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...

Tt was from the 9–16 August 1863 that the 'Great storm' hit. In severe cold Land 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  $\perp$  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.

Sat Aug 15th It was snowing very heavy last night and was snowing several times through the day but very light. We was busy to work this morning for two to three hours clearing away the snow from the tents and out of the paddocks. The snow is a fearful depth on the range. I believe it is in some places twenty feet deep. The weather is also very foggy.

Sun Aug 16th The weather looks better today but it was snowing a little throughout the day. Last week was the worst that we have experienced since we have been on the Island and I don't think the

oldest diggers ever saw it worse. Last Wednesday two men was travelling over the range and one of them got weary and tired and could not go any further. His mate pulled him along a long way but he could not pull him any further. The poor fellow layed down in the snow to die and told his mate not to stop with him to die also but try to make to some tent. The poor fellow went on and at last come to a tent. He was in a fearful state. His hands were all frost bitten and had to keep biting the icicles off from his fingers. They went in search of his mate but could not find him nor is it likely they will until the snow

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.

clears off from the ground.

Potters

No. 2

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

Lake

Roxburgh

Background photo: The Campbell Creek area. Photo: DOC

Miners' monument

Gorge

Creek

Chamounix 9

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



