

Union Church - Serpentine Diggings - Rough Ridge (built 1873)



On the Rough Ridge above Lake Onslow, many miles from any other building or sign of habitation, is situated one of the more interesting intact relics of the Otago Goldfields. The Presbyterian Serpentine Union Church was built in 1873 by public subscription from the miners resident on the surrounding diggings. Located at 3300 feet asl it is still the highest church in New Zealand.

On the occasion of the first service the minister arrived late, so after waiting some time the congregation of miners went down to the hotel for refreshments and drank deeply to keep out the keen July air - keener than ever at this altitude.

The service opened with a well known psalm and an encore was demanded by the congregation. The preacher after expressing very strong disapproval went on with the service which was however abbreviated.

After the gold ran out the church became the residence of the largest subscriber and his family.

The building has been partly restored by the Department of Conservation and is situated in the Serpentine Historic reserve. There is a 10 stamper quartz crushing battery in very good order nearby.

Access is by rough 4WD track off the western section of the Old Dunstan road, which is only passable in summer and autumn.

