



# McLintock, 2009d



## GOLD DISCOVERIES

### Otago Gold Rushes

In May 1861 Gabriel Read, an experienced Australian prospector, discovered gold in Otago, and during the two succeeding months many men left Dunedin to try their luck on the Tuapeka field. By the beginning of August there were 2,000 diggers camped on Read's location. From Gabriel's Gully men swarmed into neighbouring valleys where further strikes added to the prevailing excitement. By October 1861 there were 4,000 men working at Waitahuna alone. Between July and December 1861 Otago's population rose from something under 13,000 to over 30,000, more than half of the new arrivals coming from Australia.

The cold winter of 1862 caused the Otago rivers to fall to an unprecedented low level. In these conditions Hartley and Reilly, two Californian miners, were able to prospect sand bars along the banks of the Clutha River. On 15 August 1862 they deposited 1,000 oz of gold at Dunedin and claimed the reward for the discovery of a new field. As soon as it was known that this bonanza had been found on the Dunstan (near present-day Cromwell), many diggers rushed there from Tuapeka; and by 5 September there were 3,000 men on the new field.

In the meantime there were many rumours circulating about the doings of a digger named Fox, who was said to have "struck it rich" somewhere in the Otago interior. Fox had, indeed, found gold in the Arrow on 9 October 1862. He managed to keep the location of his discovery quiet for a short time, but persistent rumours of a rich "strike" attracted many diggers to the area. In November a further discovery in the Shotover Valley (near Queenstown) confirmed the existence of the Wakatipu field and by December there were 3,000 diggers working the two rivers. A month later there were 6,400 diggers in the district and several shanty towns had sprung into being.

The peak of the Dunstan and Wakatipu rushes culminated in disaster brought about by the freak winter conditions of 1863. In May 1863, however, the Parkers, Solan, and Warren struck gold in the Taieri-Manuherikia area near the present town of Naseby. As the new field proved more accessible than earlier finds, many diggers rushed there; and by the end of July there were nearly 2,000 men working around Naseby (Hogburn and Mount Ida). The Taieri was the last occasion in Otago in which the Australian miners took part in large numbers and when the peak of the rush faded, the Otago goldfields lost much of their glamour.

