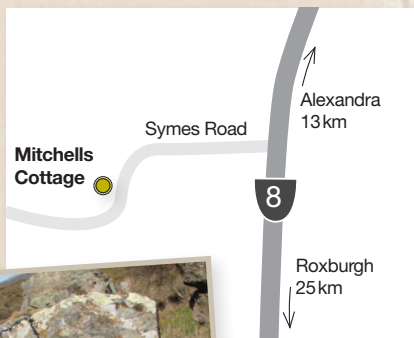




Mitchells Cottage

How to get there

Mitchells Cottage is situated within a historical reserve 1 km off SH8, 13 km south of Alexandra.



(Left) There were very few trees in Central Otago to make fence posts, so early settlers bored holes through stone.

(Right) Technique used to extract stone, brought from the Shetland Islands.

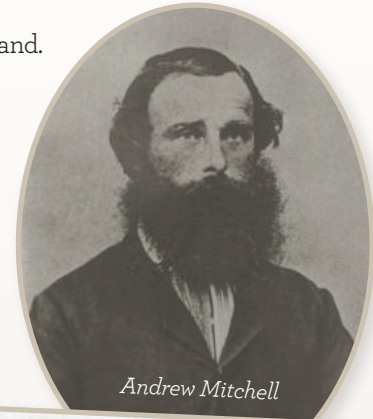


A tangible link with gold mining

Mitchells Cottage is an exceptional example of craftsmanship and is listed as a Category I Historic Place. It is one of the best surviving examples of the stonemason's craft in New Zealand.

Mitchells Cottage was built by Scottish immigrants and gold mining brothers John and Andrew Mitchell for John and his family. Andrew began the project in the 1880s, and using local stone built the cottage with stonemasonry techniques he had learned from his father in the Shetland Islands.

Building the cottage became a long-term project. It was finally completed in 1904 and housed John and Jessie's family of 10 children. Andrew Mitchell never married.



Andrew Mitchell



John and Jessie Mitchell



Mitchell Family photo circa 1890. Front from left: Barbara, Sarah; back from left: John (snr), John (jnr), Peter, Jessie.

Mitchells Cottage

The cottage and its grounds were purchased for a historic reserve in 1980 and were restored to ensure preservation. The cottage stands amongst large schist tors with a fantastic view over the Fruitland Valley. The cottage has five rooms, including a kitchen and scullery. Additional rooms are situated at the rear of the cottage, as well as other building remnants thought to be a henhouse and toilet.

Andrew Mitchell planted holly, spruce and other trees that remain today. He has also left another legacy of his remarkable skill: a sundial chipped out of a solid block of schist. Further up Symes Road (5 km) is Whites Hut, another example of Andrew Mitchell's stonemasonry craftsmanship.

Why did people decide to settle here?

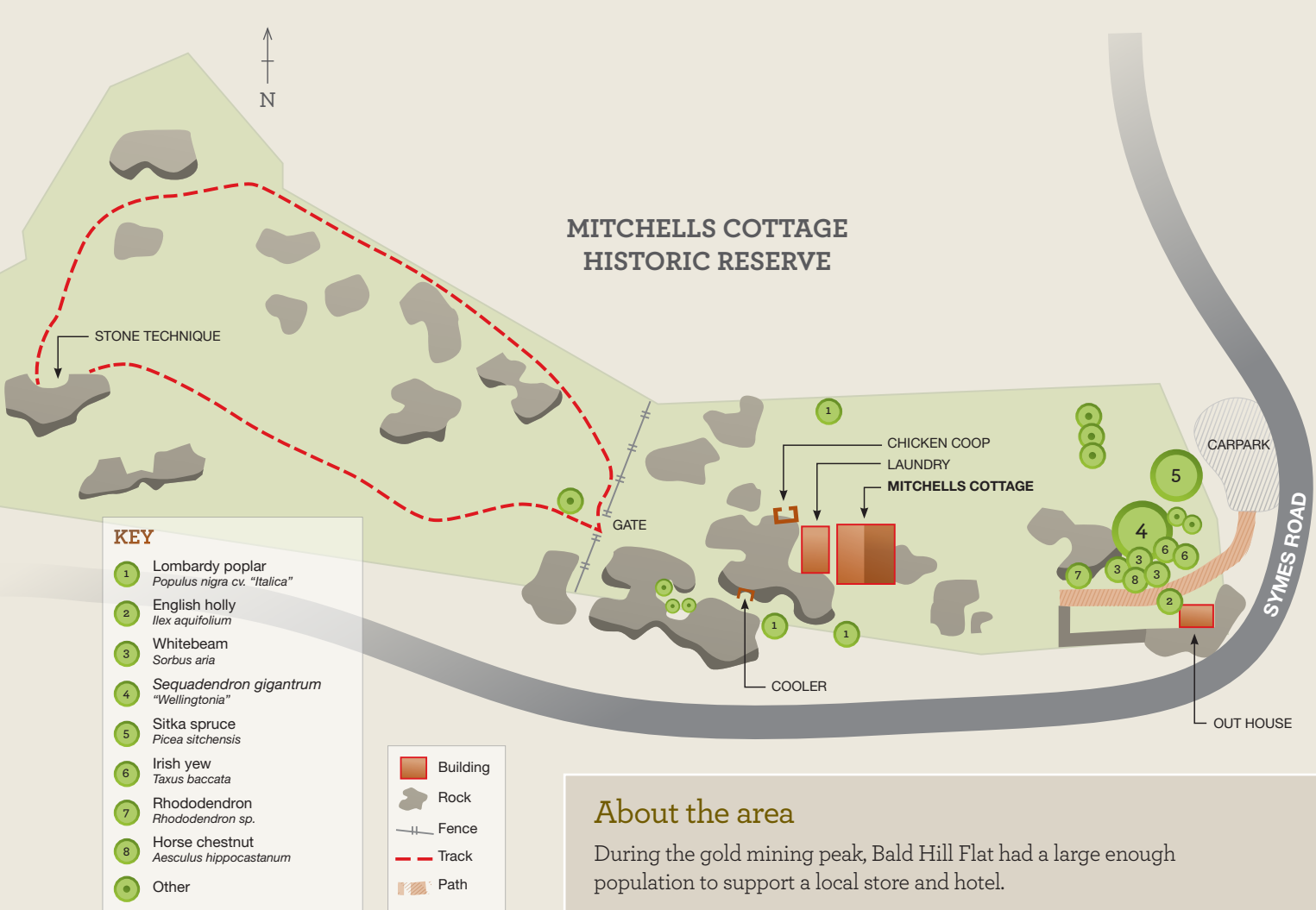
The hunt for gold—the reason for Mitchells Cottage

Andrew and John Mitchell left the Shetland Islands as young men. Andrew, the older brother, mined gold in Victoria, Australia and arrived in New Zealand in the 1860s. He had followed his cousins, the Whites, who were mining at Gabriels Gully.

As gold ran out, miners headed north. Andrew Mitchell came across gold near Bald Hill and decided to stay and mine the area. He discovered a quartz reef in the mid-1870s and asked his cousin James White to work the reef with him. In 1884 they sold the mine claim to Robert Symes & Co.

In 1886, John Mitchell joined his brother Andrew to mine Obelisk Creek at Bald Hill Flat.

Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai



About the area

During the gold mining peak, Bald Hill Flat had a large enough population to support a local store and hotel.

However, the gold mining era came to an end in 1907, as gold proved difficult to find. Many miners turned to farming and rabbiting.

After World War I, the Government planted 60,000 fruit trees as part of the soldier's settlement. This land became known as 'Fruitlands'.

However, very few fruit trees survived the harsh climate and the venture was unsuccessful.

Types of mining used by the Mitchell Brothers

Gold was extracted by crushing the rock (also known as ore), using a stamper battery. This type of mining is known as hard rock mining.

Sluicing is used to recover gold found in loose soil. Sluicing involves piping water into hoses to get powerful jets of water to separate the gold from gravel and dirt.

When there was no water on site, the Mitchell's had to construct water races—channels or trenches built to transport water from one water source to another area.

Building water races was an arduous task and a courageous feat as they were constructed by hand. There are water races throughout gold mining areas in Central Otago that extend for many kilometres.

They are still valuable today, supplying water that is used by local orchardists and farmers.

