

Wharf. Loading of ships is done by three old steam-cranes and one new electric one. They pluck the hoppers out of their bogies and swing them over the ship's holds. A "knocker-out" strikes the bottom release mechanism, and 8 tons of coal pour out. He gives the hopper a few perfunctory knocks to dislodge loose coal, and then it is rapidly returned to its bogie. At night the glare of the great flood-lights mounted on their towers 90 ft. above the wharves casts, upon a carpet of steam, strange patterns of the latticed jibs of the cranes and their loads.



*The whitebaiters.*

Once loaded, the ships, which berth heading up-stream, are swung in the 200-yards-wide river by letting go the headlines and thus forcing the current to turn the vessel seawards. At precisely the right moment the stern lines are cast off and the ship proceeds down the mile-long stretch of river to the bar. The bar at the mouth of the Buller has an importance far greater than one would expect. The river enters the sea due north, and thus the entrance is protected from the westerlies which play havoc at Greymouth; but the bar, in spite of the constant work of three dredges (two suction and one bucket), is shoaling, and the port is deteriorating. The discharge from the river, plus the sand carried at right angles to the entrance by the New South Wales current, have brought this about. As Westport is now to become a "national harbour" to ensure expedited coal-supplies, the problem of its bar has become a national headache.

Originally designed by Sir John Coode in 1880, the harbour-works consist of extensive training-walls of Cape Foulwind granite and the typical long wharf of a New Zealand river port. There was to have been a large floating basin as well to accommodate large ships—but this

is unfinished. As the shoaling of the bar is a natural phenomenon it may well be that the remedy is not dredging or carrying the moles further out—it may be more to the point to use vessels especially designed for bar harbours and shallow draft; something similar to a tank-landing ship for example.

The Buller itself is a massive and noble stream, about 200 yards wide at its mouth, but in its last mile there is very little flow. Navigation is much easier than at Greymouth. In flood the river is a daunting spectacle. Ships have all available lines out and the screws turn full speed ahead against the terrific nut-brown swirl that thunders past. On such an occasion as this over half a century ago the river changed its course and flooded the local cemetery so that the coffins bobbed merrily seawards. The main street before that flood is now the bed of the Buller. Normally, however, its green waters are peaceful enough, so that it is rather surprising that the local sailing and rowing clubs do not make a greater appeal to the young people. The facilities for both are excellent.

The river itself, however, appeals strongly to all ages and both sexes for several months from August 1 onwards. At that date the whitebait season opens. Both banks are lined by alert fishermen, endlessly dragging their nets (set-nets are prohibited in this area). Luck favours some, but it is widely believed that a life-time's study of the vagaries of the current, a knowledge of the state of the tide, and shrewd judgment in arriving first at the selected "possy" practically ensure success. There is at least the comforting reflection that if one "is not getting whitebait—why, then, there are none running." At this point it is not unusual for some callow youngster to arrive with a couple of kerosene tins