



1862



GOLD DISCOVERIES

Wakamarina and the West Coast

After the Collingwood fields declined, some prospectors moved eastwards through Nelson Province into Marlborough, where gold had been reported in small quantities. Early in 1864 four prospectors discovered a rich deposit of alluvial gold in the Wakamarina River near Havelock. The news spread quickly and by 14 May there were 4,000 miners on the location. As the Otago alluvial fields had begun to decline, many Australian diggers flocked to Marlborough, and the Wakamarina soon boasted 6,000 men working around Canvastown. Granted that 25,000 oz of gold were won in 1864, the nature of the field — many rich surface pockets and few steady workings — soon showed that the rush could not be long sustained, and before long many miners were attracted to the new fields on the West Coast.

Although the Buller goldfield had been eclipsed by the more spectacular finds in Otago, new miners continued to be attracted to the area. By 1862 there were about 300 men working on this field and, from the reports of surveyors and prospectors, it was known that there were extensive alluvial deposits on the Taramakau River and its tributary, the Hohonu. In the latter part of 1864 many miners drifted into Westland and located claims around Greenstone, Goldsborough, Stafford, and the Waimea diggings. By the end of the year there were 1,500 miners on the West Coast; Hokitika had been founded, and miners were still arriving. As the news spread, miners came from Otago and even from Victoria. By April 1865 there were 7,000 miners in the district, and by September there were over 16,000. These were not concentrated at any single strike, but were spread evenly among many camps in the hinterland between Hokitika and the Grey River. Towards the end of the year there was a rush to the rich field at Okarito, in South Westland, and, shortly afterwards, to another at Bruce Bay. News of fresh discoveries in the Grey district encouraged many to prospect in that direction, and in August 1866 the rush to Charleston began. In November of the same year Fox, of Arrow fame, made a rich strike at Brighton (now Tiromoana), about 10 miles south of Charleston. In May 1867 Addison, an American negro, made a strike near Charleston which precipitated the last real "rush" on the West Coast — the rush to Addison's Flat. By this time the West Coast gold boom was showing signs of steadying as the alluvial deposits were exhausted. About this time also, the proclamation of the Thames goldfield began to attract many miners to that district.

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