



Major changes to the Buller River mouth since 1868

### Where to go

From the Westport i-SITE go north along Palmerston Street and then explore the Kawatiri River Trail. For more of our amazing heritage visit:

**Denniston** – historic hill-top coal mining town and spectacular incline

**Granity** and **Millerton** - Museum, historic coal mining area, Charming Creek walkway

**Cape Foulwind** and **Tauranga Bay** – granite quarry, lighthouse and walkway

**Charleston** – historic gold rush area

# Early Westport



Gladstone Street, Westport 1868

Located on the east bank of the Buller/Kawatiri River, Westport emerged as a trading post servicing gold and coal miners. The town has a rich and fascinating history -

- Ancient Māori trail
- 1860s Gold Rush
- Port development
- Coal trade

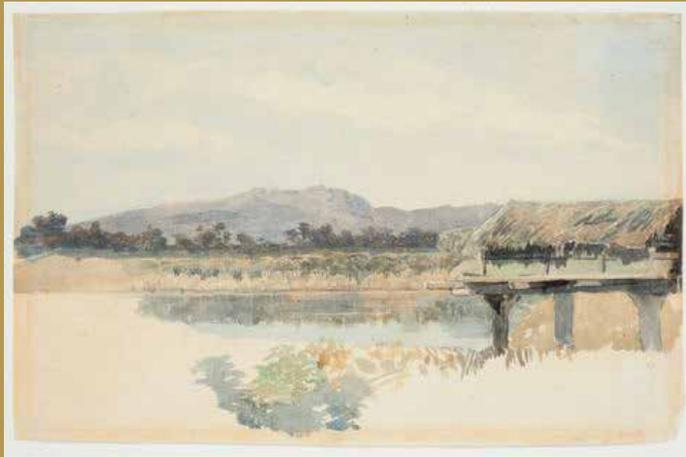
Check out **Coaltown Museum** at the **Westport i-SITE** and then go for a walk along the **Kawatiri River Trail** to the **Lost Lagoon** and **Tip Head**.

## Westport in the 1800s Historical Guide

## Māori

Near Carters Beach is a very early Māori settlement dated at circa AD 1300 and this is one of the most significant archaeological sites in New Zealand.

Located on the pounamu (greenstone) trading route along the West Coast, the Kawatiri River estuary with a wide range of birds and fish, was a natural camp for over 500 years.



*Māori storehouse at Kawatiri 1862*

## European (Pakeha) Arrival

Abel Tasman sailed past Cape Foulwind in 1642 and James Cook passed by in 1769. Whalers and sealers were the first Pakeha to exploit the natural resources on offer.

The explorers Brunner and Heaphy, accompanied by Māori guides Kehu and Tau, crossed the river in a journey up and down the West Coast and camped on the east bank in 1846.

From their expedition journals came the first detailed account of the Kawatiri area.

## Mineral Wealth

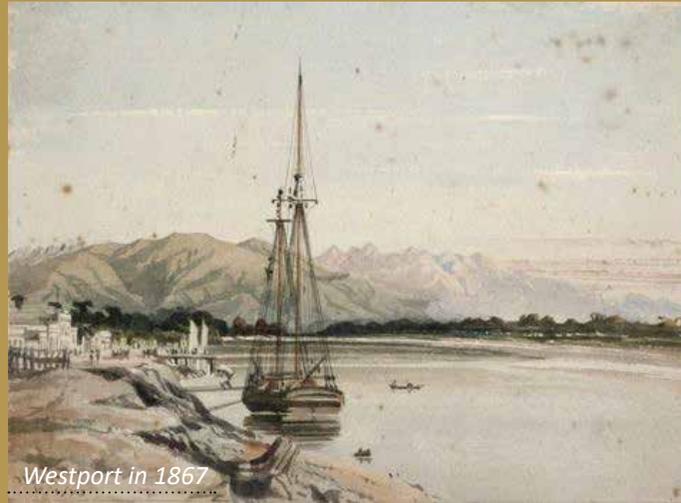
In 1859 gold was discovered in the Buller River and in the following year thick seams of coal were found at Denniston. Suddenly Pakeha became very interested in the Buller.

In 1861 the first gold seekers arrived and a small village (Westport) was established on the eastern bank of the Buller River.

## Gold Rush Times

The discovery of extensive gold deposits at Charleston in 1866 and Addisons Flat in 1867 led to an influx of miners. Thousands flocked to Westport and then onto the goldfields. Ships from Melbourne were regular callers.

Miners and supplies were ferried across the river to South Spit and Packers Point and thence by pack train or stage coach to



*Westport in 1867*

the goldfields. The gold rush lasted for five years and over 1 million ounces of gold was exported from Westport.

## Westport Moves

A series of big floods and high seas caused a great deal of damage and in 1873 the town moved inland to its current location.



*Flood damage in Westport 1870*

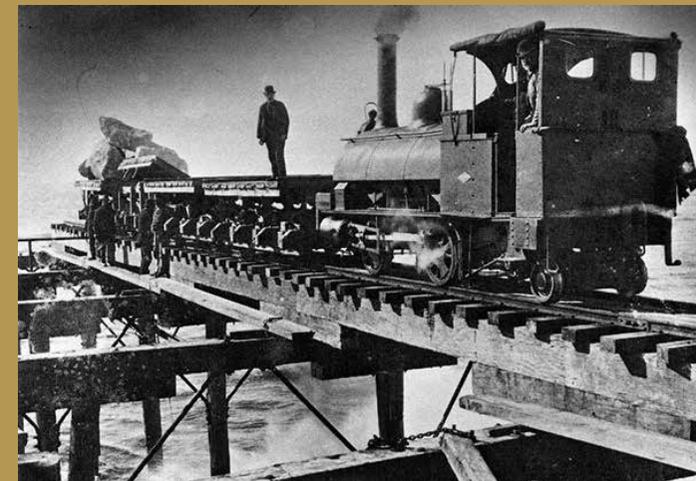
## King Coal

After the gold rush, attention turned to the large resources of high quality bituminous coal on the Denniston plateau. With the completion of the incline down from the plateau and a railway to Westport, exports of coal began. The coal was in great demand and harbour development was needed. A 12km long railway was built to granite quarries at Cape Foulwind to provide rock for the construction of the harbour breakwaters.



*Ships lined up at Westport wharf in 1907*

With the harbour completed in 1894, coal exports peaked at 800,000 tonnes in 1914 and a total of 30 million tonnes was shipped out.



*Building the breakwaters on the Buller River*