

# Chinese miners

## Digging deeper...

The most obvious and lasting legacy of the Chinese are the thousands of hectares throughout Central Otago, covered in wild thyme. The Chinese gold-miners brought thyme from China into Central Otago to flavour their food.

## Stat attack

According to census figures, just over 5,000 Chinese migrants were in New Zealand by 1881. They made up around 40% of the population of goldminers at that time.

## Local lingo

The Chinese goldminers had a name for New Zealand – 'Sun Kum Shan' which literally means New Gold Hills.

## Local nuggets

The best preserved remains of the Chinese goldmining era are on the site of Arrowtown's Chinatown. Once overgrown ruins, this was the site of a major archaeological excavation in 1980 and has since been restored, attracting many thousands of tourists per year.

The last major remains of Cromwell's Chinatown drowned in 1992 as Lake Dunstan, upstream of the Clyde dam, was filled. Cromwell's Chinatown was an important Chinese settlement consisting of some 30 huts, servicing around 400 Chinese goldminers who lived and worked in the area.

Chinese miners started coming to Otago in 1866, invited here by the Otago Provincial Government. Hard working, methodical and industrious, they discovered a lot of gold remaining in old claims that Europeans had abandoned in favour of the latest strike. This, together with being conspicuously different, led to resentment and discrimination from other goldminers and even by the Government. Chinese women were not allowed into the country and a 'poll tax' was imposed on all Chinese wanting to live here.

Some Chinese stayed on after the goldrush while other independent migrants from Canton followed them to Otago. Many established businesses – market gardens, fruit shops and stores. They were to have a major impact on the wealth of the province.

In 2002 our Prime Minister, Helen Clark, made an official apology for the discriminatory laws imposed on Chinese immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Today you can still find remnants of the Chinese goldmining era at many of Otago's goldmining sites. A sharp eye might sometimes be required but you can still spot the remains of stone huts and cave dwellings.



A Chinese miner on the banks of the Clutha River



Chinese settlement, Lawrence

