

NZ Country Trails

Newsletter



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**Ever walked into a bar and said,
“this looks interesting, I think I will stay a while”**



Well, you will be in Blackball, a small settlement on the West Coast of the Sth Island, named after the Blackball Shipping Line, which leased land to mine for coal, and renowned for its political heritage. And you will be in the bar of the local hotel known as the "*Formerly* Blackball Hilton" hotel, offering traditional West Coast hospitality and a journey back in time.

Blackball's national prominence: At first, Blackball was a base for transitory gold seekers. But from 1893 a more settled community developed with the coal mine's opening. The school opened in 1895 and was apparently well overdue as the headmaster had to prise the unruly older boys from the trees surrounding the school before he could begin his day's teaching. And, in 1908 Blackball came to national prominence with the three month long Crib Time strike. The miners were breaking the law by striking and they were fined in court. Ironically it was their lunch hour that they wanted lengthened from 15 to 30 minutes and the judge adjourned the court for 80 minutes for lunch! They eventually got what they wanted and returned to work, signalling to the workers of New Zealand the benefits of collective action.



NZ's labour movement origins: The "Red Feds", Federation of Labour, and the N.Z. Labour Party evolved from this success. By 1925 Blackball's reputation for militancy had grown to such an extent that the N.Z. Communist Party headquarters were moved there from Wellington. The population of Blackball reached its peak of 1200 in 1928. As the 1930s approached times got tougher. When the men returned to work after Christmas in 1931 the especially imported Canadian mine manager informed the miners he would give work to only some of them. They decided they would all share the work so they were locked out for six months!



Worker uprisings, miners unrest: Bill Balderstone, once an ardent Communist and unionist, suddenly declared he was turning capitalist and opened his own tribune mine. He'd been negotiating with the Blackball Coal Co to work a tunnel adjoining their mine. All hell broke out! Thirty police were needed to keep order, meetings were banned and to this day memories of this bitter time linger amongst Blackball's older folk. The mine was closed for years.



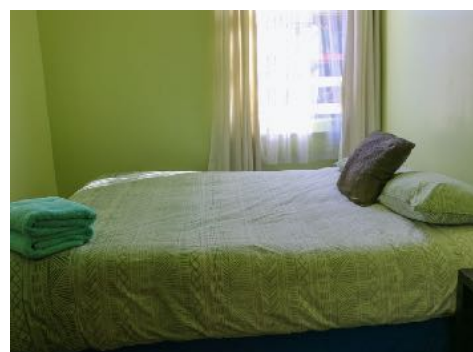
After the boom times: Once the roar of the coal trains had gone, the dredges had been sold for scrap and the mill and mines were quiet, so was the town. Many families moved away, selling their homes for a pittance. Blackball was but a shadow of its former self. Those who stayed behind witnessed an influx of "hippies" and holiday makers. This new wave enabled community facilities to remain – the school, the general store, the ambulance and fire brigade, the swimming bathes etc.



The story behind the hotel's name: It has its origins when a small hostelry wanted to open in Queenstown called The Backpackers Hilton. The Hilton hotel chain from America got to hear of it and took legal action. The small hostelry basically said "why are you picking on us The Blackball Hilton has been up on the West Coast for 20 years?" And that's when the trouble began, the legal argy bargy went backwards and forwards for a while, until the owners of The Blackball Hilton decided their pockets were not as deep as a corporation from America and settled out of court for a sum of money and changing the name. The name was duly changed to *Formerly* The Blackball Hilton, with the money from the settlement the owners built the biggest septic tank they could find. And that's another "story".



Back to the present: Today *Formerly* The Blackball Hilton is the centre of a small West Coast community surrounded by native bush and bird life and with an important history to pass on to passing tourists. On 1 May 2010, the Blackball Museum of Working Class History was opened "to celebrate the role working class people have played in creating the infrastructure and wealth of a nation...." There is now a diverse community with a growing school, a playcentre and several small businesses. Many commute from the plateau to work in Greymouth. The population is around 300 people with over 20 community groups operating in Blackball. "Our's is a real community. Blackball lives and the *Formerly* Blackball Hilton invites you to stay a while!" Click [here](#) for more information about *Formerly* The Blackball Hilton hotel.



We need to grow more trees other than Pine, so how do we do it?

At a recent NZ Farm Forestry Association presentation on the topic, 'Right Tree in the Right Place for the Right Reason', farm-forester Stan Braaksma emphasised that the following matters need to be understood prior to planting trees across New Zealand:

- The physical features and climate of a site is crucial in selecting the right tree species. Factors such as soil type, geology, moisture, and erosion severity significantly influence tree growth and success.
- Proper tree management and maintenance are essential for long-term success. This includes considering tree spacing, protection measures, and regular pruning to ensure healthy growth and prevent issues like branch breakage.
- The selection of tree species should be based on their suitability for the site's conditions and the intended purpose. Factors like growth rate, timber quality, carbon sequestration, and habitat suitability should be considered.
- Integrated planning, which combines different tree species and land uses, can effectively address erosion, enhance biodiversity, and maximise economic benefits.
- For successful tree planting, ongoing research and learning are necessary. Nursery practices, genetic diversity, and climate change adaptation should also be considered.
- The clients' stages of life and risk tolerance. Clients may have different goals and priorities, such as erosion control, timber production, or habitat restoration.



A practical example, Growing Cypresses for timber



Information Note 2, on the growing of Cypress trees, produced by the Ministry of Primary Industries, details how the right cypress species grown on the right site and well-managed throughout the rotation will produce high-quality timber with many potential end uses. The issues covered include:

- BEFORE YOU PLANT
- WHEN TO PLANT
- BUYING PLANTS
- HOW MANY TO PLANT
- PLANTING
- WEED CONTROL BEFORE AND AFTER PLANTING - CHEMICAL WEED CONTROL
- MANAGING YOUNG PLANTATIONS

Note: The best source of information and expertise about growing cypresses is the NZFFA Cypress Development Group.

The Information Note set out above is one of a series produced by the NZ Farm Forestry Association with funding from the MPI Sustainable Farming Fund. A series of videos is also available. For more information visit the NZ Farm Forestry Association website by clicking [here](#).



Free field days program:



There are still free fields remaining where NZ Farm Forestry members will share their experiences of what grows well and where, success and failure, costs and returns. These are:

- 11 May: Bulls
- 29 May: near Welsford
- 31 May: Marlborough
- 1 June: Kerikeri
- 8 June: Raetihi
- 8 June: Otaki (TBC)



Enrol on NZFFA website by clicking the link [here](#) or scan the QR code if you want to attend a field day in your area, or learn more about them. It will take you to more information and the registration form. Everyone is welcome. Tea and coffee will be provided. Click on the link [here](#) for more information about the services you will receive by joining NZ Farm Forestry Association.



What to look out for in our Newsletter's next edition

In our next newsletter we will feature more NZ Country Trails listers of special interest, who have a story to tell to those who travel through New Zealand's countryside.



NZ Country Trails

NZ Country Trails is a website on which rural property owners, interested in connecting to the tourism market, can list their activities and feature in regular newsletters to the travelling public.

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