

Waipori descendants mark the lost town's 150th jubilee

Mary-Jo Tohill, Southland Times 27 March 2016



Waipori gold, held by a pioneering family descendent, Thomas Atkinson, 11, of Kamo, north of Whangarei, who travelled south for the Waipori 150th Jubilee and reunion.

Waipori gold lured them in the 1860s, water vanquished them in the 1920s, and their descendants remembered them, at the former goldmining town's 150th jubilee and reunion, held over Easter.

With hydro storage dam Lake Mahinerangi glittering in the background, under which the town of Waipori has reposed since the 1930s, more than 200 people gathered at the lost town's cemetery, to honour their ancestors, who shaped this remote part of the Clutha District, 35km west of Dunedin.

Waipori 150th Jubilee co-organiser and pioneering Cotton family descendant, Kerry Driscoll of Christchurch, said the reunion activities, particularly the cemetery events, had brought back to life the stories she'd grown up hearing.



The newly restored Waipori pioneering Cotton family grave stone was unveiled during the 150th Jubilee and reunion celebrations held over Easter

"The strength of the people that told those stories has brought them back, and their descendants to Waipori."

While it was a happy occasion with many people catching up with relatives and friends, re-establishing connections, and finding new ones they didn't know they had, the cemetery visit was tinged with sadness and nostalgia, for a historic country town that had to give way for the electricity needs of urban centres.



Three sisters descended from Waipori Lewis and Kerr pioneering families, left, identical twins Helene Hart of Lawrence and Jeanette Higgins, 94, and Pam Arthur, 91, of Ashburton, enjoying a beautiful day at the Waipori 150th Jubilee celebrations.

Driscoll summed it up in a passage from a poem she read written by another Waipori pioneer descendent J.B. Crowley, following the unveiling of two restored grave sites, and a new information kiosk:

"...in the days of happy memory
where Waipori throbbed with life,
Now the days are long and lonely
In Waipori in the Hills..."