

# REALMS OF GOLD

## Into Otago With the NZBS Mobile Unit

**FOOTNOTES** to early New Zealand history which have existed only in the memories of men and women now well on in years are being collected and put into permanent recorded form by the Mobile Unit of the NZBS. The Unit, which has already visited Taranaki, Waikato and the Thames Valley in the North Island, recently made a start on the South Island, touring through North, Central and South Otago in search of recordings of historical and musical value.

The staff on this trip consisted of Leo Fowler (officer-in-charge), Frank Barnett and Harry Webber (technicians), with Norman Griffiths, A. Sanft and Roy Williams interviewing and commentating at different stages of the journey. The Unit has now returned to Wellington with 296 sixteen-inch double-sided recordings, representing about 143 hours of actual recorded material. They have been encouraged in their work by a general desire, on the part of old-timers, to help. Many of these pioneers travelled long distances to record their stories, which, when edited in proper sequence, will be heard in NZBS programmes starting in March or April this year. They will be broadcast in half-hour sessions, starting with Waikouaiti, and working through many of Otago's most romantic and historic districts.

To ensure a reliable picture of early New Zealand, the Unit staff cross-checked information and stories, wherever possible, with different families, some of them living far apart. In most cases they found that the accounts dovetailed in essentials. The Otago story will start with anecdotes about Johnny Jones, who was responsible for the first Pakeha settlement in Otago—at Waikouaiti. Many people whose fathers and grandfathers knew him were interviewed,

and a special recording session was held at his old house at Matanaka—a house which is, incidentally, still in use. The Orbell family, of Waikouaiti, produced a diary started in England, giving details of the voyage to New Zealand and adventures on arrival, and an account of the girls in crinolines being carried ashore by Maoris while the family butler stalked up the beach in top hat, frock coat and morning trousers.

### One-and-Six for Sheep

From Colonel C. J. Nicholl, of Kuriheka, near Oamaru, the Unit gathered sidelights on the early days of sheepfarming, and of cultivation by six-furrow ploughs drawn by teams of 30 bullocks. In pre-refrigeration days sheep were worth about 1/6 a head; after freezing came in, the value rose to £1. Colonel Nicholl described how years before modern processing of wool, fleeces were put through three hot baths containing soft soap and ammonia, then rinsed with cold water, dried, and baled up in glazed calico tied with glazed string. A. H. Mathieson, of Middlemarch, had something to add about the days when sheep, through natural increase, became so numerous that thousands were killed and the carcasses destroyed to make room for lambs coming on.

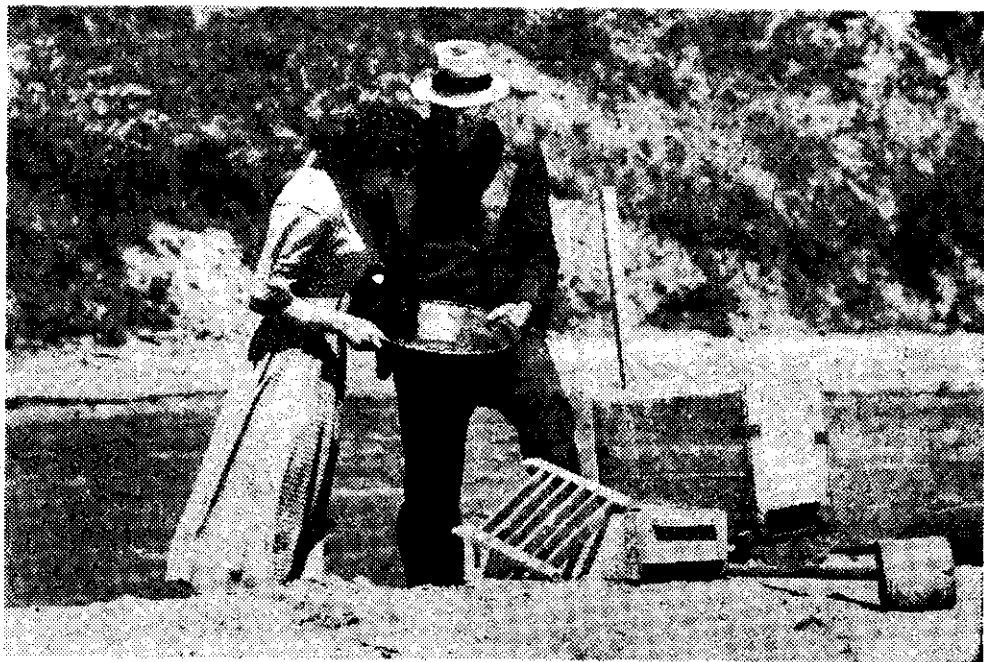
At Balclutha, Mrs. E. A. German, now 80 years of age, told how her father, George Steele, drove sheep from Dun-

edin to Clinton, taking three weeks over the job. She recalled, too, the loss of no fewer than 22,000 sheep in a snow-storm, in the days when it was not unusual to muster 75,000 sheep with nine shepherds. There are innumerable stories of people who knew what walking meant. Distances which to-day appeal only to seasoned hikers were taken in their stride. One man thought nothing of doing his 60 miles during a week-end to get the week's rations from Dunedin; and another performed a similar feat, with a 50lb. sack of flour on his

8d a pound. Blasting powder—most important of all necessities—was bought in 3,000lb. lots.

In many of the old-timers' reminiscences are references to gin cases. Being light, yet strongly built, they were used as cradles for rocking children to sleep and rocking the gold out of the dirt. They were used for transporting children from one place to another on pack-horses, made into dressing-tables, beehives, and, on many an occasion, the top and bottom of a coffin came from an empty gin case.

Hotels on the goldfields were open day and night, and most of them ran dance saloons as an extra attraction. Women were scarce; so girls were asked to come from Dunedin to act as dancing partners; most of them married miners. Servants to work in hotels were hard to get and harder to keep. One licensee, determined on female hired help, asked



**PROSPECTING IN OTAGO:** This still photograph, from a forthcoming National Film Unit production, shows the equipment used by the old prospectors in the Otago goldfields. The photograph was taken almost at the precise spot where gold was first discovered in the Arrow River

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He admits this much: "There will be no more songs; To write songs you must be young."

He finds Shostakovich's last symphony (of which he had gramophone records) "invigorating" and Vaughan Williams's Sixth "so impressive, so powerful." Of the latter composer he said "he is not a young man any more, after all." And of contemporary British music he says it is "surprisingly vigorous (in) these troubled times." All of which remarks are very circumspect, and show the master's singleness of purpose. In his music he has committed himself to the limit of his convictions, knowing that it is his own language. In words, he wittily says nothing and probably laughs at us for expecting the composer of *Tapiola* to say anything more about his beliefs. \* \* \*

[N London, music and ballet are going to take a leap into the dark in 1949, according to one of the evening papers. In the case of music, the imponderable factor is audiences. It is not uncommon now for an orchestral concert in the

Albert Hall to attract fewer than a thousand people (it seats ten thousand) and the managements are said to be wondering what to do. At the moment there are four full symphony orchestras based on London—the L.P.O., the L.S.O., the BBC, and Sir Thomas Beecham's Royal Philharmonic. But until the concert hall that is planned for the 1951 exhibition is built (on the south bank) there is nothing to take the place of the sadly missed Queen's Hall. Between the Albert Hall, which is far too big, and the handful of much smaller town halls and recitals halls, there is nothing.

In the case of ballet, the imponderable factor is not the demand, but the supply. The difficulty is to find new works, and the money to put them on. But there will probably be four companies playing here—the Sadler's Wells Company at Covent Garden (and its No. 2 company playing at its own theatre), the Ballet Rambert (expected home in February) and a new company which is expected to be formed by Kurt Jooss, who has been doing many new works in Chile.

back to weigh him down for the return trip. Then there was the very gallant young man who strode from six miles south of Milton every week-end to pay his respects to his girl in Dunedin, 40 miles away.

### Gabriel's Fabulous Gully

When they reached the goldfields the staff were swamped with stories handed down from generation to generation. At Gabriel's Gully they interviewed Robert Gray, now of Lawrence, whose father was the third man to enter the fabulous gully. It was Gabriel Read himself who showed Gray's father where to peg his claim. The equipment was kept busy putting on discs anecdotes of hard work, high living, huge fortunes made in a day or two and spent as quickly. The hard drinkers would have been staggered at present-day liquor prices. The best brandy was 29/- a case, rum 14/6 a case, burgundy 25/- a case, whisky 6/- a gallon, gin 14/6 a case and beer 10d a bottle. And on the more practical side, a tweed hat was 4/10, shirts 2/10 apiece, Inverness capes 28/- and bacon

a friend to look in at Dunedin and pick him the homeliest woman he could find. She arrived at the hotel, started work, but was married within a fortnight. Women were transported by packhorse—with freight rates at 2/6 a pound.

No story of the early goldfields is complete without references to the Chinese inhabitants who, at first, met hostility, but who soon, through their good nature, love of fun, and generosity, made themselves popular. It is recorded that at Arrowtown, some Chinese who owned a store left it to a white woman who had nursed them in illness and generally interested herself in their welfare.

The gold dredge at Lowburn (said to be the largest in the Southern Hemisphere) was visited, and at Maerewhenua, with the guidance of G. B. Stevenson, author of *Maori and Pakeha in Central Otago*, tape-recorded descriptions of Maori rock paintings were added to the Unit's collection. These two subjects will be featured specially in separate programmes, but they will represent only a small fraction of the programme material which listeners will hear in story form this year.