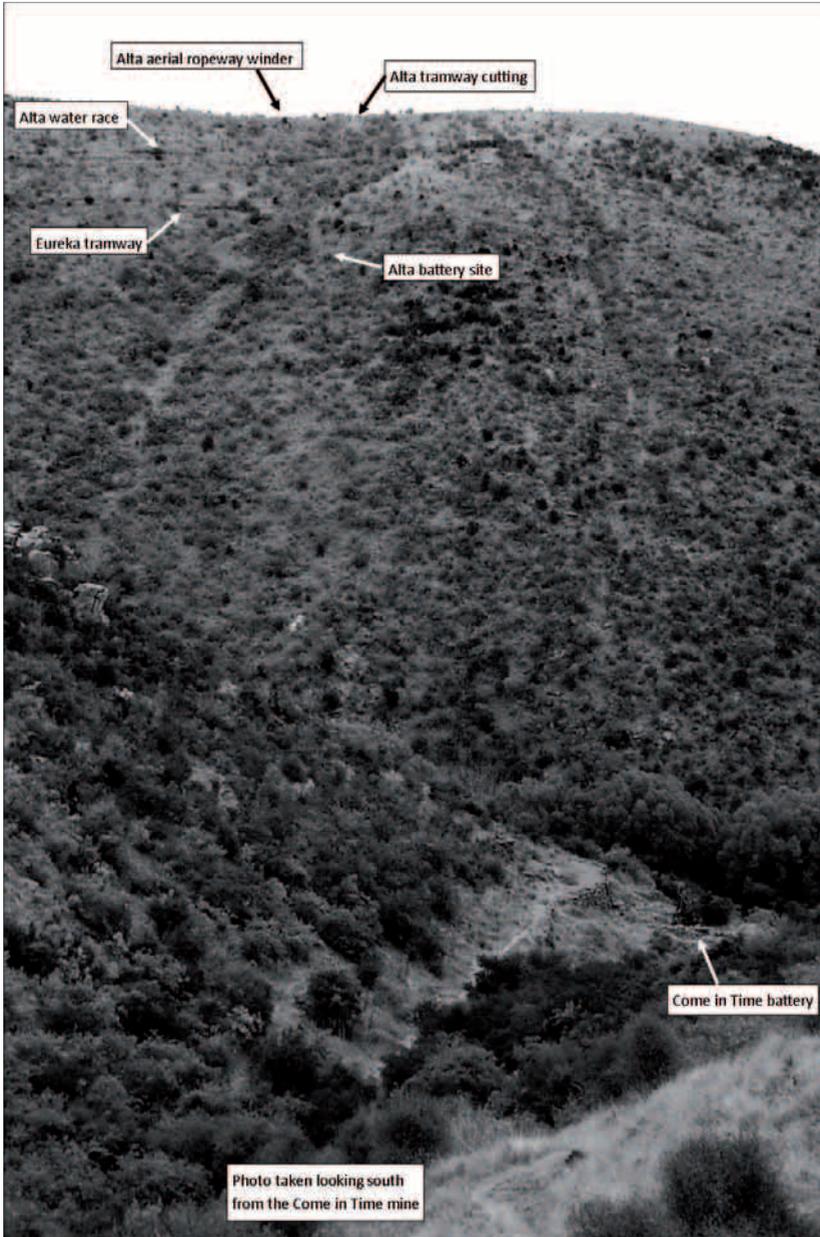


Figure 1. annotated view of the Come in Time site.

an intriguing-looking patch of red stone on a sharp ridge between Shepherd and Rise and Shine Creeks and found gold-bearing quartz there. This is the distinct, red-coloured stone on which visitors to the battery now park their car. The *Argus* was ecstatic, celebrating the discovery of a new reef with typical sanguinity: ‘a promising quartz discovery was made at Bendigo the reef is said to show two feet wide, carrying gold freely’ (*Cromwell Argus* June 16 1880: 4). Dispatched to see for himself, the *Argus*’ Bendigo Correspondent announced ‘I can vouch for its very promising appearance on the surface’ (*Cromwell Argus* June 26 1880: 3). Kane arranged with Charles Todd, Manager of the Cromwell Company to get five tons of stone crushed, employing a workman to get the stone out. The same paper noted that £100 (about 30 week’s wages for a quartz miner) had been refused for a sixth share in the new venture (*Cromwell Argus* June 26 1880: 3). The first trial crushing proved to be as good as the paper first hinted, with 6 oz 11 dwt of gold declared (*Cromwell Argus* July 6 1880: 3).

Confirmed in their enthusiasm of the new venture the *Argus* reporter next announced that ‘The Come in Time ... is looking remarkably well, and promises to be a sure fortune to the lucky discoverers. It certainly is the most remarkable quartz discovery made in Otago as yet, and in a career of 16 years’ quartz-mining I have seen nothing like it. I hardly know how to describe it. It is undoubtedly a true lode, but it’s immense size when compared with anything previously found in Otago throws me or anyone else that has seen it completely astray’ (*Cromwell Argus* July 13 1880). Kane and his partners set to work, forming a company and hiring men to exploit the find. They rented the tail water of the Rise and Shine sluicers to power a water wheel, albeit after it was re-routed from an older race on the opposite side of the valley, while a race cut from Shepherd’s Creek provided pure water suitable to run the tables the battery.¹ By August they announced they would form a ‘Joint Stock Company’, that they had purchased the old Eureka, formerly Alta, battery which sat on a site on the side of the hill and across the valley from their claim and that they would relocate this to their ground (*Cromwell Argus* August 31 1880).

Their new battery had a thorough overhaul as it was rebuilt, with the foundations replaced by new logs. It was erected about 150 yards below the initial workings, with a double tram worked by a steel rope built to convey

¹ Tail water from sluicing is completely useless for gold tables on a battery, as the sludge carries away the gold with it. The water race on the face of the hill from the Rise and Shine is quite distinct over most of its length, while the Shepherd’s Creek one has been damaged by later mining. Note that the latter race should not be confused with a race built to take Rise and Shine water OVER to Shepherd’s Creek (built in the late 1860’s) which extends eastwards from the Come in Time site.

the quartz to the mill. Since there was a good fall the full trucks were able to pull back the empties, reducing the work needed (*Cromwell Argus* October 5 1880). That they were on to a good thing was confirmed by the workmen cutting the new tramway into the line of reef. They found that the whole spur where the Come In Time claim was situated was a network of quartz and conglomerate, and all carrying gold with an average expected return of ‘half an ounce per ton’ (*Cromwell Argus* October 5 1880).

At about this time John Kane sold his shareholding to Bendigo miner William Cameron (*Cromwell Argus* December 30 1880), using the proceeds to purchase additional land on his farm at Grandview. Another shareholder sold out to Cromwell storekeeper D.A. Jolly sometime before the end of 1880 (*Cromwell Argus* July 20 1908). In less than eight weeks the Come in Time battery was reducing stone and at the end of December, declared a result of a cake of 110 ounces from 350 tons of stone (*Cromwell Argus* November 30 1880) which was less than 10 dwt to the ton, but which still returned the shareholders about £10 per week per man (*Otago Witness* January 15 1880: 9).

And then, in a pattern which is repeated over and over in the quartz mining history of the Rise and Shine Valley, the newspapers fall silent on the Come in Time Quartz Mining Company. Given the declared ease and low costs of stone extraction, the professed well-capitalised nature of the company, the experience of the ‘practical miners’ who made up the shareholding and the payable, if not spectacular returns, this mystery is frustrating. Either way, they closed their operations sometime in 1881. In early 1882 the Come In Time battery was sold to the Last Shot Quartz Mining Company, who dismantled and re-erected it on their claim near the old Elizabeth ground on the Carrick Range (*Otago Witness* November 4 1882: 21).

In 1908 the Come in Time was reborn. Mechesidec Bospednic (Dick) Edwards was a veteran miner who had worked for the Cromwell Company from its early years, was employed as a professional prospector with William Pengelly by the Cromwell Prospecting Association in 1885–87 (*Cromwell Argus* April 25 1885), then had an extended run as one of the gang managers with William Pengelly working a tribute in the Cromwell mine through much of the 1890s. He had briefly retired from mining in 1897, taking over the lease of the Temperance Hotel (which, despite its name, offered alcohol for sale) with the usual entreaties to ‘all my friends and customers’ and advising ‘strict attention to the comforts of the travelling public’ (*Cromwell Argus* April 13 1897) before he went back mining in the Nevis in 1898 (*Cromwell Argus* April 19 1898). He continued to support several mining ventures from his business in Cromwell achieving, it is clear from frequent mention of him in the *Argus*,

a considerable level of local popularity and respect.² When he announced he would undertake a careful reconsideration of the Come in Time Mine in mid 1908, Cromwell investors took an immediate interest. David Jolly, shareholder in the first Come in Time venture, was the most prominent of a significant group that backed Edwards, accompanying him to the old mine to take samples for assaying at the Karangahake School of Mines. When these samples averaged a declared 13 dwt gold and 8 dwt silver per ton (*Cromwell Argus* July 20 1908), the excitement was considerable. A company was formed, with a registered capital of £2000 in £1 shares. This acquired the old Cromwell Company Mine and its machinery, immediately investing capital in shifting half of the Matilda Battery from its site at the head of Specimen Gully at Bendigo to the Come in Time site (*Cromwell Argus* July 20 1908).

This new Come in Time Battery was a jigsaw of other machines, with the Matilda battery comprising parts from the original Cromwell Company's 'Solway' machine (which was built from one previously operated at Hindon, *Dunstan Times* September 4 1868), erected in 1868 at the mouth of Bendigo Creek, the old Aurora machine, which had formerly been the Criterion Company machine near Arrowtown (Barry 1897: 80–82) which had worked high above Logantown from 1870–78 and finally at its new location, it was set on footings and powered by a water race from the previous Come in Time battery.

For all the testing by the School of Mines and the calibre of Edwards as a miner, the new Come in Time venture proved to be a financial disaster that eclipsed all previous quartz failures in the Rise and Shine Valley. In June 1910 the *Argus* revealed that in 1909, a total expenditure of £508 17s 3d had earned 1 oz 19 dwt 18 grs worth £7 13s 11d. Then in 1910, after investing £1394 5s 4d more, a total which exceeded the paid-up capital by over £500, the earnings were a tiny 4 oz 13 dwt, worth just £18 1s 3d.

It seems surprising that someone was prepared to purchase the plant of this newly-failed Come In Time Company, especially given the very public disastrous result, but according to the *Mines Department Quartz Mines Return* of 1910, J. Dunnery and M. Birley did just that, going on to crush 350 tons of stone for 50 oz in September and 77 tons crushed in October for gold with a value £54 1s 48d (Mining Reports 1904–1939). At this point they concluded that the Come in Time Mine had nothing more to offer and ceased work.

In 1913 the shareholders of the latest reincarnation of an Alta Syndicate (see below) declared themselves excited by the prospects in a new quartz lode on the Alta ground. They immediately made plans for the construction of an

² For example, a report in the *Otago Witness* of March 22 1905: 5 details his work as a Justice of the Peace and executor of wills in Cromwell.



Figure 2. The battery in 2003 prior to restoration.

aerial ropeway to convey carefully selected stone to their newly-acquired battery, the old ‘Come In Time’ machine on the other side of the valley (*AJHR* 1913 C-2: 34). They re-fitted the battery and crushed a trial quantity of Alta stone, but switched their attention to the much larger area of prospective stone in an outcrop of the Come in Time lode, on the Shepherd’s Creek side of the ridge near the battery (*AJHR* 1914 C-2: 49). In the 1919 report to the Mines Department, it was clear that the main focus of the new Alta group³ was actually opening out the open cut area of the Come In Time claim area, crushing 100 tons of ore in the year (*AJHR* 1919 C-2: 35). This open cut is easily seen from the carpark area, looking over the northern slope into Shepherd’s Creek. They found little more than hopes of gold in this part of the workings, but the

³ The report in the *AJHR* (1919 C-2: 35) makes it clear that this was a group headed by H. Birley and party.



Figure 3. The winder unit at the top of the range opposite the Come in Time Battery.

top unit of their aerial ropeway which they used for the Alta workings remains near the crest of the hill opposite the Come in Time.

The last owner of the Come in Time was Mr. David C. Betts, who in 1933 leased the area together with the Alta site, in response to the excitement generated by the newly-formed Rise and Shine quartz claim (Mines Department to Betts 1935). When the Bendigo Rise and Shine Company emerged in 1934 they were offered the Come in Time battery for £50. It is indicative of just how long the battery had stood there neglected, when this offer was rejected. The Rise and Shine men dismissively noted that the Come in Time battery ‘is in a dilapidated [sic] condition, having been robbed of most of its fittings. It is of an old, obsolete type [which would] make the cost of reconditioning higher than the cost of a new battery’ (Aitchison to Under-Secretary of Mines 1935). It has remained standing in the Otago weather until it was restored as part of an Otago Goldfields Goldfields Heritage Trust project in 2008.

Other significant remains from quartz mining can be seen at the Come in Time site. Across the valley a collection of lines and some abandoned sites hint at more history there and this is the location of the first quartz venture in the Rise and Shine Valley. The Alta Company had appeared in late-1869 when auriferous quartz was found below and slightly south of the Rise and Shine

sluicing ground by Welshman Sam Williams (*Dunstan Times* December 17 1896). The ‘monied men’ (*Dunstan Times* January 14 1870) who bought the Alta off Williams purchased and erected a battery to crush their stone, renting the Rise and Shine Sluicing Syndicate’s water which flowed down the gully adjacent to their claim, cutting a race to drive their water wheel (*Otago Daily Times* July 20 1870)⁴ and constructing a tramway from their mine to the machine, a construction which included a twin track self-acting line from the cutting at the top of the slope down to the battery site (*Cromwell Argus* June 13 1871). The Alta battery site is visible across the valley from the Come in Time site and their water race is the higher of the two lines across the hill face. The tramway is very clear to see and a deep cutting, made to facilitate the double-action tramway is easily found. A combination of abruptly falling gold returns and difficulties with separating gold from scheelite in the ore (Report on the Gold Fields 1875: 46) saw the venture fail and the company was wound up in early 1873 (*Dunstan Times* April 11 1873: 1).

Next on the scene were the owners of the Eureka Company, who were developing a reef system found on border of the Rise and Shine Syndicate’s ground (this is the site further up the valley, near the modern farm catteries). They purchased the Alta plant (*Cromwell Argus* October 13 1875), began construction of a mile-long tramway from their claim to the Alta battery, rented the tail water of the Rise and Shine sluicers and embarked on driving an adit into the hill (*Cromwell Argus* May 12 1875). Their tramway remains where it was built, carved into the steeply-sloping sides of the hill on the south side of the Rise and Shine Valley. It is parallel with and two metres below the Alta water race. The Eureka also failed due to the fact that the gold in Eureka stone could not be freed from the pyrites present with it (*Otago Witness* October 28 1897: 30) and a devastating flood ruined the company’s efforts in its deepest shaft (Lowe to Jessep 1933). As was noted above, this battery was sold and relocated to the Come in Time site in 1880. The old battery site is very hard to see, but can be identified by the extensive damage wrought by the disposal of mullock down the slope over the years.

But the Alta continued to intrigue miners. It had shown promise then failed – but too fast, some thought. In 1897 August Sorenson, a Norwegian quartz miner from Victoria, employee at the Cromwell Mine for over twenty-five years and part of William Pengelly’s tribute party working the old Cromwell Company mine in the 1890s, took out a new lease on the Alta ground, finding stone which, after a small trial crushing, he announced confidently would ‘return 4 oz to the ton’ (*Otago Witness* August 19 1897). In

⁴ This seems to have been the first example of the use of a turbine wheel to drive a battery, instead of the usual overshot wheel in use in the Aurora and Cromwell batteries (see *Cromwell Argus* September 19 1871)

what to wearied former investors in the Alta claim must have seemed déjà vu, the *Otago Daily Times* of February 1898 enthusiastically declared that Sorenson and his associates had found ‘a good solid reef, 3ft wide, carrying payable gold’ on their claim (*Otago Daily Times* February 10 1898: 3). Even the *New Zealand Mines Record* joined in, speaking up the prospects facing Sorenson, with estimates of returns from stone hand-crushed in Cromwell running to 30 oz per ton for one sample and 10 oz per ton for the second (*New Zealand Mines Record* 1897–98: 204). Certainly gold was found, with some ‘good patches’ of stone, but not in quantities that paid the cost of raising and crushing it, so the syndicate abandoned further effort and any more expenditure at the end of 1898 (*Otago Witness* May 6 1903: 25).

Nothing daunted, another syndicate of ‘working miners’ took over the Alta in 1899 and began work, crushing an eight ton parcel of rock at the Cromwell Company site and gaining a small cake of 12 oz 14 dwt for their efforts, ‘well above wages’ for the miners (*Otago Daily Times* September 14 1899: 6). These miners were all members of one of the tribute teams working the old Cromwell Company mine and a renewed higher level of yield from stone at that mine distracted them away from the Alta mine to work on the larger, more proven site at Bendigo (*Otago Witness* September 21 1899: 34). Next to the Alta was Holmes and Co, six more ‘working miners’ who drove a cross-cut in the sixty foot shaft sunk by Sorenson (*Otago Witness* May 6 1903: 25). And in a repeat of all previous claims on the Alta, gold was found there (*Otago Witness* August 13 1902: 21). But unlike the previous attempts, this group seem to have found stone of a more consistent nature and purchased the five head stamper battery from the defunct Jubilee Mine at the Eureka (later the 1934 Bendigo Rise and Shine Company) site (*AJHR* 1902–03 C-3: 109). Using the old Eureka tramway, they moved this battery from its old foundations to its new site at the Alta beside a stone hopper they constructed to accept Alta stone.⁵ In a first for the Bendigo area, their battery was driven by a 7 hp diesel engine. This, the newest of the Alta groups clearly had the greatest level of persistence of all the incarnations of the Alta mine, with reports in 1904 and 1905 that they were still working there (*Otago Witness* May 18 1904: 24, although the Mines Reports of 1904 made it clear that the work was as sporadic as the scattered patches of payable stone, with comment that poor returns in the past year had reduced the workforce to one miner/pro prospector, but that a rich patch of scheelite had been struck (*AJHR* 1904 C-3: 68). By mid 1905 even the prospector was gone and the Alta mine closed (*AJHR* 1905 C-3: 68).

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Note that this was over the hill from the original Alta battery site.

Sandwiched between these periods of gold miners working at the Alta was Bendigo miner and farmer, Walter Faithful. In 1900 he recognised the commercial possibilities from an increased international interest in scheelite. With this mineral fetching £55-70 per ton in England, it was worth pursuing (*Otago Daily Times* April 3 1900: 3). However, like most ‘promising-looking’ prospects at the Alta, nothing came of his interest until the Cameron Brothers acquired his ground in early 1908. John Cameron applied for a lease on the fifteen acres of the Alta area, but in a telling move, did not specify that it was only gold he sought (*Cromwell Argus* September 7 1908). He and his brother then ignored the supposed reefs and the consistently lauded but failed gold prospects to work the scheelite seams. It so happened that in the pursuit of scheelite they found auriferous quartz in a seam which was, following the well-established Alta cant of the last forty years, declared to have ‘every prospect of ... turning out a great success’ (*Cromwell Argus* October 12 1908). Notwithstanding the occasional fillip to gold-mining hopes, the Camerons worked the mine mainly for the scheelite, doing so with some success and, even clearing £100 in one notable week in 1908 (*Otago Witness* December 2 1908: 39). From mines reports in the Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives, the Camerons appear to have worked the Alta claim for several years, although it is clear from 1909 comments that the small battery erected in 1902 was derelict and engineless, thanks to the liquidation of the Alta assets in 1905, entailing the sale of the engine to Morven Hills Station for electricity (*AJHR* 1906 C-3: 61). This battery ruin remains at the Alta mine site today and the mine workings, which appear to be a long open cut, but which disguises an extensive set of underground workings remain as a long scar across the spur. In the gully near the Alta site is the chimney of an old hut, while those brave enough to confront the briar around the original Alta battery site will also see a stone chimney from the old blacksmith’s hut and the entrance to the adit into the mine.

Other archaeological remains in the Come in Time area include two stone huts across the Rise and Shine stream and downhill from the battery, although these are quite difficult to get to and are not in good condition. But the Come in Time site testifies to over fifty years of quartz mining efforts, wrestling with the Rise and Shine geology that persistently refused to give up its riches. It is a rewarding place to visit.

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