



Waihi Big Day Out

Story contributed by Max Deane
ZK MBD

At 6.30 am it didn't seem like the present weather would mean our planned day was a 'goer'. Well flying wise anyway. By 8.30 it wasn't so bad and by 9am I was able to get off my airstrip. Brian and Gail Taylor, who had flown down from Whangarei in their Jodel, got caught by a bad squall at Pauanui and had to wait it out on the ground for three quarters of an hour. Once landed, I found there were a large number of people gathered at the Swell Cafe on the Waihi beach Airfield all enjoying a great breakfast. Aircraft had flown in from Tauranga, Whakatane, Ohaupo, Pukekohe and Whangarei. After breakfast, twenty four of us then boarded a Murphy's Bus. First stop was the Waihi Information Centre where we collected our tour guide, Murray Elliot, who would provide the commentary for the Martha Mine Tour. Taken to the pit rim, this hole looks a lot bigger at ground level than at fifteen hundred feet above. I could not absorb all the statistics but somehow I remembered that approximately three ounces of gold come up from the pit with every 86 tonne truck load of rock. I had a thought of getting a load dropped off at the farm and then try and extract the contents? Eighty six tonnes...Nah!!



The tour starts with a briefing and education.

The tour lasted one and half hours and also took us into the treatment plant where the bullion is extracted from the rock. The Martha mine is unique in that it produces approximately 700,000 ounces of silver as well as 100,000 ounces of gold per annum. About three hundred staff and contractors are directly employed by the mining company in the town.

See www.waihi.org.nz for more detailed information about the mine and Waihi

For the next part of the journey we were taken to the Goldfield Railway Station where we boarded a train for Waikino. Cliff sorted out our tickets and we enjoyed a relaxing



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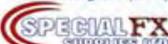
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thirty minute trip to the Waikino Cafe which operates from the Waikino Station. This short trip by vintage train follows the Ohinemuri River through some pretty farm land and across a viaduct above State Highway 2. At the Waikino Station, Cliff had organised a set lunch for us all. With twenty minutes to spare before boarding the bus again, several of our group took a short walk under State Highway 2 to the Victoria Stamper Battery. The history of the area is depicted on several information boards around the site and it is just staggering to see what was once here:
www.waihirail.co.nz



Top: Here we are on the train ride through the Waihi Basin.

Bottom: The open pit gold-silver mine.



On the bus again we were off to the Karangahake Gorge and in particular the Windows Walk. This section is one of many walkways in the gorge that follows the Waitawheta River upstream through a series of tunnels with several 'windows' carved out of the rock giving excellent views out over the river. Again I could not grasp the terrific feat of work and engineering those early miners faced back then. It's just amazing what Gold-Fever and the lure of riches will do. It left me feeling embarrassed that having lived all my life in the area and driven past hundreds of times that I have never stopped at this very interesting part of our history. This is a definite must do for those of you who have never visited and I will be going back to do it again soon. There are numerous short walks in the gorge and most are less than one hour.



With us all herded together it was back into the bus again for the return trip to the Beach Airfield for





a BBQ tea. Jim Smylie and I took the opportunity to make a short flight to Tauranga so I could gain some experience at flying into controlled airspace. Thanks for the lesson Jim, one more time and I think I will have it beaten. The flying meant we were a bit late back for the start of the BBQ but there was still plenty of tucker. I had a great time catching up with friends and it was good to see Evan Gray out and about again. It also met a number of new folk during the dinner. Thanks to Bob Byal and team for the work you put into organising the BBQ. I finished my fantastic day by flying my granddaughter, Lily, home to Whangamata.



Top: Across the suspension bridge over the Waitawheta River.

Bottom: Day's end BBQ.

Many thanks Cliff and Deb for such a great day.

Max Deane




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