

A cruel environment yields gold

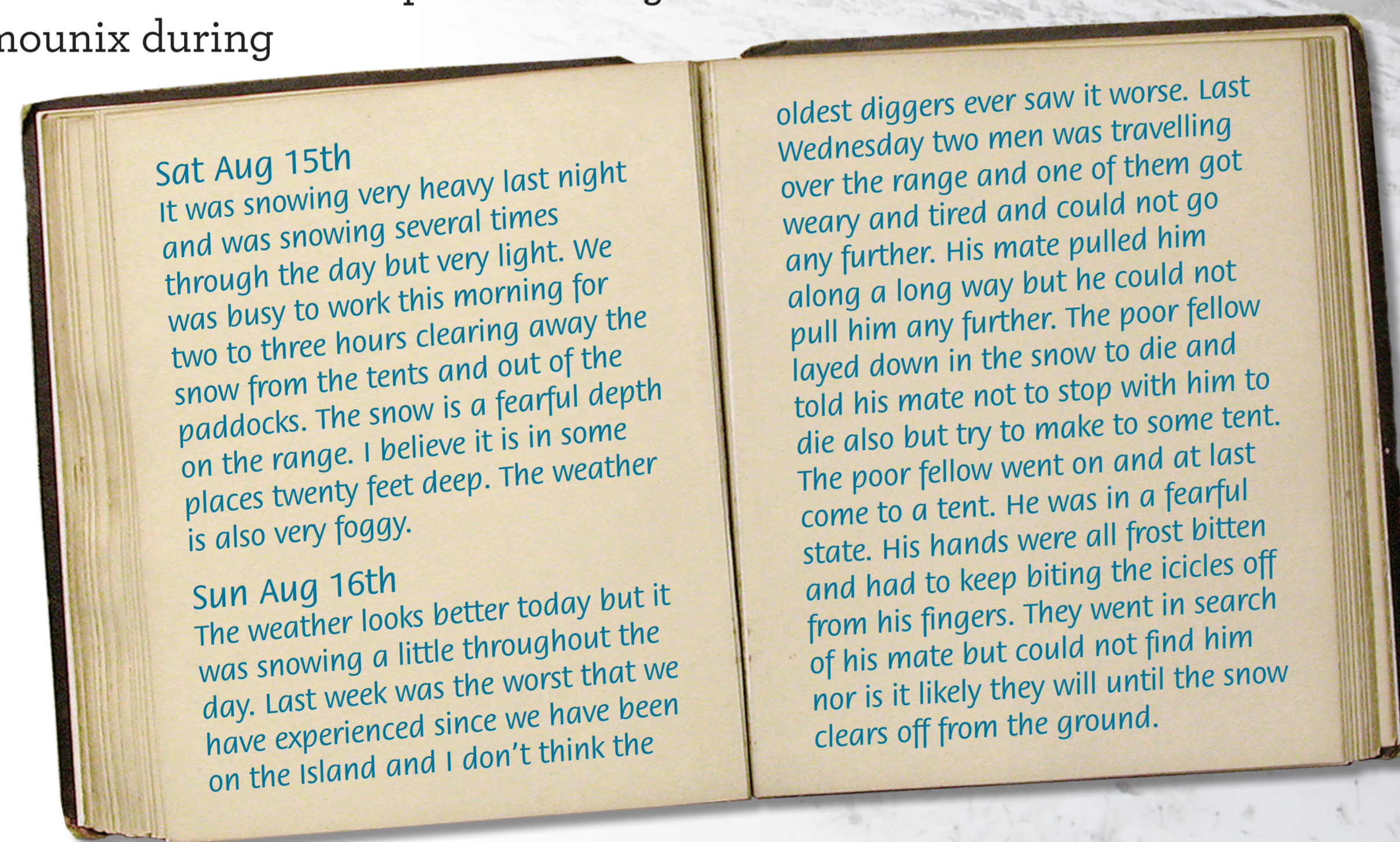
Look up towards the Old Man Range/Kopuwai and you will see Gorge Creek running down from the tops of this mighty range, now part of the Kopuwai Conservation Area. The range is a vast, exposed wilderness offering no shelter from its notoriously extreme weather.

But once gold was discovered in 1862, at a soaring 1,500 m, even this cruel environment couldn't dampen miners' enthusiasm. In September 1863 the visiting Otago Daily Times correspondent reported as many as 250 men working and living these high claims, with the largest groups at Campbell Creek and Potters No. 2.

A high price to pay . . .

It was from the 9–16 August 1863 that the 'Great storm' hit. In severe cold and heavy snow, many miners died from starvation or hypothermia – either up on the range or trying to find the snow pole route to escape it. Up to 35 men may have died between the Campbell Creek goldfields and the packers' town of Chamounix during that fatal storm. Some are thought to be buried near this site.

To this day the event is shrouded in mystery. How many men actually died in the storm? Where were they buried? Where was the town of Chamounix (or was it Chamonix)? Historical accounts give conflicting messages, and the story evolves as new evidence surfaces.



Reconstruction of part of the diary of John Pederick, a miner living at Campbell Creek during the Great storm. In the months following the storm, John Pederick writes about several corpses found on the range. Courtesy of Robert Pederick (Australia) – great-great-grandson of John Pederick.



Potters No. 2 may have looked like this typical gold miners' camp at Gabriels Gully.

Foreground photo: View of the gold-mining camp at Gabriels Gully, Tuapeka. Photo: Making New Zealand: Negatives and prints from the Making New Zealand Centennial collection. Ref: MNZ-0336-1/2-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. Background photo: The Campbell Creek area. Photo: DOC

Remember that all rocks, historic artefacts, native plants and animals are protected on public land. Tread carefully and take only photographs.

New Zealand Government



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai