

TUATAPERE – A HOLE IN THE BUSH *Homegrown Tuatapere student Julie Thomas was curious about her place of birth. She went to find out more about the history of her hometown.*

Imagine. A nice small town in the middle of nowhere where everybody knows everybody and you always get a hello, a friendly smile or a wave as you walk to work in the crisp, cold morning air.

Peaceful isn't it? Tuatapere. It being in the middle of nowhere you'd think there's nothing to such a small town but Tuatapere, as small as it is, was once considered a city less than one hundred years ago... (para 1)

History

Tuatapere sits in a natural basin in between Invercargill and Te Anau, it contained around six hundred people for the population back in 1909. When the Tuatapere Railway branch was up and running, around three thousand people lived in the town, this is why it was considered a city in 1918. In 1916, Port Craig which is located in Fiordland, used the Tuatapere rail to transport its great logs through and onto Invercargill. The mill out at Port Craig was two storeys high and produced up to 1800 cubic meters of sawn timber a month. The mill was famous for the use of the Lidgerwood steam hauler, the largest to be used in the New Zealand bush. The peak of the population was two hundred and thirty people with the mill employing at least one hundred fifty of those people. The mill carried on strong for many years but with the Great Depression, Port Craig fell into bankruptcy. People started leaving the town around 1928 and Port Craig was fully abandoned in 1930. Port Craig now is a part of the Humpridge Track and has a lodge for walkers. Also, still left standing at Port Craig is its old school house where thirty children got their education. Tuatapere was the original sight for a punt. The punt ferried people across the Waiau River and the area then was known as Papatotara. When a post office was established in 1904, the town sight was given its new name of Tuatapere. When Tuatapere was in full swing it had thirty sawmills to create a larger area for farming and other agricultural needs. (para 2)

School Life

Tuatapere Community College has been around for over one hundred years. Fifty years ago though, it was called Waiau District High School. The school started off as an Area School bringing in students from Orepuki, Piko Piko, Orawia, Clifden, Eastern Bush and Tuatapere itself to a school which had pupils from year zero right through to year thirteen. As the years passed, TCC became very large. The principle of the time, decided that building a primary school in the next field was better for the towns growing popularity. This made the school a senior campus and a junior campus; it was no longer regarded as an Area School. Tuatapere Primary school opened with ease and ran successfully for many years until the high school on the other side became small once again allowing the primary school to rejoin in 2002. TCC was once again an Area School. According to an ex-student, James Vernon the "record holder for the most canings in a year", "School was great" and it gave him "the things needed to succeed in life." I was sure that the teachers must have changed since James was at school. This wasn't true seeing as "there were some good ones and bad ones, teachers are teachers. Their pretty much the same as they are today." Even though the teachers are apparently the "same", Tuatapere Community College has come a long way since Mr Vernon's time. New changes have come in with a new uniform, new teachers and a new principle. There have been many new principles since James Vernon's time, the newest only being in office for two terms. The new principle has made some drastic changes since she has been in office. "New uniforms have made the school a lot more sophisticated and well disciplined, not everybody agrees but I believe it's what the school needed for a fresh start" she says. I personally used to go to Tuatapere Community College and when I was walking around, looking at my old school, I noticed that all the rooms had new numbers on the

doors; apparently “this is because the old number system was very confusing and many new students didn’t understand where they were going.” I thought the system was fine when I was at the school but hey, I’ve been there my entire life. Of course I would know where I was going. In recent events that the school has participated in such as the Area Schools Tournament between Tuatapere, Twizel, Lawrence, Catlins, Maniototo and Roxborough, Tuatapere came out on top winning the Area Schools trophy for the tenth time in a row. Tuatapere, known as Tui to most residents, has come rather a long way since it was first built but it still has a long way to go and will keep molding students for their futures. (para 3)

Tourism appeal

Tuatapere is known for its amazing views and great adventurous tramps. The main appeal for tourists who head to Tuatapere is the Humpridge Track. The Humpridge Track is a community funded track and was built by the locals of Tuatapere. The track was made around the Fiordland coastline and mountains. The track starts at a homestead called Rarakau, beautifully lonely and tranquil. Trampers then walk on flat ground for around an hour till they reach Devils Staircase. Nobody is quite sure but it is said to contain over two hundred steps going down a very steep hill. The trampers would then continue along the beach till they reached the Waikaou Swing Bridge, which takes them across to more beach. On this beach, the trampers can then see the hill on which they are about to climb later in the day. Once climbing up to Stage Point, if the trampers are lucky, they see the whole of Southland, Te Wae Wae Bay, Devery’s corner streetlight which is good ten-minute drive north of Tuatapere and most impressive view is the one where they get to see the hill they have just climbed. From there it is another hour to the first hut where the tired, worn out trampers are treated to a hot shower, a warm comfortable bed, five star dinner (if they wish to pay that is) and a cold beer for their achievement. The second and third days are much the same except day two is down hill, contains wind swept taverns and alpine plants. The third day is flat with a few slight hills and few different beaches along the way and then Devils Staircase again right near the very end. The Humpridge Track is the biggest part of the tourism appeal for Tuatapere; it brings in over two thousand trampers a year. I went and had a talk to the manager of the track, Trish King. The track was once inaccessible to people with certain disabilities. This was mainly aimed at people who are paralyzed from the waist down. Trish believes that she has helped make “the track more accessible to a wider range of people with the intro of upgrade options involving things like helicopters.” By making the track more accessible, the town is left with a better reputation for letting all kinds of people feel welcome in the town. Trish, being an “independent contractor,” works with many other companies such as “The Helicopter Line, Waiaurahi Jet, The Waiau Hotel and Trips & Tramps.” The track never used to work with these companies but now because Trish signed contracts with these companies, the track is earning more money which goes straight back into the community of Tuatapere. Some new attractions that are also attracting visitors and are apparently “amazing things to do to fill in the time”. These places are like “Yesteryears Café, a piece of history is within the tables and Last Light Lodge, the newest Café in town.” “Tuatapere is a growing place” and is once again becoming a huge people bringer. (para 4)

Tuatapere now...

Tuatapere does happen to be what most would call “the bottom of the world” or “truly the middle of nowhere.” But Tuatapere now is home to over nine hundred people, has a great school service and still has its place on the map in the tourism industry. The town is growing with every move it makes. Some of the moves, surprising. Others... not so much, but yet! Still doing well in today’s world. I was surprised about how much I really knew about my hometown, which happened to be basically nothing. Do you know where you truly come from? Like where you really come from and what your town was originally made for? Mine was for a punt so people could get across the river. What’s