

## *THE SERPENTINE MINE ON MT GRIFFIN*

An article in the Greymouth Evening Star on 11th Sept 1912 began ...

### **"GREENSTONE UNLIMITED"**

*"SOME SPLENDID SAMPLES.*

*MUCH INTEREST IN WELLINGTON."*

*In a corner of Stewart Dawson's show window in Willis Street, Wellington, is an exhibit which claimed the attention of thousands of Wellington folk on Saturday. It consists (according to the Dominion) of a number of samples —manufactured and otherwise —of the products of the quarries of the company known as "New Zealand Greenstone Ltd.," which is exploiting the rich deposits recently discovered at Griffin's Range, at a spot about twelve miles from Kumara, near the main road through to Christchurch, and 3000 ft. above the level of the sea. The mountain spur has on investigation turned out to be a kind of King Solomon's Mine, and most assuredly had King Solomon been able to delve in the vicinity his palaces would have been the richer in their decorative embellishments, for here is a mountain of green marble (technically called serpentine) and greenstone, of the hardest and richest quality, samples of which may be seen in all stages in Stewart Dawson's window." .....*

The report then went on to say the stone was first reported by Dr Bell of the Geological Survey but owing to lack of information it wasn't until a few months before that the location was found and a company then set up to market the stone.

The company was short lived because most of the principals in the company were German and when WWI broke out they were interned and the work stopped. Nevertheless much was done between 1912 and 1914\* to exploit the resource which was almost at the top of Mt Griffin (see mining symbol on the topo map below).

\* See 'Papers Past' online for other newspaper references

Large blocks were prised from an outcrop of serpentine ( a mineral akin to greenstone but more opaque, less hard and less valuable) and sent down Lynch Creek via an aerial ropeway to the valley floor. The drop was about 2,500 - 3,000 feet (1000m).

Down in the valley the serpentine was sawn by a steam driven pitsaw into regular blocks about 4 feet by 2 feet by 2 inches. The pitsaw had no teeth but contained lead shot instead which bit into the stone as a cutting edge. The blocks of stone were then packed into a steam powered truck which drove on down Lynch Creek to the Taramakau Valley and thence to Kumara and Greymouth. From here they were railed to Lyttleton and then shipped to Germany to be used as facade panels on the fronts of new buildings.

All that was left in 2003 was a concrete pad at the pitsaw site, a few bits of machinery and aerial ropeway buckets in the bush and the mine manager's old house at Rangiriri Ck which has lasted very well although a few a few bits and pieces were purloined by locals.

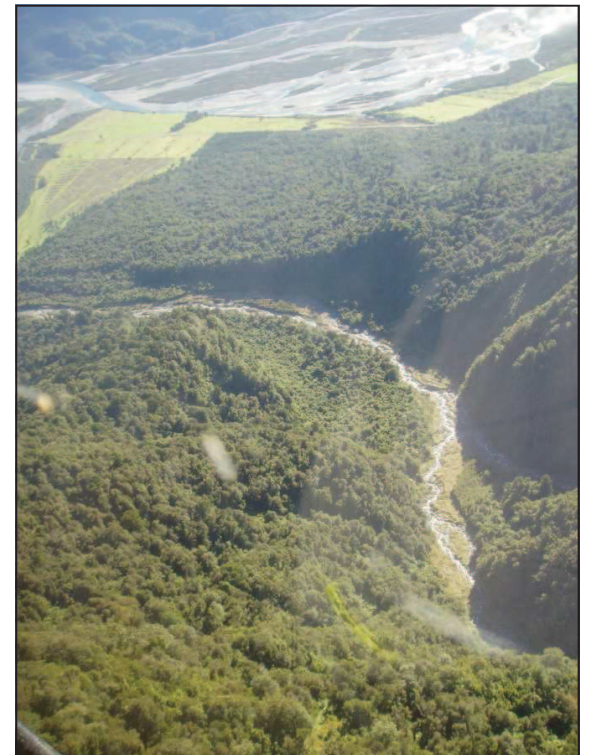
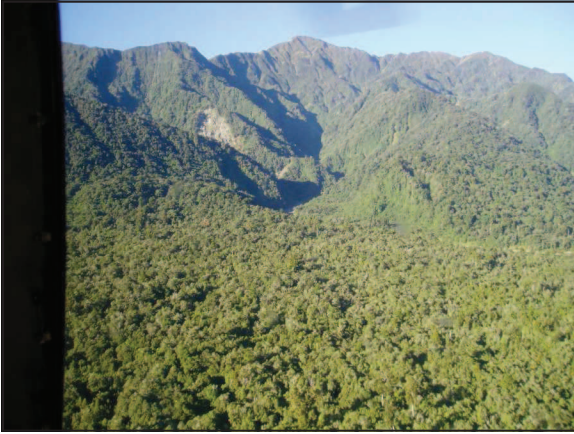
After this there was little interest for many years until in 1962 a group of geologists visited the site and reported that although there was still plenty of serpentine they thought the cost of starting up any new mine too high to make the stone competitive in any market.

In the early 2000's a new company applied for a new licence to work the site because the original mining licence had long run out but failed in its bid despite going to court because new licences for same sites are not usually let and because the serpentine was one of the ultramafic minerals along with pounamu which had been ceded to Ngai Tahu under the 1997 Arahura Settlement.

This information was compiled by M Traves in 2003 with the help of Nic Macarthur, WCRC Mining Compliance Officer and Rod Buchanan of Paroa as part of the interpretation for a field trip on the 'Shaping of the North Westland Landscape by the Taramakau Glaciation.'



## *PHOTOGRAPHS MT GRIFFIN SERPENTINE MINE*



*Photographs taken from a helicopter by WCRC staff in 2004. From top left in clockwise order: Mt Griffin straight ahead; the Serpentine outcrop; closer view of the outcrop; view down Lynch Creek (where aerial ropeway went); another view of the outcrop with winding gear; close-up of the winding gear; close-up of some serpentine (non weathered surface)*