

SOCIAL CHANGE AND KEY 'IMPACT EVENTS' IN A NEW ZEALAND HYDRO-CONSTRUCTION VILLAGE

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Location: Otematata is located in Waitaki Valley of the South Island, on State Highway 83 (SH83). The township sits between the rural settlements of Kurow and Omarama, and is a 95km drive inland from its nearest major urban centre – Oamaru on New Zealand's east coast (population 13,000) – which is also Otematata's main administrative hub. The town was the base for constructing the Benmore Hydro dam.



SIA Method: A longitudinal study of social change and key 'impact events' combining: secondary and archival data search, retrieval and analysis; thematic analysis of key informant interviews; and (postal) community survey (2013/14).

TIMELINE

**1958 – 1960s
Town Formation**

**Late 1960s – 1970s
Wind-down**

**1980s – 2000s
Transformation**

**Otematata today
and beyond**

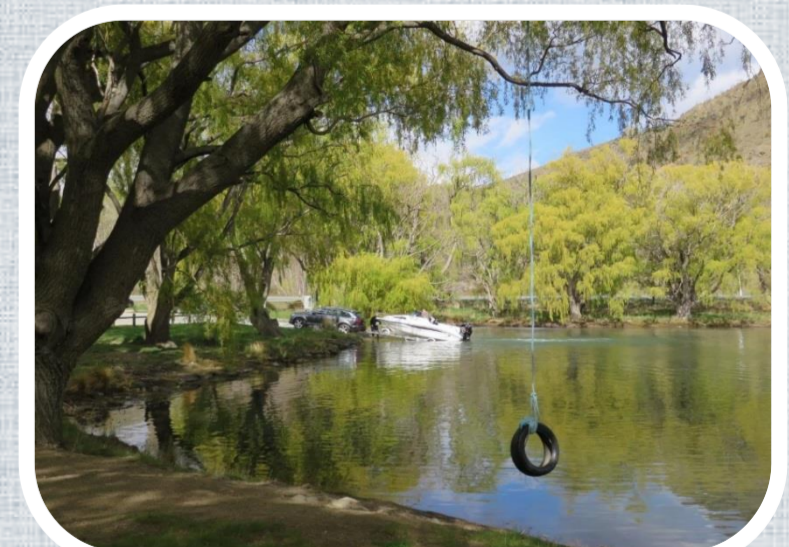
Lessons

IMPACT EVENTS

- Otematata was created in the late 1950s for the Benmore Dam workforce.
- The town's population grew quickly, peaking at over 4000 in 1964.
- Two hydro lakes were formed: Lakes Benmore and Aviemore.
- In the late 1960's and 1970s, the population dropped significantly with the hydro construction ending.
- Planned deconstruction of the town began.
- An appeal to retain some of the town was successful.
- Dwellings were sold to ex-dam workers and new holiday home owners.
- The hydro lakes started to attract domestic tourists (mostly campers in summer).
- Domestic demand for holiday homes grew (they were (and remain) cheaper than those for sale in premier lakeside destinations, such as Wanaka).
- Post-construction lakeside enhancement work was undertaken, creating new recreation landscapes, including campgrounds and walkways.
- The township experienced a shock in the late 1980s when the permanent (albeit small) team of hydro-staff – those who had remained in the village after the dams were built – were relocated to new headquarters in Twizel. But there was also a gain for the community: the building these staff occupied became the community centre with café, meeting spaces and gym.
- The resident population continued to decline and more services were lost, including the school in early 2000s – this was another big shock for the community.
- Events, entertainment and social activity today earn the town a positive reputation.
- The permanent resident population has declined to just 186.
- The town remains in its original form, but is showing signs of degradation. Some enhancement projects have been initiated by permanent residents and holiday home owners, including the Wetlands Walkway and playground (re)development.
- Newcomers have started small tourism businesses, but visitors are scarce in winter.
- The arrival of dam maintenance teams occasionally boosts the town's population.
- A new cycle trail (Alps 2 Ocean) passes through Otematata and will (potentially) raise its profile, increase visitor numbers and present new business opportunities. This development is viewed positively by locals & holiday home owners.
- Take account of the aftermath of project construction from project design stages.
- Social impacts continue over a long period of time.



Otematata 1962
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