

PORTERS SKI AREA: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

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UNPUBLISHED REPORT FOR PORTERS SKI AREA

INTRODUCTION

Porters Ski Area are planning a major upgrade to the Porters Ski Area, which is approximately 5km south of Castle Hill (Figure 1). This upgrade will involve an expansion of the existing ski field and the construction of a village at the base of the ski field (Figure 2). Other infrastructure will be required as part of this redevelopment but the exact detail of this has not been finalised yet. The Porters Ski Area is within in the Selwyn District Council and is on land leased from the Crown. This archaeological assessment was commissioned by Porters Ski Area to determine the location of any archaeological sites within the development area and to assess the impacts of the proposed development of any such sites.

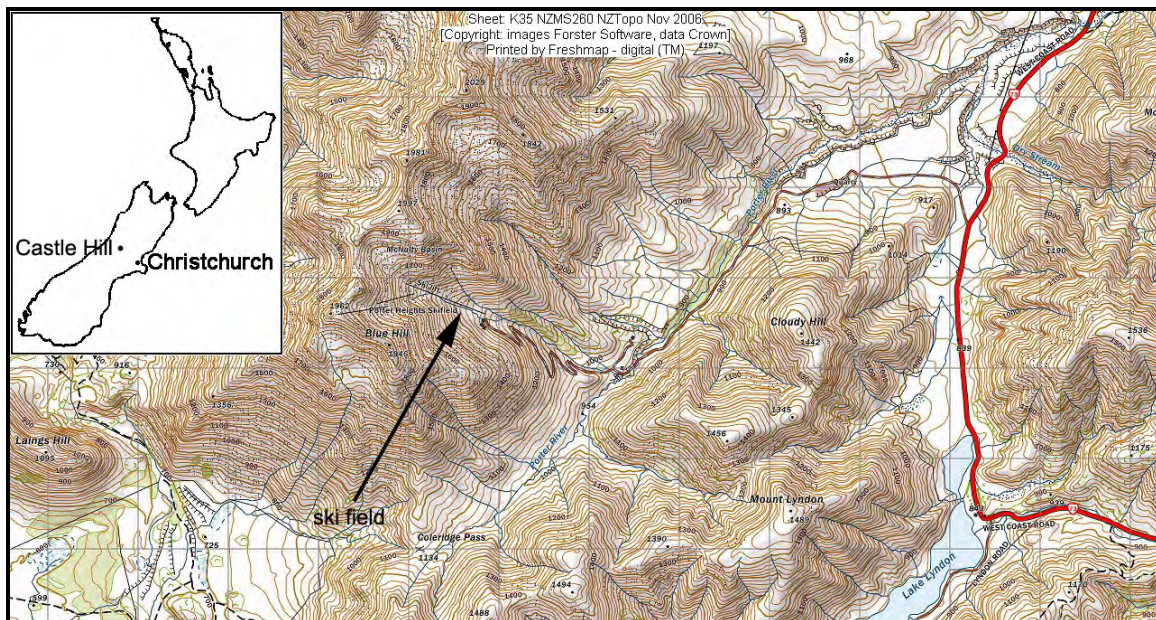


Figure 1: The location of Porters Ski Area.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

The *Historic Places Act* 1993 provides protection for archaeological sites and is administered by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust. Under section 2 of the act an archaeological site is defined as:

“...any place in New Zealand that –

(a) Either –

- (i) Was associated with human activity that occurred before 1900; or
- (ii) Is the site of a wreck of any vessel where that wreck occurred before 1900; and

(b) Is or may be able through investigation by archaeological methods to provide evidence relating to the history of New Zealand.”

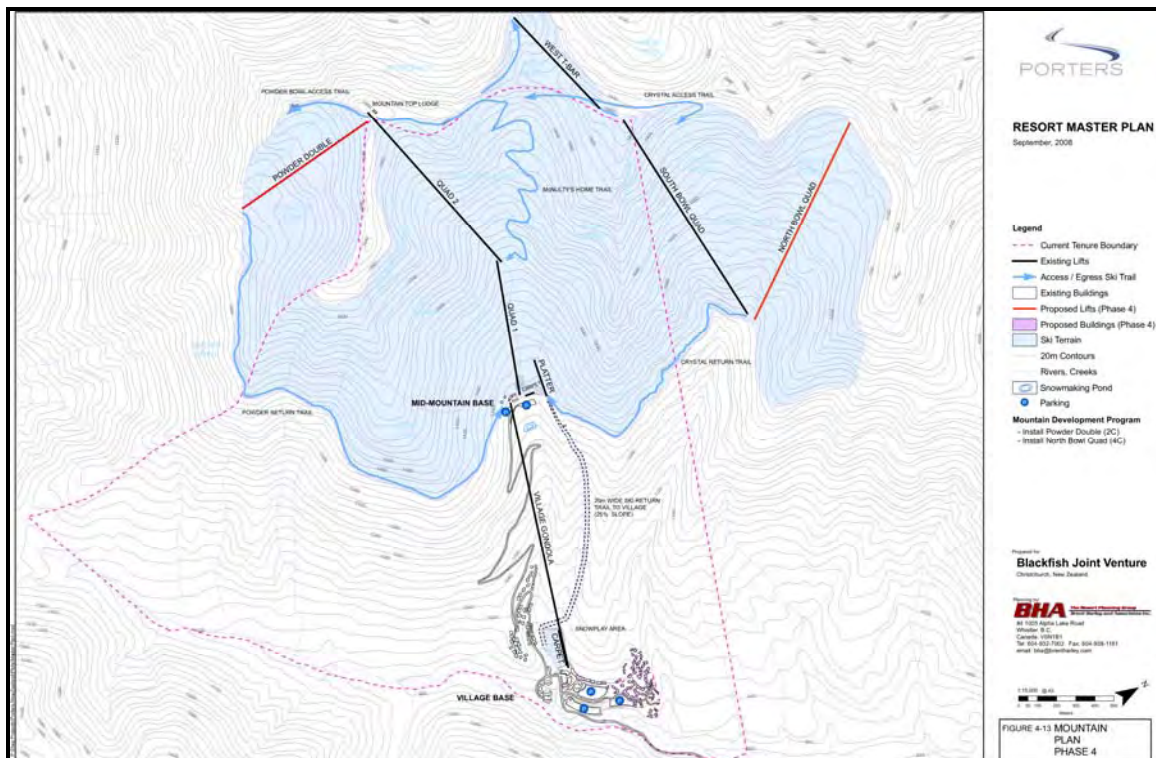


Figure 2: Detail of the plans for Porters Ski Area.

Under the *Historic Places Act*, anyone who wishes to destroy, damage or modify an archaeological site requires an authority to do so under section 11 or 12 of the Act. It is illegal to destroy damage or modify an archaeological site without an authority from the Historic Places Trust. The Act allows up to **3 months** for a decision to be made on the authority after the authority application has been lodged (the authority application will be lodged within 10 working days of being received, if all the required information is present). If granted, an authority has a life of up to five years. An authority may be granted with conditions, such as archaeological survey, monitoring and/or excavation. Any archaeologist carrying out work as a condition of the authority must be approved by the Trust under section 17 of the *Historic Places Act*. Once the authority has been granted, there is a statutory **15 working day** stand-down period before earthworks can begin. This is one of the standard conditions of an archaeological authority.

Summary of the timeframes associated with applying for an archaeological authority:

- The Historic Places Trust has 10 working days to lodge an application for an archaeological authority. The application will not be lodged if insufficient information is provided. Instead, a request for information will be sent to the applicant.
- Following lodgement of the application, the Historic Places Trust has 3 months to process the application.
- After the authority has been granted, there is a 15 working day stand-down period before earthworks can begin.

It is illegal to destroy, damage or modify an archaeological site without an archaeological authority. Legal action may result if the site is destroyed, damaged or modified without an archaeological authority or if the conditions of the authority are not complied with.

METHODOLOGY

The historical research undertaken for this assessment had two foci – establishing the background history of the area; and determining the history of the track that runs through the property. Researching the latter required researching the history of the Arthurs Pass Road, which is intimately connected with the history of the West Coast gold rushes. To this end, the following books were consulted: *Jack's Hut*, *Lake Coleridge: The Power, The People, The Land, Going for Gold*, *The West Coast Gold Rushes*, and *The Road to The West Coast*. For the background contextual history, *The Early Canterbury Runs*, *Waimakariri*, and *Castle Hill* were consulted.

A number of repositories of primary sources were consulted, including Land Information New Zealand (LINZ), Archives New Zealand, the Canterbury Museum, Matapihi¹ and Papers Past². Of these, the most useful proved to be Land Information New Zealand. The Canterbury Museum holds John Enys's diary – Enys was one of the early owners of Castle Hill station (Porters Ski Area is on land that was once part of this station). Excerpts from this diary have been published in *Castle Hill* and it was not felt necessary to consult the original as part of this assessment.

A search of the New Zealand Archaeological Association Site Recording Scheme database indicated that there were no previously recorded archaeological sites within Porters Ski Area. There was, however, one recorded site nearby – K34/15, The Springs staging post.

I visited Porters Ski Area with Mike Sleight on 18 November 2008. During this site visit Mr Sleight showed me around the property, with a particular emphasis on the locations of the various aspects of the development. Mr Sleight showed me the archaeological sites that he knew of on the property and on adjacent land.

¹ www.matapihi.org.nz

² www.paperspast.natlib.org.nz

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The land leased by Porters Ski Area covers an area of land to the west of State Highway 73 encompassing the headwaters of the Porter River, Coleridge Pass and Blue Hill. The area reaches a maximum of 1962m above sea level. Most of the area is taken up with the ski field, which is essentially scree slopes. The lower altitude parts of the lease are covered in tussock, which has not been grazed in recent years. There are a small number of buildings at the northeast corner of the lease.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

While Castle Hill (Kura Tawhiti; approximately 4.5km north of Porters Ski Area) is rich in Maori history and Maori archaeological sites, there is no known Maori history associated with Porters Ski Area itself. Lake Coleridge (Whakamatau) lies immediately to the west of Porters Ski Area and is known to have been utilised by Maori, for eels (Britten 2000:62) and as a point on the journey over Browning Pass to the West Coast. Browning Pass was not one of the main Maori routes over the alps, but was certainly used and known to them (Keene 1995:12). This information is relevant because a track crossing Coleridge Pass was found during the archaeological survey and is shown on an 1882 topographic map of the area (Figure 3). This track is known to have been used by Europeans in the nineteenth century – it was not uncommon for early European tracks to follow Maori trails. Thus, given the Maori history of the surrounding areas, it is possible that Maori in the area used Coleridge Pass (although, as discussed below, travelling between the areas via Lake Lyndon would surely have been much easier).

Porters Ski Area leases land that was originally farmed as part of Castle Hill Station. The Castle Hill runs were taken up by Alfred and Joshua Porter, who were brothers (a third brother was also involved in the property but Acland (1975:225) could not locate any information about him). Runs 205 and 205A (of 25,000 acres) were taken up by the brothers in June 1858. Run 294 was added in February of the following year and Run 399 in March 1861. These two runs brought the total acreage of the station to 35,000 acres. The brothers owned the station until 1864, when John and Charles Enys and Edward Curry purchased the lease in spring of that year. Acland records little information about Curry and his involvement in the station, which may indicate that he was involved only for a short period or that his interest was purely financial (Acland 1975:225-226).

The Enys's held the lease until 1901 (having had sub-lessees on the property from 1890). The 1901 purchaser was John Mackenzie, who sold the lease to the Milliken brothers in 1908. These brothers, in turn, sold it in 1920 to W. B. Clarkson and Company (Acland 1975:226).

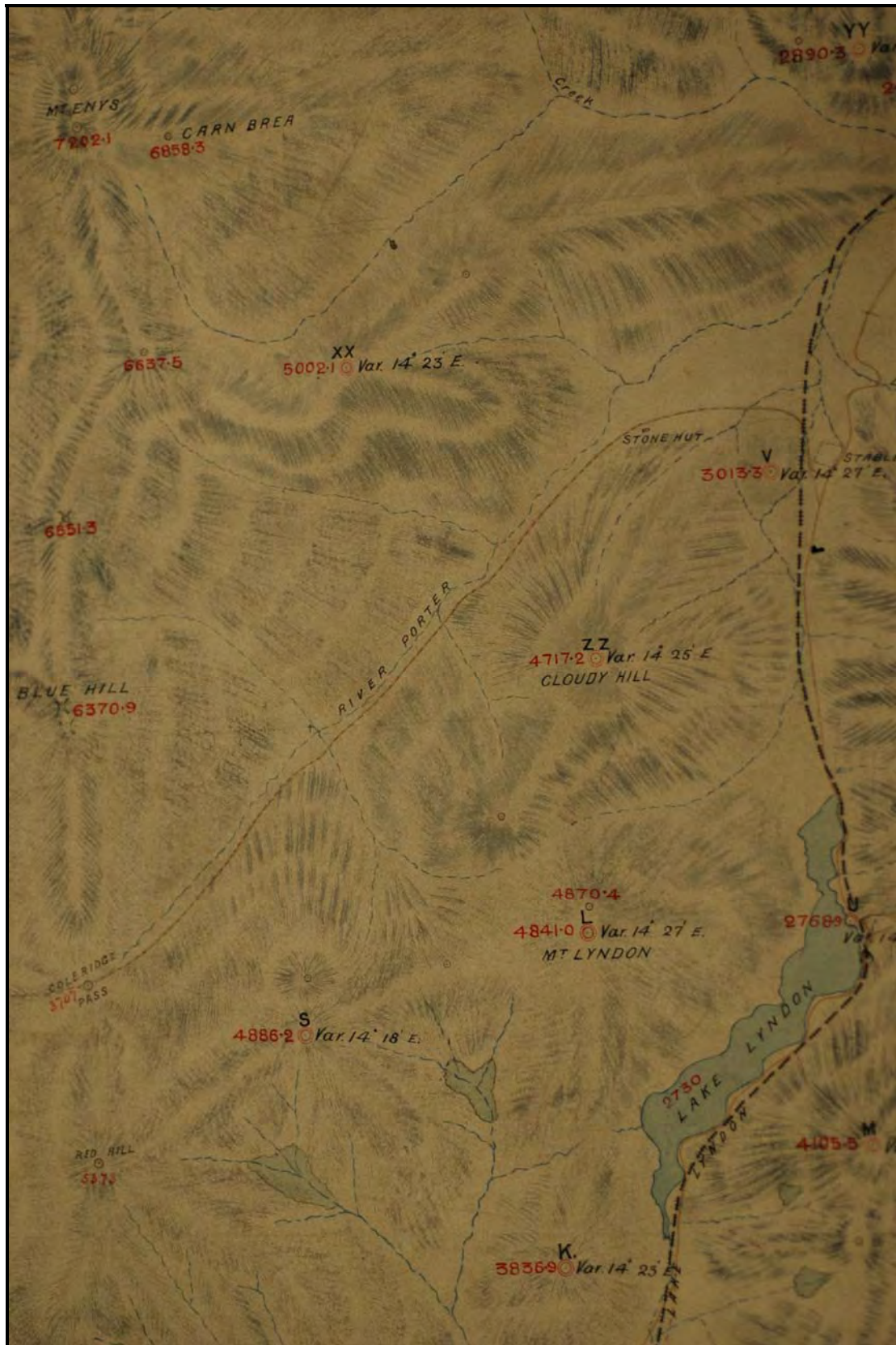


Figure 3: Part of topographic map 7P, drawn in September 1882, showing the track to Coleridge Pass, the stone hut and the stables. Original map held at LINZ.

The Porter brothers lived on the station, although it is not clear when they moved up there. They built their homestead (known as Otarama) “in the angle of the Porter River and Spring Creek” (Acland 1975:226). The name ‘Spring Creek’ is no longer in common usage. This building cannot have been occupied for long as in 1866 John Enys moved into a new house (called Trelissick) on the true left of the Thomas River (Acland 1975:226, Logan 2008:85). Enys built a second house (for the manager) in front of Castle Hill itself (where the modern Castle Hill Station buildings stand; Logan 2008:85). The Porter brothers’ woolshed, however, was left where it was for the time being, although W. B. Clarkson’s manager was to later base the station buildings around the manager’s house (Acland 1975:226-227).

PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK

No archaeological work had been carried out in the Porters Ski Area prior to this archaeological survey although, as noted above, there is one recorded archaeological site nearby.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The research into the history of the Porters Ski Area highlighted only one potential archaeological site, the track over Coleridge Pass shown in an 1882 topographic map (Figure 3). The map shows the track running up from the main road through Arthurs Pass to Coleridge Pass on the true right of the Porter River and then down to the road to Browning Pass (unfortunately not shown on the Figure 3). This map also shows a stone hut nearby and a stables (K34/15, the previously recorded archaeological site). Neither of these features are within the boundaries of the Porters Ski Area. The historical information about this area indicated that the likelihood of finding any other archaeological sites in the area was low.

K35/3: Coleridge Pass track

The remains of the track through Coleridge Pass can be picked up in places in the valley up above the ski field buildings and road, on the true right of the Porter River. In some areas, it is not easy to follow the track, and no attempt was made to follow it to the top of Coleridge Pass, as this area will not be affected by the proposed development. Where it remains clearly visible the track has a narrow benched formation. Nineteenth century pack tracks were typically 6ft 6in wide (Breen and Nelson 2006:15). Although there may have been some slumping on this track, it is unlikely that this track was ever that wide and, as such, is more likely to have been a foot track than a pack track. Pack tracks were built specifically for facilitating the movement of pack horses. The evidence, then, indicates that this was not the function of the Coleridge Pass track.

The section of the track from E2401356 N5768935 to State Highway 73 has been destroyed by the construction of the ski field road.

It proved difficult to locate historical information about this track. Only two references to it was found, both in E. C. Richards's *Castle Hill*. Richards's volume is a compilation of information about Castle Hill collected by Richards from various sources, but there are few references to indicate where the original information came from.³ Richards records that the track over Coleridge Pass was the original track used by miners from Otago to reach the West Coast goldfields. Miners would cross the Rakaia River at the gorge and then follow a pack track up the valley to Lake Coleridge and cross the Craigieburn range via Coleridge Pass (Richards 1951:54).

There is some information to suggest that miners may have travelled along a similar route to the one described by Richards, but not through Coleridge Pass. An article in the *North Otago Times* in March 1865 describes a route that Otago miners could use to reach the West Coast. These directions were based on a map published by Fergusson and Mitchell.

Follow the track of Cobb and Co.'s Coaches as far as Marshall's Ferry, then leave the Christchurch track to the right. You will see some low downs (Gawler's Downs) and Mount Somers, Alford Forest, and Mount Hutt beyond, Brian's Ferry is at the foot of the Gorge of the Rakaia, immediately below Mount Hutt, and both Brian and Turnbull, at Windwhistle, now the road to Lake Lyndon. At the further end of Lake Lyndon you come on the Christchurch track, to Craigieburn, and thence by Dobson's track to the diggings. This is also the shortest way from the West Coast to the good claims now being left in Otago.

North Otago Times 16 March 1865

The Canterbury Provincial Government objected to this information being published and had the map withdrawn from circulation. May suggests that only a few hundred men would ever have used this route (May 1967:120).

Consulting a modern topographic map suggests that the Lake Lyndon route (which followed the Acheron River) would have been an easier route than that via Coleridge Pass. Nonetheless, the track clearly existed and someone went to the trouble of benching sections of it, but it would be interesting to know why this route was used instead of the Lake Lyndon route. It is possible that it had something to do with the location of the Lake Coleridge station buildings.

The second reference to the track in Richards is only a possible reference. As well as excerpts of Enys's diary, *Castle Hill* also contains excerpts from E. R. Chudleigh's diary. One such excerpt is dated to 16 April 1869 and states "My journey to Enys was through hail, sleet and rain and mud and stones" (Richards 1951:12). Richards (1951:12) has added the following information "Reached Castle Hill by the track from Lake Coleridge", which could refer to the track through Coleridge Saddle. Attempts were made to verify this by consulting Chudleigh's published diary, which was edited by E. C. Richards.⁴ These attempts were unsuccessful, however, and no such information could be found for any 16 April reference.⁵

³ This is where the published excerpts of Enys's diary can be found.

⁴ The originals of Chudleigh's diary are held at the Macmillan Brown Library (University of Canterbury) and the Canterbury Museum.

⁵ Subsequent checking of other excerpts from Chudleigh's diary published in *Castle Hill* showed that some were correctly referenced, but some were not.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

One site (K35/3) was recorded during the archaeological survey but this will not be affected by the proposed development in its current format. If the development plans change and work will take place to the west of the point where the ski field road crosses the Porter River, the impacts of the development on the archaeological site will need to be reconsidered.

At this stage, however, an archaeological authority from the New Zealand Historic Places Trust will not be required. An accidental discovery protocol, however, should be put in place.

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