

# Old stone buildings

## X marks the spot

Some of the best-preserved examples of schist stone architecture are the stone ruins at the site of Logantown and Welshtown on the Bendigo goldfield at the northeastern end of Lake Dunstan. Others include the restored Needham's Cottage and Smith's Bakehouse at Macetown, Mitchell's Cottage at Fruitlands, and the Serpentine Church high on Rough Ridge on the Serpentine goldfield.

## Those were the days...

Mitchell's Cottage, at Fruitlands, just south of Alexandra, was built by goldminer Andrew Mitchell using stone-working skills learned in his native Shetland Islands. This tiny cottage, the size of many modern living rooms, had no electricity, no running water, no central heating or insulation and no internal flush-toilet. Somehow, Mrs Mitchell still managed to raise and educate ten children within its four walls!

There are few built structures more iconic to Central Otago than the small stone buildings that dot its landscape. A handful of these have survived intact, but many more have crumbled into ruin, with only a solitary chimney or foundation to testify to their existence.

The majority of these humble structures are relics of the goldrush era, many the dwellings of goldminers and their families. When goldminers flocked to Central Otago in their thousands during the late 1800s, they were faced with a barren and inhospitable landscape, devoid of trees. Right from the beginning, this made finding suitable shelter a major problem. The first goldminers were forced to make do with whatever they were able to bring with them, often spending the first year or two in nothing more than a canvas or calico tent for shelter.

After enduring a harsh Central Otago winter in their tents, however, many miners sought to build more permanent shelters. Construction was severely limited by the lack of timber in the area, and so goldminers and other settlers looked to other building materials. They quickly discovered that the local schist rock was not only freely available, but that its soft, flaky nature meant it could be easily split into blocks suitable for building. So it was that cottages, stores, churches and hotels began to be constructed using the local stone cemented with a soft mud mortar.



Old stone ruins situated in Welshtown – an old goldmining town at Bendigo



Mitchell's Cottage at Fruitlands

