



Oral Histories of the Selwyn Waikirikiri River

Summer Scholarship Report

WCFM Technical Report 2019-002

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& Selwyn Waikirikiri Working Group

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Executive Summary

The aim of this summer research project was to collect a series of oral histories exploring how the local non-Māori community observed, interacted with, and valued the Selwyn Waikirikiri River prior to 1990. The results of this study have been presented to the Selwyn Waikirikiri River Working Group (a sub-committee of the Selwyn Waihora Zone Committee). The working group seeks to restore the Selwyn Waikirikiri river to an acceptable, valued state. This research helps to build understanding of how local communities, who often may not view the river through a Māori-cultural lens, have interacted with the river in the past, and what they have valued about it.

Previously there have been few oral history projects undertaken regarding rivers in New Zealand. The comments and recollections gathered from the 9 community members who participated in this study are provided here in their original state (as quotations), without significant analysis or interpretation. They highlight some interesting themes, such as the premise that river health is related to the health of social communities. These commentaries provide a general insight into the macro-scale changes that have occurred in both the ecology and function of the Selwyn Waikirikiri river, over the last 100 years. Photos provided by participants help to create a visual record this change.

Future research may seek to extend this work, seeking the perspective of a greater number of participants and perhaps focusing on other areas of the Selwyn Waikirikiri catchment. Further exploration of themes emerging from this study may provide additional and valuable detail into the history of the river.

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Supplementary information:

Note that transcripts of the interviews are available as supplementary information and can be obtained by contacting the Waterways Centre (waterways@canterbury.ac.nz)

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In August 2018, the Waterways Centre for Freshwater Management (a joint partnership between University of Canterbury and Lincoln University) commissioned and funded this Oral History project for the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri river Working Group. The project formed a Summer Scholarship Research project hosted by supervisors in the Faculty of Environment, Society & Design and in the Waterways Centre for Freshwater Management. The aim of the project was to collect a series of oral histories exploring how people have observed, interacted with, and valued the river prior to 1990.

The Selwyn-Waikirikiriri river Working Group is a sub-committee of the Selwyn Waihora Zone Committee, which provides guidance on the management of the Selwyn Waihora Zone in the Canterbury Water Management Strategy. The Working Group has been formed to develop a plan for restoring the river and will receive a copy of this oral histories study. The Selwyn-Waikirikiriri Oral History project will be used by the Working Group to:

1. Inform the plan for restoring the river.
2. Help to build understanding of how communities (both past and present) interact with the river, and what they value about it.
3. Contribute to an archive of community-based information about the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri river.

Oral histories are a method of gathering information, typically being in the form of a sound or video recording of an interview featuring a participant, who speaks from personal experience regarding a subject of historical interest (Ministry for Cultural and Heritage, 2016).

Although oral histories are used throughout the globe, they have not been applied widely to rivers within New Zealand. A few oral histories undertaken in recent years relating to New Zealand's rivers include Paul Moon's 'The Waikato: A History of New Zealand's Greatest River' (2018) and Catherine Knight's 'New Zealand's Rivers – An Environmental History' (2016).

1.2 The Selwyn-Waikirikiriri River

The Selwyn-Waikirikiriri river holds two names, originally named by Ngai Tahu as 'Waikirikiriri' - meaning 'river of gravel or stones' (Davie, 2016), and later renamed in the late 1840's by the Canterbury Association surveyor, Captain Joseph Thomas to the Selwyn River (Selwyn District Council, n.d.).

The Selwyn-Waikirikiriri river begins in the Canterbury foothills above Whitecliffs and flows through the Canterbury Plains to Lake Ellesmere/Te Waihora (see Figs 1 & 2). The river originates and is fed from two sources – springs in the lower Canterbury plains and rainfall within the foothills of the upper catchment, the flow of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri is often very seasonal with flows being high in winter and early spring and low during summer, the river

often features dry stretches of river bed through its upper reaches during summer and can have violent flooding in winter months (Selwyn District Council, n.d.).

The river has been a highly contentious setting in the last few years, particularly with respect to documented and perceived health risks for swimmers, and low water flows. Coes Ford and Chamberlains Ford in particular are much loved by generations of people as places for recreation and leisure along the river. The Selwyn-Waikirikiriri plays an important role as a key influencer into the state of Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere, as outlined in a biennial “State of the Lake” report (Ford, Hughey & Taylor, 2017).

2 Methods

This project aimed to explore the social history of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri river, collecting data on how people have observed, interacted with and valued the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri river. This project was undertaken through qualitative interviews with people who have memories of the Selwyn River prior to 1990.

The Selwyn-Waikirikiriri River Working Group initially identified 7 individuals who had expressed a willingness in principle to participate as interviewees, 5 of which were later interviewed. Additional interviewees were recruited using the ‘snowball technique’ – asking interviewees to suggest additional individuals who might have a willingness to participate as interviewees, with a total of nine participants being interviewed.

Initial contact with potential interviewees was made by telephone or email, with the research explained and their participation requested. Upon agreement to participate in a face-to-face interview, an information sheet was sent out explaining the research in more detail, including the procedure for arranging interview time and location. This information sheet explained the interview process including the fact that interviews will be recorded, that interviewees may review their own interview transcripts and gave the option of storing their interview recording and transcription in a New Zealand public archive.

Nine interviews were undertaken at a site of convenience to the participant, in all cases this presented as the participant’s residence or Lincoln University. The interviews followed a semi-structured interview format following a range of thematic questions (see Appendix 1). The interview schedule provided a guide of possible questions, outlined four key themes that were to be followed, these were asked in no particular order, the order was dependant on the conversations evident within each interview.

The interview schedule provided a basis for a series of questions relating to the each theme.

The first theme was ‘general biography/life context’, which established family history with the area and importance of the river for livelihood. The schedule then explored interactions with the river, posing questions relating to different life stages, such as interactions as a child, young person or adult and the different contexts of each life stage, e.g. working, recreation or travelling. As well as other perceived interactions and witnessed interactions from other groups or communities. This was followed by the theme of ‘observations of the river over time’, this theme explored questions relating to changes of the river over time, where these

took place, when and what changed. This section also explored definitions of a healthy river systems and the reasons behind each given statement. The final theme outlined in the interview schedule followed the 'attitudes and beliefs' relating to the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri river system. This theme explored questions relating to feelings regarding the state of the river, areas of importance within the river system and recommendations regarding the river.

With permission of the participant the interview data was digitally recorded. The data was then downloaded and transcribed before being manually analysed, initially according to responses to the semi-structured research questions, and then according to any broader themes that emerged from the data.

Participants were given multiple opportunities to withdraw from the research, which was outlined both in a research information sheet and consent form. Participants were able to withdraw anytime leading up the interview as well as during and up to one week after the transcript had been sent for checking. Contact details of the researcher and supervisors were provided on the research information sheet. Written consent was sought at the commencement of each interview using the consent form. The project and its methodology were approved by Lincoln University's Human Ethics Committee.

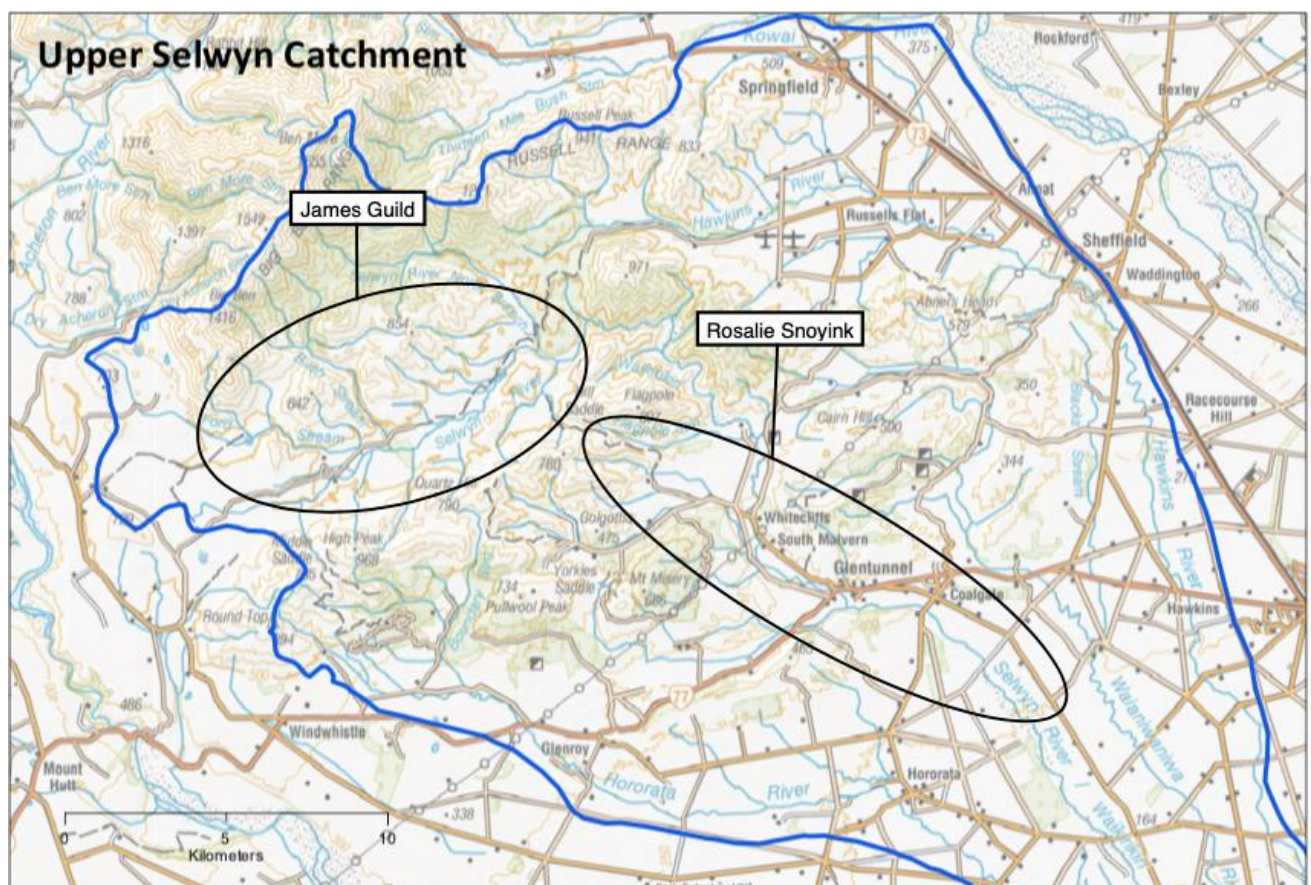


Figure 1. Location of oral histories within the upper catchment of the Selwyn Waikirikiriri river

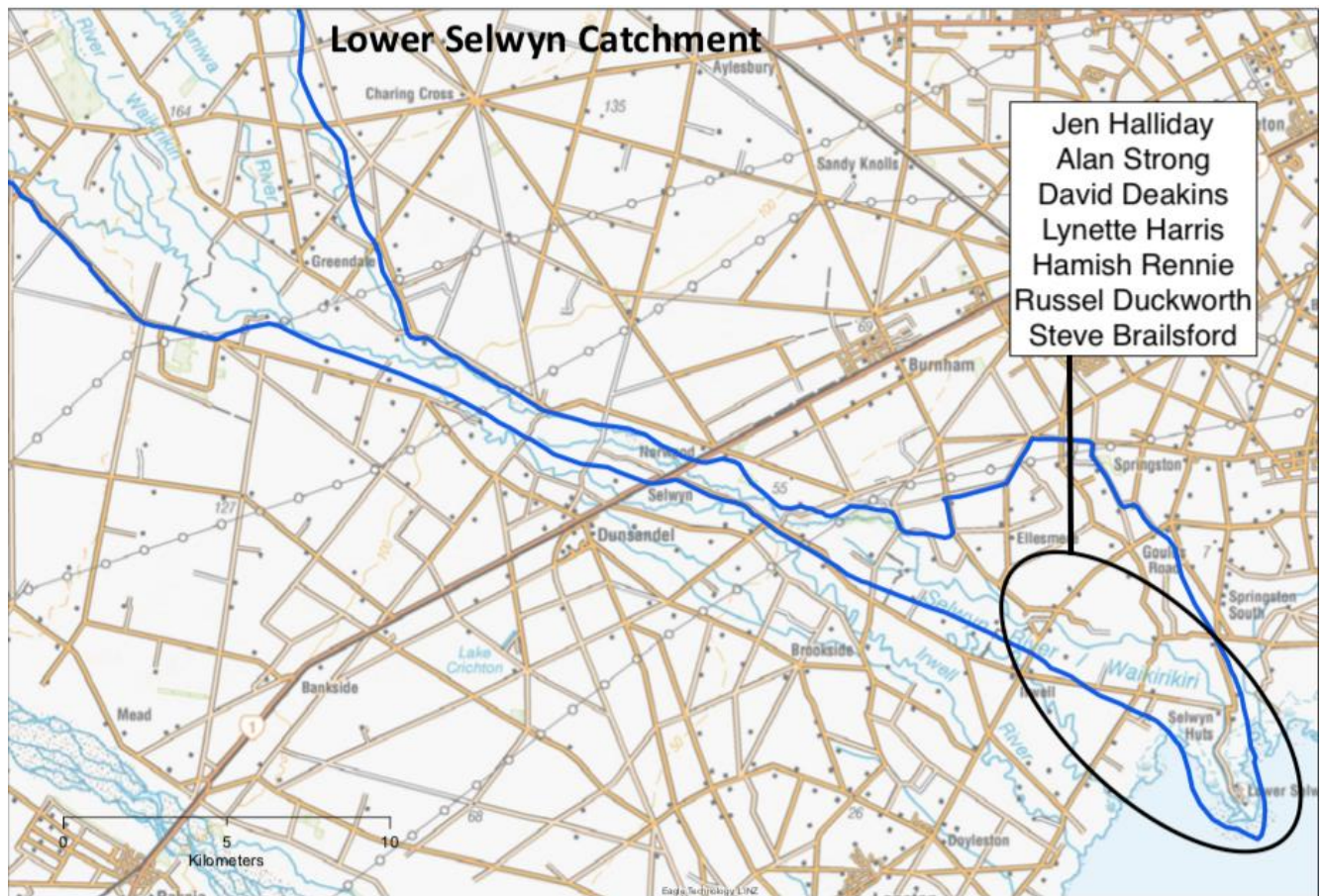


Figure 2 Location of oral histories in the lower Selwyn Waikariri Catchment

3 Results: Oral History Summaries

This section presents summaries of the nine oral histories, providing eyewitness accounts from across the entire Selwyn-Waikirikiriri river system (see Figs 1 & 2). Full transcripts of each oral history is available as supplementary information (please contact the Waterways Centre at waterways@canterbury.ac.nz). The oral histories have been arranged in chronological order of family history - for example, Hamish Rennie shares family memories from as far back as 1863 through to the present day.

Table 1 Overview of oral history participants

Participant	Dates relevant to oral history
Hamish Rennie	1863 - present day
Lynette Harris	1903 - present day
Russell Duckworth	1910 - present day
Jen Halliday	1930s - 2005
Alan Strong	1940s - present day
Steve Brailsford	1960 - present day
David Deakins,	1960s - present day
Rosalie Snoyink	1965 - present day
James Guild	1973 - present day

3.1 Hamish Rennie



Figure 3 Hamish Rennie

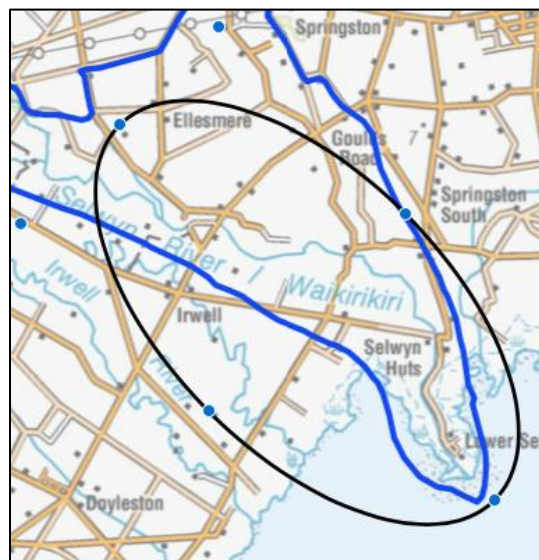


Figure 4 Location of Hamish Rennie's oral history

Hamish has known the river throughout his life and his family history with the river stretches back to 1863, as noted:

"We are living on land at the moment that was first bought by our ancestors back in 1863."

Hamish is both a descendant of the Coes family and Rennie's, two of the original settler families in the Selwyn area:

"My mother was a Coe from Coes Ford... and my father was a Rennie from Doyleston."

Hamish spent his childhood years growing up along the banks of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri, with his family residence located directly opposite the Upper Selwyn Huts on the southern banks of the river. Hamish spent his childhood years of the 1960s to 1978 near the river before he moved away from the district to attend Otago University in 1978, he later returned to the river in 2000.

Hamish's comments are in reference to his experience with the lower catchment of the river, in this case being from the Lower Selwyn Huts and Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere up to Chamberlains Ford (See Fig 4).

Interactions with the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri

The Selwyn-Waikirikiriri was a large feature of Hamish's childhood as can be seen through the stories of fond memories of his time by the river which he shares, such as his time spent watching the river's aquatic life:

"I used to go and enjoy just watching the fish and watching the eels especially through the water."

Hamish comments upon the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri during his childhood feeling like a safe environment:

"Oh yeah, I mean like I didn't have my parents monitoring, when I was out there we would look after townies and other relatives that came and would keep an eye on them but it would just be kids looking after the younger kids, older kids being maybe 10 or 11 and you were sort of in charge of looking after the others. You would go for walks with my dog for hours down at the river."

Hamish further mentions his time using row boats during the 1960s and 1970s, remarking on the specific boat design that was present at the Selwyn Huts during his childhood:

"Loved it, spent time swimming in it, I learnt to swim in the river, I kayaked on the river a lot, I didn't fish, my mother fished but I preferred watching the fish so I would spend a lot of time in the kayak you know, or the row boat, I got my own kayak fairly young which was really fun but we have big old river row boats that were specially designed for the river, there is only about one or two of them left on the river now, big wooden heavy boats, but they really glided really well, pull on the ores and they would really glide far... They were designed for a river like this, made flat bottomed and ours had a very slight depressed bottom so it had two Vogel shaped and two slits... and slit keel which made it glide very well. When we used to have the rowing races on the river, it usually went extremely well."

The bottom eventually rotted out of it and by then everyone was using cheap tinnies and plastic things, but we used to fit several sheep into that and dogs and a couple of people to take across the river and stuff from one side to the other.”

Additionally, Hamish mentions an interaction between the Selwyn Huts community and his family farm which was located directly across the river:

“The people from the huts used to come across the dairy and line their milk cans there and my father would fill up the milk cans and they would row back across the river with their milk.”

Observations of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri over time

Hamish also shares his observations of the river’s state and health over time. Commenting on the depth and clarity of the water during the 1960s, Hamish describes a waterway that is clear and transparent with a notable depth to it:

“We used to walk about two thirds across the river and then the water would go over your head, so there was always a deep channel somewhere in the river... you could always see the bottom at the Selwyn Huts except when there was a flood, at the Upper Huts you could always see the bottom and for a far way down until you would get intrusion from the lake water coming in.”

He mentions however that upon his return to the river in 2000 onwards he noticed a decline in water clarity around the Upper and Lower Selwyn Huts:

“When I came back, I would kayak down the river, there was the milky white discoloration that started sort of at the bottom end of the huts and over time would move up to mid-way and towards the upper end of the huts.”

However, it is also noted in the dialogue that Hamish noticed a presence of algae as early as 1968, stating:

“When we had algae blooms on the river we would, they would make great throwing things, you would make a big slime ball and sling it at them, the river weed didn’t roll up as well and so was useless for throwing. But the slime was great... It would have been from 1968 that there would have been slime on the river.”

He also noted the dramatic changes he has witnessed both to the health of the river and the decline in human interaction with the waterway, as quoted below:

“I went away for about 30 years and I came back various times but the biggest thing I noticed was that the river used to be the heart and the focus of everyone’s recreation activity.... The change was quite dramatic in that time, you would use to have all of these people using the river and it was

the focus of things, all these boats on it, there would be the boat races every New Year and stuff like that and just the colour of the water changed dramatically as well."

Thoughts, beliefs and emotions associated with the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri

Throughout this dialogue Hamish expresses his concern for the river and his feelings regarding his observed changes both physically within the river and the decline and difference in human interaction with the waterway. Hamish shared his beliefs on the changes he has witnessed, notably commenting on a link between the health of the river and community:

"People are a really good indicator of the health of a river. If they're not using it then that's a pretty good indicator that it is not healthy."

Additionally stating:

"Yeah it will attract people that are more likely to just be there to play and recreate on it and when it's not so healthy the only people you tend to go there are scientists and people you want to study it or those doing restoration. Visits to replant and stuff like that. Usually not people from the area, they are usually from somewhere else who come and do the planting thinking they are doing something good."

And in a response to a question on whether he believes it to be important to restore the river to a healthier state Hamish states:

"Absolutely. No doubt at all. I think it should be used, it used to be a major playground for people from the city and I think it needs to be, when I see the landings at the huts being restored and people using them out in the water and stuff like that... that would be my indicator of when it would be healthy again."

Furthermore, Hamish remarks on the deep connection that he feels towards the river:

"It's a place, it's a flow, it's a person, it's someone I relate to. I do bad things to it I feel bad about it and apologize to it, so I try not to do bad things to it, so I guess I feel it's a person, it's a water body with whom I have had a relationship with all of my life."

Additionally stating:

"Otherwise why on earth would I be living in an area that is probably going to be flooded by lakes or sea with climate change, so it's purely because I really love the river and the place."

However, Hamish also describes how his relationship with the river has soured in recent years:

"We used to go collect all sorts of stuff from the river, we used to collect cow pats from the Coes Ford that would end up on our places, and they

seemed to drop out at our place. We you know bits of cars, bits of tents that would wash up after a flood and we would clean up those, well we used to. But now we feel so distant and disconnected from the river that we are not walking it every day. In fact, I have not walked it since probably since July I haven't walked it. Now that's partly because it is not grazed as much as we used and because it's not as pleasant and because it's just so many battles. Yeah battles with ECAN over the river have been the closest thing to pushing me to sell."

Hamish also describes what he would like to see change in the river and mentions a desire to retain the identity of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri:

"Well it's got to feel safe to swim in again. To get rid of the cyanobacteria type algae, the black stuff that comes down, but very close on its heels would be I think the sedimentation is a greatly under-rated problem I think the amount of silt that is coming down the river is a problem. ...(T)he Waikirikiriri basically means gravel bottom. If it loses its gravel then it loses its name, its identity. So that is a major concern and of course just the water clarity I'm not sure which of those three is the most important. I can't sort of differentiate the three."

3.2 Lynette Harris



Figure 5 Lynette Harris

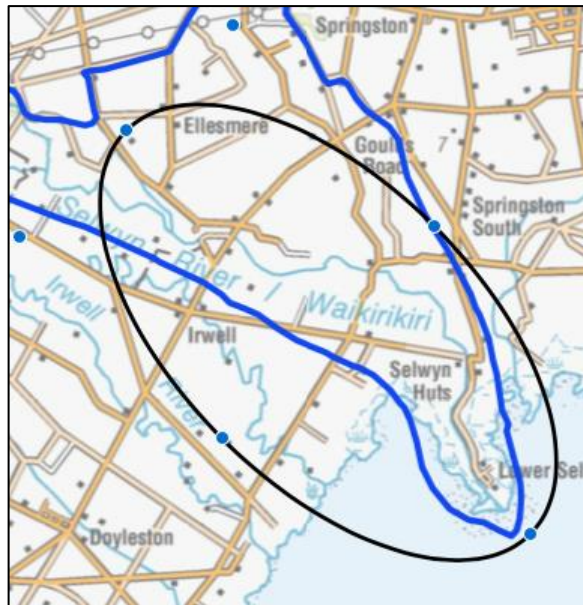


Figure 6 Location of Lynette Harris' oral history

Lynette's family are long time dwellers of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri river. Her family first moved to the river in 1903 when they moved from Okains Bay, Banks Peninsula to a property in Springston South. She states that her family is now in its six or seventh generation living near the river:

"So, we've basically in the area now up with my grandson we are up to six or seven generations."

Lynette's remarks are in reference to her experiences with the lower catchment of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri river (See Fig 6)

Interactions with the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri

Lynette has spent much of her life near and around the river, sharing stories of when she was a child and talking of the different interactions that she has had with the waterway. Lynette describes the river as a place of relaxation:

"It was a place of relaxation for us and it was really very important to us as far as the land went, being farming in the district. It was a place for the locals to gather and it was just, because we lived between the LII and the Selwyn. Both of the rivers were sort of like our very important boundaries."

Further to this, Lynette also shares a number of recollections of her interactions with the waterway as a child, mentioning the river being a meeting place for friends to engage in recreation together through the 1950s until sometime in the 1970s:

“Well we went down there for swimming, we would bike from our place in what was Tramway Road which is now Powell’s Road. So, we would bike there, and my girlfriends would come from other parts of Springston South from Days Road and Sergeants Road. So, we would be pretty hot, we would have our own lunch and mum would make up a cordial drink up for us and way we would go. Mostly I remember after the stop bank went in. So, you used to have to get off your bikes and walk up the stop bank and then slide down into the Coes Ford. We used to get changed down there behind the tree, we didn’t bike in our togs and then we would go to our swimming hole which usually wasn’t where the townies were.”

Lynette also mentions watching local farmers helping to tow people out from Coes Ford during her childhood years of the 1950s to 1970s:

“Well they would be in the main part of Coes Ford where the bridge goes across, you know the concrete pad that goes across. There didn’t used to be a concrete pad. They were always getting pulled out by the local farmer with his local tractor when they got stuck in there.”

Additionally, Lynette comments upon an aspect of local knowledge that was required in regard to finding the ‘best’ place to gather on the river:

“The town people would congregate in the shallow parts and we would walk through ... the gorse and broom and whatever and fallen trees and climb over fences to find our spot.”

Lynette further remarks that during the 1950s and 1960s an abundance of cars heading to the river during weekends:

“It was always very busy in the weekends. We used to sit at our place and could look out to Days Road and there were streams of cars going. And also, in the summer they would come out in their tents and camp out there. Sort of in the 1950s and 1960s people didn’t really have big camper vans or anything, it was mainly old tents.”

Additionally, Lynette comments on a two-day event over New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day down at the Selwyn Huts:

“Every New Year’s Day it was New Year’s Eve that they would have the concert down there at Selwyn Huts and then the next day was the sports day and people would come and have boat races, swimming races, all sorts of races you know and all in the river. And it was down in near, well it used to be the Pritchard’s who used to live there, it was were the top huts or where the shingle starts just at the end there. And that was always there on the bank.”

She also notes the presence of a ‘swag’ who would visit the family homestead, exchanging some form of work in return for food:

"Swag used to come to our house and mum would usually get him to sharpen her scissors and in return he would get food or whatever and I think he would probably go down and sleep down there at the river."

Observations of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri over time

Lynette describes her observations of the river, over her time in the area. She mentions a changing river and remarks on the excitement that came with finding each new swimming hole as they appeared.

"When there was a flood that went through, someone on the school bus would usually come to school and say, 'oh I've just been down and found out where the new swimming hole would be'. Because as the river came down it changed, it changed the banks, it changed the swimming holes and everything."

Further to this Lynette comments upon the flood prone nature of the river throughout the 1940s and 1950s:

"Well in the forties we have two floods throughout the house which were because of the river and then there was the floods in the 50s. When they built the stop banks to stop the floods there was the big one in 1951, it took the bank out. And well yes there was always water in the paddocks across from us which sometimes had to do with the heavy rain and remember, it was a swamp that we lived in. Springston South. But in recent years there was a flood a few years ago where they evacuated. Down at the bottom huts there was always water flooded in there. Always, every winter basically. Well we don't wear gumboots around all the time for nothing."

Within the dialogue she mentions an abundance of aquatic weed within the river, stating:

"There was a lot of duck weed which you had to swim through... yeah the weed cutter used to go up and down there, I think."

Furthermore, Lynette mentions a presence of slime on the river stones throughout her childhood years, sometime from the 1950s to the 1970s:

"Well it was clear, you could see the cockabullies' you could see the trout. There was always the scummy weed slime, that was always there on the boulders. But yeah it was. It used to flood. Sometimes it wasn't so good, but a good flood would always clear it out."

She also mentions that there is now a buildup of shingle in the river that wasn't present in the 1970s:

"There is more shingle that has built up in the middle of it. Well going right back they used to go down with their horse and tray down to the river and get their shingle for their driveways or whatever they needed to build, the Springston South Hall foundations were built with the river stone."

Thoughts, beliefs and emotions associated with the Selwyn-Waikirikiriki

Lynette shares a number of her personal beliefs and attitudes regarding the river. She mentions a stigma between within the Selwyn Huts, between the Upper Huts and the Lower Huts:

“There was always this stigma against the top huts and the bottom huts. You know like, we are the top huts and you’re the bottom huts.”

She also notes her feelings surrounding the notoriety that the river has developed in recent decades, stating:

“Personally I feel that there is a lot of hype about the river and I think personally that it is good that they are addressing the problems with the river but there is also a lot of information out there that is anti the farmers and the farmers have been doing a lot of good work and I can see it from both sides. From a farming family and farming ourselves. But unfortunately, we are paying for what went on in the past and it is at least being addressed. So, I also think that there is a lot of bureaucracy that gets in the way.”

Lynette also shares her belief on what a healthy Selwyn River might look like, commenting on a desire for the river to look like it had in the past:

“Well we have a picture of what the river used to look like at the height of summer here. Well I think a river that is free of a lot of the stones that accumulate, I mean the Waikirikiriki translates to the river of stones and I am not meaning in the upper reaches, it has always gone underground there. A lot of people don’t realize that. Well I just would like to see it so people can go and enjoy it.”

Furthermore, she comments upon her desire to see greater management of willows along the banks of the lower reaches of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriki:

“I would like to see a lot of the willows taken out, because I think they, I mean it is good to have the great big trees where you can go and sit under but a lot of them further down where people don’t see when you go further around where the McCleods and that farm and down further a lot of them are just blocking the river as well. So, it needs clearing out and it is needing a lot of the shingle taken out. There is a great big bank, it is like an old island down there now.”

Lynette provided a number of fascinating photographs of the river throughout the 20th century (Figures 7 – 13).



Figure 7 Trevor Mounce on tractor bringing milk to meet the milk truck. Freda McBean and Malcolm Kimber "assisting" (Photo Credit: Elsie Kimber, year unknown. Donated by Lynnette Harris)



Figure 8 Arthur Payne's truck stranded. Donated by Lynnette Harris, year unknown



Figure 9 Trout caught at the Selwyn. Approx. 1922 (Photo Credit: Elsie Kimber, donated by Lynette Harris)



Figure 10 The Selwyn Huts, year unknown (Photo Credit: Mr and Mrs G Shufflebotham, donated by Lynette Harris)



Figure 11 "McLeod's Corner" (Donated by: Lynette Harris, 19th April 1951)



Figure 12 Percy Claude Kimber on his 21st birthday. Trout caught in the Selwyn River, weighing 12 ½ lb. November 1926. (Photo Credit: Elsie Kimber, donated by Lynette Harris)



Figure 13 Coes Ford, year unknown (Donated by: Lynette Harris)

3.3 Russell Duckworth

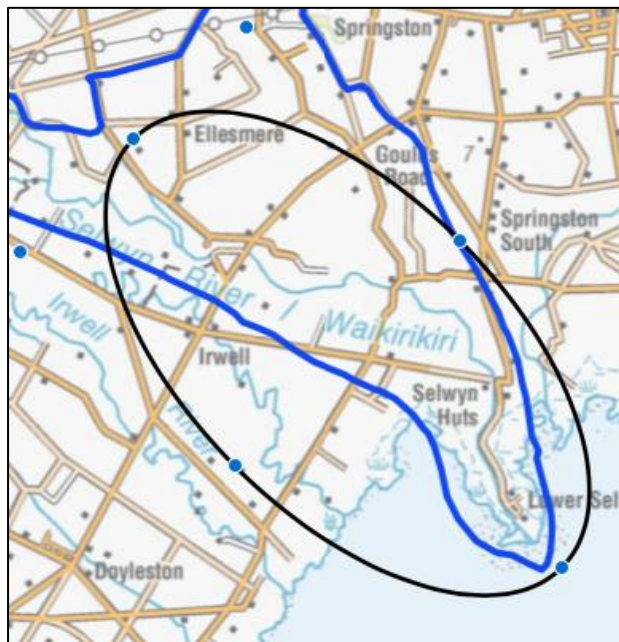


Figure 14 Location of Russell Duckworth's oral history

Russell's relationship with the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri extends the duration of his life, from 1929 to the present day. Although his family resided in Christchurch, Russell's family owned a bach at the Selwyn Huts which they visited most weekends and holidays:

"We just had the bach, which we went to every weekend."

Russell's comments are in reference to experiences with the Lower Catchment of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri, primarily surrounding the Selwyn Huts (See Fig 14).

Interactions with the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri

Russell comments on his interactions with the river, describing a strong community being present throughout his younger years which he describes to have brought a strong group atmosphere to the Selwyn Huts:

"The river was the main attraction for all things concerned. There was a group atmosphere, and our street for arguments sake, my mother and about five other hut people played bridge while the men were out fishing, and they had morning and afternoon tea and were going from bach to bach. There was a whole sort of range of social activities that were there."

Russell describes spending much of his spare time interacting with the river, as commented:

"As a kid, we wouldn't say we lived on it, but we spent two thirds of our time doing something, rowing boats, fishing, eeling, swimming, everything that you did in a river we did."

Commenting that the primary reason for his interaction with the river was due to fishing:

"We just had the bach, which we virtually went to every weekend, because for the fishing, it was a fishing village, it was a fishing reserve, which was fairly uncommon as I understand. My grandad and my father were keen fishermen."

Russell noted the large population of fishermen that would gather and fish upon the river, and describes the river prior to the 1940s:

"Virtually 100% of the people in the village were fishermen, most of them in the weekend. There was a limited number of people who could stay there permanently you had to have a fishing license, or you couldn't register, the land of course was leased, you didn't own the land, it was owned by the government. So, it was very much a fishing time, the river, one bloke in our street he used to go down at about 9 o'clock at night, row his boat down the river fish all night. We would see him in the morning coming home, but most blokes fished till around mid-night or one o'clock and as I was saying, you would see some of the bags of fish they caught was astronomical and they were good fish."

Additionally commenting:

"Down river was mainly fishing but most of the picnicking was up further. I can remember, this was when the fishing wasn't all that brilliant but when they put the cut through, there are two mouths to the Selwyn, there was the old mouth which was the natural mouth and then when they started to put the banks up they put in what we call the cut which goes straight through and goes out towards the lake and in the heat of the season there would be 40 to 50 people fishing, you used to be able to go out and drive down to the mouth and of course we did fish a lot in the lake, there were a lot of fish in the lake. You would see on a Saturday morning 20 boats out there."

Furthermore commenting:

"The fishing in the early days, going back as far as I remember was nearly all live bait, not lures and that which sort of came later. But the river in those days had quite big holes in it, what we called the big hole was just where the H=huts start, so deep that I never saw the bottom of it. Some blokes, some of the keen fishermen would at 4 o'clock row their boat up there and park for the evening fishing and then come home and leave their boat there to reserve their spot. You would see 8 or 9 people on that particular hole."

Russell also describes regular help that local fishermen gave to the Colonization Society when patches of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri dried:

"When we were kids at about 16 or 17 when the river dried up, well when the river would dry up after a flood or anything like that we used to go to

the rangers and net all the little ponds that were left, the fish couldn't get out, they would load them up into a tank in the back of the truck and rush them down, either down to where the water was running or alternatively to other places. Then occasionally you would come across one of these little patches that had dried out and 50 or 60 fish would be dead. So, it was a regular thing and as kids we used to go up and help the Colonization Society."

Observations of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri over time

This interview also explores some of Russell's observations of the river since 1929. Russell explains that he first noticed the river changing sometime in the 1940s:

"The river changed not much until I was in my 20s really, it stayed clear, it was full of what I call clean weed which is oxygen weed, the stuff that now doesn't seem to exist now. But it was full of fish and silveries and the trout to eels and the bird life."

Furthermore commenting:

"It started to change mildly just when the war started which was the 1940s and then gradually got worse and when the blokes who built the banks, when they started, they ripped out a lot of that natural weed that we were talking about. It was replaced by stringy sort stuff and the silvery runs got less and less"

He comments that prior to the changes in the 1940s the river was abundant with life, mentioning the abundance of aquatic life at night:

"There was all sorts of life in the river, that make it a paradise for fish life. The eels were thick, we used to go fishing at night a lot and normally on the edge there would be the silveries running up the river and then there would be the eels sitting on the other side with their heads out of the water, catching whatever they could and then you would get the fish on the outer side and if you weren't careful and you felt eels which made a hell of a mess of your line. The river would be at night particularly would be absolutely full of fish."

Russell also comments upon the quantity of water within the river throughout his time, and mentions the absence on depth in the river in the present day -'deep holes' being a feature of the river during the 1950s and 1960s:

"But the river in those days had quite big holes in it, what we called the big hole was just where the huts start, so deep that I never saw the bottom of it... Things sort of disappeared dramatically, hear again I'm no engineer but that river had as I said, big holes, deep holes were all along it right down to the mouth, that is all shingled up now. Where there was the big

hole that I talked about, I don't know how deep it was, I know my grandad on one side drowned there. He went down, he was plastered at the Renee's over the road there and he went down for an afternoon swim and he drowned in that big hole. But that hole you can now walk across it and you would, I doubt that you would be up to your knees now and the shingle builds up all the way up, the depth of the water is, the places that we used to swim, I learnt to swim there, was up to your waist and now to walk across it you barely wet your feet and in some places it is no longer a barrier."

Thoughts, beliefs and emotions associated with the Selwyn-Waikirikiri

Furthermore, the interview explores some of Russell's thoughts on the state of the Selwyn-Waikirikiri. Russell comments that he feels disgusted by the state of the river, remarking:

"Well I would just like to see signs of it improving, I haven't seen that. Actually, I got so disgusted with it, while I was a keen fisherman, I haven't fished there for twenty years, I had to go down to the Rangitata because the Selwyn was in such a frightful state."

He further comments upon the absence of fishermen who now frequent the river:

"I doubt whether you would see a fisherman from the Selwyn Huts down, yet in its hay day that mile and a half or whatever it was from the mouth was the greatest brown trout fishing ground in the world and now it is nothing."

Russell also mentions what he believes have caused the Selwyn-Waikirikiri to change:

"Well I think it is extensive farming, a lot of the places up river towards the mountains, a lot of it is very poor country and it only exists today as dairies, you know as farming. By pouring water onto it and keeping the nitrates up, if they stopped that the whole place would go back to what it was, which was sort of dry tussock and that. I suppose civilization has odd things play with it whether its pollution but basically, I'm afraid that the Canterbury plains should be limited in my opinion to the amount of cattle that they can carry."

Further, Russell remarks:

"I think it's part of our heritage, there are rivers in Canterbury because of their nature are clean and fishable, there is the Selwyn and two or three others down there which are all virtually in the same state of decline, the big worry with it is the water was clear and you could drink anything if you liked, now well I know some places and not very far away from here where they are having to cart their drinking water in and that has come from pollution from something or a reduction of the water in aquifers being

depleted. The shallow wells now are a lot of them as I say un- drinkable or not drinkable now that to me is, when you get to the stage where you can't drink the water something should be done. It would take a lot of effort on somebody and something, I think that the number of dairy farms on the Canterbury plains in the unsuitable places should be limited, not increased. I am afraid that is how I think it has developed because when I was a kid, we used to go rabbiting at places that were only light tussock and shingle, now they're covered in green grass, which has been manufactured by humans."

3.4 Jen Halliday



Figure 15 Jen Halliday

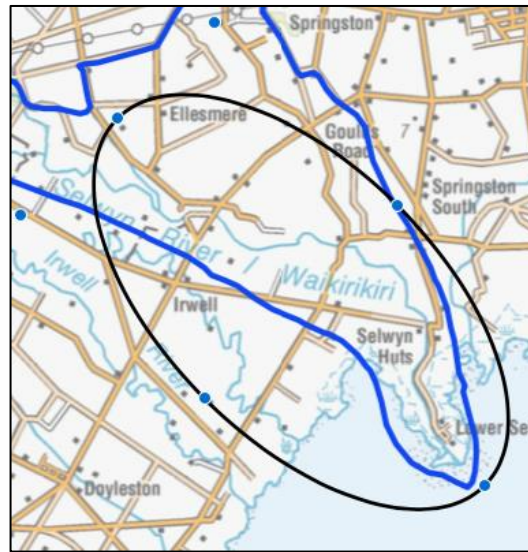


Figure 16 Location of Jen Halliday's oral history

Jen first arrived in New Zealand at the age of 9 and originally encountered the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri river at the age of 10, during a trip with her parents. In her late twenties, she married David Halliday and they moved to a farm near Irwell where they raised their children. Jen eventually moved away from the river in 2005 and now lives in Cashmere, Christchurch.

Jen speaks with a fond memory of the river. She shares a number of fascinating memories. Jen's comments are in reference to her experiences the lower catchment of the river (See Fig 16).

Interactions with the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri

She mentions the baptism of her youngest daughter in the flowing waters of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri in 2003:

"I think it was about 2003, she would have been about 16 and we had an English relative who we would call the vicar of Dibley, she wasn't quite as big as that but she was a real character and my youngest daughter at 16 asked this cousin of hers if she would baptize her in the river, so we had this wonderful ceremony with lots of friends and family coming down to the river and I will look up some photos for you of this baptism in the Selwyn river. A river which you wouldn't put your toe in now."

The photo referred to is included as Fig 17. She further talks of the times spent along the banks of the river podding peas whilst her children interacted with the river:

"The river was the most wonderful place especially in summer, because we used to grow peas for seed and my husband would at the peak as they were ripening would pull the whole plant up and we would shove it in the boot of the car and I would take the kids down to the river and they would

swim and I would pod peas and it actually became not just us it became family, it became friends, and so a lot of us would spend.... about two weeks down at the river."

Furthermore, Jen comments upon her children learning to swim in the waterway:

I remember my children learning to swim in the river and holding onto logs and swimming against the stream, you know to sharpen their swimming. It was you know a very important place."

As well as commenting upon primary school children camping next to the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri:

"The children from Springston Primary School had a campsite down there once. I think it was at Coes Ford not Chamberlains Ford. But I can remember walking down the river and seeing how they were getting on and how they were doing."

Additionally, Jen mentions the discovery of a dead fisherman by a neighbor among other interesting memories of her time near the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri, commenting:

"I remember one summer a fishermen died down there and our neighbor had apparently picked up the body and was driving back with the body in his van and I was taking a whole crowd of kids down to the river for a swim and of course being neighborly he stopped and talked and sort of said to me "sorry I can't stay" and I thought oh he's in a bit of a rush what's going on and later on he told me he had a dead body in the back and didn't want the kids to see him and get frightened. But that was the fisherman and he died of natural causes, but what a lovely thing to die fishing doing what you love."

Jens regarded the river in the 70s as something that could be both a wonderful place to be and a thing to be feared, as she notes here:

So, the river in my knowledge of it, my history of it, it was always something to be feared and dreaded because it had come through the house. But when we moved a little cottage onto the farm, he was very careful to make sure that the foundations were very high, should the river flood again, it wouldn't go through the house."

She also comments upon people living along the banks of the river:

"But there used to be, there were often odd people, I can remember two, one was what we called the Russian, they would live down there by the river, I can remember one had kind of built a bivouac type of affair and he used to shoot rabbits and catch fish and on pay day he would catch the bus and go into town and do some shopping and he was very kind but he was as a Russian we didn't have a lot of communication as his English wasn't very good."

She also speaks of her children's, husband's and her own interactions with the river – telling the tale of a waterway which in many ways brought people together and was the fascination of many holiday makers, noting that:

"It was a very popular place for campers and even after my husband died there were people who came out to the place and would come up to the farm and say, "I remember when I was a kid and we would camp here, we would come here for milk", so it was a lovely spot."

Observations of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri over time

Her observations tell of a waterway which varied from year-to-year never remaining the same, noting that:

"The river changed, it was always interesting after winter to go down to the river and see whether your favorite pool was still there or where you could still swim."

But also talks of how it supported a range of wildlife, as she notes that in the 1970s:

"It was the things growing there, the life that was there, the birds, the welcome swallows. This would be in the 70s and the first birds that came over would go down building nests under the bridge, it was just life and loveliness and beauty and growth."

Jen also comments upon two flooding events which he late husband experienced in the 1930s:

"But the river... flooded through the farm twice in January and that was when crops and sheep and everything were at their peak... That was in the 1930s, I didn't check the dates, but it was probably one the 30s and one in the 40s I can't remember but it was before the stock banks were built."

Jen also mentions heavy machinery working in the river during the 1980s:

"The only noticeable difference would be if the council had been down there getting sand or gravel or grading up the river or changing or trying to control its direction... maybe it was once a year or once every other, I can't remember, but that would be part of the if the council had been down there with their graders you would have thought are they mucking up our pool."

Additionally, Jen comments upon the presence of dry patches within the river:

"Oh yes there were dry patches there. There would always be one major stream with a good flow of water but there were dry patches and little eddies and streams."

Furthermore, Jen comments upon the dumping of rubbish by the river during the late 1980s:

"It didn't often happen, but there was one year where people started to dump rubbish there, and I can remember somebody from the Council coming up to my son who would have been about 16 or 17, getting him to look as if he was collecting it. But they got him down there to clean it up and got a photo of him and said something along the lines of 'this is what the inhabitants of the river have to do, clean up another people's rubbish'."

Thoughts, beliefs and emotions associated with the Selwyn-Waikirikiriki

Jen notes her concern for the river in the present day and her feelings both of guilt and sadness that she has attached to it throughout her time with the waterway, as noted here in response to how she feels about the current health of the river:

"Well, disheartened, depressed, concerned, it's sort of that feeling of what can you do. I mean this is what people are getting there living from, I had to give consent to a neighbor to allow them to take so much extra water, for irrigation and I found that really really hard because they are wanting to make a living and we've made a living off of that land but I think I found that if I said no, it wouldn't really make much difference, it was it's a time of guilt it was actually to be honest, where I felt that if I was really concerned about the health of the river and the state of our rivers I would have said no, but I didn't."

Furthermore, Jen describes the health of the river attracting a variety of social changes, commenting:

"The place was home to a sort of variety of people, but they were people you felt quite safe with. But not now. For example the concrete structure has been taken away, I think people are discouraged from camping or picnicking this side of the bridge and to go to what they are calling properly Chamberlains Ford, which is further away. ...(P)eople ...living there now have told me of people coming up and stealing things out of sheds I think it is really interesting thinking about when the river was lovely and beautiful the sort of people it had attracted were those who loved and appreciated the countryside but now that the place is awful, you could almost say that those people who are really on the fringes of society find the best place for them is under a bridge, it's really very sad."

Although Jen speaks about the river with a sense of sadness, she also shares her nostalgia of the time she has spent there and as she notes:

"I'm so glad I've lived by a river and my children have grown up with it, I think it's been a real privilege, it really has"

Additionally, Jen also comments upon the importance she feels towards restoring the river:

“If it’s possible yes, I think that it would be wonderful. Well I love seeing what they’re doing with Snake Creek, it’s starting off something too, I think they’ve got some funding from somewhere, after so many years, we the owners have to be responsible for maintaining it, what they’re doing. That’s a great move, but the Selwyn river they’re going to have to stop dairying..., if you’re going to return the river you have to change land use around it.”

Furthermore, Jen describes what she would like to see changed about the river:

“The most important thing to change about the river now, I suppose it would involve both what it taken out of it and what is put into it, it is both of those things, they have taken out the water and all the leaching and all the run off and chemicals.”

Further commenting:

“A healthy river would be one that survives without any interference from us, but we can’t control the weather.”



Figure 17. Family and friends watch a baptism in the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri River.
Donated by Jen Halliday

3.5 Alan Strong



Figure 18. Alan Strong

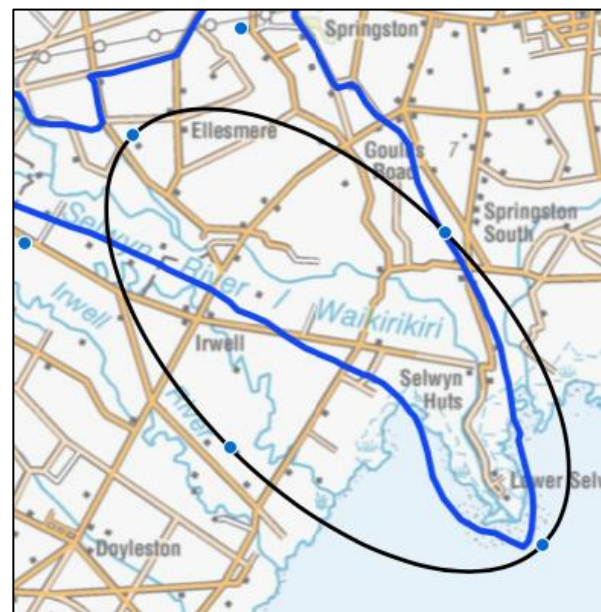
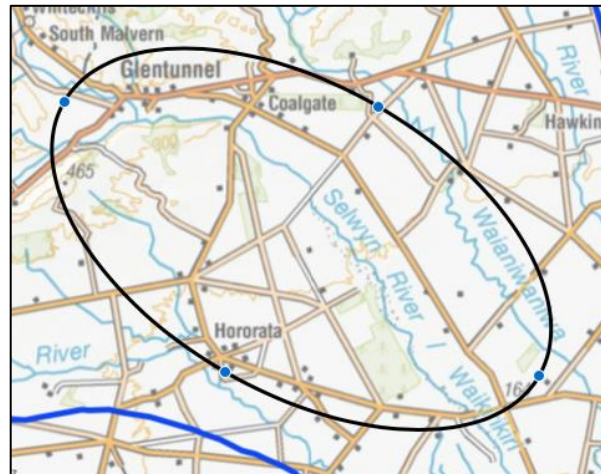


Figure 19 (top) & 20. Location of Alan Strong's oral history – upper (top) and lower catchment

Alan is a keen fisherman who has frequented the Lower Reaches of the Selwyn-Waikirikiri from a young age. Although residing in Christchurch Alan's family has owned a bach at the Lower Selwyn Huts since the 1940s and four generations of Alan's family have spent their weekends and holidays at the Selwyn-Waikirikiri over this time:

"My family have kind of grown up around the area around the lake and the Selwyn river."

Alan's comments are in reference to his experiences with primarily the lower catchment of the river, but also talks of his memories of the upper catchment (Figs 19 and 20).

Interactions with the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri

Alan has interacted with the river throughout his entire life and shares a number of fascinating memories of his time with the river. Such as his memory of spending time studying in the 1980s on the river:

"I would do my school certs there and my school studies sitting in a boat at the Lower Selwyn Huts moored to the bank but with a fishing rod in the river while I was studying. So, I did my study by going out there and staying for a week or two at a time. It was a nice quiet place so I would do a little bit of fishing."

He additionally mentions learning a variety of life skills at the river and on the river at a young age, commenting:

"I learnt to handle a boat there, I learnt how to row, I learnt to swim, I learnt water safety, all sorts of things on that river. As does everyone, I am a pretty handy fisherman and I learnt to fish there, I started fly fishing when I was 8 years old."

Furthermore, Alan mentions a river that attracted numerous people who came for recreation. Commenting in regard to prior to 1990 on the activities that you might see at the river:

"There would be people kayaking it, people picnicking, people fishing, people just generally being there, because it was still a relatively nice environment and it was well used."

He mentions an abundance of families and children who spent their holidays by the river, such as his recollection of the river during the late 1970s and early 1980s, remarking:

"When I was younger there were a lot of children my age and teenagers who were coming through the settlement at the lower Selwyn huts and it was all based around recreation in the river and lake."

Alan mentions a high level of public interaction with the river at locations such as Coes ford, he notes in the 1970s the presence of Christmas picnics by the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri:

"Coes ford in the 70s when I was a child, a lot of companies used to have their Christmas picnics there and all of the kids would be swimming in the river, it had really good flow and clean water."

Further, Alan notes a shift in the demographic of the Selwyn Huts over time from one of a recreational based population in the 1970s and 1980s to the present-day population, who he believes now to be living at the Selwyn Huts by necessity. Alan relates this to the health of the river, and refers to the 1970s and 1980s at the river, noting:

"It was all based around recreation in the river and the lake. So, a lot of fishing with floundering in the lake and eeling in the river, swimming, boating you know, all of that kind of stuff, kayaking, rowing and that. So

that has changed over the years, so if you were now to ask me what happens at the settlement, well firstly no one swims in the river, the fishing is quite poor so no one is doing that, no one is in there in boats or that kind of thing which is sad but the other thing that I have noticed is that there are no young people out there anymore. So, the make up or the demographic of the baches has changed from recreational people who were families to, it's now simply just cheap living for people who are displaced either by the earthquakes or other people. So effectively the residents now simply aren't recreationalists."

Alan also remarks upon the river community during the colder winter months and the shift from fishing to duck shooting:

"Interestingly the lower river then gets used in the winter a bit with duck shooters, so, there is this kind of changeover of fisher people to people who are doing duck shooting, accessing and using the river, either to duck shoot on or to access to move around by boat. A lot of people used to simply walk up the river, up from the Lower Huts with their gun and a dog and get their dog to flush ducks out of the reeds and shoot them."

Observations of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri over time

Alan describes some of his observations of the river over time. He recalls and considered the river to be in an 'okay' condition up until the early 1980s:

"The river was quite good then, even right through till the early 80s it was still reasonably okay and still a lot of life."

Alan describes the river prior to the early 1980s as having good clarity and supporting and abundance of macrophyte beds:

"So clear water, so it wasn't the sort of lake colour, it was clear, and it had big banks of weed both sides."

Mentioning also his time on the river in the 1970s and the clarity and productivity he noticed:

"I spent the 70s ... on the river ... because it was protected from that wind still had good beds of weed and it was still clear and still quite productive and in fact it was still a nice environment and unfortunately that has been lost now and probably by the 1990s."

His observations note that these features he describes started to change around the mid-1980s, with the larger and more noticeable changes to the river taking place from the mid-1990s onwards, as he noted:

"The big changes occurred from the mid-90s on and 2000 on... It's quite a lot shallower than it used to be when I was young, there are no weed beds and therefore there is not as much fish life, eels, bullies, trout and other species because there just isn't any cover. And so, it's quite shallow and

prone to warming. I have seen some pretty nasty algae blooms there over the summer when it is hot in the last couple of years."

Alan also talks of his experiences with some tributaries of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri river, noting that prior to 1990 little care of tributaries was being undertaken:

"Prior to the 1990s the tributaries weren't fenced, and stock had full access to them and the silting and the tramping and the general, they were just ground zero nuclear bomb environments."

Furthermore, Alan also mentions the introduction of the stop banks to the Lower Selwyn-Waikirikiriri in the 1950s:

"My dad remembers before the stop banks were installed, they were only put in, in the 50s and there were no stop banks and the river just ran down there. They came along and dredged it and put those stop banks in. Which I believe the old timers like my grandad were dead against in terms of destroying a fishery, apparently it did take a hit for a few years and then came right again but it is kind of at that stage where it needs to be dredged again because it so shallow and silty."

Interestingly, Alan also mentions briefly his grandfather refusing to fish in the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri sometime in the early 20th century:

"If you look through my family going back to my grandfather's time. My grandfather refused to fish for trout in the Selwyn river because he considered it unsporting, he fished in the lake. Which is now, even in my time is unfathomable."

Thoughts, beliefs and emotions associated with the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri

Within the dialogue of this interview some of Alan's thoughts and beliefs of the state of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri are explored. Alan believes that the river is a poor state, commenting:

"Now I look back and think, well it was wonderful and now it's not."

Alan feels a strong attachment to the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri both through his family history of the location and his own experiences, he mentions the pain that he feels about the state of the river:

"Three years ago, I was standing on the banks of the Lower Selwyn Huts, looking at the river and I thought it's a write-off, sell the bach, were done, there is nothing here for us anymore. The river is dead, the lake is poor, the makeup of the demographic of the people has changed, time to go... my children think that the Lower Selwyn river is what it is and have never seen it in a healthy state."

Additionally, he describes a feeling of duty to the river, stating:

"I think it's certainly a big job and I am not even sure if it is possible, but I think we should, and we owe it to environment and to our kids to understand what's caused this and what we can do to rectify it."

Alan also discusses many of the aspects he believes to be important to foster a healthy waterway and in response to a question regarding what a healthier Selwyn-Waikirikiriri might look like, he states:

"I would like it to look like it did in the 70s, so would have clear water, less nitrogen, less phosphorus, no E. coli... more fish, more bird life, more natural, more insects.... Plenty of water, clean gravels, no algae or slime, so, you should be able to lift a rock and see caddisfly or mayfly nymphs living... You should be able to walk into a cobbled shingled river like the Selwyn and see bullies scattering in front of you, living in there. And if you're not seeing those things then you are not, it's just not healthy, there is something going on."

Furthermore, he describes some of the factors he believes to be driving the current state of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri in the present day, describing the river as being caught in a dilemma:

"That's driven by weather and irrigation. It's pretty clear that the evidence says that. Yes, it is drier and the whole weather being drier ..., the more people want to irrigate and it's like a catch 22."

Alan also shares his thoughts on what he considers to be the most important aspect of the river that he would like to see changed, describing an adaptive management approach to the river:

"So, what I would like to see is that changes to a more adaptive approach where in a dry year we reduce our irrigation take so that river and the irrigation take a share of the burden and not just the environment and in a wetter year of course you can take more. I know of course that in a wetter year you don't need more but there needs to be some sort of balance whereby the river is not taking the full brunt of the environmental impact. At the moment it is. The problem from an environmental perspective is that you can only die once, and what you will see if you go to the lower Selwyn now, even though there is good flow in there, there are very little bullies, very little of anything because the food web got wiped out, and it will take some time to recover. So, you dry that river every ten years you will never get a recovery."

3.6 Steve Brailsford



Figure 21 Steve Brailsford

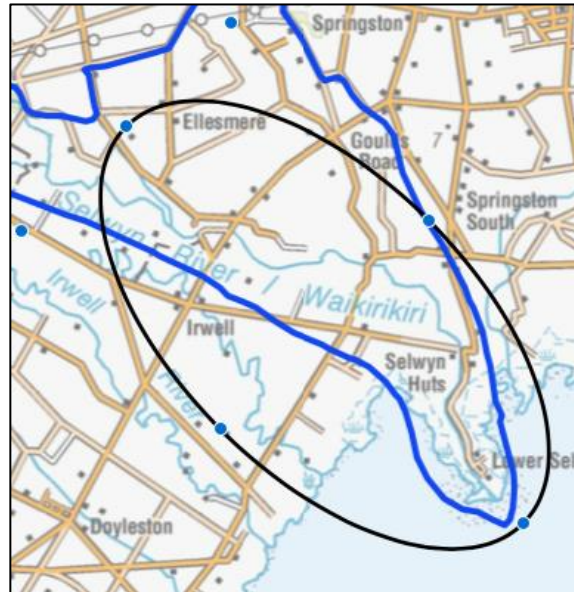


Figure 22 Location of Steve Brailsford's oral history

Steve's family shares five generations with the Selwyn-Waikiriki river and the surrounding area, as well as owning a bach at the Selwyn Huts. Steve works as an environmental consultant and in ecological restoration.

During this interview Steve shares his past with the river, commenting upon his interactions and observations of the river since 1960s. His comments are in reference to the Lower Catchment of the river, primarily regarding the area from Coes Ford down (See Fig 22).

Interactions with the Selwyn-Waikiriki

Steve comments on a river that was seen as a key location for recreation due to its location, productivity and being a 'fun' place to visit, commenting:

"It was the place that you, the Selwyn Huts and going to the river was where you always went when you wanted to recreate, that was the primary place to go and recreate, back in those days you wouldn't go to the mountains much. It was such a productive place and such a fun place, so we had boats, we had a bach, we had lots of friends out there and every weekend of the summer and every holiday, Easter, Christmas was always at the Selwyn Huts, out fishing, out swimming in the river and interacting with the river."

However, Steve does comment upon the Selwyn Huts in the 1960s and 1970s as a location that at times was hard to reach and so, was primarily a summer destination:

"It was a summer destination. Sometimes it was quite hard to get to the bach in winter because it was wet, it wasn't shingle tracks, they were just

grass mown tracks and the place would get flooded and wet and you wouldn't go there a lot."

Steve describes the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri supporting a large fishing community. He comments on the excitement as a child catching his first fish and the joy of displaying it to the community at the Selwyn Huts:

"So, I think my first real recollection of the river is as a five-year-old catching my first trout on my 5th birthday at the Lower Selwyn Huts and it was five pounds. So, I think that is the first memory I have, "dad I've got something", oh no it will be an eel, winding it up and it was this big trout. In those days you went and showed your fish off to everyone when you were a young fella, and walking around the Selwyn Huts showing all our friends this five-pound trout."

Steve further comments upon large numbers of fishermen using the river during the decades of the 1960s through to the 1980s:

"You rowed downstream to fish at night through a place called The Macrocarpas which is below the Upper Selwyn Huts and there would be a hundred boats down there fishing, roughly. If you went late it was hard to get a prime spot. They were all anchored up in the river."

Additionally commenting:

"It was a fantastic brown trout fishery and you know during the day you would swim and at night you would go to that river and you would be fishing. You know we would swim in some of the holes during the day and would return to it at night to fish."

Although commenting that the river was home to a large fishing community, he also comments upon his experiences of duck hunting upon the river during winter months:

"Duck hunting, we used to hunt the ducks in the winter. I don't think that has changed that much."

Observations of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri over time

Within this dialogue Steve compares the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri over time. While referring to the river in the 1960s and early 1970s Steve states that he considered it to be healthy at that time:

"I think later in the summer, when the river flows got low it was always weeded up and it never seemed to appear that healthy. But generally, in my youngest years there in the 60s and earlier 70s it was really healthy, it seemed really healthy."

Steve talks of a river that has changed dramatically and describes the physical changes that he has witnessed, such as his comments in regard to the 1970s and 1980s:

“It was deeper, a lot deeper, big deep pools, permanent weed beds, a lot more trout but not big ones... I just think that the dramatic change in the piece above the Selwyn Huts, you know to Coes ford. Just such a totally different river, it is narrow, it is small, it is tiny, it is channelized, it’s lost all of its shape and character. Yeah, if I hadn’t seen the change and you blind folded me and you from the 70s to today you took me there and said where are you, I wouldn’t know. I would look at that and say I wouldn’t know, if you said it was the Selwyn river, I would have said no it’s not. Dramatic change.”

Further to the above comment this Steve remarks upon the section of river adjacent to the Selwyn Huts, referring again to the 1970s and 1980s:

“You can walk across the river in front of the Selwyn huts, it has shingled right up. It was really deep back then at that point, so the river that I know, the part that I interacted with from the Upper Selwyn Huts to Shingly beach which is all filled in. So, it is filled in with shingle and it not deep holes, I do remember as a young person going up stream and seeing the beautiful big holes that we used to swim in, we used to always go up and they would be the great places to camp and have a barbeque and swim and going up there one year and they had all straightened out. The engineers had been in with dozers and diggers and scraped the river out to take the bends out, it totally changed the whole place.”

Steve also comments upon the presence of algae in the waterway during the mid-1970s onwards:

“Not as a very young kid, it was ever a problem, but you know once I became a teenager and, in my twenties, I remember lots of weed and algae and green slime.”

Thoughts, beliefs and emotions associated with the Selwyn-Waikirikiri

Steve further comments upon what he considers a healthy waterway to look like, describing the characteristics he believes are important:

“It has got to have clear water, it has got to have naturalness to it, some velocity to the way it flows, the way it moves, it has got deep holes, it has got rapids, it has got all those things, it has got over hanging trees and shade, it has got weed in there, it is not covered in algae, it is not discolored water.”

Commenting also upon the quantity and quality of trout which now reside within the waterway, Steve attributes changing in the abundance and size of fish due to poor spawning grounds:

“It is different now because it is probably quite hard to catch a fish under five pounds. It is relatively common to catch a ten-pound fish, because there are not many of them... that is usually a sign of rearing territory, so there is not enough young fish surviving, the trout are spawning and there is not enough young fish coming back, because there is plenty of food.”

Steve describes some of the factors that he believes have led to the condition of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri in the present day, commenting upon agricultural systems in use on the Canterbury Plains:

“Water abstraction off the plains, taking water from clean aquifer water and putting it on top of the surface and putting that through an intensive agricultural system with some contaminates coming off that and that water being carried down into top aquifer and feeding into the river. So, the water is being taken, most of it has evaporated away, some of it has actually gone back into the profile with agricultural contaminates in it, moving back into the river. You can’t take that much water out of the Canterbury plains and still have that river sitting on the surface, it is going to, it is all connected. So, intensive agriculture production has had, probably a huge impact.”

Steve furthermore comments upon the reputation that the waterway has developed, remarking upon the perception of the river in the present day:

“I think people are pretty upset, some of that is perception. I talk about the lake to a lot of people and they can’t believe that those fish came from those rivers, they can’t believe that I eat fish out of there, they can’t believe that I interact with that lake and hunt ducks on it, I do things in the river, they had heard that it is so polluted.”

Additionally, Steve mentions an experience he had whilst working on a restoration project along the banks of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri, commenting upon the perception of the river held by the boys, noting a difference in perception between urban and rural outlooks that had developed regarding the river:

“I had some young Maori boys working for me down doing a restoration job at the mouth of the Selwyn river, we did a big planting there below the Lower Selwyn Huts. We must have been poisoning some gorse stumps that were cut off and we were painting straight round up onto the stumps and this boy got a little bit of round up on his hand, and I said look you better go into the river and wash that off, and he said ‘no no, I am not putting my hand near that river’ and said he would prefer to have that Round Up on him then put that hand in the river and he was a town boy, they were all town boys, urban. That is just the media’s interpretation of what is going on and sensationalizing the state of the river and for the average person they got this view that it is totally toxic, and you can’t go near it. His view was that he was far happier to have a product out of a plastic bottle with

a cap and a nice colorful label, happier to have that on his hand even though he knew it was a harmful poison than he was to touch the water."

Steve attributes this perception to be driven in part by the media:

"I don't know how much of it is the media, especially with the media's interpretation of the lake and the river. We have view of what is going on, and some science that is telling us what is going on and the media tend to get it and you know explain that the river is polluted, and the lake is polluted, and dogs die, you can't go near it."

Further, Steve shares his own concern of the river and his disappointment in the current state of the waterway:

"I am not happy about the state of the river, and all of the rivers and am quite conscious about the life I have had associated with that river and the other streams going into the lake and how important it was for my life and I want future generations to have that to. So, it's a loss to our society when we remove that resource from peoples' experience."

Additionally, mentioning the attachment that fishermen felt towards the waterway:

"I think to all the fishermen. It was a really sacred place. I don't know if sacred is quite the right word for a country that has only had five or six generations of trout fishing people and that sort of thing in it. But it was special, you would go out there and the first thing you would do was run up the stop bank to look at the river and go, mmmmm that looks 'trouty', I could see the next six weeks of my summer holidays having fun here."

3.7 David Deakins



Figure 23 David Deakins

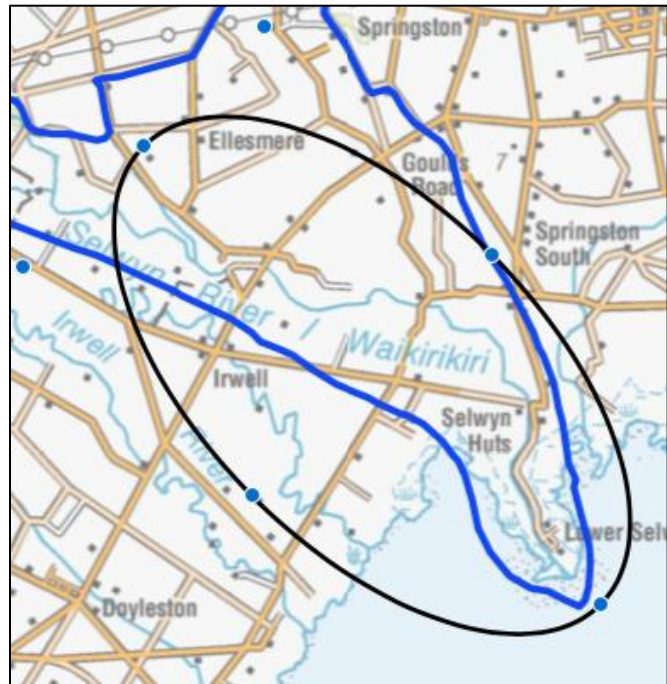


Figure 24 Location of David Deakins' oral history

David has engaged and interacted with the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri since a young age. He first encountered the river as a child in the early 1970s during a fishing trip with his father, and has returned ever since to pursue a recreational based relationship with the waterway. A relationship that was first founded on family trips to Coes Ford and later strengthened through his pursuit of fishing:

"There was only myself and my father who liked fishing but for my brother and sister and mother and extended family we use to go to Coes Ford to have our family picnics."

The memories and experiences in which David mentions are in reference to the lower catchment of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri River, from Chamberlains ford down to the Lower Selwyn Huts (See Fig 24).

Interactions with the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri

David shares his memories of his interaction with the river since the early 1970s, regarding it as being hugely important for recreation and often provided a meeting place, remarking:

"Well to be able to use it as a meeting point for everybody to meet and also you know back then the swimmability of the river was one of its main attractions in summer, so yeah it was huge recreationally obviously. But for me personally I love swimming, but I loved fishing in it way more than

swimming and so for that it was about as high as it could get on the recreational side personally. ”

Furthermore, David mentions swimming in Coes Ford and at times White Cliffs during the 1970s:

“Well we used to swim mainly at Coes Ford because that was where the picnics were, but we used to go up to White Cliffs occasionally. And swim up there as well... That was mainly through the 1970s, I was 14 in 1980 so I probably wasn’t hanging out and doing that sort of thing as much with the family, but we still continued to meet the wider family there and have BBQs and picnics even after the river, even after the decline in the river, and couldn’t swim in it.”

He also comments upon the attraction he has felt towards the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri compared to other waterways, remarking on the clarity and cleanliness that the river had in the 1970s:

“Other places we used to go to swim like the Groynes for instance were all weedy and you didn’t want to stand on the bottom whereas the Selwyn, the stones were always clean and the water was pure, you know you didn’t mind if you got it in your mouth or you went under the water, it was nice on your skin.”

He also comments on a transformation in the number of people recreating on the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri, notably commenting on the fishing scene of the river during his time in the area:

“October to April, there used to be obviously a real scene around the fishing like hundreds and thousands of people used to fish it... Growing up there was a definite vibe and scene around the place, that is now completely gone. It’s 100% gone... No one fishes down there anymore, hardly anyone, very few. Whereas there was a massive sort of team or scene of people that used to fish up and down the river.”

Observations of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri over time

David notes a visible changes in the river and states he witnessed the most dramatic changes of the river through the 1990s.

“It would have been through the 90s I think that I started noticing the biggest changes.”

David’s observations are of a decreased amount of water within the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri, the presence of algae covering the rocks at the bottom of the river and a decrease in fish spawning and population, as stated:

“Less water and the bottom of the river is covered with slime, when you go down to the Selwyn huts area the algae from the lake backs right up the river... Just less water, you know, less flow and then down where we used

to fish a lot, just above the upper huts the weed growth would come on much sooner.”

David also mentions the river drying up for a period of time and attributes this to a decline in fish spawning:

“Once the river stopped flowing for a lot of the time, severing the connection between you know the upper river and the lower river the fish travel for spawning was obviously affected and I think that’s when the numbers really dropped I think with, it was only a very small amount of low quality spawning water available to the fish, I think that must have been the real thing that ruined and killed the fish.”

Thoughts, beliefs and emotions associated with the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri

David believes that the lack of water in the river can be attributed to water being taken in excess across the river system. He also believe that nutrients from fertilizers and cattle entering the waterway are resulting a decline in water clarity and excessive growth of aquatic plants:

“For it to be consistently so much lower now with flow there must be water being taken somewhere from its system... There is nutrient going into it from fertilizers and cows. It’s fairly obvious that must be happening because you know for the weed to grow so much quicker and for it to have that dirty appearance.”

David also believes that having a healthy waterway is important for wellbeing, as stated:

“I think for people’s wellbeing, not just mine but obviously. I don’t think people realize that how much they need natural rivers flowing near them.”

Furthermore, David mentions the emotion he associates with the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri in the present day, stating:

“Every time you would see the river it would get a little bit more depressing. it’s not the only river that I have based my life on but it’s one of the main ones that I sort of one of the reasons that I live here, 10 minutes from the river and I am pretty angry about what’s happened to it. Well I was angry, but I pretty much went through years of anger about it and now I am just sad and depressed about it.”

3.8 Rosalie Snoyink



Figure 25 Rosalie Snoyink

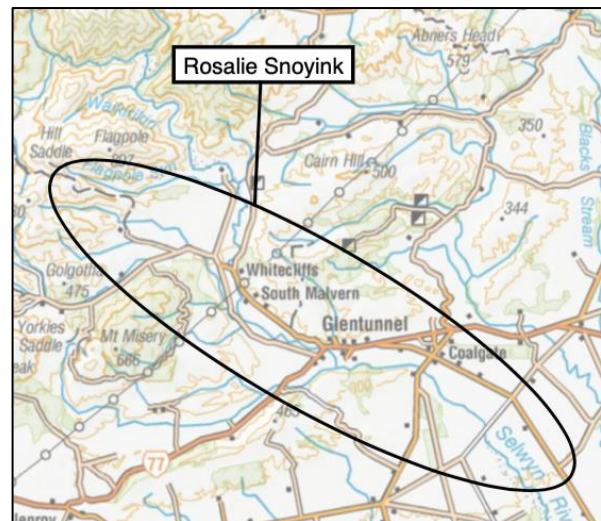


Figure 26 Location of Rosalie Snoyink's oral history

Rosalie is a long-time resident of the Selwyn District, moving into the area in 1965 after getting married. She first moved to Darfield where she ran a local business for a number of years before retiring to Glentunnel, where she now resides.

Rosalie's comments are in reference to her experiences with primarily the upper catchment of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri river near Glentunnel and Hororata (See Fig 26).

Interactions with the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri

Rosalie's interaction with the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri river is based primarily on recreation. She speaks of spending countless hours down by the river with her family, often spending weekends by the river:

"We spent every weekend at the river, we are really outdoor people and we had a young family and the Selwyn was just the perfect river for families to go and enjoy. So, whenever we could even in, we had a commercial glass house business so we would work quite well into the evening and then take a picnic down, either to the Selwyn River or out to the Waimakariri. So, we lived on the river... The Selwyn was just an ideal river, it was beautiful and actually I can't even calculate how many hours we would have sat on the banks on the river."

She describes her interaction being driven by her family and the convenient location of the river to her home:

"I think it was because we had children, because once we had a family and you had to look for more children friendly activities. We would head to the mountains and go to the ocean, but the river was really at our back door"

so that is why we spend so much time there... We would come to Glentunnel because we lived in Darfield originally and we had a business in Darfield. So that is about 12ks away, so it was nothing to just you know, come up here and it is no surprise that we retired here. It is a lovely green leafy village really and then the river is still there."

Rosalie also describes the attraction of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri for recreation, talking both of the enjoyment she sought as well as the attraction for her children (Fig 27):

"....It was the swimming for the kids that drew them and when they got a bit older, they canoed in the river and I remember rafting or floating down on tubes"

Additionally, Rosalie comments upon the ability to bring wider family together, meeting at the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri, through 1965 to 1975:

"For recreation or just contemplation, rivers are just peaceful places to be, I mean the kids were all going to run off and play and when everybody was fed, I would get my book out. I would love to lie by the river and just read. It was a good place then. We had relatives in Christchurch with a young family as well and they came out from Christchurch every weekend, every Sunday and we had a family picnic, so you got that other stuff going on where it was bringing families together and all the kids played and two or three members of our family did that, and we did it every Sunday."

Noted within the dialogue is also the mention of a variety of ages drawn to the river:

"I think mostly they were younger ones, but you might take your elderly parents down, we didn't have any here, my husband's parents were in Europe and my folks weren't here, but you often used to see several generations getting together for a picnic or the grandparents would take kids down to the river."

Observations of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri over time

Rosalie shares some of her observations of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri river over time. She makes note of the regular dry patches within the length of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri, commenting upon the section that she is familiar with:

"Yes, there has always been a dry, as I know it under the bridge from the Bealey road, it is just above that which it occurs and goes for several kilometers down and that has been well known that the river just flowed underground."

Additionally, she notes that she believes this to be a natural process, as commented in response to whether or not she believed the process to be natural:

“Yes, I do. I don’t worry about the river not flowing there because it come up, if the river is healthy there are high flows down at Coes ford and further down.”

Rosalie also talks of discovering dead cattle within the upper reaches of the river in 2009, she also notes the observed damage that she attributes to the animals:

“We were up there walking in the river one day and saw a dead cattle beast right in the river... There was a lot of pugging in the river where the animals were, in the edges or in the river itself, they would be coming in and out and there was a lot of mud.”

Rosalie notes a perceived decline in the quantity of water within the Selwyn-Waikirikiriki:

“Yes, well there is definitely less water in the river and that shows up as you get further down, we don’t notice it here so much because we are in the foothills of the catchment.”

Thoughts, beliefs and emotions associated with the Selwyn-Waikirikiriki

Rosalie goes into detail about her thoughts and beliefs of the state of the river and the management surrounding the Selwyn-Waikirikiriki catchment. She states the devastation she feels about the state of the river:

“I feel devastated, absolutely. I think that you know, we tired our best to stop it, but I think it was the political decision that was made that we would accelerate irrigation across Canterbury, and we would take the water where ever it was... But our catchment became over allocated and that was for a start a shocking thing, that we were red-zoned. We were actually allocated more water than what was there. So, we were bound to get this effect and I think it was a terrible thing that happened.”

Furthermore noting:

“I feel that we have let a lot of the younger generations down, my generation have been responsible for this, a lot of them have fought back, there are some good people who are trying to defend it. So, we have got good policies and we have got a regional policy which says, no more loss, but we just need to get the decision makers to implement it, we don’t need better laws, we have got them. We just can’t get them to make the right decisions. They balance development with the loss, and they say, we can have a bit more, but we can’t have anymore because the people have gone too far.”

She further notes her desire to see the river return to a healthier state:

"It's important to return it to a state where aquatic life can live in the river, absolutely and a swimmable state where people can swim without it being a danger to their health, we need to get back to that... We can certainly improve on what it is, and we should stop degrading it further."

Rosalie identifies some of the aspects that she believes a healthy waterway should have, commenting:

"The water would be clear and sparkling, you would be able to see to the rocks at the bottom, the rocks would be clear of any sediment and other debris, you see rubbish in rivers, you see weeds, you see it would be clear of all that, it would be safe to swim in, even I grew up drinking the water out of the rivers. I am not that old that you would you know, people wouldn't think of ever doing that, but we did. We swam in it all the time. It would be safe for; a healthy river has to maintain its eco systems as well. That is vital, without that it is not healthy for humans."

Furthermore, Rosalie describes a shift in attitudes regarding the river since coming in contact with in 1965:

"We had a favorite spot on the other side of the river, halfway between Glentunnel and White Cliffs, you could get access through farmers property which in later years they closed off that access and that put an end to all that. But you see that was the different attitude then in those days, the river was belonged to everybody, we didn't have this concept of ownership, like we have now, like land owners cutting off access and not wanting people to come through the property because there are more people around now, bigger populations and they have to control that. But that was the same for tramping and fishing and whatever, you seemed to get a lot more access."

Additionally, she also mentions her desire for a change in how the river is managed:

"I want to see better management of the river, and a buffer for the river from development and any kind of water takes, I would like water takes reviewed. If we are going to restore the river and be serious about then we need to have this serious, give the river space you know. I think that is where we have to go now, we have the situation, so what do we do about it. We know its value and we know what we need to do, it is just how we are going to get there basically."



Figure 27. Nicky Snoyink playing in the Selwyn-Waikirikiri, 1968. Photo: Rosalie Snoyink

3.9 James Guild



Figure 28 James Guild

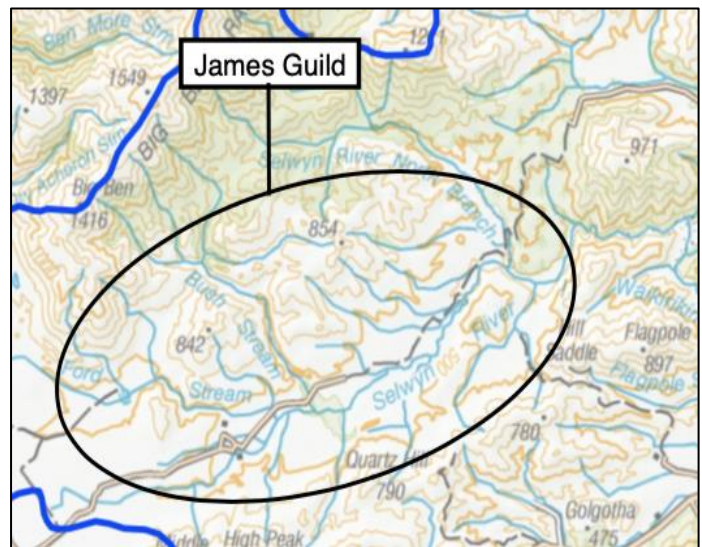


Figure 29 Location of James Guilds' oral history

Originally a flat land farmer in Temuka, James came into permanent contact with the Upper Reaches of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri in 1973, after his father purchased High Peak Station in November 1972. Today, James is the owner of High Peak Station, a farm which straddles either side of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri:

"We straddle the river on both sides, and it runs through our property for 10kms... To straddle the river is pretty unusual in New Zealand, so we have always thought of being pretty privileged."

James's comments are in reference to his experience with the head waters and upper catchment of the river, in this case primarily that portion of the river which flows through High Peak Station (See Fig 29).

Interactions with the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri

James talks of his interaction with the river as being a relationship that is both tied up in everyday life on the farm and one of an emotional attachment, mentioning the bearing the river has had on High Peak's operation:

"So, we have actually as a result of that we have got lane systems that run both sides of the river, well up from the river on a whole terrace so in the event where it does flood, we can actually get down both sides even if we can't cross it... it can be a right pain in the ass too when it is in flood, we have had situations where we can't cross stock or can't cross vehicles and we are sitting with the place affectively divided clean down the middle because there is a roaring great torrent going through it."

Although considering the river to be important to his family's livelihood James remarks how the use of the river has changed for his family at High Peak:

"Historically we made much more use of the river at its tributaries and I remember deciding that it's not just the Waikirikiri which goes literally a few meters past here for stock water, now there is a lot less of that now because we are fencing off a lot more of it, so the stock doesn't have access to it. That was an important part, but it is also just that it is a really special right as a land owner to have a river meandering through your property."

James also talks of raising his children and grandchildren alongside the river and its part it has played in educating his children:

"When they were little tackers, take them and they would start to paddle and then start to float, and you would tell them to watch the colored stones as they floated down the river and things like that."

James notes the lack of interaction from public through this upper section of the Selwyn-Waikirikiri and describes some of the factors relating to this:

"Because you basically have to come through this part of the property and go down stream to get into it, so it's not exactly like walking upstream to it. There have always been a few people who have wanted to. But it is more likely to be fishermen, there has been the odd tramper who has come through, we have had in the past more demand for 4-wheel drives and they love plugging through the river and things, we don't like that particularly, but they just like playing in water. So, in this end it doesn't have a high usage."

Observations of the Selwyn-Waikirikiri over time

Within the interview James shares some of his observations of the upper catchment of the Selwyn-Waikirikiri over time. Although stating that the river looks very similar in the present day than in 1973 James does portray a changing and varying waterway, he states:

"It seems to have a bit more shingle in it. As in any shingle slightly braided river it moves around, so one year it will be over there and next year it will be 100 meters back the other side and that's just usually a shingle accumulation. And quite often when you get a fast flood where you get a lot of water very quickly it will throw up real banks and then next year it will be somewhere else."

James additionally comments upon the flood prone nature of the river, remarking on features of floods during autumn and spring (Figs 30-32):

"It is more likely to happen in the autumn or the spring than it is in the winter, occasionally it happens in the winter but more normally if we get a heavy rain fall in the winter it will either be held up as snow so it tends to be when you get a spring fresh or a late autumn rain."

Furthermore, James makes some remarks towards a change in vegetation along the river, commenting:

“(W)e had a lot of gorse and broom when we first came here, which we have contained. Well it’s pretty much eliminated but we still are spraying. 40 years 45 years we have been doing it... Big gorse population and big gorse so two to three meters tall. Real old man stuff that had probably been there for decades, so we have tidied it up. Where we can we have eliminated the willows, but not entirely. And I suppose anything else that has popped up like elderberries and things we have tried to get rid of those.”

James also comments upon the appearance of algae within the upper reaches of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri that flow through his property:

“Some years there was always some algae, you know in hot years when the river got low and deoxygenated, you would see algae on the stones and that. So that was a seasonal phenonema, if it was just hot and low rainfall, we would expect to see some.”

He also talks about the presence of Didymo in recent years within the upper reaches of the river:

“We saw Didymo a couple of years ago. Very disappointed to see that, it was in that really dry period. And it did get quite a hold, it doesn’t appear to be any sign of it now, so weather the floods from last summer purged it, I don’t know.”

Further to this James comments upon dry patches within this portion of the river, stating:

“So, most summers we will have up to two or three kilometers where the river is dry.”

Additionally, James does mention the river drying up on a daily basis during a heat wave of over 40 degrees, unfortunately the year is unknown:

“...I recall one year we were in the mid-40s and the river just, it would be flowing in the morning and by 11o’clock it would dry up and it might start flowing again at 10 o’clock at night, just the heat. Now there were dead trout everywhere and everywhere was getting deoxygenated and going belly up, but it bounced back.”

Thoughts, beliefs and emotions associated with the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri

The interview also addresses some of James’s own beliefs and thoughts associated with the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri. James comments upon his view of the river in the 1970s addressing that he believes that it was healthy at the time but the treatment that it received was not good environmental management:

"Yeah, I think it probably was... Everybody probably didn't treat it with the same awareness of river contamination and so forth, it wasn't at the forefront. For instance, the kitchen sink drained into the creek... it must have been doing that for 100 years."

Furthermore, the dialogue also explores some of James's opinions on the health of the river and how to better manage it in the future:

"I would like to see a more holistic and supportive approach to it, good science based on some pretty good analysis and if we can detect things that are wrong like if it is excessive extraction or something like that is part of it. Yeah there is still conflicting things like we don't want willows but hang on, willows keep it cool, willows are good for shade and all that sort of stuff. We have got to start to think in compromise terms ...I have no doubt that in another 30 years things that we now think we are doing are really smart and are really good at are going to be laughed at. And I think handling a river is a bit the same, I think we have all got in our ideas of this thing that If we pull back and keep away from the banks, leave it on its own it will look after itself. I think the river needs a helping hand. Its population, its pressures, its climatic change. There is a whole raft of things."

He also makes some remarks towards what he believes may having an effect upon the state of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri in the present day, remarking on water extraction on the Canterbury Plains:

"I think ...in terms of water extraction ... should be reduced rather than enhanced and I can understand the temptation there because its flowing past so we will just take a bit of it and a hundred years ago they did that. They stuck water races all over the plains because it was all for stock because you couldn't run stock without water. So, they just tapped into creeks and where there was water and diverted it. That has all changed, we have different ways. I think it's, just sort of needs to be, there is a balance, recreation is certainly important but then you know you talk to the fishermen and they don't want anybody else recreating on it other than fishing, they don't want to see canoes and bits and pieces and people walking their dogs. People need to learn to accommodate all sorts of things. So, I think it's a balance and it is a relatively small river close to a big center of population that just puts pressure on it to a certain extent."

Additionally, James also mentions that he believes the river is being looked after better in the present day than any time in the past:

"I think we are looking after it better now than we ever have. Not because we were neglecting it, but we are just more conscious of it and protecting it, putting fences on both side of the creeks and that sort of stuff."



Figure 30. The Selwyn-Waikirikiriri river in flood, High Peak Station August 2000. Photo: James Guild



Figure 31. The Selwyn-Waikirikiriri river in flood, High Peak Station. August 2000. Photo: James Guild



Figure 32. The Selwyn-Waikirikiriri river in flood, High Peak Station. August 2000. Photo: James Guild

4 Discussion

This project explored three key themes within each individual dialogue, interactions, observations and thoughts and beliefs of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri river. Each theme provided insight into different aspects of the social and physical history of the river, and has resulted in a colorful account of the waterway. Participants have shared stories throughout the length of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri catchment and so have allowed a brief snapshot into the past of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri river system.

4.1 Recreational Use

Throughout the dialogue contained within the transcripts, a strong sense of the recreational value of the river is present, being considered a valuable and important location for recreation. The transcripts contains many interesting and quite profound stories of times spent swimming, fishing, boating, picnicking and all doing all manner of activities along the banks and within the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri River, such one story, as described by Jen:

“The river was the most wonderful place especially in summer, because we used to grow peas for seed and my husband would at the peak as they were ripening would pull the whole plant up and we would shove it in the boot of the car and I would take the kids down to the river and they would swim and I would pod peas and it...became not just us, it became family, it became friends.” (Jen Halliday).

Furthermore, another story commented upon by Russell:

“The river was the main attraction for all things concerned. There was a group atmosphere, and our street ... my mother and about five other hut people played bridge while the men were out fishing, and they had morning and afternoon tea and were going from bach to bach. There was a whole sort of range of social activities that were there.” (Russell Duckworth)

4.2 Changes in River Characteristics

Observations and changes of the river over time have also been noted by each participant. The observations focus primarily around the quantity of water present within the river, the presence of algae and populations of aquatic life that have been witnessed throughout each participant's time with the river. Such as one recollection commented on by Steve, regarding some of the physical changes to the waterway:

“....it was deeper, a lot deeper, big deep pools, permanent weed beds, a lot more trout but not big ones... I just think that the dramatic change in the

piece above the Selwyn Huts, you know to Coes ford. Just such a totally different river, it is narrow, it is small, it is tiny, it is channelized, its lost all of its shape and character. Yeah, if I hadn't seen the change and you blind folded me and you from the 70s to today you took me there and said where are you, I wouldn't know. I would look at that and say I wouldn't know, if you said it was the Selwyn river, I would have said no it's not. Dramatic change.” (Steve Brailsford)

Additionally, remarked by Russell:

“The depth of the water is, the places that we used to swim, I learnt to swim there, was up to your waist and now to walk across it you barely wet your feet and in some places, it is no longer a barrier.” (Russell Duckworth)

4.3 Thoughts, beliefs and attitudes surrounding the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri River

Participants share a number of their personal beliefs and values associated with the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri. Participants describe a number of causes that they believe to be influencing the current state of the waterway, what a healthy waterway looks like, their emotions surrounding the river as well as a variety of other ideas that emerge individually within each interview.

As seen in one comment by Russell, remarking upon dairying farming in the district:

“Well I think it is extensive farming, a lot of the places up river towards the mountains, a lot of it is very poor country and it only exists today as dairies, you know as farming. By pouring water onto it and keeping the nitrates up, if they stopped that the whole place would go back to what it was, which was sort of dry tussock and that.” (Russell Duckworth)

And further comment from Hamish, regarding what a healthy waterway should be:

“Well it's got to feel safe to swim in again. To get rid of the cyanobacteria type algae, the black stuff that comes down, but very close on its heels would be I think the sedimentation is a greatly under rated problem I think the amount of silt that is coming down the river is a problem. (T)he Waikirikiriri basically means gravel bottom. If it loses its gravel then it loses its name, its identity. So that a major concern and of course just the water clarity I'm not sure which of those three is the most important. I can't sort of differentiate the three.” (Hamish Rennie)

Additionally, such as remarked by David, referring to his emotions regarding the river:

“Every time you would see the river it would get a little bit more depressing. it's not the only river that I have based my life on but it's one of the main ones that I sort of one of the reasons that I live here, 10 minutes from the river and I am pretty angry about what's happened to it. Well I was angry,

but I pretty much went through years of anger about it and now I am just sad and depressed about it.” (David Deakins)

Lynnette describes another view point on the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri:

“Personally I feel that there is a lot of hype about the river and I think personally that it is good that they are addressing the problems with the river but there is also a lot of information out there that is anti the farmers and the farmers have been doing a lot of good work and I can see it from both sides. From a farming family and farming ourselves. But unfortunately, we are paying for what went on in the past and it is at least being addressed. So, I also think that there is a lot of bureaucracy that gets in the way.” (Lynette Harris)

5 Conclusion

This oral history project acts as a pilot study for future qualitative work on people's perceptions of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri river catchment. Previously there have been few oral history projects undertaken regarding rivers in New Zealand. The data gathered throughout this study highlights some interesting themes and observations, such as the premise of river health being related to the health of social communities. A larger and more robust study may seek to explore additional oral histories in greater depth. Oral histories provide a useful way to record participant memories about changes in the characteristics of rivers, but as a qualitative form of data they do not provide a reliable scientific record of river health.

Rather, oral histories can be viewed as providing a general insight and record of macro-changes in the both the ecology and function of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri river over a long period of time. Photos provided by participants also help to form an invaluable insight into the rivers at a particular point in time. Future research may seek to form a larger project aiming for a greater number of participants, perhaps focusing on other areas of the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri catchment missed in this project. Further exploration of themes may provide additional and valuable detail into the history of the river.

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Appendix A. Interview Schedule

General biography/life context: What does the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri mean to you/your family? (Which part of the river?)

- Family history – where did they live, what did they do, when, how many generations?
- Any memories of other people or families they associate strongly with the river?
- Was, or is, the river important for your families' livelihood? In what way?

Interaction with the river

- Life stages; interaction as a child, young person, adult. (working, recreation, travelling)
- What did they observe other people doing in or around the river?
- Did particular communities use the river at certain times? (E.g. women, families, students, fishing, hunters). When or how?

Observations of the river over time

- How would you describe/define a health Selwyn-Waikirikiriri river system?
- When can you remember the Selwyn-Waikirikiriri river system being in a healthy state as you describe? (Which parts? sections or whole? when?)
- Why do you think it was healthy? Or wasn't?
- Has the river changed in any way?
- When did changes take place? When? Where?
- What changes have been observed? (e.g. plants, animals, fish, insects, trees/riparian planting, algae)
- Are there any specific sites the participant wishes to comment on?
- Have stretches of the river always been dry? Where?

Attitudes and beliefs

- How do you think the health of the river system can be improved?
- How do you feel about those observed changes?
- Is it important to restore the river to a healthier state?
- What do you think a healthier river would look like? Should there be water along it all of the time, or is it natural for the river to be dry at times?
- What is the most important thing you would like to see changed?

Archival material

- Any photos or family records might be happy to share?
- Where and when were these photos taken? By whom?