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THE GOLD MINES OF PRESERVATION INLET

John Hall-Jones
Invercargill

In 1982 the author published an account of the Preservation Inlet gold mines in Goldfields of the South (Hall-Jones, 1982: 6-31). Unfortunately his research notes and field sketches could not be included in a general publication of this nature. But after presenting this unpublished material at the Association's Conference in Wanganui in 1987 he was persuaded that he should make his records available through the medium of the Newsletter.

Historical summary

In 1892 a gold reef was discovered in the gorge of the Wilson River a few kilometres east of Preservation Inlet. To instal a crushing battery at the Golden Site mine the township of Cromarty was founded at the Inlet and a wooden tramline was constructed eight kilometres inland to reach the Wilson River (Fig.1). The battery's first year of operation was its peak (875 ounces of gold in 1894), but fortunately that same year an extension of the reef was found at Te Oneroa on the Inlet. The township of Te Oneroa was laid out to service the Morning Star mine which proved to be the most successful of all the Preservation Inlet mines (3,420 ounces of gold in 1896). In between these two mines the reef was picked up again at the Alpha mine on Sealers No.1 Creek. In 1898 the Alpha battery was hauled by sledge along a track branching off the Golden Site tramline.

In 1908 a five stamper battery was installed at the Crown mine at Cuttle Cove but unfortunately it was badly damaged by a tree fall and was not re-erected. But the most extraordinary looking of all the Preservation Inlet mines is the great reclining chimney of the Tarawera smelter. The Tarawera lode contained a mixture of gold, silver, copper and lead and in 1910 the smelter was erected in the hope of separating the components. Unfortunately a trial smelting of 35 tons of ore in 1912 produced no return at all and the smelter had to close down. Nevertheless the reclining brick chimney on the forested hillside remains one of the most incongruous sights in Fiordland.

The following findings represent five expeditions to Preservation Inlet by the author and companions between the years 1975 to 1983.

Golden Site

On the first visit in 1975 the Golden Site battery (Fig.2) was found to be covered with moss and fern. There were saplings growing in the stamper boxes and in between the stamper rods. There was a rusting berdan beside the battery and a Pelton wheel lying free nearer the river. The battery (a ten stamper) has subsequently been cleared of overgrowth in an endeavour to prolong its life and the Pelton wheel has been lifted out by helicopter for display at the new Fiordland National Park centre at Te Anau.

The layout of the rest of the mine, however, was difficult to visualise until coming across a plan of the mine and an old photograph of the field (Hall-Jones, 1982:12, 14). The area was revisited and a working diagram of the field was compiled (Fig.3). The water race was followed for several hundred metres up the north bank of the gorge and the remains of the pipes leading down to the 'wheelhouse' and battery were found. The 'wheelhouse' was so-called because a fly wheel could be seen on the outside of the shed in the photograph and a Pelton wheel was found in this vicinity. The Pelton wheel probably drove a pump for the adit, which is on the site of the original flooded mine. The main shaft of the Golden Site Extended mine was located in the mine head area but was found to have collapsed in. Some iron rails from the tramline that conveyed the ore to the battery for crushing were found at this level. The shed labelled 'workshop' was so-called because a grindstone could be seen there in the original photograph.

Morning Star

In 1979 Assistant Chief Ranger Tom Paterson and the author carried out a survey of the Morning Star mine. The battery site and various drives were located and their heights above sea level were recorded. The numbering of the drives in the diagram (Fig.4) is the same as in a longitudinal plan of the mine (Hall-Jones, 1982:22).

Being close to the sea much of the heavy machinery from the Morning Star mine has been salvaged, but the boiler and the camshaft remain at the battery site. Also the concrete foundations of the battery, a stamper box and a fly wheel. Gold was first discovered at the No.1 level and three drives were found in this vicinity. A pair of giant winding wheels (diameter 1.42 m) were also found in a recess at this level and a tram cable led straight down to the battery - presumably to carry the ore down for crushing.

From No.1 level a track led up the hillside to two drives at the No.1 A level. Higher up a recess and a cutting for the

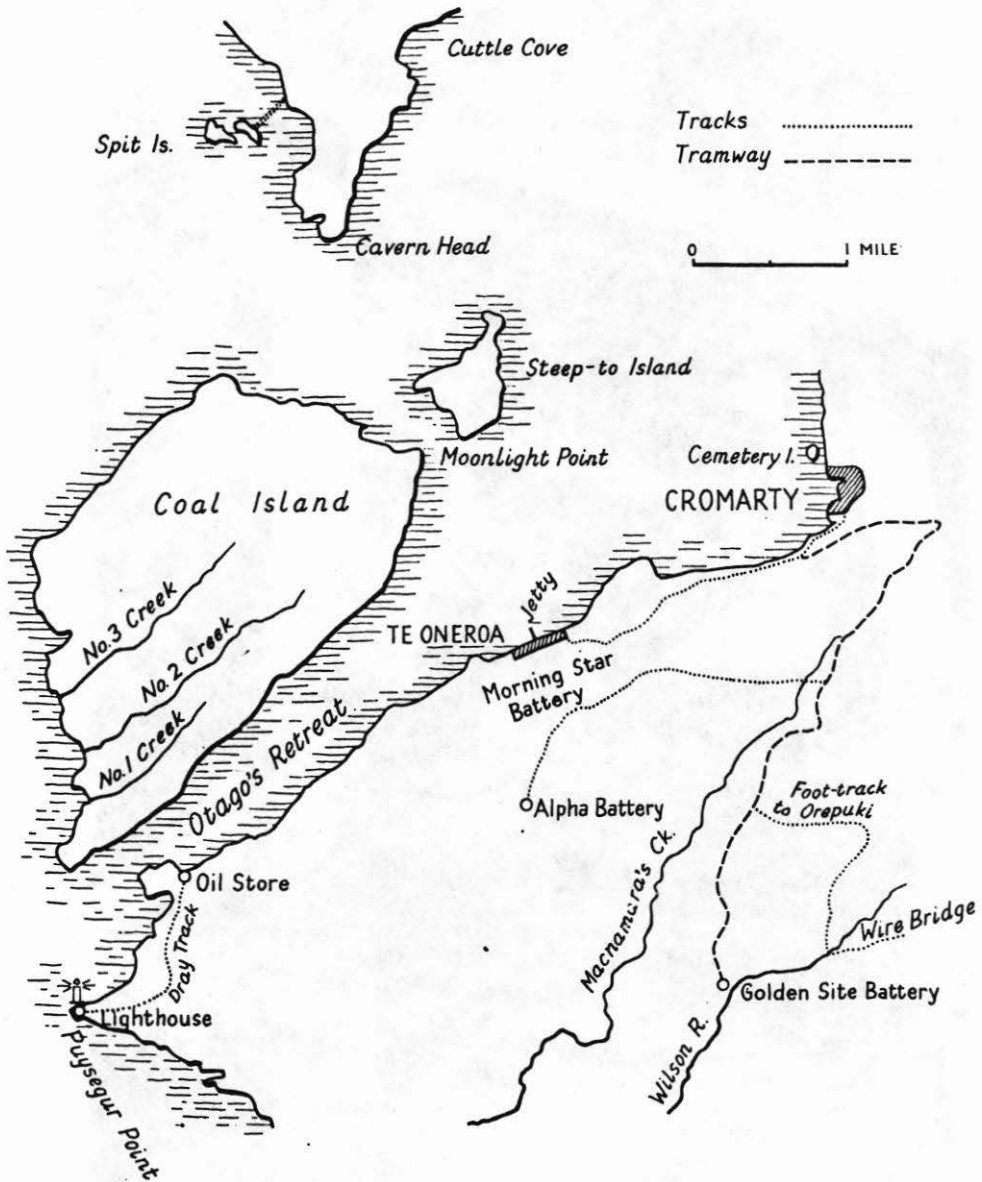


FIGURE 1. Preservation Inlet in the 1890s.



FIGURE 2. Golden Site battery, 1975.

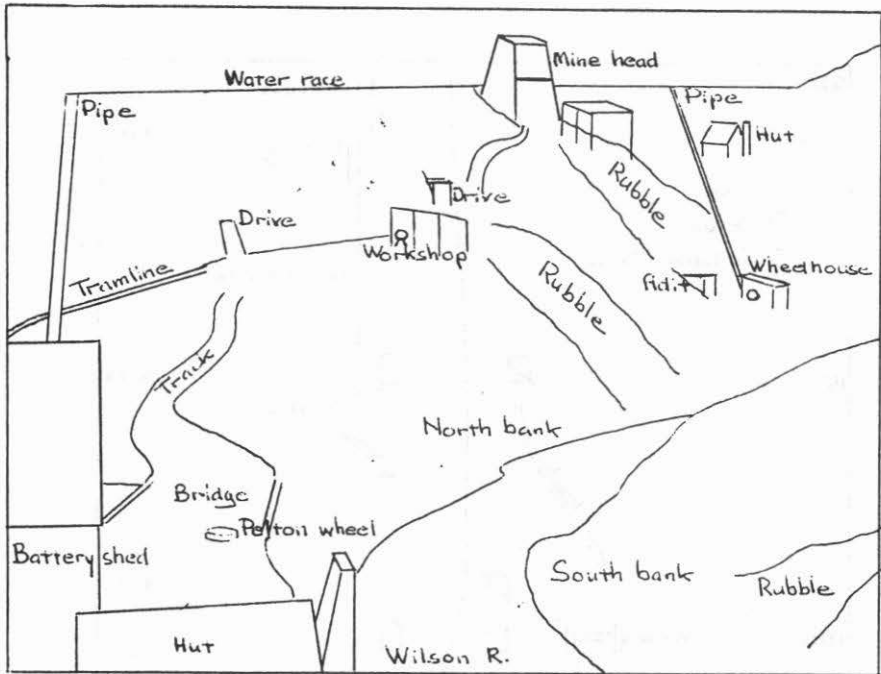


FIGURE 3. Working diagram of the Golden Site mine. From a photograph of ca. 1898.

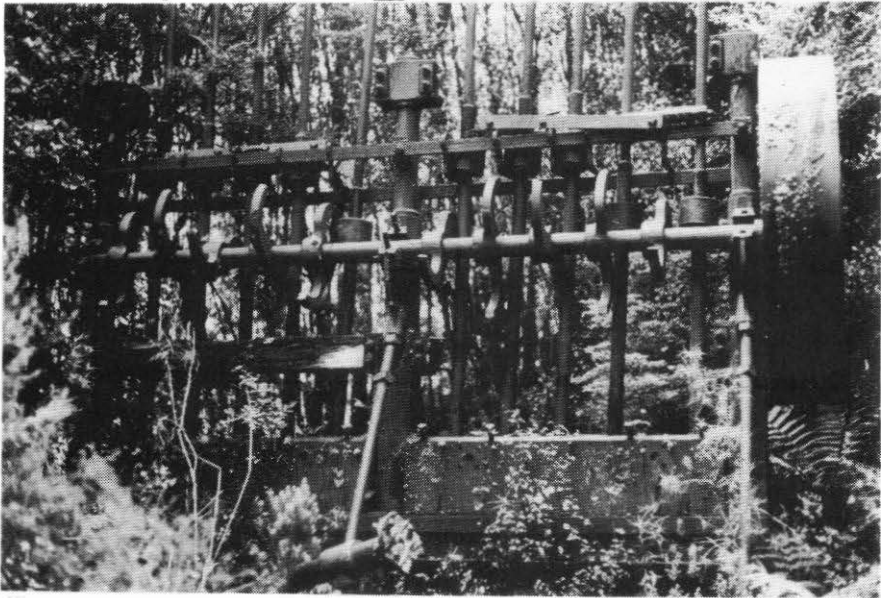


FIGURE 5. The Alpha battery, 1977. Photo: Kim Morrison.

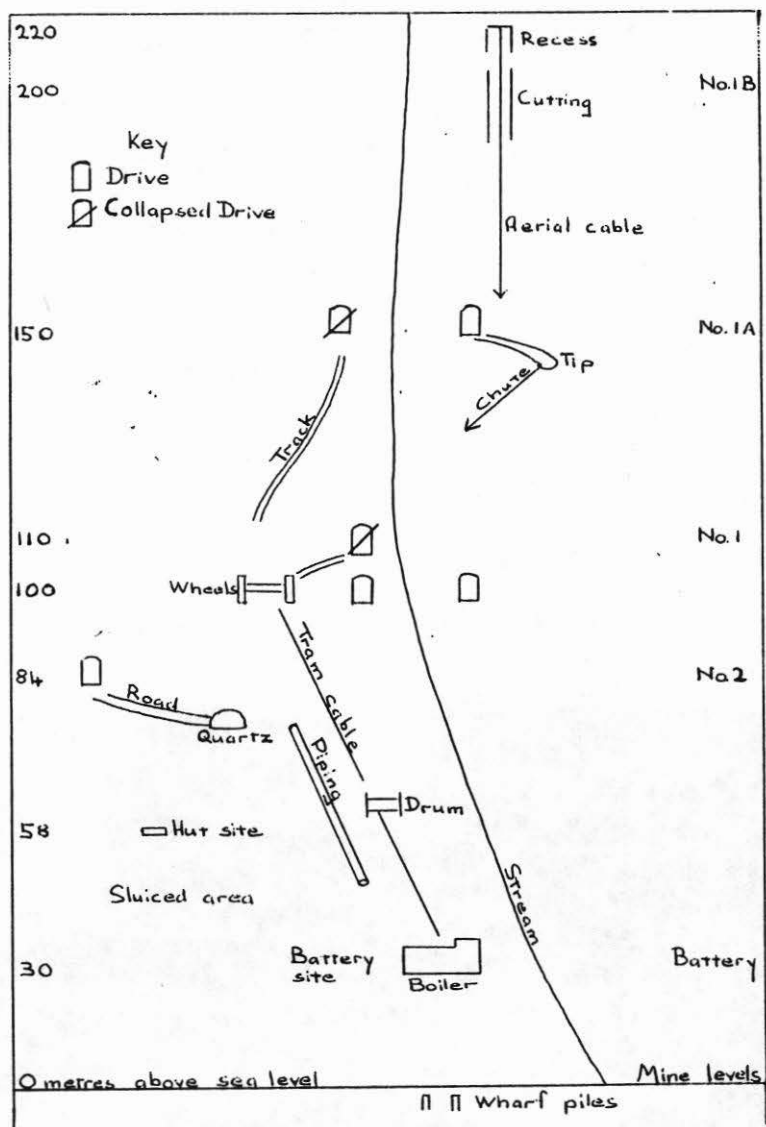


FIGURE 4. Sketch plan of the Morning Star mine, 1979. West elevation.

aerial cableway (Hall-Jones, 1982:21) were found but there was no sign of a No.1 B drive. Below No.1 level a large mound of uncrushed quartz was found and from here a well defined roadway led round the hillside to No.2 drive.

Alpha Battery

By 1977 the Alpha battery had not been reported for over ten years and there were fears that it may have collapsed or become overgrown by bush. The remains of the old branch line from the Golden Site tramline were found to be obliterated by dense regeneration and could no longer be followed. In 1977 the author and two companions followed the old miners' route round the south coast (a journey of five days) to find that the battery was still standing at the edge of Sealers No.1 Creek (12 m in from the east bank, grid reference 906260). Made of iron the ten stamper battery proved to be the best preserved of all the Preservation Inlet batteries and the fly wheel could still be turned (Fig.5). Two berdans, two Pelton wheels and a gold safe were recorded at the battery site and the mine shaft was located 30 m north-east of the battery. A pair of bull wheels (1.5 m diameter), presumably to work the mine head, lay close by. Uphill from the mine shaft was a cleared terrace with hut sites. From the battery site piping was followed up the hillside to its origin at a water race about 80 m above the battery. From the machinery identified at the site a working diagram (Fig.6) was compiled to show how the mine may have operated.

Crown Battery

In 1975 the author discovered some heavy beams at the mouth of a stream (grid reference 903366) about 500 m north of Cuttle Cove. The significance of these beams was not appreciated until coming across a reference (A.J.H.R. 1908, C3 :35 and 1910, C3 :54) to the collapsed Crown battery of the Crown mine at Cuttle Cove. In 1979 the author revisited the scene with a Fiordland National Park Expedition and after clearing the overgrowth the collapsed end supports of the battery were identified and measured (Fig.7). Also identified were the grooved guide for the five stamper rods, one stamper, one stamper box and the rim of a berdan. On the opposite (south) bank of the stream beside a waterfall was a drive which extended in for about 85 m.

Above the waterfall the stream was followed inland for about 90 m where two more drives were found on either side of another waterfall. Along the banks of the stream between the two waterfalls there were the remains of formed tracks, iron rails, a water race and a pipeline to the battery. A cylinder with wooden slats (? a winding drum) lay in the stream bed.

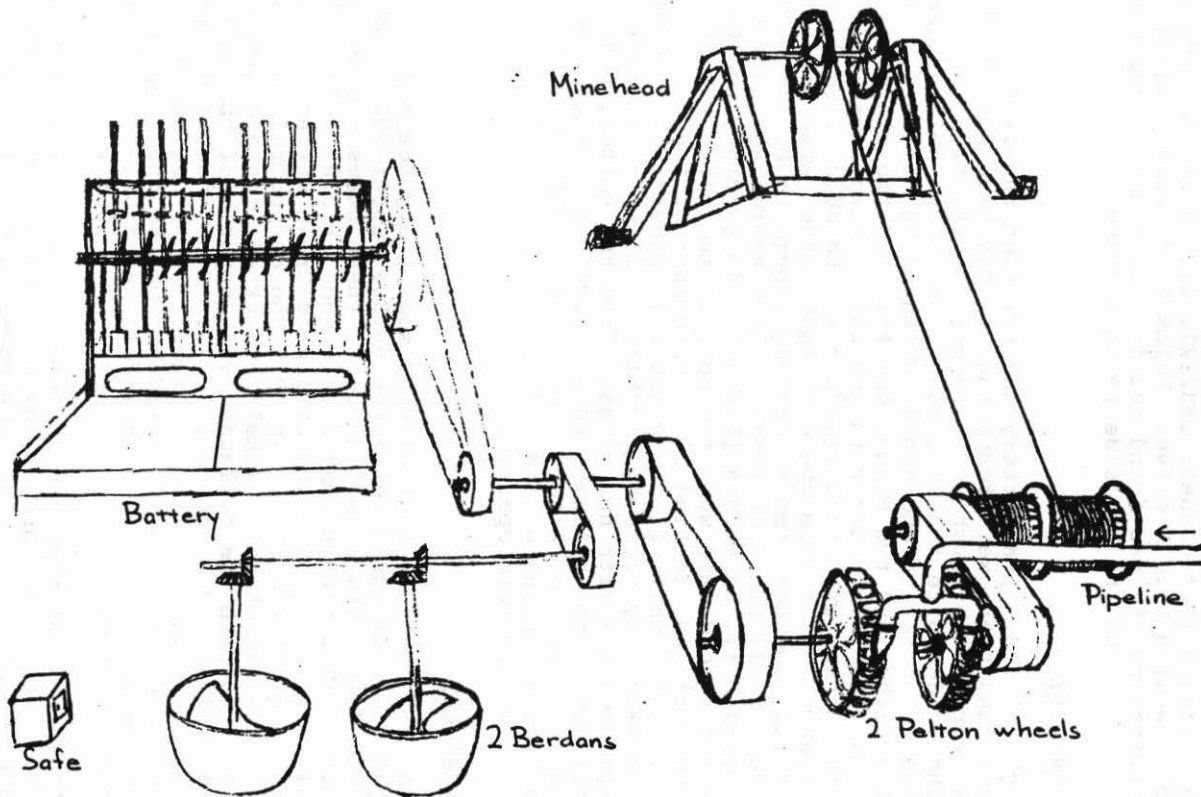


FIGURE 6. Working diagram of the Alpha Mine, 1977.

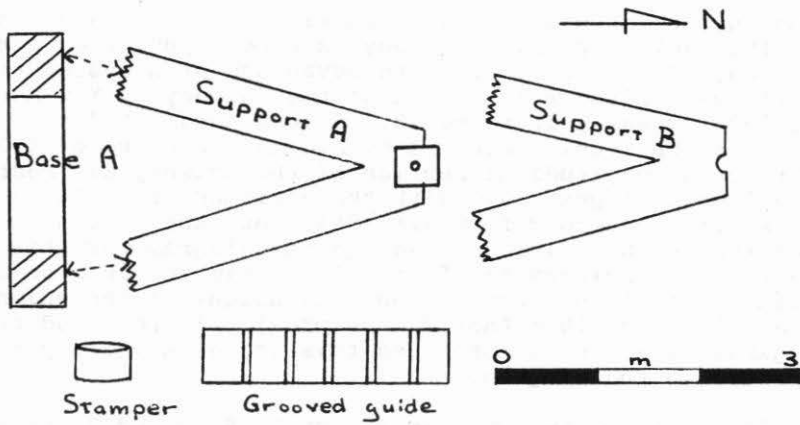


FIGURE 7. Diagram of the collapsed Crown battery as found in 1979.

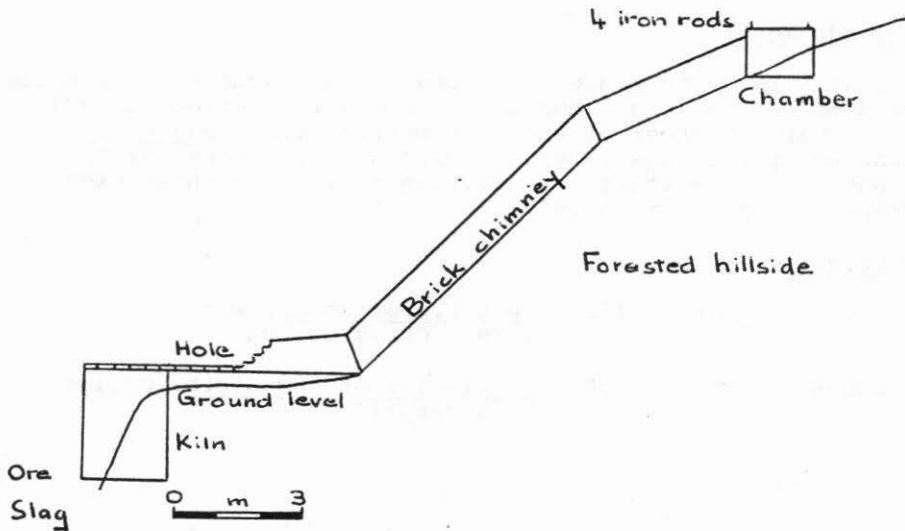


FIGURE 8. Longitudinal plan of the Tarawera smelter and chimney.

Tarawera Smelter

Photographs showing the construction of the Tarawera smelter and the reclining brick chimney have been published already (Hall-Jones, 1982:27-29). But the advantage of a systematic survey was emphasised when a plan of the chimney by Kim Morrison in July 1978 revealed it to be 18.1 m long, and not "about 150 feet" as previously reported by A.C. and N.C. Begg (1973:259). Kim Morrison's longitudinal section of the chimney was redrawn by Jenny Cave in August 1978 with the addition of a flue dotted in (N.Z.A.A. Site Record form S165/34). But there is no real evidence that such a flue existed and the diagram for this article (Fig.8) excludes the flue. Also, Kim Morrison on a subsequent visit found that the gain in height of the chimney from the kiln is c. 10 m (not 8 m as previously recorded on the original site record form) and this increase in height is corrected in the diagram.

In 1987 the smelter was visited by L. Shaw and P. Brotherston of the Park staff and five "Operation Raleigh" venturers who repaired the hole in the chimney as seen in the diagram and Figs.9 and 10 and sprayed the vegetation on the brickwork. They also cleared the earth back from beside the chimney.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Bruce Miles and Kevin Mischewski for accompanying me on the long tramp into Preservation Inlet in 1977 and John Ward, Skipper of the Park patrol vessel Renown for picking us up six days later. I also wish to thank the Fiordland National Park staff for inviting me to join their expedition to Preservation Inlet in 1979.

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