



## Site Record Form

**NZAA SITE NUMBER:** L28/36

**SITE TYPE:** Transport/ communication

**SITE NAME(s):** Mokihinui-Seddonville railway line

**DATE RECORDED:** 20/11/2013

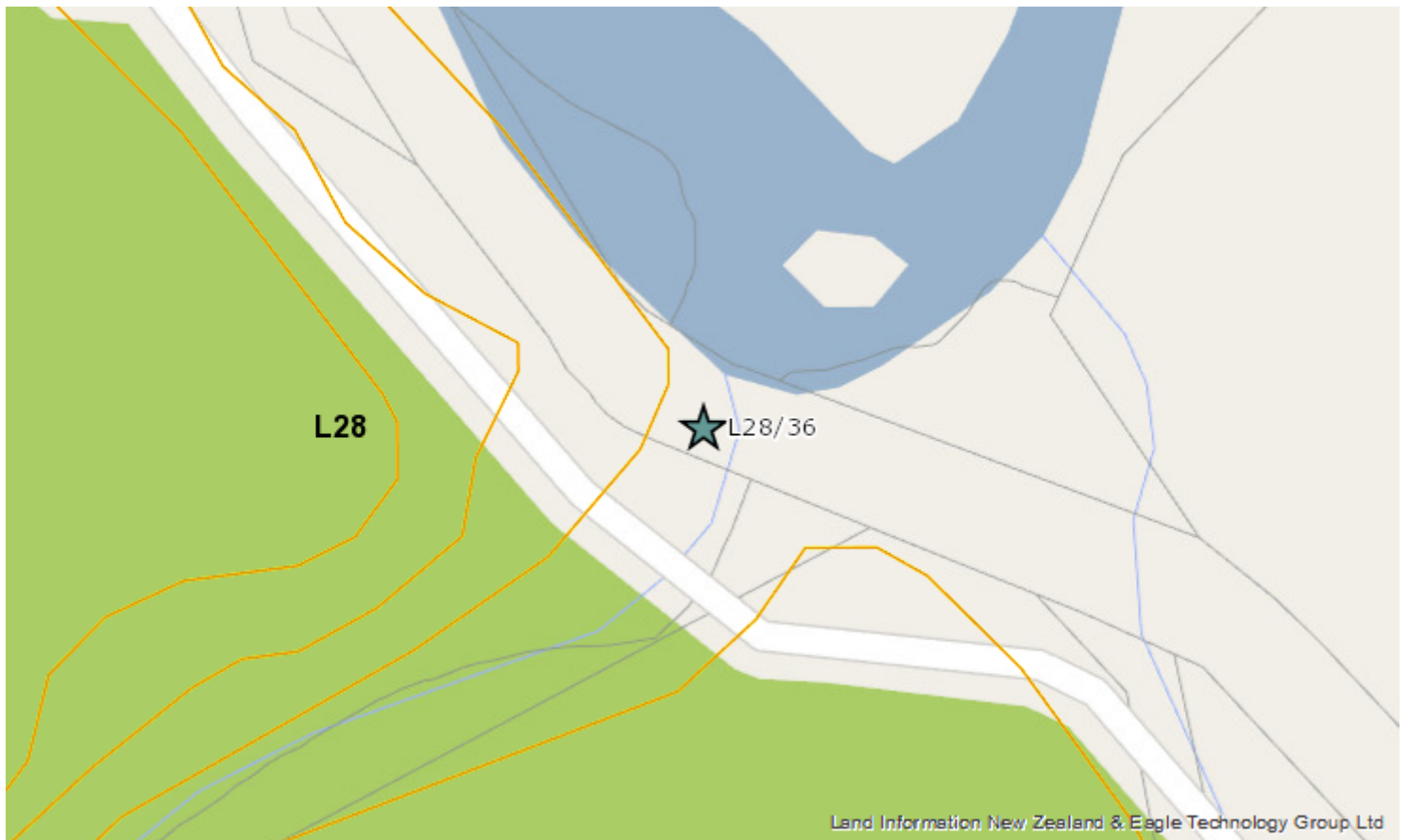
**SITE COORDINATES (NZTM) Easting:** 1514739

**Northing:** 5400235

**Source:** Handheld GPS

**IMPERIAL SITE NUMBER:**

**METRIC SITE NUMBER:**



### Finding aids to the location of the site

Between the Mokihinui-Seddonville Road & the Mokihinui River.

### Brief description

The site of a 19th century railway line.

### Recorded features

Bridge, Railway, Tunnel - rail

### Other sites associated with this site

## SITE RECORD HISTORY

NZAA SITE NUMBER: L28/36

**Site description**

Updated: 20/11/2013, Visited: 23/10/2013 - NZTM E1514739 N5400235 (Handheld GPS). In June 1885 part of the Buller Coal Reserve on the south side of the Mokihinui River at Coal Creek was leased by the Mokihinui Coal Company Ltd (AJHR 1887 C8: 2). The company immediately set to work constructing a railway line from their mine at Coal Creek to a point on the Mokihinui River approximately one mile (1.61 km) above the river mouth (AJHR 1886 C4a: 15). The railway line cost around £25, 000 to construct (AJHR 1889 I6: 33). Where the railway terminated on the Mokihinui River the company also constructed a wharf and staiths (AJHR 1886 C4a: 15; 1889 I6: 33).

Newspaper reports indicate the formation (i.e. the earthworks) for the line was complete in November 1885, when the steel rails and a locomotive arrived (via boat) at the Mokihinui River mouth. The company already had coal trucks at Mokihinui (EP 24/11/1885: 2).

A few details regarding the construction of the railway are available in reports made to the government after the line was completed. Two bridges, one across Chasm Stream and the other across Page's Stream, and a tunnel were constructed for the line. The timber used for both the sleepers and the bridges was cut from trees growing along the route. The section of line between Chasm Stream and Pages Stream had to be reconstructed when it was found that both the Chasm Stream bridge and the cutting were too high. Both the bridge and the cutting were lowered 10 inches before work on the line continued (AJHR 1894 I9: 44).

This infrastructure was intended to facilitate the transport of coal from the Mokihinui Coal Company's mine to Westport via railway and boat. Hopes were high for the success of this mode of transport, as an obstructive sand bar in the river had been removed a short time previously. However, the removal of this bar did not sufficiently mitigate the shallow depth of the river and by 1889 the difficulties in shipping coal between the mine and Westport had become apparent (AJHR 1889 I6: 33). The provision of railway transport between the coal field and the port therefore became crucial for the success of the mining operations.

By the end of the 1880s the potential of the Mokihinui coal field had been recognised by the government and by other investors (AJHR 1889 I6: iii). The Mokihinui Mining Company held two mining leases of 800 acres total at Coal Creek and had applied for another 1400 acres (AJHR 1889 I6: 11). The company had invested a considerable amount in infrastructure and opening up the mine, but up to that point the mine had produced little. Despite the low output the company invested in a lightdraught steamer to transport coal from their staiths to Westport. Messrs Bayfield, Grant and Rowland had also applied for 1800 acres under the guise of the New Cardiff Coal Company (also referred to as the Cardiff Coal Company and the Westport Cardiff Coal Company; AJHR 1889 I6: ii). While this company had previously acquired a prospecting license for this land they had not invested in any infrastructural improvements and it is possible that they expected future output could be transported along the Mokihinui Coal Company railway line (AJHR 1889 I6: 109).

Heightened interest in the Mokihinui coal field motivated earnest discussion about connecting the Mokihinui Coal Company's railway with the government's coastal railway line (AJHR 1889 I6: ii-iii). The government line ran north from Westport but terminated short of the Ngakawau River. Laying approximately seven miles (11.2 km) of rail would connect the government line to that of the Mokihinui Coal Company. Increased competition in the coal trade (and a consequent reduction in coal prices) and increased revenue for Westport Harbour were touted as further incentive for the connection between the two lines being made. This connecting line had been surveyed at some point before 1889 and was considered an easy and cheap undertaking. However, there was some suggestion that a line held by a private company, such as the Mokihinui Coal Company, would be injurious to public interest (AJHR 1889 I6: 58). It is possible that those with interests in the Mokihinui coal field and not associated with the Mokihinui Coal Company, such as the New Cardiff Coal Company, objected to the former company's potential monopoly of transport infrastructure.

The relationship between the Mokihinui Coal Company and the New Cardiff Company appears to have been antagonistic from the beginning. In 1889 the Mokihinui Coal Company objected to the New Cardiff Coal Company's lease application. The latter's application surrounded the former's lease on two boundaries and prevented them from working half of their lease from their base of operations at Coal Creek. The company was criticised in a report to the Government in 1889 for failing to prospect their lease effectively in order to prevent such a situation. However, their investment in infrastructure was commended and the report noted that the New Cardiff Company was yet to make such a commitment (AJHR 1896 I6: 109).

The following year saw no improvement in the Mokihinui Coal Company's coal yield and development at the mine was described as "lamentably slow" (AJHR 1890 C3: 193). This did not prevent further infrastructural investment, with the arrival of a steamer with a carrying capacity of 400 tonnes for the transport of coal to Westport. Things looked up for the company briefly in 1891 when it secured a contract for the supply of 15,000 tonnes of coal to government railways. However, that same year their new steamer was wrecked on the Mokihinui River and the company was forced to give up the contract (AJHR 1891 C2: 10).

The wreck of the Mokihinui Coal Company's steamer reinforced opinion (evident in the government reports since 1889) that

the Mokihinui coal field would not be profitable until a railway line was constructed for the transport of coal to Westport (AJHR 1889 I6: ii-iii, 1890 C3: 193). Therefore, the following year the Westport-Ngakawau Railway Extension Act 1890 was passed, authorising the expenditure of £36,000 to connect the coastal government line to the Mokihinui Coal Company's railway. The money was to come from the Westport Harbour Board (AJHR 1894 I9: 1).

This was followed by a formal agreement between the New Zealand Railway Commissioners and the Mokihinui Coal Company, determining the means by which the part-public part-private line was to be run (AJHR 1891 D1: 1-2). While the company was to equip and maintain their own portion of the railway line, the commissioners were to be responsible for running goods and passengers along the full extent of the railway between Westport and the Mokihinui Coal Company mine. The commissioners therefore had right of approval with regard to the rates charged by the company for transport over their portion of the railway. In return, the Mokihinui Coal Company was to supply the coal needed for running the trains at a fixed rate of 10s. By 1891 work on the railway was well underway (AJHR 1891 C2: 10).

The railway connection was complete in August 1893, and opened by Premier Richard Seddon (MCH 2012a). Reference was made to the "starting" of both the Mokihinui and New Cardiff (now known as the Westport Cardiff Coal Company) mines in government reports (AJHR 1893 C3: xvii, 1894 D1: x). While both mines had previously been operational, the belief in the positive effect of the railway seems to have been so great that the mines only really "started" after its completion. The new railway and the consequent mining impetus created demand for homesteads and settlements in the Mokihinui river valley. As a result the township of Seddonville was established in 1893, named for Premier Richard Seddon (AJHR 1893 C3: xvii).

Unfortunately, the antagonism between the two Mokihinui coal mining companies impeded the output of the Westport Cardiff mine, despite the renewed sense of industry (AJHR 1894 D1: x). A dispute arose regarding the rates the Westport Cardiff company had to pay the Mokihinui company for haulage over their part of the line. The Westport Cardiff Coal Company had constructed a branch railway from their mine to join the new Westport-Mokihinui railway line. This branch railway met the line at a point on the Mokihinui Coal Company's part of the line, and so in order to transport coal to Westport the company was required to pay haulage rates for use of approximately 1 mile 22 chains (1.81 km) of the private line. The haulage rates, set by the Mokihinui Coal Company in conjunction with the New Zealand Railway Commissioners as per the 1891 agreement, were perceived as excessive by the Westport Cardiff Coal Company. Having no means to transport their coal the Westport Cardiff mine was forced to close for a period in 1894, despite having bins filled with coal waiting for transport (AJHR 1894 D1: x, 1894 I9: 88).

In order to settle the dispute the government arranged to purchase the full extent of the railway for £15,745, after careful valuation of the line had been made (AJHR 1895 D1: x). The money for this purchase were provided by the Westport Harbour Board on the provision that future profits from the working of the line were received by that body. Of the money used to purchase the railway line, £1,245 was paid to the Working Railways Department for the purpose of ensuring the line was in a good state of repair. The department reported that the railway needed more sleepers and new ballast added, and the line itself needed lifting and straightening. The bridges also needed strengthening, the formation needed draining and several slips had to be removed. This work was undertaken and completed in 1896 (AJHR 1895 D2b: 42).

Despite the sale of their railway, the Mokihinui Coal Company was in financial difficulty by 1895 (AJHR 1895 C3b: 4). The coal produced by the mine proved too soft to be profitable and several obstructive faults were identified when the mine attempted to extend operations. As a result, the company suspended their operations. The mine was subsequently worked by a cooperative company, the Knights of Labour, but was handed back to the Mokihinui Coal Company in 1896 when it encountered difficulty disposing of the soft coal and was unable to make wages (AJHR 1896 C3: 159-160). The Mokihinui Coal Company mine seems to have been worked sporadically in 1897, but by 1898 the company had gone into liquidation (AJHR 1897 C1: 17, C3: 156, 1898 C1: 15). The following year their mining lease was sold to the government (AJHR 1899 C3: 168).

In contrast, the government purchase of the railway seemed to have a positive effect on the Westport Cardiff Coal Company, at least in the short term. After reopening following the haulage dispute, the mine struck good quality coal and began turning an impressive profit (AJHR 1897 C3: 156). In 1897 the mine employed 78 workers. The following year, when the Mokihinui Coal Company mine closed, the Westport Cardiff mine had a high output and in 1899 they extended their workings over Chasm Stream (AJHR 1898 C1: 15, 1899 C3: 168). However, their success was short-lived. After continuously encountering faults and soft coal the company ceased operations in September 1899. The following year the mine was flooded when a fire was identified in part of the mine. The Westport Cardiff Coal Company went into liquidation and the mine was sold to the government (AJHR 1901 C3a: 2).

The closure of both mines had a negative effect on the township of Seddonville, as the majority of residents had been employed on the Mokihinui coal field. The closures also meant that there was almost no freight being run along the railway line. The residents of Seddonville petitioned the government to open a state mine at Mokihinui. The government was looking to select a location for a state coal mine as a result of the State Coal Mines Act 1901 and so the Seddonville State Mine was opened in 1903 (MCH 2012b). However, the same problems encountered by the Mokihinui and Westport Cardiff companies – faults and soft coal – also plagued the state mine and it was closed in 1914 (MCH 2012b).

Despite the decline in freight, trains continued to run along the Westport-Mokihinui Railway until the 1980s. One of the industries that helped keep the line open was, once again, coal mining, this time in the form of the Charming Creek coal mine. This mine opened in the 1920s, and used its own tramway (now the Charming Creek walkway) from the mine to Ngakawau to transport coal until about 1958. From the late 1950s, the Charming Creek Road (from the mine to Seddonville)

and the Westport-Mokihinui railway line was used to transport coal. The company built a private siding at Seddonville to facilitate this operation. In April 1976, the Charming Creek Coal Company was informed that the Ngakawau-Seddonville railway line would be closed in July of that year. The company protested this development, based on the cost of moving the siding, and the lack of other suitable options, not to mention the fact that the mine only had 5-6 years left. In the end, these protests were successful and the line – and mine – remained open until 1 May 1981 (Breen and Findlater 2008: 32-39).

The section of railway line between the old Mokihinui Coal Company mine and Seddonville was closed in 1974, and the Ngakawau-Seddonville line was closed in 1981 (MCH 2012c).

Following the closure of the Ngakawau-Seddonville line – and the subsequent lifting of the rails – the Chasm Stream railway line was turned into a walkway by the New Zealand Walkways Commission, and the management of the walkway was transferred to the Department of Conservation (DOC) in 1987, when that department came into being. In the early 2000s, a local community group also became involved in managing the walkway. DOC ended its role at Chasm Stream in 2011 (DOC 2011). Correspondence held in the DOC file indicates that Telecom laid a cable down the centre of the embankment in the early 2000s.

### Archaeology

The Chasm Stream railway line is 900 m long, and runs along the south bank of the Mokihinui River. The former railway line meets the Mokihinui-Seddonville Road at each end, and there were no doubt level crossings in these areas, prior to the line being lifted. The line was walked from west to east for the archaeological survey.

The former railway line is in good condition, as is perhaps to be expected for a line that has been maintained and used as a walkway since it ceased to function as a railway line. It ranges in width from 3 m wide (including a side drain; waypoint 741) to 6.7 m (at the west end; waypoint 736). It is only 6.7 m wide for a short distance and the reason for this width is not clear. It is possible that it related to a level crossing, or that there was a building here. In some places, the original ballast surface is visible. No sleepers or rails remain in situ – these were no doubt lifted and retained for use elsewhere when the line was decommissioned.

Most of the Chasm Stream railway line is benched, or in cuttings. There are short sections on a built-up embankment at each end of the line, where it meets the road. There are five cuttings, the longest of which is 87 m long (waypoints 752-754), and the deepest was approximately 10 m deep. Each of the cuttings has a side drain (on the south side) and the longest cutting has a drain on both sides for part of its length. This cutting also had a cut-out through the north wall, which allowed water from the drain to run out of the cutting (waypoint 753). The cut-out is 7 m long and 550 mm wide, and the corresponding drain is 500 mm wide and 150 mm deep. There are no drains on the embankments (where the water would have been able to percolate down through the ballast, or run off the sides). As well as the cuttings, there is one tunnel, which is 3.1 m wide and 73 m long (waypoint 749). No drains were visible in the tunnel. At the east end of the tunnel was a mid-late 20th century concrete retaining wall, built to shore up the road above.

As well as the drains, there are two modern plastic culverts (waypoints 739 and 741) and one concrete culvert (waypoint 748, just west of the tunnel mouth). The plastic culverts are likely to be completely modern i.e. it is unlikely that they replaced an earlier feature, but probably had to be installed once the side drains were no longer maintained. The round concrete culvert, while not necessarily original, almost certainly dates to the railway era, and would have carried water from the drain away from the tunnel.

There are also two modern footbridges on the Chasm Stream railway line, both of which are built from a combination of 'railway' and modern materials (waypoints 742 and 745 – Footbridge 1 and 2 respectively). Both footbridges may have replaced railway culverts. Footbridge 1 crossed a cut-out that carried water from the drain on the south side of the railway line formation. The only fabric in this structure that may be original, in situ material are the ballast guards at each end, and the railway irons holding these in place. Amongst the re-used fabric in the bridge are the beams on the outside edges of the bridge platform and the beams that support the bridge. No date stamps were visible on any of these elements. There is a vertical railway iron in the regenerating bush on the outside edge of the railway line immediately east of the footbridge (at waypoint 743).

Footbridge 2 (at waypoint 745) has been built over what was clearly an old culvert, which carried water from a stream that flowed through the railway formation. A stone-lined channel had been formed (and its base lined with concrete) for the stream to run through. There is also stone revetting on the corner of the railway formation on the east side of this bridge, and concrete between the edge of the stone channel and the revetting. The form and nature of this channel suggested that it was built during the railway era, and possibly during the 19th century.

As with Footbridge 1, Footbridge 2 had been built using a mixture of railway and modern fabric, including beams that were second hand in 1974 and 1979. It is not clear whether these beams were installed here in the 1970s (when the railway was still functioning), or if the timbers were added here when the footbridge was built. Recycled bridge beams were also used in the bridge platform. These dated from 1963.

In the river below this footbridge were four or five railway cars, which appeared to have been dumped here deliberately, possibly to shore up the river bank, as the current swirls and eddies in here. When these were dumped is not known, although the cars appeared to date to the 20th century.

## NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

### Bridge 37 (waypoint 751)

Bridge 37 is a three-span bridge, supported by four piers, that curves to the left. The spans comprise two beams, bolted together, with cross-members running at right-angles between them. This type of span is known as a built-beam. These are clearly not the plate iron girders that were proposed in 1901. Date stamps were only visible on Span 1: the top beam was stamped 03 (1903) and the bottom 60 (1960), indicating that neither beam was original, and suggesting that, even if plate iron girders were not installed in 1901, modifications were made to the bridge in the early 20th century.

The ballast guards at each end of the bridge were modern tanalised timber, but the concrete piers in front of each of them (Piers 1 and 4) were probably original. Piers 2 and 3 both had three piles with a raker on each side and bracing and waling, as well as a cap and beams. The bolster on Pier 2 was second hand and had been installed in 1967. Piles 2 and 3 in Pier 2 had no date stamps, and Pile 1 had been stumped in 1974. It was not possible to get close enough to see any date stamps on Pier 3.

In summary, then, Piers 1 and 4 of Bridge 37 are the only components of the bridge that can confidently be said to date to the 19th century, although it is quite possible that any of the undated fabric also dates to that century.

### Bridge 38 (waypoint 755)

Bridge 38 has four spans sitting on five piers. The spans are the same built-beam spans as on Bridge 37, although these ones have cross bracing underneath. There are timber ballast guards at each end of the bridge, with piers immediately in front of them. Piers 2, 3 and 4 are of the same design as those on Bridge 37: three piles, two rakers, a cap and two beams. There are some differences, however. Pier 2 has two square cross-section piles and Pier 4 has one square cross-section pile (as opposed to the more usual round piles). Also, these piers have bracing but not waling. Piers 1 and 5 both have three piles and a cap.

The following elements date stamps were observed 02 (Pile 2, Pier 1), 03 (Pile 2, Pier 2), 62 (Pile 2, Pier 3; cap, Pier 4; lower beam, Span 2), 63 (Pile 3, Pier 3), 73 (lower beam, Span 3) and SH71/4 (Pile 1, Pier 5). No date stamps could be seen on any of the other timbers. As such, it is difficult to say when the other timbers were installed, and whether or not any pre-1900 fabric remains in situ on the bridge, but the possibility cannot be discounted.

For more information, see: Geary Nichol, R. and Watson, K., 2013. Chasm Stream railway line, Seddonville: An archaeological assessment. Unpublished report for Colliers Ltd.

Inspected by: Watson, Katharine.

### Condition of the site

### Statement of condition

Updated: 04/03/2014, Visited: 23/10/2013 - Good – Majority of visible features are intact, but some minor loss of definition and/or damage

### Current land use:

### Threats:

## SITE RECORD INVENTORY

NZAA SITE NUMBER: L28/36

### Observations about this site made in

Author

Year

Title

Publication Details

### Supporting documentation held in ArchSite

