

# Historic Lake Coleridge Village – Walking Guide



*The Power Station today.*



**Brochure produced by:**

**© Lake Coleridge Lodge *Canterbury's best kept secret***

Revised September 2012

## Introduction

Lake Coleridge Village in Canterbury's High Country is 362m above sea level, approximately 100km west of Christchurch and 35 km to the northwest of Methven. The Lake after which the area is known has a surface area of 47 km<sup>2</sup> and is about 165m above the village.

The Lake Coleridge landscape has been formed over millions of years. Massive glaciers gouged out the land and earthquakes, wind, rain, frost and even volcanoes, have all been part of the process that has helped form the landscape we have today.

Lake Coleridge is called Whakamātau\* by Māori. According to Māori legend it is among the great inland lakes dug out by Chief Rakaihautu on his exploratory journey of the South Island. The lake area had a plentiful supply of eels and birds and was an important food gathering stop for Māori crossing the Southern Alps seeking precious greenstone (pounamu) from the West Coast.

The first Europeans to arrive in the Lake Coleridge area were surveyors looking for a route to West Coast gold fields. They named the area after early members of the Canterbury Association who were nephews of famous English poet Samuel

Taylor Coleridge.

\* Whakamātau means to experiment, try or teach. The name perhaps reflects that Rakaihautu was learning or teaching.



*Lake Coleridge, looking towards Christchurch*



# Start



*Lake Coleridge Lodge when first built in 1934.*

**1. The walk begins at Lake Coleridge Lodge.** Built in 1934 as a hostel for Power Station staff, it was known as the Single Men's Quarters. It has been privately owned and operated as a B&B since the Electricity Corporation (ECNZ) sold it and other village houses in the 1980s and early 1990s.

The dry stone walls at the Lodge entrance were built in 2000 by Robert Orchard who grew up in the village and still lives here today. He is a landscaper and one of two fishing guides in the village. The stone is from Middle Rock, a station 10km away.

Across the road are the pipes (penstocks) that bring water to the Power Station from Lake Coleridge, which is approximately 150m higher in altitude than the Power Station. You will learn more about the Power Station (built between 1911 and 1914) later in your journey.

***Walk down to the bottom of the hill (approximately 200m).***

**2. Power Station Store** – at the road intersection the large cream wooden building on the left is the Power Station Bulk Store. Dances were held here during the construction days of the village.

**3. Post Office** - built in 1949 it is still used today by residents to collect mail through the PO Box system. In the mid 1950s it was the scene of an attempted safe robbery the night before pay day. All three of the robbers were apprehended, either by the police or local residents during an all night man hunt. The full story is in the history files at the Lodge. By the side of the Post Office is the village notice board.

***Head towards the Power Station and turn left at the toilet block (stop here if you need to!).***

The skip behind the toilets is the local rubbish and recycling collection facility.

***Take the path to the left of the toilet block through the trees towards the cottage.***



*The Post Office, scene of a robbery in the mid 1950s.*







**4. Electric Cottage** – This privately owned cottage has the sign “Hikorangi” on the gate. In 1915 it was known as the Electric Cottage - a ‘show home’ when it was built that demonstrated the benefits of an all electric home.

*Walk to the right of the cottage.*

You will come across a meadow which was used previously for camping and a picnic area. Walk around the back of the cottage and you will find a track through the trees. It can be a little overgrown and you’ll need to be careful on the steps. You’ll cross a small bridge and then follow the track up to the road, which is Kowhai Drive. On the lawn where you exit the path is the framework for drying the hoses used by the Volunteer Fire Brigade. At the road take a left and walk towards the buildings also on your left.

**5. Fire Station** – The larger of these two buildings is still the village Fire Station, but used to also house the petrol pump, dangerous goods and be the foreman’s office. The smaller building was the stable and feed barn for the many horses used during the Power Station and village construction days. Horses were used until 1953 for village rubbish collection and carting firewood.

*Walk between these two buildings.*

You’ll see a cute walkway ahead over a stone bridge built by local residents George Good & Hugh Burrows in 1952, which takes you back towards the Electric Cottage. When you get back to the Cottage turn right and head back to the Post Office. Continue past the Post Office and you will see two walkways on your left - take the second one.

**6. Walkway** – head up this sealed walkway which has bars at the entrance. It comes out onto the “S bend” of the road. Cross the road and continue through the trees. You will come to a clearing and in front of you is the Village Hall.

**7. Village Hall** - built in 1939 the Hall was a gathering place for movies, dancing and other events. The projectionist’s room still exists and the Hall is still used as a gathering place for locals. To the left are privately owned houses and sections for sale on the former site of the Lake Coleridge School.



*Village Hall*



**8. Lake Coleridge School** – the school was built in 1914, the same year the Power Station became operational, and it survived until 2004. With the operation of the Power Station, the village boomed and improved living conditions encouraged wives and children to join their husbands. The school opened with 15 pupils. An original coat rack and photos from the school are at the Lodge.

**9. Playground** – to the right of the Village Hall is the playground, once belonging to the Lake Coleridge School. It has been relocated next to the Tennis Court.

**10. Tennis court** - built in the early 1920s, the first recorded tennis match was held on Boxing Day in 1924. Also in this area was the school swimming pool, constructed in 1941, and the village croquet lawn.



*Lake Coleridge School in 1943*

***Follow the track passing the Village Hall on your left and between the houses with green and red roofs until you get to the road which is Acheron Avenue.***

If you wish you can explore Acheron Avenue, which used to be called East Flat or Top Flat. From where you exited the track, turn left and walk towards the main road. When you reach the main road, you can turn right and walk up to the second paddock on the right (about 400m). This was the location of the village golf course which started in 1924. There is no record of any formal opening of the course, but the first recorded match was against a team from Hororata on 19 July 1924. Harry Hart (famous for his work at the Arboretum, which you will get to later) was a founding member of the club and given the honor of teeing off to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Club in 1974. Due to lack of demand, the Club had its closing day on 15 September 2001 and on 23 May 2003 the clubhouse was moved to Darfield to become the Malvern News office.

***Return back along the main road and past Acheron Avenue. Turn left down Hart Place back towards the Hall and Tennis Courts.***

**11. Teacher's Track** – When you get back to the Village Hall face the track you originally came up. If you look carefully, about 10m to the left of this is the Teacher's Track – it has a lamppost at its entry. This track went from the old teacher's house on Kowhai Drive to the School. It now goes through the arboretum extension.

***Follow the Teacher's Track – it will take you through a clearing, past a sign for the Aspen Walk and back to the Fire Station.***

Once you get to the road with the Fire Station in front of you, turn left and head down this road, Kowhai Drive, which has recently been planted with new Kowhai trees. Now all private residences, it used to have a huge Villa with very high studs called House No. 1, home to the Power Station



Superintendent. This house is now at Long Spur Station on Coleridge Road. There was also a batch that is now at Windwhistle garage. This street used to be known as Centre Flat or Bottom Flat and houses were rented by power station staff until the early 1980s when they were able to be purchased.

***Continue to the end of Kowhai Drive and go through the Angler's Access gate towards Lake Coleridge Cemetery. Keep going on this forest path which has pine trees planted in the 1920s and you will come out at a clearing and the Cemetery.***

**12. Cemetery & Historic Moa Cooking Site** – as you get to the clearing there is a white sign on your right which stands before a tree that was hit by lightning in January 2000. Turn around and opposite the damaged tree you'll see a large pit which marks a moa hunters' cooking site unearthed by three residents of the village in the 1950s. This represents the first evidence of human presence in the area. Bill Leith, George Good and Hugh Burrows discovered at a depth of 30 inches a fireplace of blackened river (greywacke) stones, charred wood and tussock, plus neck and leg bones that had been picked clean from at least two moa and a flake of obsidian rock. These are now found at the Canterbury Museum. This site is approximately 635 years old with carbon dating of the birds indicating they were cooked around 1380 AD, give or take 40 years.

Among the graves in the Cemetery are those of Laurence McKeown who died aged 23 from flu in 1918 during the pandemic and Julia Wallace who died age 9 in a car accident in the village.



*View up the Rakaia River from The Point*

**13. Trees** - the large trees around the Cemetery are *Pinus Coulteri* (Big Cone Pine).

***Behind the gravestones on the right is a loose stone and clay track through the trees which leads you down to The Point.***

**14. The Point** – there is a white triangle at The Point marking the boundary between the upper and lower Rakaia. Here you can see a wonderful view up the Rakaia River. If you look down below to the fast flowing water, this is the Tailrace water from the Power Station meeting the Rakaia. You will often see adult salmon here gathering in large numbers before going upstream. Sometimes they spend 3 to 4 weeks in a pool until a flood triggers their journey up the river. Across the river is Redcliffs.

**14. Redcliffs** – on the other side of the river you may notice pink marble cliffs. This is actually lime, but is not economical to crush because it's too hard. Up on the right of this (to the north-west) although not visible from The Point is Glenariffe Stream.





**15. Glenariffe Stream** – this stream featured one of the earliest experimental salmon farms on the Rakaia, operated by the government. Lake Coleridge Village also had a salmon hatchery (you'll see remnants soon) and Fish & Game continue to operate salmon hatcheries on the Rakaia and manage the landlocked salmon population in Lake Coleridge.

**16. Manuka Point Station** – In the centre of the Upper Rakaia Valley is Manuka Point Station where the progenitors of the Rakaia Red Deer were released in 1896 having been brought over from Stoke Park in England. Today the area is known for guided hunting.

**17. Mathias & Wilberforce Rivers** – to the right of Manuka Point is the Mathias River, which flows into the Rakaia, and to the right of the Mathias is the Rolleston Range and Mt Algidus where Mona Anderson lived. Mona wrote many books about the area in the mid 1900s sharing her life experiences. To the right of Mt Algidus is the Wilberforce River, which borders the north western edge of Lake Coleridge and also joins the Rakaia.

*Now head towards the Power Station along the clay path following the track with the Tailrace on your left.*

**18. Tailrace** - You should be able to see the Power Station in the distance. There are many Kowhai trees here that look magnificent all in flower. A reasonable way along this track, you will notice a small fence on the left. If you look across the Tailrace you should be able to see part of the old salmon hatchery. There was a barrier set across the Tailrace (remnants can be seen when the tailrace is running low) which prevented the salmon going back up to the Power Station. The last harvest here was in 1994.

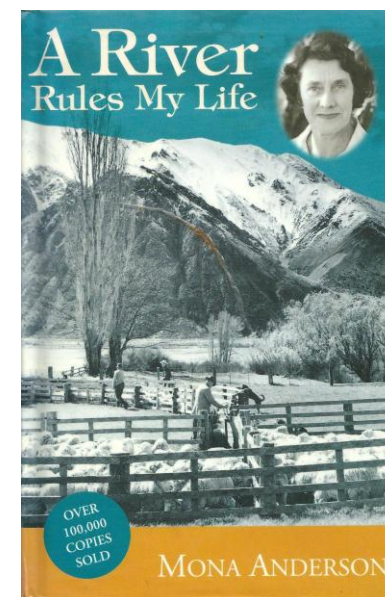
*Follow the Tailrace path until you cross a small wooden bridge and reach a clearing.*

To your right is part of the village sewage treatment facility. This area used to house people in tents in the early construction days. Carry on to the sealed road. In front of you is the sewage treatment plant pump house. If you go over the bridge on your left you will head down to the river (about 20 minutes return).

When you're ready, head back up towards the Power Station. Near the Power Station on your right is the site of an old Blacksmith's and Carpenter's Shop. You can see the old furnace here, still used today as an incinerator. On your left across the head of the tailrace, hidden among the trees, you may spot an Igloo shaped structure.



*Fish caught in Lake Coleridge around 1912*



*Mona Anderson wrote many popular books about life in the Lake Coleridge high country*



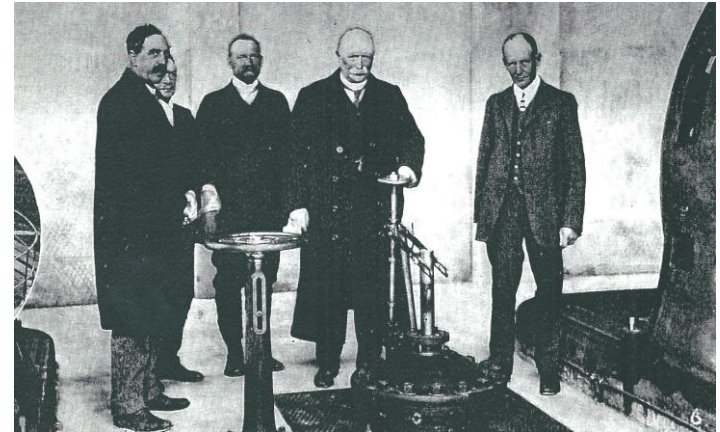
**19. Igloo shaped structure** - this was built during the war and would have been used for covering the generators in case of an air raid. It was later shifted to its present position to be used to store scrap metal until ready for sale.

**20. Power Station** – the Lake Coleridge Power Station was the first Government-owned hydro-electric power station built in New Zealand. Building started in 1911 with construction workers arriving to a wild and bleak landscape. Initially workers were housed in tents and sheds. The winters were harsh which prompted the building of some permanent housing. Construction of the Power Station was a massive undertaking at the time and it took three years to complete. At the time it was a significant engineering feat as it was built on glacial moraine (base shingle) which had never been achieved before.

The Power Station officially opened on 25 November 1914 although on 2 December 1914 Prime Minister Massey attended an opening function. By March 1915, the Power Station was contributing to the power supply of Christchurch City. The site for the Power Station was chosen for a number of reasons including the storage capacity of the Lake, the excellent head of water in such a short distance (there is a 165m difference in altitude between Lake Coleridge and the Rakaia River) and the proximity to Christchurch being a centre for industry. Water is taken from the south western edge of the Lake through two tunnels to surge chambers and then through steel penstocks down to the Power Station.

During the construction days, building was carried on everywhere at the same time and the village swarmed with workmen, up to 400 at a time. Traction engines, horses, carts and motorised lorries carried all the gear necessary for building and living. As construction workers moved on, Power Station staff and their families replaced them. The village took shape with the three main streets (you have already seen Top Flat and Centre Flat and you will get to West Flat soon) providing most housing and the school.

Today, with many Power Station functions automated, the village's permanent population is small and instead the area is most valued for its recreation. The Power Station still feeds into the national grid with a maximum 40 megaWatt output (equivalent to 40,000 kiloWatts, or 40,000 1kW microwave ovens all running at the same time!). There have been a number of anniversary celebrations with a significant one on 25-26 November 1989 to mark the Power Station's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary.



*Prime Minister Massey opens the valve to start the first Lake Coleridge machine on 2 December 1914*



*Tent accommodation for construction workers at Lake Coleridge in the early days*



*Head up the road away from the Power Station and back towards the Post Office. Opposite the Post Office take the first sealed path. Walk up the path behind the old Bulk Store and you will be on the Lodge Chip & Putt golf course.*

**21. Lodge Chip & Putt golf course** - this was developed in 1999 to enhance what was available at the Lodge. You are most welcome to have a game (a small charge applies for people not staying at the Lodge).

*Follow the path through the Lodge grounds until you reach the road which is Riverview Terrace. Across the road is a black house.*

**22. House No 4** - this black house was originally a hostel built around 1952. This house included a Manageress's flat and a room that could be used for an assistant. The Hostel was used for the main dining area to feed all the single men who worked at the Power Station and lived in the single men's quarters (now Lake Coleridge Lodge).

**23. Billiards Club** - to the left of the hostel is the Billiards Club. Before the hostel was built this was used for the dining room and Manageress's Flat and later converted into the Billiards Club.

*Continue to walk up the road until you get to the intersection with Harper Place.*

The Harper Place cul-de-sac housed the Public Nurse during the early construction days, when it was known as Pipeline Flat or West Flat. The Nurse had a two-roomed building where she treated patients. You can walk around Harper Place, which is now private residences and holiday homes.



*Exit by walking to the junction with Coleridge Intake Road, with Lake Coleridge Lodge on your left. Turn right and after about 200m you will see on your left a gate leading into the Hart Arboretum.*

**24. H.E. Hart Arboretum** – one of the most famous Superintendents of the Power Station from 1923–1953 was Harry Hart MBE. Harry contributed hugely to the area. This Arboretum of hardy pines and conifers covers approximately 2 hectares and was established from 1933 by Harry Hart to provide shelter for staff working at the Power Station. He loved trees and the park-like setting of the village today is due to him. The Arboretum contains one of the best mature conifer collections in New Zealand and at least two thirds of the world's pine species. Feel free to explore the Arboretum and if you are interested the Lodge has a separate brochure that gives more information about this site.





*Head back down the hill towards the Lodge.*

Just below the Arboretum is where some of the original huts were as well as a cookhouse, bakery, blacksmith and recreation area.

**25. Lake Coleridge Lodge** - originally had 6 bedrooms with another wing added in 1958. The building has received many facelifts and now sleeps 18 and holds significant history about the area. Each room in the main Lodge is named after a nearby river and the newest cabin is named after Hugh Burrows who lived in Lake Coleridge Village for 36 years, much of that time at the Lodge. Hugh has left a lot of the recorded history and also helped with recently published books on Lake Coleridge.

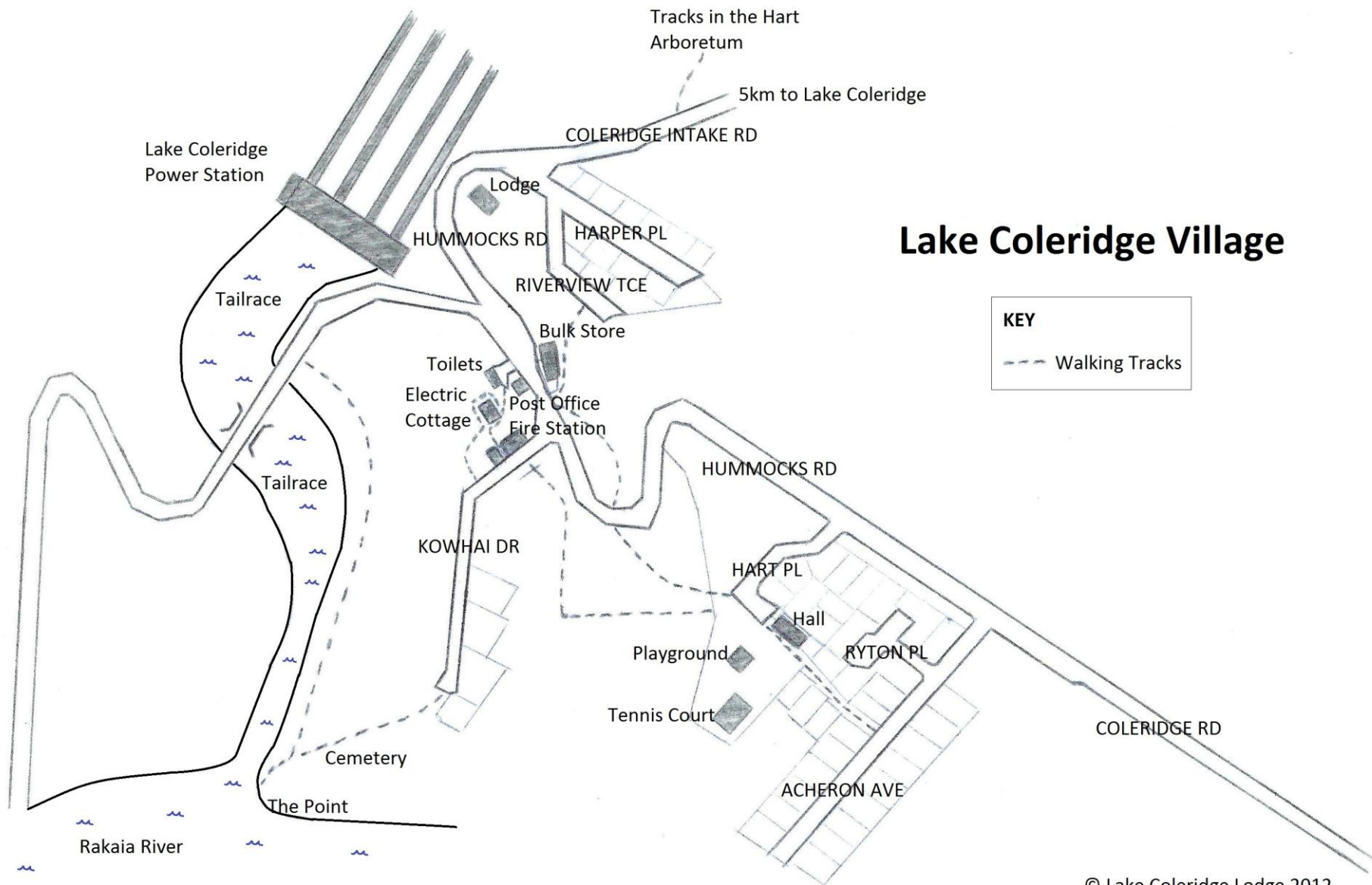
**We hope you have enjoyed your journey.**



*Hugh Burrows, former Lake Coleridge Village resident and historian in his Christchurch home (photo taken June 2012). Do you recognise the building in the painting behind him?*

*The End*





## Lake Coleridge Village

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