

HISTORY OF MINING AND CLOSURE AT REEFTON

Gold was discovered on the West Coast of New Zealand's South Island in the 1860s.

Fortune seekers flocked from around the globe, seeking alluvial gold; tiny grains and nuggets washed down rivers and creeks. In the hills around Reefton there was another form of gold, trapped in the solid rock and buried deep underground in rich veins. Its discovery in 1870 made the district the centre of a gold mining boom.



EARLY GOLD

Tunnels and shafts drove deep into the rugged hills to reach reefs of gold-bearing quartz ore. Far below the surface, miners attacked the rock with picks and explosives. Above ground, stamper batteries crushed the quartz to release the precious metal.

As gold fever grew, so did the town of Reefton. Shares in mining companies were bought and sold amid wild speculation. Many of the small gold mining companies soon collapsed. New mining equipment was introduced in the 1890s. Rock drills and air compressors were introduced, and an aerial tramway was constructed to carry the ore. At Consolidated's Progress mine a giant battery of 65 stamps was built.

By the early 1900s Cornistown was a thriving township of 300 people supporting the busy Globe Progress underground mine. Eleven levels reaching down over 600 metres were used to mine the narrow quartz reefs. The mine closed in 1926 after producing over 400,000 ounces of gold. While other mines in the area would continue until the middle of the twentieth century, the era of underground gold mining at Globe Progress was over.



GLOBE PROGRESS MINE

The modern Globe Progress Mine seven kilometres southeast of Reefton opened in 2006, with ore processing underway in 2007. In the open pit, rock was drilled and blasted to retrieve gold-bearing ore. Trucks then hauled the gold-bearing ore to the processing plant. The mining fleet moved over one million tonnes of rock each month.

At the plant the ore was crushed and mixed with water to form a slurry. The addition of chemicals and further treatment produced a gold-bearing concentrate. This concentrate was railed over 600 kilometres through the Southern Alps to Palmerston. From here it was trucked to OceanaGold's Macraes Operation for final processing.

Bars of gold from the new Globe Progress were 93-94% pure gold. During each year of its operation the mine produced around 70-80,000 ounces of gold. Just over 610,000 ounces of gold was mined from the open pit operation mine between 2007 and 2016.

In 2016 – 90 years after it first stopped producing gold – Globe Progress closed again. But this time, the mine site would take on a new life.

GREEN FROM GOLD

OceanaGold's Globe Progress Mine near Reefton is the first modern large-scale gold mine in the South Island of New Zealand to move into closure. After mining ended the operation was known as the Reefton Restoration Project.

The aim of the restoration project is to leave the site in a safe and sustainable condition. Excess rock was contoured to the shape natural landforms, before being planted with native species. The rock stacks blend into the landscape. Their shape and cover mirror the surrounding topography, vegetation, and animal life.

Plants selected as initial ground cover were chosen for their ability to encourage the arrival of other native plant and animal species found in a mature West Coast forest. Tree stumps and logs were placed on the contoured rock stacks to reduce erosion. The woody material also encourages birds to perch, which helps disperse the seeds of a range of native plant species.

The small Souvenir open pit was filled, capped and planted with beech species and manuka. The Fossickers tailings impoundment was partially capped, contoured and planted. It will remain as a shallow lake, which has proved attractive to waterfowl and gulls.

Throughout the restoration project contractors planted approximately one million seedlings across an area of over 160 hectares. Ecosystems of indigenous species have been established across the site, populated by a variety of beech species and complemented by native conifers. The trees which have been planted will encourage the development of a mature natural forest. The water leaving site meets all of the water quality standards.

The project was a multidisciplinary effort, with the OceanaGold team working closely with the Department of Conservation, the West Coast Regional Council and the Buller District Council. The once-busy gold mine is now once again becoming part of its surroundings, providing a home to local wildlife and increasing biodiversity opportunities.

After two lives as a productive gold mine, Globe Progress now has a new life, creating green from gold.

