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Reefton

2013 population: 1,026

Town on the banks of the Inangahua River, 79 km from both Greymouth and Westport. Reefton is the only place on the West Coast where quartz reefs (after which it is named) have been successfully mined apart from Lyell. Originally called Reeftown, the name was shortened to Reefton (and sometimes nicknamed Quartzopolis). Broadway, the main street, was named after Charles Broad, an early magistrate and warden.

1888

1888

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Timeline 1

The saviour of Reefton

David Ziman, a Polish investor with South African experience, visited Reefton in 1895 at the suggestion of Premier Richard Seddon. Realising the potential of the then-depressed mining industry, he formed a new company, Consolidated Goldfields of New Zealand, with the assistance of the Rothschild family. Booming times in Reefton in the 1890s led to the boom of the

Although Reefton is traditionally associated with gold mining, all of the mines had closed by 1951, and coal mining and forestry became more significant. Reefton also serves the farming community in the Inangahua valley. Tourism is important in summer months. In 2007 Oceana Gold opened a large opencast gold mine, and gold again made an important contribution to the local economy.

Gold mining

Alluvial gold had been discovered in the Inangahua valley in 1866, but returns were consistently lower than in the Kumara–Hokitika area to the south. The first gold-bearing quartz reefs near Reefton were discovered in 1870, and gold was extracted by 1872. There were further discoveries during the 1870s, leading to the formation of a number of mining companies. Although returns to shareholders were high at first, there was a slump in the 1880s as money to develop deeper mines was not available. With the formation of Consolidated Goldfields New Zealand in 1896, leases were amalgamated and modern technology was used to successfully mine the quartz reefs for the next 55 years.

From 1872 to 1951 over 4 million tonnes of quartz were mined in the Reefton area, producing 64,700 kilograms of gold. Although there were 59 mines, only 11 produced more than half a tonne.



20th century were largely due to his energy and foresight.

Picturing Waiuta

Moravian immigrant Joseph (Jos) Divis worked in the Blackwater mine at Waiuta for many years. A keen photographer, he recorded mining life around Reefton, including some of the few photographs taken underground. A trademark feature is that Divis often appears in his own photographs. He stayed in Waiuta until his death in 1967, and photographed the gradual decline of the town after the mine closed in 1951.

Electricity

Walter Prince, an English electrical engineer, installed a 1-kilowatt electrical plant to light Dawson's Hotel in 1886. By 1888 a hydroelectric plant was installed to provide lighting in Reefton – said to be the first town in the southern hemisphere to be lit by electricity.

Waiuta

An almost abandoned gold mining town, 38 km south-east of Reefton. Waiuta grew up to provide accommodation for miners who worked at the nearby Blackwater mine. A gold-bearing quartz reef was discovered by a prospecting party in 1905, and acquired by Consolidated Goldfields who developed the mine. From 1908 to 1951 this mine steadily produced gold from a steep, narrow quartz reef, providing 36% of the gold produced from the Reefton area. The town is now designated a protected area, under the care of the Department of Conservation, the few local residents and a volunteer society, the Friends of Waiuta.

Blacks Point

A settlement about 2 km east of Reefton on the Lewis Pass highway. It is the start of the Murray Creek walkway. Blacks Point Museum has an interesting collection related to local mining history.

Victoria Conservation Park

The largest conservation park in New Zealand, Victoria Conservation Park covers more than 200,000 hectares, including the Brunner and Victoria ranges. A network of tracks, some dating back to mining days, gives access to many parts of the park, including old mining settlements. Deer hunting and trout fishing are possible in many places.

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