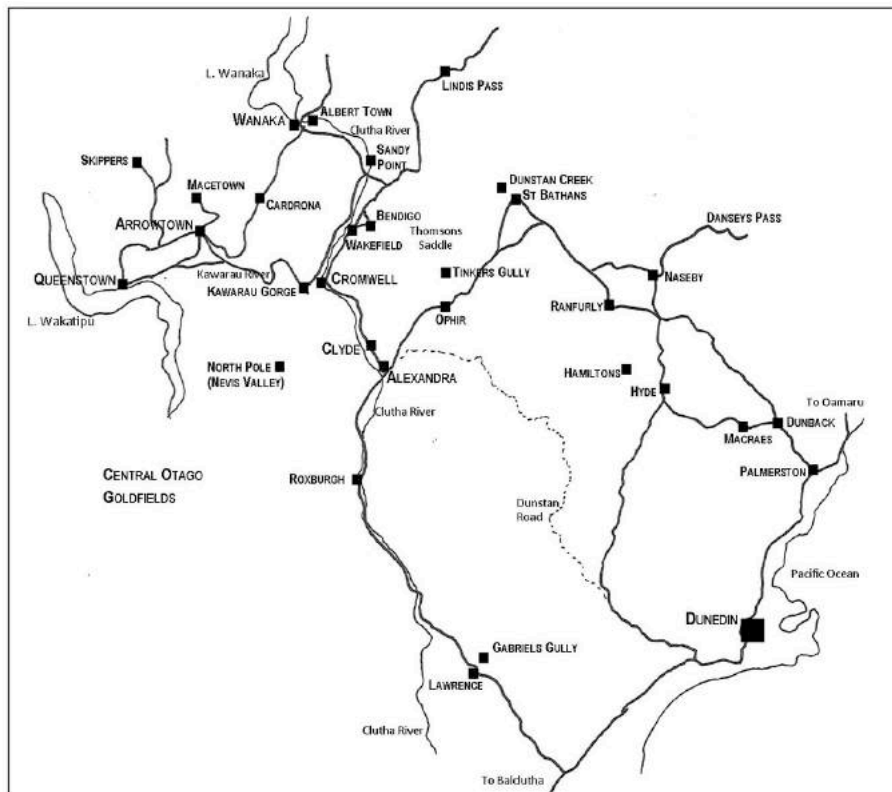


Defining a Date and Place in the Otago Gold Rush: The Problematic Journal of George Magnus Hassing and Bendigo

By LLOYD CARPENTER
University of Canterbury, NZ

In August 1862, the history of Otago, New Zealand, changed forever, when eighty-seven pounds of gold thumped down onto the desk of the Dunedin Gold Receiver's office. The Californian veteran prospectors named Horatio Hartley and Christopher Reilly who brought in the gold were reticent about revealing where they had worked, as they hoped to persuade the Otago Provincial Council to pay them a reward for their find.¹ They had endured months of privation while they secretly worked their claim and the sheer size of their hoard attracted fevered curiosity and speculation. Their news about the Dunstan goldfield and the £2000 they were awarded (conditional on gold receipts in excess of £16,000 being recorded in the following six months, a target which was met in three)² created banner headlines and sparked the Central Otago gold rush.³ (Map 1).

Map 1: *The Otago Goldfield*



Source: The author 2012

The first diggings were centred on the site of Hartley and Reilly's discovery at what became known as Hartley's Beach, on a bend in the Clutha Gorge. The seemingly unlimited gold deposits attracted people from all over the world, each with a dream that

they could 'make a pile'. However, the Clutha River, which had been unusually low when Hartley and Riley were mining, would not cooperate, for it flooded with sudden malevolence with levels that fluctuated with a capriciousness that miners came to loathe.⁴ When the winter freeze led to falling levels, claims could be worked between the narrow walls of gorges and fortunes were made, but when rainfall or the spring melt caused levels to rise, claims were flooded, forcing miners to file for 'protection' of their claims and to prospect for workable ground further afield.⁵ This led to new fields being discovered and declared at the Arrow, Shotover, Skippers, Cardrona, Nevis, Nokomai, and throughout the Manuherikia valley and Maniatoto Plain.

Each miner dreamed he (and it was overwhelmingly 'he'; the 1861 census had 11,304 men on the goldfields and 148 women) would be the next Hartley or Reilly, finding his pile and returning to his home country a wealthy man.⁶ In the earliest months of the rush, a combination of this dream plus regular reports of the discovery of almost unbelievably rich goldfields caused some miners to coalesce into a restless mass, swarming across the province, flitting from one field to the next, abandoning proven, profitable claims in their mania to chase hints and rumours of richer ground. They erected or dismantled whole towns of tin and canvas in a few hours, depending on the collective whim of this mob. The history of these ephemeral towns can only be constructed out of vague newspaper descriptions, deducing dates from hints found within imprecise narratives, written by excited, less than impartial and sometimes barely literate observers.

Even the goldfields administration scrambled to keep up with the ebb and flow of new settlements. In one instance a warden and staff was sent to a remote locale which had been deemed a 'duffer' and abandoned by the time the officials arrived. At the town of Charleston in the Shotover, the warden opened premises beside a newly built Bank of New South Wales branch and a post office, only to close it and dismantle the building when the goldfield failed a few weeks later.⁷

Throughout 1862 and 1863 fortunes were made by some lucky men. One find occurred in early February 1863, when Dan Erihana and Hakaria Haeroa prospected a section of Skippers Canyon. Swimming across a promising-looking beach, they lost a dog downstream. In the process of rescuing the animal, they found crevices stuffed with gold and in one memorable afternoon collected 25 pounds weight between them.⁸ Further remarkable finds were announced by 'the Redoubtable' William Fox in the Arrow Gorge, and by Thomas Arthur in the Shotover. In November 1862, the *Otago Witness* said in Conroy's Gully, they were 'getting, in a few days, pounds weight of gold ... 10, 20 and even 50lbs, ... procured by isolated parties who have happened to hit on the richest spots'.⁹

Shanty Towns

Diggings and associated shanty towns emerged from Kyeburn to Cardrona, from Nokomai to Doctors Point, mushrooming into existence in the most improbable of places, constructed out of the sparse materials at hand. Some stayed, others vanished. In November 1863 the newly-built town of Hindon emerged:

The township ... has on each side [of the main street] about forty dwellings of a heterogeneous character, hotels, shanties, stores, and tents, but buildings are being run up with such rapidity, notwithstanding the almost incessant rain, and the abominably muddy state of the streets, that it is not unreasonable to suppose the town will have doubled its extent in the course of another month.

Several of the buildings now in course of erection are of timber; last week not more than half a dozen were of this material. Of the hotels, the Golden Age, by Messrs Paterson and Fargie, seems to be doing what is called a roaring trade; ... has well nigh completed a tolerably extensive concert room, to which is attached a neat stage; and nearly opposite, the Game Cock hostelry attracts crowds by day and night, who join inside singing choruses to the accompaniment of a shrill harmonium. Dr Hewlett seems to enjoy an extensive practice in surgery as well as medicine, for heads are broken nightly in the rows and revelries which are, as a rule, inseparable from the initiation of a new diggings

There is also a restaurant ... and although it is not to be expected that the viands are of the most recherche description, all things considered, the fare is good and wholesome, and the charges reasonable. Several bakeries are being erected with all speed, as the demand for bread last week was incessant, and the few ovens at work were "rushed" by the hungry men, some of whom had not tasted bread for several days.¹⁰

Kawarau Gorge¹¹, Dunstan Creek¹², Sandy Point¹³ and North Pole¹⁴ have all disappeared from both memory and landscape, yet each was a Central Otago goldfields town, with a post office, hotels, ferries and a population of miners for whom they were created. Wakefield proved peculiar in that it was a town surveyed in case it was needed, and in anticipation of a demand that never eventuated, remaining just a ferry crossing with a post office.¹⁵

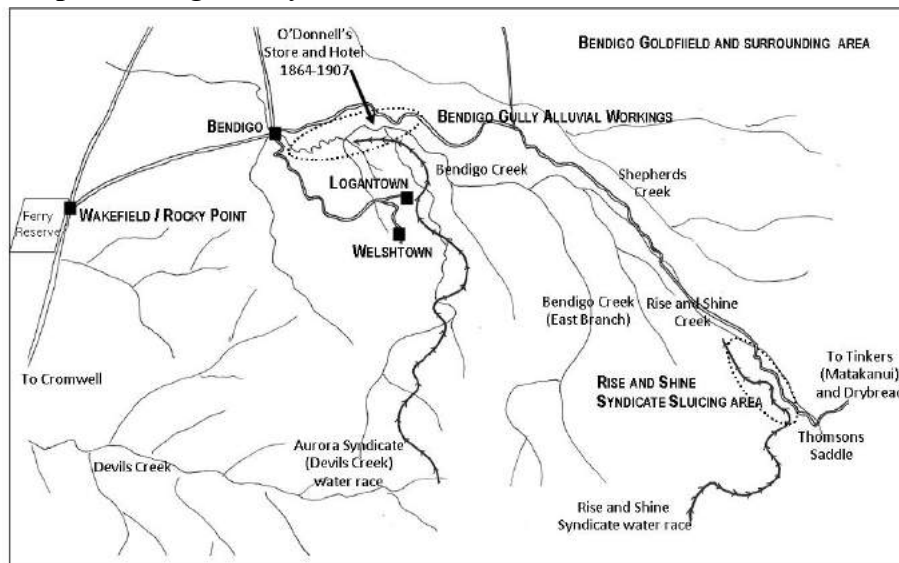
Assembling the order in which new goldfields were found and settlements built is thus a process complicated by several factors. One is the secretive behaviour adopted by prospectors when they found new, rich fields. They took for their standard the behaviour adopted by MacGregor, Low and Fox at the Arrow in late November, 1862,¹⁶ who despite being cognisant of Provincial Government prospecting rewards, decided to keep quiet to exploit the best ground for high rewards. Such practice makes research difficult and the establishment of time and location challenging. New goldfields were found and worked in secret for weeks until a warden, fellow miner or prying newspaperman declared the news to a breathless public looking for the next big find.

Another factor complicating the goldfields timeline is that much of the history was reported retrospectively by correspondents playing 'catch-up' on fast-moving events and a changing population in the vast and expanding areas they covered. In addition to accounts written contemporaneously with these events, some records are based on interviews with older miners decades later by the likes of Herries Beattie of the *Mataura Ensign*, and contributions to the *Gabriel's Gully Jubilee Reminiscences* and other similar celebrations. Still others, like veteran goldfields administrator, lawmaker and MP Vincent Pyke, and retired Cromwell policeman John Cassels, penned regular contributions to the *Otago Witness*, recounting stories of the earliest days in the province. Each wrote with the benefit of hindsight, recourse to official documents, long

experience, and a lack of surviving contemporaries to disagree with their version of events. However, relying on the memories and writing of elderly miners, some of whom stray into polemic and occasionally add detail of events they were not actually witness to, is unreliable as a primary source.

It is in this context that this paper challenges every history of the earliest years of the goldfield at Bendigo Gully. Mis-reading changes the order of discoveries and adds a level of prominence to an area in 1863 which is not borne out by a study of records and archival material. The ‘received’ narrative of Bendigo was written over 60 years after the events they cover and is told in such a way that modern researchers have leapt to conclusions which demand revision.

Map 2: Bendigo Goldfield



Source: The author 2012

George Magnus Hassing

In 1921, a well-respected Southland primary school headmaster, a widower approaching his 85th birthday began to reflect on his earlier life and set pen to paper. Danish-born George Magnus Hassing was renowned for his genial ways, copper-plate handwriting and for his abiding passion to educate the whole community, not just the children in his care. He courted controversy in 1878 for daring to set up night classes to teach Chinese miners English, but such was his standing in his community that in 1908 he was selected to greet Prime Minister Ward on behalf of the citizens of Southland.¹⁷ But behind Hassing's reserved, genteel mien lay thrilling memories of a rambunctious, action-packed youth. He told these stories in a series of articles written for the *Otago Witness*. His early writing covers his work as a sea-farer with trips to the orient, South America and even to Calcutta, a few months after the ‘Black Hole’ incident had shocked the British world.¹⁸

In February 1922, Hassing began writing of the Central Otago gold rush. In a sprawling tale he recounted his work as a ferryman, log raft-rider, miner, shipbuilder, trader, gold miner and finally teacher at Cardrona. He met and did business with the personalities of that period, dotting his story with names of prospectors, entrepreneurs

and adventurers like Barry, Goodger, Fox, Logan, Hallenstein, Pyke and Grogan, infusing each tale with the spice and veracity of personal memory. In the readers of the *Otago Witness*, Hassing had a ready audience. With the horrors of the Great War and the recent influenza epidemic bleakly weighing on everyone's consciousness, nostalgia for the freshness, simplicity and adventure of the gold rush times of sixty years earlier had widespread appeal. There was a vicarious thrill, sitting in neat Otago's 1920s suburbia, in reading of lonely prospectors clambering around bluffs where there are now roads, risking their lives to swim cataracts now tamed by bridges, and footsore after slogging great distances now covered in hours in the comfort of the Central Otago railway. As one American writer put it, 'We want to relive those thrilling days of yesteryear, but only because we are absolutely assured that those days are out of reach'.¹⁹ And for the readers in 1922 who worked for companies or the government on wages, the stories of individual diggers risking it all to strike it rich with golden finds had a romantic appeal that took them out of their humdrum existence. Hassing's stories suited the times and his audience.

In the *Otago Witness* of 14 February 1922, Hassing recalled an association with Bendigo: the primary argument offered in the case illustrating the difficulties of goldfields dating.

Fifty-eight years ago, when Fox's rush took place, miners and packers from the Dunstan were unable to cross the Upper Clutha, in order to reach the new rush, unless they travelled up the eastern side of the river as far as Albertown, where at that time I had a ferry established.

A few months afterwards, or early in 1863, another ferry was started at Rocky Point by two enterprising fellows known as Pat and Charley. After they had done a roaring trade for a few months, a bridge was erected over the narrow gorge in the Clutha above the point or the junction now known as Cromwell ... This bridge diverted the traffic from Rocky Point and the Roaring Meg and Gentle Annie now became the nearest and most direct route from the Dunstan and Fox's. Pat and Charley therefore sold out to George Rainer and William Rankin. The latter, familiarly known as 'Scotty' worked for many years afterwards about Cromwell and Bannockburn.

Good payable gold was struck in Bendigo Gully about this time by a party who came over the Dunstan Range from Thomson's Gully or Tinker's. Anticipating a trade, I bought out Rainer and Rankin and put on a new boat. Soon about 150 miners took up claims and located themselves in the gully, and things began to liven. Though there were no 'pile' claims, yet from £10 to £15 per week a man was not uncommon.

A store and saloon was started by Mr Sam Box, a tough old Cornishman, and his inestimable wife, an Irish lady, with a captivating and persuasive brogue; and my word! didn't she rake in the shekels! Mr Box and his son Sam did the packing from the ferry. Other saloons speedily followed under the ownership of Mr and Mrs Charles Hare, Mr and Mrs George Blanchard, Mr and Mrs Joe Smith, and Mrs J. Wilson (wife of Drummer Jack). These places became crowded with diggers in the evenings, when the shouting, drinking, and yelling were something to astonish a new chum. A butchery was also started by William Smith (Sydney Bill), and Chas. O'Donnell.²⁰

Using this account as the basis, every subsequent historian addressing the history of Bendigo has written of it beginning between late 1862 and early 1863, describing a place thronged with hundreds of miners and several goldfields businesses.

Figure 1: *Bendigo Gully mining, ca 1880*



Source: Courtesy R.W. Murray Collection

The first to attempt a history of the area, lawyer James Crombie Parcell tempers his account, admitting in his Cromwell area history, *Heart of the Desert*, that for the early years of the Bendigo goldfield, ‘The history of this alluvial field from 1862 to 1866 is very ‘sketchy’,²¹ yet he reproduces Hassing’s account in its entirety to cover its beginnings. Cromwell historian and writer Ron Murray admitted the same in interviews when he hinted at his frustration at the lack of information: ‘I could never understand why Bendigo is never heard of, and then all of a sudden in June, 1865 it has 60-odd miners working there. If the place was worked from 1862, it seems odd that no-one wrote of it’.²²

How are we to account for the fact that no mention is made of Bendigo Gully in any local or national paper prior to 1865, when it leaps, fully populated into the record? No earlier report by a goldfields warden includes ‘Bendigo’ or ‘Bendigo Gully’; it is not mentioned in any of the Otago Provincial Government Gazettes until 1867, and is not in any record in the Mines Department or School of Mines Archive. Hassing’s is the sole eyewitness account, but the interpretation of its narrative has been problematic, for reasons which are outlined below.

Any reports that do exist suggest that the area now known as Bendigo Gully was worked sporadically or ignored entirely; that it was worked by such small numbers that it attracted no attention from the wardens in their reports, and that the miners there – what few there were – worked in an unlikely and uncharacteristic harmony requiring absolutely no recourse to the Plaintiff (Miner’s Disputes) Court until 1865. Miners of the 1860s and 1870s were remarkably litigious, taking offense at any perceived wrong, intrusion on their claim, water right or share dispute, and hauling their opponent off to court in Clyde to settle affairs. The Plaintiff Court records show that everywhere in the

Dunstan region, whenever miners were found working cheek by jowl, or whenever they worked very rich ground, the Court was busy. In 1864, Warden Broad said ‘Disputes are rife at Hyde, which may be taken as evidence that the ground is considered valuable’²³ and two years later Warden Simpson commented on the ‘multiple disputes at the Black’s Field’ as ‘proof of its wealth’.²⁴ A blank Plaints Court record for 1863-65 therefore says a great deal about the Bendigo area, while the frequent disputes between Bendigo miners after June 1865 corroborate the dates suggested. It also shows that Bendigo Gully was not called Bendigo Gully, or at least, not on any official document or proclamation, and if it had acquired that name, that it was not in common or widespread usage until 1864.

Reports and rumours in the area

There are independent clues in the contemporary press on the development of the area that became known as Bendigo Gully. Gabriel Read, sent on a Government-sponsored prospecting and reporting expedition in September 1862, reported ‘an extension of this [Dunstan] field is rapidly being made towards the Lindis’.²⁵ A month later, Read reported miners working near what became known as Quartz Reef Point, a few miles south of what would later be called Bendigo:

...on the Clutha proper, the stream running from Lake Wanaka, diggers are working up to within a short distance of the Lindis River – the majority are not of the opinion that the yield improves the farther they attain to the north in that river they have sound prospects which might induce the hope that, with improved appliances, room may be found for sluicing companies even there’.²⁶

No place was given the name ‘Bendigo’. But it is likely that Read’s report was not widely read because as he wrote, everyone’s attention was distracted by the twin announcements of the opening of the Cardrona field by Michael Grogan, and the discovery of the remarkably rich workings of the ‘redoubtable’ William Fox at the Arrow.

Once the secret of his finds at the Arrow Gorge was out, Fox was persuaded to contribute to the pages of the *Witness*, where he wrote accounts of his find and provided information on how to get to the areas he and others had recently opened up. He discussed other mining areas, and in late November, supported Read’s assertion that the area north of the Kawarau Junction was unlikely to be very rich:

I crossed the river (Clutha) near the junction with the Kawarau and followed up the west bank. From the junction this branch runs through extensive flats. Table Ranges, with gravelly terraces intersected these flats. Some parts of this formation are likely to be auriferous, but the working of them is not at present profitable ... It is a sluicing country, and would entail an outlay of capital, or large co-operative bodies of miners to get sluice heads of water to work effectively.²⁷

Read and Fox both made reference to a lack of likely profitability, an opinion that would be echoed in the warden’s reports of Bendigo in 1865, where miners

produced a mere ounce for a whole week's effort, a yield regarded at the time as mere 'tucker', or subsistence returns. By contrast reports were penned by the *Otago Daily Times* correspondent enthusiastically declaring that at the Shotover and Arrow fields, 'Men are earning in a few days amounts as large as [Central Otago gold rush pioneers] Hartley and Riley [sic] did in months.'²⁸ Given such stories of vast wealth being won from the Arrow, Roaring Meg, Shotover, Nevis and Conroy's, it is hardly surprising that the area with at best sparsely distributed gold near the Rocky Point Ferry was explored but passed over in favour of the richer areas.

In completing this analysis of Bendigo's early years, a minor goldfields retailer presents an intriguing anchor point to the narrative. McLeod²⁹ and Gibson's store was the only one to remain on the Lindis in mid-1862, as that field's gold ran out and the miners departed³⁰. It is mentioned in Vincent Pyke's December 1862 report, that for a considerable period this store was the major source of supplies in the region, as witnessed by the man he encountered heading back from the Arrow diggings, seeking to replenish his food stocks there.³¹ What Pyke does not make clear is that this store he talks about appears to have moved from the Lindis to near Rocky Point (the ferry crossing point and later gateway to Bendigo), because Dr Hector, who passed the point as he embarked on one of his major explorations, located this business as being 'at the mouth of the Lindis, about fourteen miles above the junction'.³² Hector also says in passing that it was near the store that he and the others in his party 'swam the horses over the Molyneux', an indication that no ferry operated from that locale³³ at that time. This location is confirmed in a report of the first developments in the alluvial gravels of nearby Sandy Point, five miles up the Clutha from Rocky Point. The store would later shift to Albertown, where it remained for many years.³⁴ When the first miners arrived at what they would later call Bendigo, they would have had in this store a convenient local source of supplies until such time as other stores were opened in the middle of the workings of Bendigo Gully itself.

In his late 1862 report to the Provincial Government, Pyke states that the most northerly workings he encountered as he journeyed up the valley to Wanaka were wrought by a group of miners at what would later become known as Quartz Reef Point.³⁵ A year later, in September 1863, a new goldfield was declared at a place 'about 25 miles from the Upper Dunstan'.³⁶ This ambiguous description could conceivably refer to either Rocky Point (26 miles from Dunstan), or Amisfield Burn (25 miles from Dunstan, across the Clutha from Rocky Point). Whichever this refers to, it is clear that while it was near Bendigo Gully, it is extremely unlikely to have been Bendigo (28 miles from Dunstan). Either way, whatever was announced found no echo in later reports of workings in the region, so whatever was found and wherever it was, it proved a short-run thing.

The Dating Problem

This is the crux of the dating problem. Every historian and writer since James Crombie Parcell has used Hassing's text to locate the beginning of Bendigo. All use late 1862 or early 1863 as the incontrovertible start date for Bendigo Gully, since Hassing, the

eyewitness, provided it. And yet, as outlined, there is not one extant document from the period referring to 'Bendigo' before September 1864.

So was George Magnus Hassing wrong? Did he make it up or borrow someone else's experience and appropriate it as his own, like the famous 'Captain' William Jackson Barry was accused of doing in the 1966 *Encyclopaedia of New Zealand* ('Barry was ... undoubtedly New Zealand's greatest literary liar ... New Zealand's de Rougemont, as de Rougemont was Australia's Munchausen'),³⁷ or did the vagaries of time and memory simply produce an unintended confusion? Or do these facts offer a simpler explanation of what happened?

Hassing, it must be recalled, was writing in his second language, for all his erudition. He was also well-known – in fact fêted for his circumlocutory skills and ability to keep an audience attentive for hours, by splicing in additional off-topic material into his stories and lectures.³⁸ Lastly, his other writing contains asides, diversions and the insertion of supporting evidence and opinion in the middle of his narrative. It seems highly likely that any or all of these storytelling habits impacted on the difference between what he wrote and what he meant. It remains to examine what he wrote, to discuss what clues are found within his story and see what would give a different date from that which has been assumed by every modern historian.

Hassing states the date about which he writes with precision. In his introduction, it is 'Fifty-eight years ago', which places the date as 1864, given his article was dated 1922. He also notes that

when Fox's rush took place, miners and packers from the Dunstan were unable to cross the Upper Clutha, in order to reach the new rush, unless they travelled up the eastern side of the river as far as Albertown, where at that time I had a ferry established.

This is easily located, given that Hassing's Albert Town ferry was established in the Otago Provincial Government Gazette in late 1862³⁹ and Fox's rush to the Arrow River happened in late November 1862.⁴⁰ The Albert ferry was later controversially re-awarded, with eight other Central Otago ferry contracts to Henry Hill in a new tender awarded in July 1863, which was fully operative by August.⁴¹

The next characters discussed by Hassing are also ferry-related: 'A few months afterwards, or early in 1863, another ferry was started at Rocky Point by two enterprising fellows known as Pat and Charley.' These were the two contractors under the tender offered for a ferry at 'Lindis Crossing', a point which from the description is on the Clutha, and was shifted for convenience – and a safe landing place – to what later became known as Rocky Point. This is the only ferry ignored by Hill.⁴² This ferry was established to allow the safe crossing of miners on their way from the port town of Oamaru⁴³ to the diggings around the Lakes district (Superintendent Richardson noted the volume of supplies coming from Oamaru in December 1862,⁴⁴ and in 1866 the route over the Lindis Pass from Oamaru is described as 'the main trunk of road' to the Lake District).⁴⁵ The route was also important for those who used the Thomson Pass from the Maniatoto Plain, near what became known as the town of Tinkers. It is likely that

‘Charley’ was Charley Hinsburgh, a popular German miner who operated the Manorburn Ferry and store on the Manuherikia River from mid-1864.⁴⁶

In a boon to researchers, Hassing also lists some names that appear in the official records, when he says that ‘Pat and Charley therefore sold out to George Rainer [sic] and William Rankin’. George Raynor was appointed Post Master at Rocky Point on 12 May 1864, a position he held until at least the end of September of that year.⁴⁷ In a statement which links his purchase of Raynor and Rankin’s ferry to the finding of gold at Bendigo, Hassing states ‘payable gold was struck in Bendigo Gully about this time by a party who came over the Dunstan Range from Thomson’s Gully or Tinkers,’ placing the earliest occurrence of the events Hassing describes at Bendigo as late 1864.

There are other clues in his narrative: saloons were operated, (probably without a license), ‘by Mr. and Mrs Sam Box, Mr. and Mrs Charles Hare, Mr. and Mrs George Blanchard, Mr and Mrs Joe Smith, and Mrs J. Wilson (wife of Drummer Jack). A butchery was started by William Smith, and Chas. O’Donnell.’ Some but not all of these people can be located in the records.

The Boxes are the hardest to track down prior to 1867. Mrs Box was charged with selling liquor without a licence from her premises in Cromwell in 1867,⁴⁸ one of several appearances on this charge in the Dunstan Court until her hotel gained a licence in mid-1868. Her husband Sam was charged with operating a business supplying farm produce to Cromwell businesses without a licence in 1868⁴⁹ and he died sometime in the early 1870s,⁵⁰ leaving Mrs Box running her Junction Hotel until the early 1880s. In a court case in 1874, Sergeant Cassels said that ‘it was a rowdy house; drunken diggers and so on’; that ‘her servants were generally prostitutes’, and that ‘the house was always called into by the loose characters who came into town’. He offered some ameliorative comment, acknowledging that ‘the house had been quieter lately’ and that ‘Mrs Box had got good accommodation in her house, and kept good liquors’ but then in an aside to Judge Simpson, said that ‘Mrs Box was hot-tempered, and had a bad tongue’, and that ‘he would certainly not allow any female connection of his to serve there’.⁵¹ Mrs Box’s obituary states that she came to Cromwell in the ‘early sixties’ and operated an hotel there until her second marriage to David Murley took her dairy farming in 1905.⁵² Cromwell Historian Ron Murray was confident Ann Box was living at the Kawarau Gorge settlement, locally named Gorgetown in 1863-65, and found oblique references to her premises there being a ‘bawdy house’.⁵³

The next of Hassing’s Bendigo businessmen was Charles Hare. He operated a liquor sales outlet from his farm at Poison Creek (opposite Sandy Point and about five miles north of Rocky Point) From July 1864, under a ‘bottle’ licence - meaning he did not need to provide accommodation.⁵⁴ Given records showing uninterrupted farming activity at Poison Creek throughout the 1860s, it seems likely that while Hassing remembers the Hares near Bendigo, he was almost certainly not a resident at the settlement.

Of the other business owners named by Hassing, two left the area, appearing on the West Coast field. In 1865, Blanchard went sluicing at Kaniere⁵⁵, then Okarito⁵⁶, where he ran a hotel⁵⁷ until 1874, when ill health forced his retirement.⁵⁸ Joe Smith is not recorded beyond his arrival at Hokitika in 1865.⁵⁹

Mrs Jane Wilson seems more like a character from the pages of a ‘penny dreadful’ novel than true life, for by all accounts she was as bad as the worst of the goldfields women could get. She was violent,⁶⁰ a drunkard,⁶¹ a sly grogger,⁶² prostitute,⁶³ brothel keeper⁶⁴ and a mother who (according to a marginal note penned by the magistrate) raised minimal protest when her five daughters were taken from her to be sent to the Industrial School in Dunedin.⁶⁵ She would shift around the towns of Central Otago in reaction to the twin influences of police pressure and the apparent level of wealth in different towns. In 1870, she was arrested as a ‘Shanty Grog Seller’ at Arthur’s Point, where it was reported she was selling ‘some of the vilest compounds ever proposed to poison man. Brandy and whiskey appeared to consist of raw spirits from some illicit still, combined with spirits of wine and kerosene’.⁶⁶ The presiding judge felt that the compounds related to the arrest were ‘so vile’ that he ordered the samples to be retained for analysis.⁶⁷ Throughout the 1870s, she was rarely off the Court pages of the *Dunstan Times* and *Cromwell Argus*. If she was present at Bendigo in the very earliest times, then the likelihood is that whatever she would have got up to would have been illegal, uncontrolled, and definitely hazardous to health and morality.

William Smith was sluicing at Clyde in 1863, moving to Sandy Point in April 1864, where he worked a succession of sluicing claims.⁶⁸ He was still at the latter location in January 1865, when he sold his shares in the water races, and probably, given the coincidence of dates, he moved to Bendigo.⁶⁹

Charles O’Donnell combined the work of storekeeping with his mining work in Central Otago. He began mining at the Manuherikia in March 1863,⁷⁰ moving to Hogburn (now Naseby) where he opened his first store in July 1863,⁷¹ then to Hamiltons in January 1864,⁷² and finally to Tinkers Gully in July, where he was one of the shareholders in a water race up in Thompson’s Gully.⁷³ He sold his shareholding in all water races in the Thompsons area in September 1864⁷⁴ and is not found in the official records again until he applied for a slaughterman’s license as part of his Bendigo Gully establishment in 1868.⁷⁵ However, in October 1866 his store was listed as one of two places where a share in the Aurora Sluicing Company could be purchased.⁷⁶ Intriguingly, George Hassing credits miners working their way over Thompson’s Saddle with the full exploitation and development of the Bendigo field, making O’Donnell’s part in the establishment of the field significant, and relatively easy to locate in terms of a date. In 1869, Charles O’Donnell replaced his sod and canvas structure with a substantial stone building. O’Donnell would later expand his store to include a butchery, hotel and bakery. The last store and hotel operating at Bendigo, it finally closed and he abandoned it in 1906, following the death of his wife. The roofless ruin remains in remarkably good condition in Bendigo Gully, where it is protected within an historic reserve (Fig. 2).

The documentary evidence shows that if Hassing, Smith and O’Donnell were active participants in the events of early Bendigo, they could not have been there any earlier than early August, 1864, while George Blanchard’s decision to shift over to the West Coast means that it could not have begun any later than September 1865.

Concrete support for a late 1864 date is provided by the fact that in September, 1864, the police at Cromwell changed from referring to ‘Rocky Point’ in their

Occurrences Book,⁷⁷ to talking about ‘Bendigo Gully.’ This is the earliest official primary source reference to Bendigo as a location that I have found. The earliest newspaper reference to Bendigo Gully occurs when gold was contributed to the New Zealand Exhibition held in Dunedin in February 1865. That the area was not initially called Bendigo is confirmed in a 1874 retrospective in the *Witness*, which discussed the quartz mining story of Bendigo: ‘In 1863 gold-bearing quartz was found upon the surface of several of the little chain of hills which are known now as Bendigo’.⁷⁸

Figure 2: *O’Donnells Store, Bendigo Gully*



Source: The author 2011

Examining Hassing’s report in the light of this supporting evidence suggests that all the 1863 information is an extended aside by a master story-teller and may be treated parenthetically:

Fifty-eight years ago,

(when Fox’s rush took place, miners and packers from the Dunstan were unable to cross the Upper Clutha, in order to reach the new rush, unless they travelled up the eastern side of the river as far as Albertown, where at that time I had a ferry established. A few months afterwards, or early in 1863, another ferry was started at Rocky Point by two enterprising fellows known as Pat and Charley [who] sold out to George Rainer and William Rankin...),

good payable gold was struck in Bendigo Gully about this time by a party who came over the Dunstan Range from Thomson’s Gully or Tinker’s. ... I bought out Rainer and Rankin and put on a new boat. Soon about 150 miners took up claims and located themselves in the gully, and things began to liven.⁷⁹

All the evidence located by the author in contemporary sources makes it clear that a date of mid to late 1864 start date for Bendigo is likely, with the reports of the Gully ‘rising in repute’ in 1865, with Warden Stratford recording 120 miners at work there in July 1865⁸⁰ (note that the warden’s regulations required a monthly report which included an estimated census for each settlement area, a report which would later be

sub-divided into ‘miners and Chinese’. The Dunstan warden would not have missed 150 miners in an area like Bendigo Gully in 1862 or 1863, but it is easy to see how ten to fifteen miners or so would be ignored as not being worthy of separate comment or tally). The year 1864 is also consistent with the interest shown by Christian Hansen and his fellow Swedish miners in the Rise and Shine Valley, upstream from Bendigo Gully. They first applied for a water race in Smoker’s Creek near Thompson’s Gully in July 1864, re-submitting their application in December of that year to bring water westwards from Tipperary Gully to the area encompassing the headwaters of the Bendigo Creek.⁸¹ And 58 years back from 1922 is 1864, as noted earlier in this paper.

George Hassing confirms this thesis in a 1901 letter to the *Witness* headed ‘A Reminiscence of the “Old Man” Flood’, where he recounts his experience of the massive flood of June 1863 that caused widespread destruction throughout the goldfields. In passing, he states his residence in 1863 as Sandy Point, not Bendigo.⁸² This is also confirmed in the lengthy obituary published in the *Otautau Standard and Wallace County Chronicle*.⁸³

Bendigo Gully (almost certainly without bearing that name) was prospected in late 1862 according to the first miner there, Joseph Dods, who also admitted that not enough was found there for him to persist.⁸⁴ Its position, athwart two major traffic routes and beside a busy ferry meant that miners would test the ground as they passed through. Indeed, the late 1862 date was confirmed in 1874 by the Cromwell correspondent of the *Otago Witness*, who stated that miners coming south from the Lindis rush were the first there,⁸⁵ a statement supported in 1887 by Vincent Pyke in *The Story of the Early Gold Discoveries in Otago*.⁸⁶ It is equally likely that it was worked on an inconsistent, if low-key basis throughout 1863 and into early 1864, without attracting enough miners or earning sufficient results or notoriety to gain a name separate from Rocky Point, until the sluicing claims of mid-1864 increased its potential.

The Bendigo Field

What then influenced the changes which led to Bendigo Gully attracting enough alluvial miners to catch the attention of the warden and newspaper correspondents, given so many years of neglect and inconsistency? The biggest influence was the increased volume of water in Bendigo Creek, when its flow began to be supplemented in 1864 by the Rise and Shine sluicers, who brought 12 sluice heads of water from the Tipperary Stream on the other side of the Dunstan Range.⁸⁷ In 1866, the Aurora Syndicate’s water from their massive Devil’s Creek race doubled this capacity again. Greater water flow meant miners were ‘enabled to work ground that baffled all the energy of former miners’.⁸⁸ With the diminution of payable river claims, the rich alluvial areas of Central Otago were increasingly worked by sluicing syndicates and company men. Bendigo Gully thus became attractive for individual miners who sought the opportunity to continue to work for themselves, thus miners made their way to those fields still offering opportunity. The gully’s increased water flow also presented the opportunity for men with relatively low capital to form groups, such as the ‘Rip and Tear’ syndicate that tackled the rocky gorge at the lower end of Bendigo Creek.⁸⁹

The consensus of opinion held that Bendigo Gully was never a rich field. As Warden Simpson stated 'There are no very rich workings in this locality — and, on the other hand, there are none getting less than fair wages'.⁹⁰ The opinion of the correspondent for the *Dunstan Times* was that miners could earn 'very steady and satisfactory wages',⁹¹ but it was consistent, did not require large amounts of capital to develop claims, and had water in good quantities. This all made for a population and business boom, and Hassing's descriptions of exciting times at Bendigo in 1864-5.

It is utterly clear that until late 1864, Bendigo Gully was not worked seriously, that few miners were involved, that the field was at best a 'tucker' one. The events recounted by George Magnus Hassing, involving 150 miners swarming over the gully, took place at least 18 to 24 months later than everyone has assumed from his story.

Such precision is not an issue in a stable, settled society. But in the mercurial history of the Central Otago gold field, 18 months can represent almost a whole generation of mining activity. In addition, the start date of the alluvial area would have had a profound impact on teasing out the detail of when Bendigo became famous as a quartz mining area in 1869-70. Tracing the beginning dates of areas like Bendigo reveal more about how the commerce and society of the goldfields developed than do mere study of gold yield statistics.

Given its location on the New Zealand gold rush time line as a settlement of 1864, Bendigo becomes important as one of the few new fields to develop. It did this as the more easily won Otago gold petered out and the new rush on the West Coast emerged to draw attention, and attract miners and commerce away.

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Endnotes

¹ T.J. Hearn, 'Hartley, Horatio 1826 - 1903'. *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007 URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>

² V. Pyke, *The Story of the Early Gold Discoveries in Otago*, Ch. XII, in *Otago Witness*, 21 January 1887, p. 14

³ *Otago Witness*, 23 August 1862, p. 7.

⁴ John George Walker, *Journals and Letters, Mainly from the Otago Goldfields*, 1862-1863, Macmillan Brown Library Collection, journal entry, 5 April 1863.

⁵ *Otago Daily Times*, 1 November 1862, p. 4.

⁶ J.L. Dickinson, *Picks, Pans and Petticoats: Women on the Central Otago goldfields*, Honours History Essay, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, 1993.

⁷ *Otago Daily Times*, 30 July 1864, p. 4.

⁸ V. Pyke, Chapter XII, Published in *Otago Witness*, 21 January 1887, p. 14

⁹ *Otago Witness*, 27 December 1862, p. 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21 November 1863, p. 6.

¹¹ At the mouth of the Kawarau Gorge, Cromwell end, sometimes (perhaps originally) called Gorgetown.

¹² Behind and west of St Bathans, although St. Bathans was frequently (erroneously) also called Dunstan Creek.

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- ¹³ 17km South of Wanaka, now marked by a Dept of Conservation Parking area.
- ¹⁴ In the Upper (southern) Nevis Valley.
- ¹⁵ About 1km north of the 'Crippletown' parking area on SH 8.
- ¹⁶ *Otago Witness*, 6 December 1862, p. 2.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4 November 1908; *The Otautau Standard*, 8 January 1929, p. 4 (Hassing's Obituary).
- ¹⁸ In 1930, a year after his death, the *Southland Times* would print these as *Pages From the Memory Log of George Magnus Hassing*, Invercargill, 1930.
- ¹⁹ R. Rosenblatt, 'Look Back in Sentiment' *New York Times*, 28 July 1973, p. 23.
- ²⁰ *Otago Witness*, 14 February 1922, p. 63.
- ²¹ J.C. Parcell, *Heart of the Desert - A History of the Cromwell and Bannockburn Districts of Central Otago*, Otago Centennial Historical Publications, 1951, Dunedin.
- ²² Ron Murray worked for James Crombie Parcell in his Cromwell law practice for over 30 years and published *Costly Gold*, 1976. Interviewed in October 2010 and February 2011.
- ²³ *Otago Daily Times*, 15 December 1864, p. 4.
- ²⁴ *Otago Witness*, 20 October 1866, p. 1.
- ²⁵ 'Report on the Dunstan Gold Field to Deputy Superintendent Hon. J. Hyde Harris', *Otago Witness*, 20 September 1862, p.3.
- ²⁶ 'Report to Hyde Harris dated 24 September 1862', *Otago Witness*, 11 October, 1862, p. 5.,
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 28 November 1862, p. 4.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 27 December 1862, p. 2.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 28 February 1906. P. 11.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 4 October 1862, p. 8
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 27 December 1862, p. 5.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 28 November 1862, p. 4.
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ Hassing, in an earlier letter noted that this store shifted again, and in 1864 was at Albertown. See *Otago Witness*, 28 February 1906.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 27 December 1862, p. 7.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 11 September 1863, p. 5.
- ³⁷ 'BARRY, "Captain" William Jackson', from *An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*, edited by A.H. McLintock, originally published in 1966. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 27-Oct-11, URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/1966/barry-captain-william-jackson/1>
- ³⁸ *Otautau Standard and Wallace County Chronicle*, 23 December 1919, p. 2.
- ³⁹ *Otago Provincial Government Gazette*, March 25, 1863, p. 105.
- ⁴⁰ *Otago Witness*, 6 December, 1862, p. 2.
- ⁴¹ Archives NZ Dunedin Office, Superintendent's General Inwards Correspondence OP 7, January 1862 – August 1863, Box 3; *Otago Provincial Government Gazette*, 2 September 1863, p. 337.
- ⁴² *Otago Provincial Government Gazette*, 8 July, 1863, vol. VI, no. 254, p. 240.
- ⁴³ *Otago Witness*, 26 July 1862, p. 3.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 27 December, 1862 p. 2
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 21 April 1866, p. 11
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 20 October 1866, p. 2, See also 20 May 1865, p. 5; *Otago Daily Times*, 31 March, 1865 and others.
- ⁴⁷ *OPGG*, 15 June 1864, vol. VII, no. 308, p. 183.
- ⁴⁸ Cromwell Magistrate Court Judgement Book Record Book 67-71, NZ Archives, Dunedin Office, DADO Acc D557 207c.
- ⁴⁹ Cromwell Plaints 1865 - 67 NZ Archives, Dunedin Office, ABBO Acc D98 7440.
- ⁵⁰ *Otago Witness*, 8 May 1907, p. 39
- ⁵¹ *Cromwell Argus*, 12 May 1874, p. 2.
- ⁵² *Otago Witness*, 8 May 1907, p.3 9
- ⁵³ Personal comment from Ron Murray, 101 Innescourt Rd, Cromwell, February 2010.
- ⁵⁴ Archives NZ Dunedin Office, Cromwell Magistrate Court Judgement Book Record Book 67-71, DADO Acc D557 207c. The earliest date of this license is alluded to in a reference beside his renewal application.
- ⁵⁵ *West Coast Times*, 14 October 1865, p. 3.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 12 June 1866, p.2 .
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 5 January 1874, p. 2.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 6 April 1874, p. 2.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 26 July 1865, p. 2.

- ⁶⁰ *Cromwell Argus*, 18 August 1876, Fined and sentenced to 14 days imprisonment in Clyde gaol, with hard labour
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 12 January 1870.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, 8 February 1871 (fined £50, or in default, three months jail in Dunedin, with hard labour).
- ⁶³ Wilson was convicted of vagrancy and sentenced to one month jail at Clyde, with hard labour. Archives NZ Dunedin Office, Charge sheet, Cromwell Magistrate Court Judgement Book Record Book 67-71, DADO Acc D557 207c
- ⁶⁴ *Cromwell Argus*, 14 May 1878, p.3.
- ⁶⁵ Archives NZ Dunedin Office, Cromwell Magistrate Court Judgement Book Record Book 67-71, DADO Acc D557 207c.
- ⁶⁶ *Dunstan Times*, 5 May 1870.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁸ Archives NZ Dunedin Office, Clyde Warden's Court Applications ABBO Acc D98 7299 Record of transfer of share in sluicing operation from James Patterson to William Smith 27 September, 1863; Record of application for a water race by Smith and two others 24 December 1864.
- ⁶⁹ Archives NZ Dunedin Office, Clyde Warden's Court Applications ABBO Acc D98 7299 Record of application for transfer of shares in a water race at Sandy Point to James Horn, 16 January 1865
- ⁷⁰ Archives NZ Dunedin Office, Dunstan Warden's Court Complaint Record Book 1862-65, Entry for May, 1863: DADO Acc D557 130c.
- ⁷¹ *Southland Times*, 4 August 1863, p. 3.
- ⁷² *Otago Witness*, 13 February 1864, p. 12.
- ⁷³ Archives NZ Dunedin Office, Clyde Warden's Court Applications, ABBO Acc D98 7299 Record of application for registration of a water race at Thompson's Gully by Charles O'Donnell and four others, 15 August 1864.
- ⁷⁴ Archives NZ Dunedin Office, Clyde Warden's Court Transfers, ABBO Acc D98 7416.
- ⁷⁵ Archives NZ Dunedin Office, March, 1868 entry in Cromwell Magistrate Court Judgement Record Book 1867-71, DADO Acc D557 207c.
- ⁷⁶ *Dunstan Times*, 19 October 1866, p. 1.
- ⁷⁷ Archives NZ Dunedin Office, Cromwell Police Station Occurrences Book no. 2, from June 1864 to July 1865, DAKU D383 Box 1. The first reference to Bendigo Gully is dated 11 September 1864.
- ⁷⁸ *Otago Witness*, 22 August 1874, p. 6.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 14 February 1922, p. 63.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 15 July 1865.
- ⁸¹ Archives NZ Dunedin Office, Clyde Warden's Court Applications, ABBO Acc D98 7299 Record of application for application to construct a water race out of Tipperary Gully and out to Rocky Point, 20 December 1864.
- ⁸² *Otago Witness*, 14 August 1901, p. 18.
- ⁸³ *Otautau Standard and Wallace County Chronicle*, 8 January 1929, p. 4
- ⁸⁴ Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives, 1878 Session I, I-01a , Goldfields Committee, (Report of, On Petition of Daniel James Moore, Together with Minutes of Evidence.) I.—IA 1878. NEW ZEALAND. Brought up 11th October 1878, p. 4
- ⁸⁵ *Otago Witness*, 22 August 1874, p. 7.
- ⁸⁶ Pyke, *The Story of the Early Gold Discoveries in Otago*, Chapter XII, in *Otago Witness*, 21 January 1887, p. 14
- ⁸⁷ *Otago Witness*, 2 December, 1865, p. 13; 15 September 1866, p. 8; *Bruce Herald*, 13 April 1865, p. 9.
- ⁸⁸ *Dunstan Times*, 26 April 1867.
- ⁸⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁹⁰ *Otago Witness*, 15 July 1865, p. 11.
- ⁹¹ *Dunstan Times*, 26 April 1867.