

Fallen giants, a coin toss and lots of steam.

Insider's Guide to the TSS Earnslaw & Walter Peak.

Over a century of service...

The Lady of the Lake

Named after Mount Earnslaw, and known as the Lady of the Lake, the Twin Screw Steamer Earnslaw has served Lake Wakatipu and its surrounding businesses and communities for over 100 years now.

The origin: In 1912 the boat was constructed by J. McGregor and Co in Dunedin. The company won the government tender to construct the vessel for £20,850 and the boat was run as part of the New Zealand Railways network. After initial assembly the Earnslaw was dismantled, loaded onto a train and transported to Kingston, where, with the help of 70,000 rivets, it was reassembled.

At work: The Earnslaw worked primarily as a cargo ship, with space for 1,500 sheep and 30 cattle on her decks. Working alongside paddle steamers Antrim and Mountaineer and the screw steamer Ben Lomond, the Earnslaw ensured the local high country stations were kept in stock.

The rescue: As lakeside road access improved in the 1960s the Earnslaw's use declined. The boat fell into mismanagement, with plans to scrap her. In 1969 Real Journeys provided a new lease of life with a pioneering tourism venture. The complete refit closed the upper deck, exposed the engine room and opened the Promenade café.

Presently: Now the last remaining commercial passenger-carrying coal-fired steamship in the southern hemisphere, the Earnslaw continues to serve. While over 100 years old the TSS still works 14 hour days during summer, and for eleven months each year.



TSS Earnslaw in construction ▲



TSS Earnslaw at work as a cargo ship ▲



TSS Earnslaw Stokers at work ▲

Key figures

On board

Cruising speed:
11 knots

Construction:
78 frames, 140 plates,
70,000 rivets

Length:
51 metres

Weight:
337 tonnes

Beam:
7.3 metres

Draught:
2 metres

Boilers:
Two locomotive-type, smoke
tube boilers. Working pressure:
73 kilograms per 6.5 squared
centimetres

Coal bunkers:
7 tonne capacity each
(loaded twice daily)

Coal consumption:
One tonne per hour

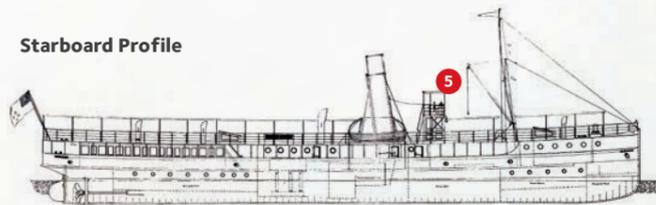
Steam-plant:
Two triple expansion 250 horse
power steam engines

Main deck / saloon:
Original native Kauri timber

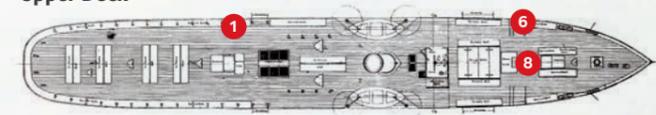
Capacity:
350 passengers

Sing-along suitability:
High

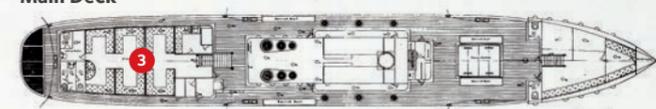
Starboard Profile



Upper Deck



Main Deck



Lower Deck



TSS Earnslaw

- Promenade deck:** While originally open to the elements this area was enclosed in the 1970s when bar and café dining were added
- Engine room:** This was opened up for viewing by the public with the tourism conversion of the Earnslaw in the 1970s
- Main deck / saloon:** With beautiful native Kauri timber this was once the site of the first class lounge
- Fo'c'sle gallery:** Originally the crew's quarters, this is now a gallery of historical imagery
- Wheel house / bridge:** While open when the Earnslaw was first launched the bridge is now fully enclosed
- Winch:** Still operational, used to load cargo
- Coal bunkers:** With a 7 tonne capacity these bunkers are loaded twice daily
- Concrete block:** This large weight is used to balance the ship once the coal is loaded on board

Stolen maidens. Strong fires.

The legend of the lake

The distinctive shape of the lake holds a compelling story of desire and revenge – how the 'hollow of the giant' was made. The giant in question was Matau, who snuck into a house one night and stole a maiden, Manata.



Lake Wakatipu ▲



Lake Wakatipu view from Queenstown ▲

Her lover, Matakauri, tracked the fleeing giant, only to discover her tied with unbreakable cord to Matau. Weeping bitterly, his tears dissolved the cord and the two lovers escaped.

He then returned and, as the hot northwester wind blew, set the sleeping giant alight. Waking in agony, Matau drew his legs up and, as the fire burned hotter, sank into the earth. His bent legs left a distinctive hole and, as the heat melted the snow from the mountains, water rushed in to fill the hollow. All that was left was the giant's heart. From beneath the waters it still beats, the mysterious rise and fall of the lake now in time to its haunting rhythms.

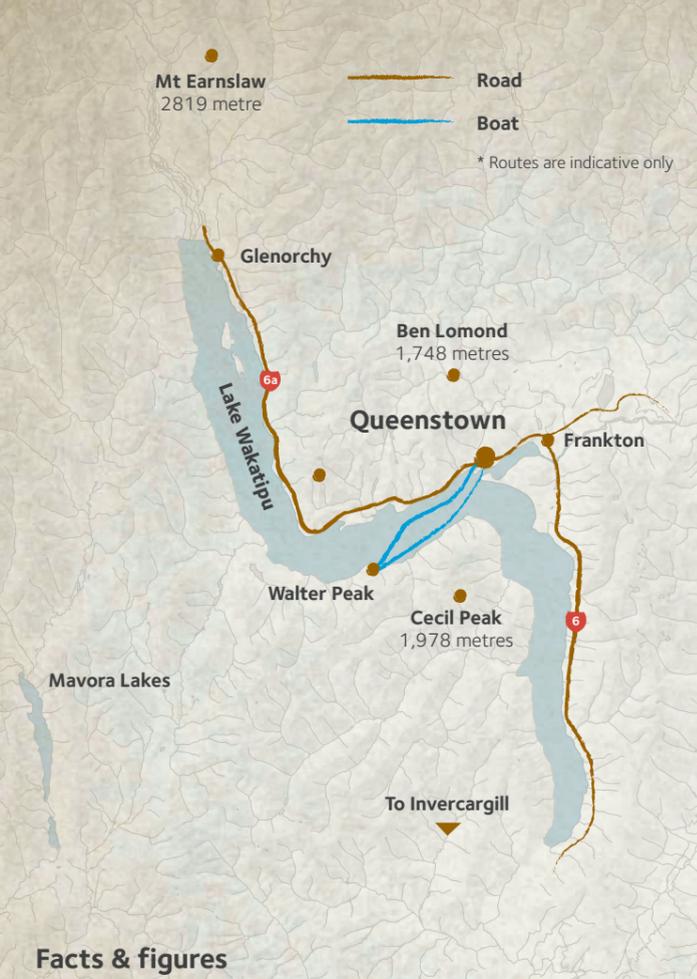
Of the many potential origins for the lake's name, one, Whakatipua, stands out. The translation means...

"The hollow of the giant."

Real Journeys is a family owned business founded in 1954 by tourism and conservation pioneers Les and Olive Hutchins. We offer experiences in Milford and Doubtful Sounds, Te Anau, Stewart Island and Queenstown.

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Facts & figures

Lake Wakatipu

Size: 84 kilometres (the second longest in New Zealand)
Elevation: Just over 312 metres above sea level
Depth: Averages 300 metres, with a greatest known depth of 410 metres
Temperature: Glacier-fed, 12°C (53°F) with an icy, unforgiving grip. Only varies 1 – 2 degrees all year
Wildlife: Brown & rainbow trout, longfin eel, salmon, pied shag, black-billed gull, mallard
Movement: The lake rises and falls every six minutes on average around 7.5cm, but at times up to 20cm!
Why it moves: This process, known as 'seiche', is due to variations in wind pressure from the surrounding mountains
Travel time: Queenstown to Walter Peak, 11kms via the TSS Earnslaw

Southern Maori

Hunting & gathering

With the area too cold for horticultural pursuits local Maori instead used various areas in Queenstown and Glenorchy as stop-off points on their annual journeys to collect food and Pounamu (green-stone). Settlements from the late 1700s have been discovered along the shores of the lake, with ovens and moa bones unearthed near Walter Peak.

Making history

Heads or tails?

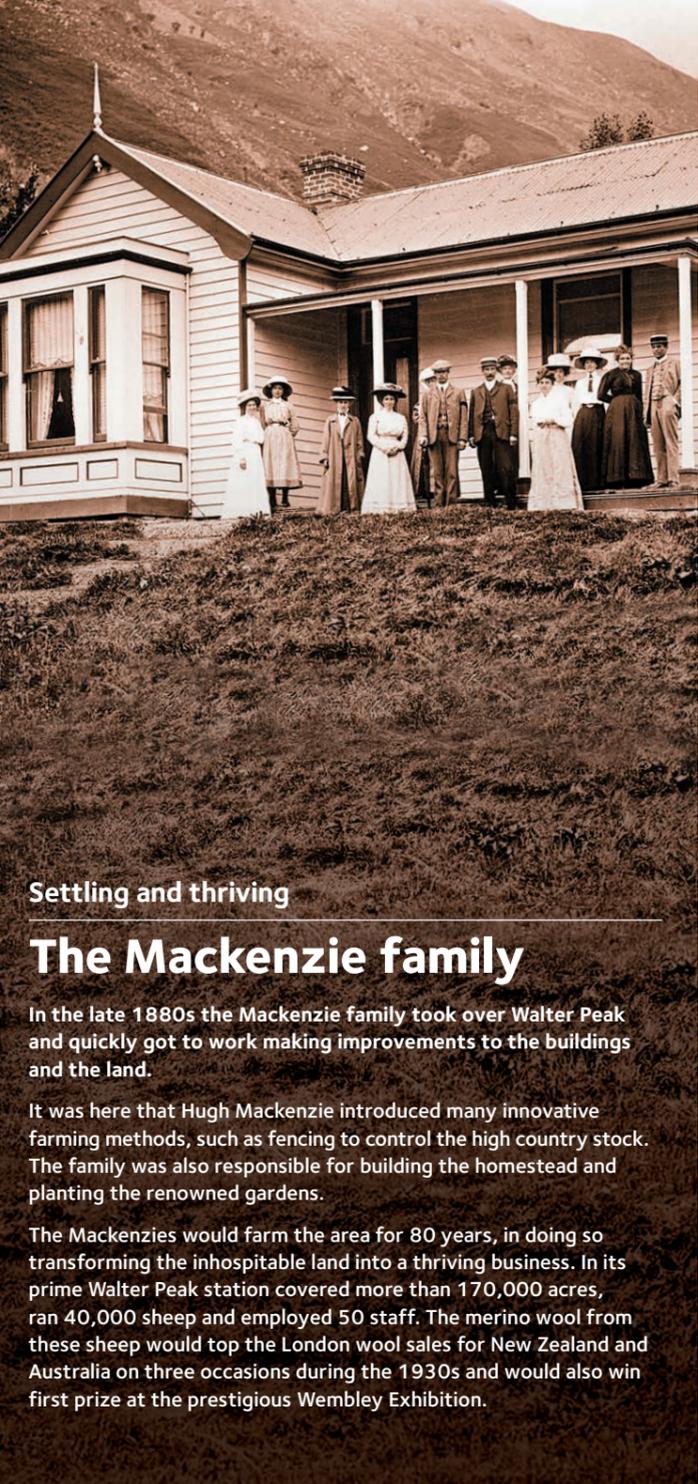
How much have you won or lost on a coin toss? The fate of the first European settlers was apparently sealed using such a method. Legend has it that William Rees and Nicholas Von Tunzelman flipped for which side of the lake to settle on in the late 1850s. Rees got the Queenstown side (with the gold rush and a boom time). Von Tunzelman got Walter Peak (with snowstorms, stock loss and money woes that eventually forced him from the land).



Walter Peak

The family name

Much of modern Queenstown, its streets, suburbs and geographical features, share a name with one man's family. Explorer and surveyor William Gilbert Rees stamped his mark on the region when, as the first European settler of Queenstown, he set to naming the highlights after those nearest and dearest.
 His son, Cecil Walter Rees, was the inspiration for both Cecil Peak and its slightly lower companion – Walter Peak. The suburb of Frankton was named after his wife, Frances.



Settling and thriving

The Mackenzie family

In the late 1880s the Mackenzie family took over Walter Peak and quickly got to work making improvements to the buildings and the land.

It was here that Hugh Mackenzie introduced many innovative farming methods, such as fencing to control the high country stock. The family was also responsible for building the homestead and planting the renowned gardens.

The Mackenzies would farm the area for 80 years, in doing so transforming the inhospitable land into a thriving business. In its prime Walter Peak station covered more than 170,000 acres, ran 40,000 sheep and employed 50 staff. The merino wool from these sheep would top the London wool sales for New Zealand and Australia on three occasions during the 1930s and would also win first prize at the prestigious Wembley Exhibition.

Challenges and triumphs

Building a future

The Colonel's Homestead was constructed in 1908 as a wedding present for Hugh's son, Colonel Peter Mackenzie. After a fire damaged the homestead in 1977 it was carefully reconstructed.



The gardens were started in the 1870s when two of the region's oldest introduced trees were planted – the Sycamore and Oak now protected. A native Kauri tree was also planted here in the 1960s and, in the decades since, the gardens have gradually evolved and enhanced.

Such comfort and support was vital – in the early days it was an isolated place and the trip via rowboat to Queenstown took five – seven hours. Even so, the Mackenzie family would make this journey every Sunday to get to the local Presbyterian church.



Wildlife

Meet the locals

Dogs

Two breeds provide the perfect mix of skill and energy here. The border collie is known as the most intelligent and obedient of all dogs. Energetic and extremely focused, it uses eye contact instead of barking. The huntaway is the opposite. It literally barks to 'hunt sheep away', making it ideal for when flocks disappear from view during steep country herding.

Huntaway
Colouring: Black & tan
Strengths: Agility, intelligence, stamina
Lifespan: 12 – 14 yrs

Border Collie
Preparation: Takes 18 mths to train
Key attributes: Energetic, athletic, smart

Sheep

There are three species farmed at Walter Peak. The Merino is bred only for its wool – which is some of the finest, softest and most luxurious in the world. The Romney, a distinct New Zealand breed, produces meat and coarse wool ideal for textiles. The Corriedale, a cross between the Merino and other long-wool breeds, is a dual-purpose breed also.

Merino Sheep
Origin: Modern breed first developed in Spain
Value: The finest wool
Farmed for: Wool only

Corriedale Sheep
Farmed in: New Zealand, Australia, USA, Patagonia
Farmed for: Dual-purpose (wool and meat)

Farmer

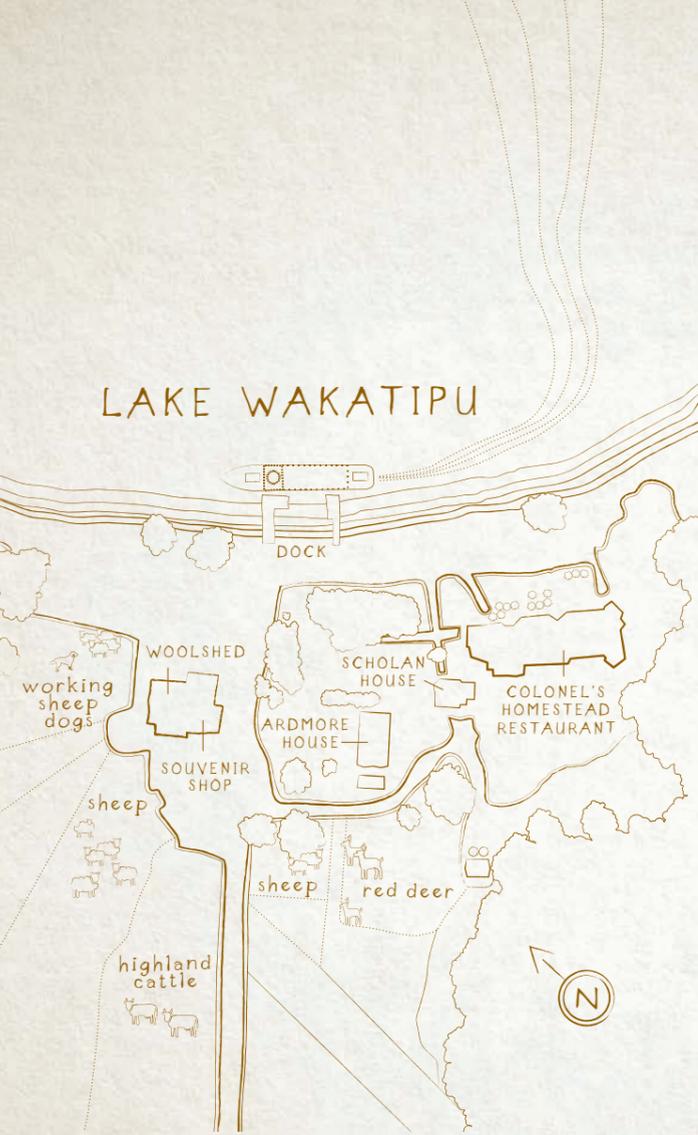
Introduced into the area in the mid 19th century the farmer is a homo sapien breed known for a connection with the land, a tight-knit community and a fit, healthy and hardworking lifestyle.

Farmer
Communication: Uses voice, whistles and hand signals to command dogs
Diet: Diverse, occasionally enhanced by barley/hops/yeast/water mix

Cattle and Deer

There's more than sheep here! The Scottish Highland Cattle is renowned for their lean meat and ability to handle the cold, making this hardy breed ideal for the tough conditions. Red deer were originally introduced via Australia for local hunters to stalk. There are now still thousands running wild (and rigorously hunted) and many more farmed commercially.

Highland Cattle
Walter Peak origin: From Queen of England's Balmoral Estate herd
Known for: Large horns, shaggy red fibre
Survival ability: Skilled at finding new food sources in mountain areas



Walter Peak land restoration project

In 2014, Real Journeys embarked on a major conservation project after buying the land around the Colonel's Homestead that makes up Walter Peak Farm. The company began clearing its land (155 hectares) of the invasive non-native trees and weeds that have been spreading rapidly across Walter Peak and the surrounding Central Otago landscape. Pockets of native bush are being planted and a public walkway created along the foreshore to the stunning area of Beach Point.