

WAIMATE



Left: The view of the town from the Whitehorse Lookout; Above: Norman Hayman's realised dream of a monument to honour the invaluable contribution of the Clydesdale horse in the early days of the settlement

PENNY JONES

Hop into Waimate

Despite producing former Prime Minister Norman Kirk, Waimate's most famous residents are probably its red-necked wallabies. The current population rests between 500,000 and one million which exploded from two does and a buck released in 1874 by Waimate's founding father Michael Studholme. In the face of some pesky habits, such as damaging vegetation, cropping the grass and developing a taste for swedes, wallabies have still been embraced by many in the region as either cuddly friends, a tourist magnet or a worthy hunting opponent.

Waimate Township was founded in the mid 1950s and grew alongside its timber industry which helped supply the needs of Oamaru and Timaru. The area grew famous for its totara, rimu, matai and kahikatea but almost 30 years of intensive logging and finally an eight day fire in 1878 spelled a major disaster for the region. The entire Maori settlement, all five sawmills and 70 European cottages were destroyed, 200 men lost their jobs and, worse still, vast swathes of Waimate's forest came to a smouldering end. Only a few native remnants survive today and are protected nature reserves with regenerating bush and walkways.

One such valuable remnant forms the early section of the two-hour return Waimate Whitehorse Walkway. The iconic Waimate Whitehorse was constructed in the late 1960s by Norman Hayman who dreamed of building a monument to honour the invaluable contribution of the Clydesdale horse in

the early days of the settlement. He fundraised the necessary \$240 and over the course of three months, he and his wife laid 1220 concrete slabs and the horse's two and a half tonne head at the top of the hill. Today, although under regular redesign by local graffiti artists, it remains a striking Waimate symbol for all to see and is well worth the tramp up the hill for the great views of the township and ocean.

Kelceys Bush and Gunns Bush are two other surviving native forest remnants. Kelceys Bush is named after two pioneer brothers who helped regenerate the bush after the fire and, being only eight kilometres from Waimate, it's popular with the locals and makes a perfect spot for a day trip and picnic. The Sanders Falls track takes 20 minutes each way and the Intake Track is 90-minutes return (with stream crossings).

Gunns Bush is about 13km from Waimate and offers a two-hour loop track through the bush. The area is well known for its bird life and mossy trellises, which coat the trees, drape from branches and lend the reserve a mysterious and magical air.

Other nearby walks include: the Waimate Historic Walk – a self-guided ramble through town which highlights Waimate's impressive Edwardian buildings; Knottingley Arboretum Park which is set in 37ha on the outskirts of town and is home to many varieties of trees, flowers and shrubs. The park is especially lovely in spring when thousands of daffodils come into bloom; Otaio Gorge Scenic Reserve which has a number of naturally-formed swimming holes, camping and picnic areas, and a pleasant walking track; and Mt Nimrod Scenic Reserve which

has a few interesting walks including a three-and-a-half hour medium loop track taking in a picturesque waterfall.

Bird watching in the area is popular at Lake Wainono. This freshwater wetland conservation area is a nationally important locality for white heron, royal spoonbill, wrybill, black swan, Canada goose, grey teal and pied stilts as well as a diverse range of fish species.

Mountain bikers can choose from a number of trails ranging from 6.2km to 100km. The 60km Pentland Traverse starts at the Waihao Forks Hotel, has 60 per cent gravel tracks and is closed during October and November for lambing; the 100km Hakataramea Pass Trail has impressive views of Aoraki/Mt Cook, the alps and high country and covers mostly unsealed tracks; or, a nice one for a Sunday is the 55km Pub-to-Pub ride which leaves from the Waihao Forks Hotel and ends up at the Hakataramea Hotel. Waimate Information Office has further details.

Accommodation is plentiful around Waimate with many B&Bs and farm stays, and there are town campgrounds in both Victoria and Knottingley parks. The Savoy Tearooms makes a good pit stop for a famous Waimate wallaby pie and Devonshire Tea and the local dairy provides scrumptious and enormous ice creams for the princely sum of \$2.

So, the next time you pass the giant yellow Waimate shed, on SH1 between Timaru and Glenavy, why not take their suggestion and 'hop into Waimate' for a little look-see.

For more information phone the Waimate Information Office: 03 689 7771 