

FROM HOLLYFORD TO MARTIN'S BAY

BY SEAMUS J. KING

Anyone who has visited the south-west of the South Island of New Zealand will probably have got to Milford Sound. It's one of the world's top travel destinations and also New Zealand's most famous tourist attractions. The sound, and the river Cheddau, which flows into it, are named after their Welsh namesakes.

The sound runs 15 kilometres inland from the Tasman Sea and is sided by sheer rock faces that rise nearly 1,200 metres. There are two permanent waterfalls and many occasional ones that pour millions of gallons of water into the sound every year. Milford Sound is also the wettest place in New Zealand and one of the wettest places in the world, where rainfall can reach 250 mm in a 24-hour period. This volume of water creates the temporary waterfalls.



A general view of the terrain near Milford Sound, South Island, N.Z.

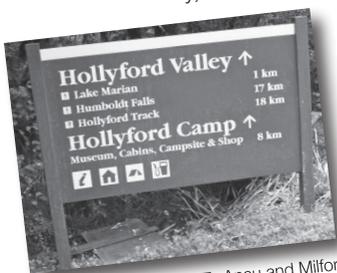
The village of Milford Sound is a tiny place with little or no accommodation. The result is that visitors have to travel there from Queenstown, c. 300 km or Te Anau 120 km. The road there is slow, winding and spectacular and much of the transport is tourist buses. Once the visitor arrives he gets on to one of the touring boats that takes him on one- and two-hour trips down the sound. One can be unlucky. Because of all the rain the weather is problematic and many are disappointed to find the place shrouded in fog and mist and only a limited view of the splendour of the cliffs. I was one of the unlucky ones the day I visited in February 2014 but I had some consolation in the discoveries I made along the way.

The Hollyford River

One of the exciting things that I discovered on the journey from Te Anau to Milford was that a man from Hollyford was very much involved in the exploration of the area in the nineteenth century. His name is Patrick Quirk Caples (with the 'e' rather than

the 'i'), a prospector and explorer, who was born in Hollyford in 1829/1830?. Some reports state he was born in Bilboa, County Limerick. It is possible he was born in Bilboa but that the family moved to Hollyford early in Patrick's life. The fact that he was to name the places he discovered in New Zealand after Hollyford, rather than Bilboa, would seem to suggest his personal identification was with the former place. The letter at the end of this article adds credence to this surmise.

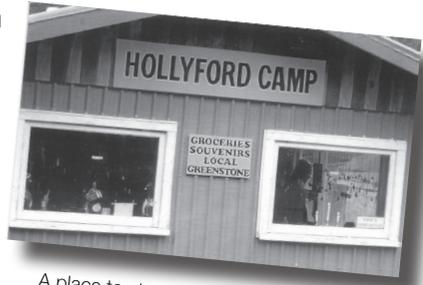
He is reputed to have been the son of Patrick Caples, a doctor, according to the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, and Julia Quirk, whose name he was to retain as a middle name. Nothing is known of his early family life. He travelled to Australia, probably in the 1850s and had some success in the gold rushes there. In 1861 he joined the gold rush to Otago, in south-east New Zealand.



Road sign on route between Te Anau and Milford Sound, South Island, N.Z.

In 1862 Patrick Caples was elected to the Mining Board of Gabriel's District, where the gold rush began in Otago and, as their representative, went prospecting for gold, mainly from the head of Lake Wakatipu. This tells us something of his leadership qualities. He also became one of a number of explorers seeking a route from the Lake District to harbours on the West Coast, to improve transport to the goldfields. One of the many miners who went into the hills prospecting for gold, Caples was to be one of the few whose work was recorded.

His exploration took him along Lake Wakatipu on the Greenstone Route to the head of the lake. In January 1863 he travelled up the Routeburn, cutting steps in the snow and ice with a shovel to reach Harris Saddle. Printed on the New Zealand Department of Conservation, Parkmap 335-02 of the Routeburn, Caples & Greenstone Tracks at the Harris Saddle is the legend: 'P. Q. Caples, first European to cross saddle en route to Martin's Bay 1863.'



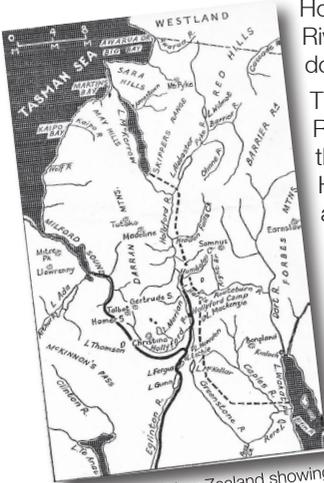
A place to stay and get provisions.

The Routeburn Track traverses the Southern Alps of New Zealand and passes through ice-carved valleys and beech forests. It contains pristine rivers and glistening alpine lakes offering breathtaking views and mountain scenery.

Having crossed the saddle he descended to the river below, the first European to do so and, not forgetting where he came from, he named it Hollyford after his native place in Ireland. He followed the river down as far as Hidden Falls Creek, which he ascended to cross a saddle into the north branch of the Routeburn

Hollyford Names

Caples returned to climb a peak above Harris saddle. He observed a large lake to the west, with smoke lifting beyond, but lacked sufficient food to reach it. Instead he went up the Hollyford into the saddle separating it from the Greenstone Rivers, passed Lakes Howden and McKellar, then crossed what is now the Caples River, a north branch of the Greenstone, which he followed down to Lake Wakatipu.



Part of South Island, New Zealand showing places associated with Patrick Quirk Caples, Lake Wakatipu, Caples River, Hollyford River, Milford Sound and Martin's Bay.

Traversing the area today as well as the Hollyford and Caples Rivers, one reads of the Hollyford Valley, the Hollyford Track, the Lower Hollyford Road, the Upper Hollyford Road, the Hollyford Shelter, as well as Caples Track, Mid Caples Hut and Upper Caples Hut. All these names show the indelible imprint left by Patrick Quirk Caples in the area the 1860s.

Patrick Caples's next trip was to Martin's Bay, which is north of Milford Sounds. He set off walking along the Greenstone River and then followed the Hollyford River to his destination. On his way he found a few specks of gold in the Pyke river and reached Martin's Bay on March 10, 1863. An account takes up the story: 'Keeping above the bush line on the north bank, he explored until he was within a few miles of the ocean and could see, near the beach, a rudely-constructed hut.'

Afraid that he would meet hostile Maoris (stories of wild Maoris in the mountain fastnesses were common) he camped that night without lighting a fire. As he said, 'It is easy for a person to find courage when he has law and assistance at his back, but let him be alone and beyond any assistance near the camp of savages, and he will find how fleeting courage is.' After secretly examining Martin's Bay and washing his hands in the salt waters of the ocean, he went back up the river, ravenously hungry, to eat every rat he could catch.' For some reason he did not return to Lake Wakatipu by a previously used route, but made an astonishing journey across country to Nokomai

Some explorers weren't prepared initially to accept Caples's names for his newly found places. Sir James Hector, of which more below, did some naming of his own in the region. This included the name 'Kakapo' for both the Hollyford River and Lake McKerrow. Thomson, the Otago surveyor, pointed out that these features had already been described by Caples and Captain Alabaster who preceded Hector, and he overruled Hector's names.

Looking for Gold

Caples's searches for gold weren't very successful in spite of the great expectation that following his journey to Martin's Bay. He found only traces but he recorded his observations in his report to Vincent Pyke, secretary of the Gold Fields department, and drew up a very accurate map of the area. He didn't receive the recognition he might have for his discoveries, mainly because James Hector, the Scottish Doctor, also explored the Hollyford-Greenstone-Wakatipu route a few months later, and the publicity he received obscured previous efforts by Caples and others. The chief surveyor of Otago, J. T. Thomson, was, however, aware of Caples's work. He subsequently incorporated some of the geographical features Caples had noted and named, including the Hollyford Valley, into the map of north-west Otago. The accuracy of Caples's work facilitated the progress of other surveyors who eventually followed in his path.

In 1864 Caples and five miners crossed the Rees Saddle into the Dart River in the Mount Aspiring National Park to search for reported gold, but little was found and after days of snow the party retreated to the Rees valley. Caples was the first to refer to the Dart Glacier, which they saw on the trip.

Later Life

By the early 1870s Caples had settled in Reefton, a small town on the west coast, some 80 kilometres northeast of Greymouth. Although he did not prospect in the area, he discovered Point Reefton, Moonlight and Georgetown. In December 1873 Georgetown, some kilometres east of Reefton, was renamed Caplestown in his honour. He is reputed to have made a profitable find of gold there on February 2, 1877. Caples is said to have erected the first quartz-crushing battery on the West Coast and the discovery of quartz was to be his great achievement.

In 1873 Patrick Caples was elected to the local district board. In the same year he was appointed to the Goldfields Local Revenue Board for the Inangahua District. In 1877 he was elected for the Boatman's Riding, another name for Caplestown, Inangahua county. From November 1878 until November 1879 he was chairman of Inangahua County Council.

He also became a manager of many of the quartz mines in the district board. Although he lived quietly, he always maintained a community profile of the highest integrity. He never sought financial reimbursement for his maps or discoveries.

An unusual aspect of Patrick Quirk Caples was his interest in cricket. We get the first reference to this in the Inanghua Times in 1877 where there is a report of a cricket match between Reefton and Greymouth and Caples is included in the Reefton team. He continued to turn out regularly during the following years up to 1883. During that period he lined out twice at Melbourne with a team of expatriate New Zealanders. There is a report in the paper on June 24, 1887 that the foundation stone of the Victoria Institute and School of Mines at Boatman's Creek (Capleston) was laid the previous Tuesday by Patrick Quirk Caples.

On March 15, 1889 the Government Gasette announced that John Gallagher and Partick Quirk Caples had been appointed Justices of the Peace for the Colony. According to a report in the Inanghua Times on June 12, 1891 Patrick Quirk Caples had passed his examination and been awarded a certificate of competency as mine manager by the Board of Examiners in Wellington. It added that Mr. Caples was one of the pioneers of the quartz mining industry. In fact in the same year under the Mining Act of that year, Caples was appointed one of four to the Board of Examiners.

Capleston

The Inanghua Times carried the following report on October 31, 1891: 'R. Reeves has been for some time endeavouring to get the name of Boatman's Creek officially changed to Capleston, the postal authorities are favourable to the alteration. The old and respected colonist, Patrick Quirk Caples, who has rendered much good service to the country, has long been associated with the place. We hope that Boatman's Creek will receive the more appropriate and euphonious name of Calpeston'

The change was made as the paper reported in its edition of December 20, 1891: 'Officially announced that from and after January 1, Boatman's Creek will be known only as Capleston, well deserved recognition of the pioneering service rendered by P. Q. Caples.'

A headline, 'Mr. P. Q. Caples Missing', appeared in the Inanghua Times on March 8, 1895. According to the paper Mr. Caples had been prospecting in the Big River district and hadn't been seen for three weeks. The report continued: 'Mr. Caples is well known as an adept in the bush, and there are still chances in his favour, but on account of the time he has been absent and the small stock of provisions in his possession, and his advanced age, there is reason to fear the worst.' The worst wasn't realised and Caples returned safely.

The West Coast Times reported on May 17, 1895 that 'Caples, the prospector about whose safety fears were entertained some time since, arrived at Reefton from the Mariau country last evening, having been absent since the middle of February. He was looking well and attributes the fact to the virtues of the hot springs. He found many quartz reefs but none payable, He obtained alluvial prospects in many places but too remote from civilisation to be payable.'

Death Headlined

Patrick Caples never married. He appears to have been a very busy man right up to the time of his death. He was visiting Havelock inspecting reefs on April 13, 1904 when he suffered a stroke of paralysis, affecting the whole of his right side. He was brought to hospital in Reefton and remained in a semi-conscious condition until soon before his death, when he recovered his speech for a short time.

His will is dated October 24, 1904. He was unable to sign it and made his mark in the presence of two witnesses, E. J. Scuttlebury, JP, Stationer, Reefton and Robert Craig, Farmer, Reefton, 'having been first read over to him in our presence when he appeared to perfectly understand the same.' He is described as a Mining Investor.



What is most revealing about the will is that Patrick Quirk Caples had a brother, John, living in the same area. 'I appoint my dear brother John Caples of Globe Hill near Reefton aforesaid to be the Sole Executor of this my will. I give devise and bequeath all my property and estate real and personal whatsoever and wheresoever situate of which I shall die seised possessed or entitled to unto my dear brother aforesaid John Caples absolutely.' From other sources it appears that John was a storekeeper near Reefton. When the will was probated on the 7th March, 1904, it was shown that Patrick Quirk Caples left a gross estate of over £821. It included cash in bank of £495. The amount was large for the time and yet it is strange that the figure wasn't higher. When he was chairman of Inanghua County, he received a stipend of £200 per annum. As well as being a successful prospector himself, his services were in demand by others in the mining world. There is a newspaper report on July 20, 1895, which states the following: 'It is understood that Mr. Caples, who is a veteran prospector, has been appointed mining adviser to Mr. Ziman at £500 per annum. Mr. Caples is a really clever miner of vast experience and Mr. Ziman could not have made a better selection for the object he has in view. Mr. Caples has been known in the Inanghua district for many years and few practical miners can show him his way about in the ranges.'

Perhaps Patrick Quirk Caples was a benefactor of note. There are a couple of newspaper reports that might give credence to this idea. One on October 13, 1882 tells us that William McMyn, cadet in the Telegraph office found £5 on his journeys, it was claimed by Mr. Caples who rewarded McMyn with £3! There is another reference to him contributing to the Irish relief fund in April 1880. He is mentioned on the Reefton Hospital subscription list for the quarter ending June 30th, 1887.

Patrick Quirk Caples died at Reefton on 27th November 1904, aged 74 years and was buried in the Burkes Creek cemetery. His death received much publicity in the newspapers. The Southland Times referred to him as 'One of New Zealand's Forgotten Benefactors'. The Marlborough Express described his passing as the 'Death of an Old Miner' and described him as 'one of the oldest miners on the West Coast.'

A letter, headed 'A Pioneer Digger', appeared in the Otago Daily Times on November 30, just three days after his death, signed by N. Moloney and it gives us some insight into the person and the achievement of Patrick Quirk Caples. Having referred to the announcement of his death, Moloney adds: 'It may be of interest to state that early in 1863, Mr. Caples started from the head of Lake Wakatipu for the West Coast Sounds with a gun, a dog and 50lbs of flour, and succeeded in reaching the coast. The river he tasted the sea water in, he christened the Hollyford, that being the name of the place he came from, in the County of Tipperary, Ireland.'

Hundreds may fail, but he never was the same man after, and he told me that he would not undergo the same hardship again if he got the whole of New Zealand for doing so. I happened to be a neighbour of Mr. Caples when we were boys, and when he was on his way to the Coast diggings, he called to me in Dunedin. He stated that he endured terrible hardships on the journey to the Sounds, as owing to the wet weather he was days without being able to light a fire, but having made up his mind to do, or die in the attempt, and being a man full of energy and determination, he succeeded where The Otago Daily Times had a report of his wonderful journeys to the Coast and back to Queenstown. It is doubtful if there is one person in Queenstown at present who resided there then.'

Part of his home was later incorporated into a motel complex on the corner of Sinnamon Street and Broadway in Reefton. There is a Caples Court Motel in Queenstown but I'm not sure if it has any connection with the famous Hollyford explorer.

John Caples

There is a report in the Bendigo Advertiser (Victoria, Aus.) for Monday, December 9, 1912 of a man found dead in the city. The discovery of gold in the soils of Bendigo during the 1850s made it one of the most significant Victorian era boomtowns in Australia. The report stated: 'An old man named John Caples, 71 years of age, a native of Tipperary, Ireland, was last evening found dead in his hut in Arnold Street, by one of his old friends, Mr. Edward Hayes, a resident of Victoria Street, Ironbark. Mr. Hayes immediately informed the North Bendigo police of the matter, and Constable Cuffe had the body removed to the morgue. There were no indications of foul play, death evidently being due to natural causes. The old man, who was a bachelor, had done a large amount of travelling, and had visited practically the whole of the Australian goldfields. He had been living in the hut in which his death occurred for about twelve months. When last seen alive by Mr. Joseph Hoffbauer, the owner of the hut at about 7 pm on Saturday, deceased appeared to be in his usual state of health. He had been a sufferer from bronchitis for some years. The matter has been reported to the coroner.'

On February 5, 1913 a will by John Caples, described as a retired storekeeper, was filed in the Master in Equity's office, Melbourne. He was originally from County Tipperary, Ireland. There is no mention of any relationship with Patrick Quirk Caples, but the similarities to the John Caples who was made sole executor of Patrick's will are so great that it is unlikely to be a coincidence.

If we accept they were the same people then we can only speculate as to what John Caples did after his brother's death. He was left reasonably well off after his brother's death. He probably returned to Australia, where he had spent much of his life in the gold fields, and continued his prospecting.

In his will there is mention of two sisters that we hadn't heard of before. John left all his personal estate to the children of his sister, Mary, 'who married Cornelius Ryan, Grallan?, Tipperary and John Ryan, overser of the Post Office, Thurles, (This part is unclear) and Julia O'Brien, wife of ? O'Brien, plumber, Tipperary, equally between them, subject to the sum of Fifty pounds being set aside to defray the cost of my funeral and the purchase of a headstone to be erected over my grave and the sum of five pounds to be paid to the Bishop of Sandhurst for masses for my soul and ten pounds for St. Aidan's Orphanage, Bendigo to the Bishop of Sandhurst.'

Assessment

One of the problems writing about Patrick Quirk Caples is that whereas there are many references to the public man in documents and newspapers, there is very little about the private man. He was a great prospector and explorer and made a big impact wherever he lived. He was a physically strong man with impressive courage as his endurance during his exploration trips reveal. He was the foremost explorer for quartz in New Zealand. However, we have no description of the man, of his personality, of his conversation, of his thoughts about Ireland.

In an account of the Great Days of Quartz Mining at Reefton, Waiuta and the Lyell, which was published by Darrell Lathan in 1983, the author bemoans the loss of so much source material and 'irreplaceable photographs and documents [that] had been dumped or consigned to the clean-up fire, particularly the demolition of old buildings.' Lathan continues: 'Probably the most tragic loss was when I found, after searching high and low, that the diaries of Patrick Quirk Caples had been thoroughly destroyed.' Only one remains 'to give a faithful and educated account of the daily activities of a man who must be numbered among New Zealand's greatest explorer-prospectors and mining experts.' What a pity!

When the author goes on to discuss the quartz reef discoveries at Boatman's Creek, he gives us this appreciation of the Hollyford man: 'This was the hey-day of Patrick Quirk Caples, a celebrated prospector and explorer, and certainly one of the discoverers of the reefs at Boatman's Creek. Caples had been sent out by a group of Greymouth backers who knew of his reputation as a successful prospector. There was great excitement at the seaport when the first news from Caples arrived by an express messenger. It announced his finding of an auriferous quartz reef over three feet in thickness and 'showing as much gold as would satisfy any man.'

He had pegged out three claims and put on twenty-one men to hold the ground. Needless to say the Greymouth shareholders saddled their horses with great haste and set out at once for the new fird.

This discovery was in the area of the most successful of the future Boatman Creek's mines, situated at Caples Creek, on and near which were to arise the rich mines of the 'Fiery Cross', the 'Hopeful' and the famed 'Welcome'.

Claims were quickly taken up north and south of each prospecting claim.

Between 8 January and 3 February, 1872 the Receiver of Revenue in Reefton collected £1400 and handled no less than two hundred applications for new quartz claims, as well as many applications for special and business sites, races and dams throughout the whole Inanghua district.

So great was the demand for miners rights that he suffered the worst fate of the civil servant; he ran out of forms¹

