



Resource Community Formation and Change

A Case Study of Methven



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METHVEN

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INTRODUCTION

This paper reports the findings of a case study of Methven, mid-Canterbury. It is one of a series of three case studies of tourism communities in New Zealand that are part of a project entitled “Resource Community Formation and Change” which has been funded by the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology¹. The other case studies of tourism communities in this series are Te Anau (WP 27) and Paihia (WP 29). The Methven case study was selected because of the development there of a winter tourism industry, based on snow sports, in a traditional farming economy. This report provides findings relating to the economic and social impact of tourism, but not exclusively snow tourism, on this traditionally agricultural district.

A variety of research methods were used in this case study, which primarily focuses on the economic and social history of Methven since the early 1970's and tracked the development of the snow industry and allied hospitality and tourism ventures. Consideration was also given to the continued development of cropping and arable farming in the district in particular at those points where the two industries transect, particularly in relation to employment. These research methods included an analysis of census statistics, a review of published documents describing the social and economic condition of the district and six days of interviews with farming families, community leaders, local business people (retail, commercial and agricultural), school principals, tourism entrepreneurs, ski field management and local government officers. A small number of telephone interviews were also carried out; this form of interview was only used to gather specific information. Generally interviews were prearranged although a number of informal interviews were carried out with business operators, primarily in the retail sector².

The work provides a stronger conceptual and empirical basis for social assessment and resource planning in New Zealand, especially in rural communities that depend directly on the primary production or processing of natural resources. The findings from the analysis of the three communities in the tourism sector will be added to those from communities based on the forestry, mining, agriculture, energy and fishing sectors, to develop an improved understanding of the processes of community formation and change in these types of resource communities³.

METHVEN AND ITS DEPENDENCE ON TOURISM

The research area, comprising the township of Methven and its farming hinterland, lies on the Canterbury Plains beneath the foothills of the Southern Alps and between the Rakaia and Ashburton rivers. The area is dominated by the mountain, Mt. Hutt (2,170m high). The presence of the mountain has generated a successful snow tourism industry. The research community, Methven, has a permanent population of just over 1,000 (1,070 in 1996) residents, which swells during the winter season with some 2,500 visitor bed numbers. It is mid-Canterbury's second largest community, second to Ashburton, and lies within the local government jurisdiction of the Ashburton District Council.

For over half a century Methven has been a market town for the nationally significant arable farming area of the upper mid Canterbury plains. Excellent soils, hot summers and cold winters make for unsurpassed

¹ Contract TBA 801. For further information on the research project contact Taylor Baines & Associates (PO Box 8620, Christchurch or by email: n.taylor@tba.co.nz).

² A total of 39 interviews were completed. The interviews were carried out on the 10th and 14th of October 1999, the 19th and 20th October 1999, and the 15th and 16th November 1999..

³ It should be noted that most of the other sector study communities in this phase of work also had tourism as an element in their local or regional economies, eg the fishing communities of Riverton (WP24), Moeraki (WP25) and Havelock (WP26), and the energy communities of Manapouri (WP21), Twizel (WP22) and Opunake (WP23).

growing of cereal crops, seed production, and livestock, including the breeding of thoroughbred horses (Methven Community Strategic Plan, 1997:3). Agricultural development has been enhanced by the presence of water. The Rangitata Diversion Race put through during the depression years has served the industry well. Historically, townspeople were employed in seed potato production and seed dressing. The demand then was for manual workers and people seeking work were quickly absorbed by the community.

European Settlement

In 1869 Robert Patton bought land that lay on the open tussock plains at the foot of the Southern Alps and named his purchase after his home town Methven in Perthshire, Scotland. Like other parts of the province this area of mid-Canterbury is threaded by rivers that have themselves created the very plains they flow over. The Rakaia and Ashburton rivers rise in steep gorges deep in the mountains to the west of Methven. They and their tributaries create natural, sub-regional boundaries and in the early days of colonisation they were impediments to exploration and settlement. Death by river drowning was known as the 'New Zealand death'. The old-man nor' wester (Fohn wind) drops its moisture in the Alps and roars out across the plains melting winter snow and ensuring dry summers and reliable summer harvests⁴.

The mountain that dominates the district was called Opuke by the Maori. With the arrival of the early colonists the mountain was named for John Hutt (1795 - 1880) the first chairman of the London-based Canterbury Association.

While Methven was initially settled by Europeans in 1869, the year 1879 is used for commemoration purposes - it was during this year that the Mt. Hutt Roads Board office was opened. The Roads Board became the driving force in infrastructure construction and the administration of the district.

Robert Patton built the first Methven hotel in 1880. The present hotel, known as 'The Blue Pub' was built in 1918. The second hotel, the Canterbury Hotel or 'The Brown Pub', was built in 1883, destroyed by fire in 1922 and later replaced. However, pre-dating both township hotels was the first accommodation house opened by John Bryan, in the Rakaia Gorge in 1851. It was built of bush timber on the north side of the river and destroyed by fire in 1874. John Bryan also ran a ferry service on the north side of the river, one for passengers and one for stock.

On the south side of the Rakaia River at the head waters, lies Double Hill station one of the original valley runs. The lease was taken up in 1863. In its earlier days the station encompassed Glenfalloch, Manuka Point and Glenrock stations. Manuka Point has another claim to fame, it was here in 1887 that the first herd of deer, shipped to New Zealand from England, was liberated.

Original farm settlement was dominated by large leasehold properties grazing sheep and producing wheat.

The Rakaia and Ashburton Forks Railway completed a line from the coast in 1879. Its terminus was a six-way crossroads on the Ashburton-Upper Rakaia road near the 'Methven' farm. A small settlement began to develop round this crossroads. A school was opened, churches built and by 1902 the population of the town

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According to Maori mythology a taniwha dwelt in the gorge of the Rakaia river. He lived on moa and weka, his possessions were tapu. One cold day while he was away seeking a hot spring in which to warm himself the demon north west wind came down the Rakaia from the mountains with a mighty roar and flattened the taniwha's tapu dwelling. Determined to seek vengeance and outwit the north west demon the taniwha himself journeyed up into the mountains and carried down huge boulders to halt the course of the demon wind by narrowing the gorge. These boulders can be seen today, they form the island lying between the two bridges. As the north west demon battled through the narrow gorge he became so warm he melted the snows on the mountains and the sweat from the body of the taniwha as he struggled with the boulders to form a barrier to the demon's progress fell onto the rocks and boulders and formed crystals in the river bed.

was about 300. While family farms emerged as the major form of agricultural tenure during the first two decades of the twentieth century, large sheep runs continued to predominate in the foothills nearby. Tradesmen and transient labourers were attracted to the district. During the 1920's, the introduction of farm machinery and the increase in motor vehicles helped establish Methven "as a prime location for family farming". There was a gradual reduction in farm size and some labourers made the transition from farm worker to owner of a small holding. Between the 1930's and 1960's a growing number of businesses (e.g. local transport operators and seed dressing plants) lost local ownership to outside companies based in Ashburton and further afield, and an increasing reliance on branches or agencies of national companies meant a decline in locally-controlled businesses (Fairweather and Campbell, 1990, pp.42-49).

Interviewees had a strong sense of their community and the district was frequently and unabashedly described as 'the jewel in the crown of Ashburton'. There was no confusion within the minds of local residents as to either the identity of their district nor its value in the sub-region. A large sign stands in the town centre:

"METHVEN
MT. HUTT VILLAGE
SISTER CITY OF SHIOZAWA"

The sign encapsulates the inseparable relationship that exists today between the mountain and the township, and the critical importance of tourists to both, particularly Japanese tourists.

Mt. Hutt Ski Fields - a short history

The Methven Lions Club initiated the concept of a ski field on Mt. Hutt in the late 1960's. Local residents, both town and farm, had long recognised the potential for skiing that the mountain offered but they were always confronted with the problem of access to the ski area. The County engineer held a strong view that a road up the mountain was impossible. This view was endorsed by the engineer brought in as 'a second opinion' by the Lions Club. However the Club refused to be deterred and turned for advice to heavy machinery contractor and local resident Doug Hood, a man whose contracting skills are legend. Doug Hood believed that road access was possible and in 1971, to prove his argument, he drove a bull dozer straight up 'The Ridge' to form the first access track. That track became the foundation of today's ski field road. The Lions immediately promoted the formation of a company to raise finance for the development of a ski field. Initial funds of \$30,000 were raised, made of \$100 contributions from district and town households. The vision had come from the community and the community was to drive the project. That winter Willy Huber, an Austrian ski instructor, built a hut on the mountain and lived there taking recordings of snow depths. His assessment, come the spring, was that the mountain was 'skiable'.

Doug Hood put the access road through, a major undertaking clearing rocks and cutting through bluffs, for shares in the company. By winter 1973 the first rope tow was in operation and the following year, 1974, saw the operation of the first Tee Bar. That year major development began when the company decided 'to go public' to seek necessary finance. That decision was made at a meeting in Rakaia attended by 300 local shareholders. A public company, Mt. Hutt Ski and Alpine Tourist Company, was proposed and listed for public share holdings. The constitution stated that at least 75% of the shareholding was to be locally based.

By 1986 development had proceeded but the money had run out including financial support from the community. Times were tough then for a rural community. A number of the older shareholders had died and their widows and families required access to the money held in shareholdings. From this time the ownership and development of Mt. Hutt becomes somewhat chequered.

A controlling interest in the company was bought by Auckland based Leisureland Holdings, a company that promoted theme park experiences. In the difficult climate following the 1987 share market crash, Leisureland was taken over by Japanese investors, the Victoria USA Company, who were convinced of the potential of

New Zealand tourism. They wanted to diversify their investments from clothing retailing into ski sports enterprises. From 1991 they invested considerable amounts on the mountain, including snow making equipment. By June 1994, however, Victoria USA began to disinvest from Mt. Hutt and was bought out by the Mt. Cook Company, which had itself been absorbed in a takeover by Air New Zealand. Victoria USA had lacked a clear, long-term strategy and had stopped investing in development of facilities on the mountain.

The Mt. Cook Company has interests in the Coronet Peak and Remarkables ski fields and now operates the three fields under the trade name NZski.com⁵, and has headquarters in Queenstown. With, as the website comments, “a history forged in the mountains of New Zealand’s Southern Alps since 1906” this trade name also reflects the increasing reliance of the modern tourism industry on the internet. There are 35 permanent staff covering the three ski areas, plus seasonal staff. Latterly, Mt. Hutt has attracted a number of awards, to staff for efficiency and friendliness, as a visitor attraction, and for the education and training of staff.

There was much in the succession of ownership at Mt. Hutt that caused the community to view the changes negatively. This was a community that had participated actively in the initial establishment of the ski field. Foreign owners had not conveyed to the community a vision for the future of the mountain. By 1999 a new development plan was being implemented to allow the ski field to increase capacity and cope with more visitors. Improvements have included new base buildings and sewerage treatment and a new lift is being investigated.

Climate

Both farmers and snow tourism depend on the weather (Holmes, 1987:36). The winter prayer of Methven farmers is

“Let it snow on the mountain but not dear God too much on the plain”.

Farmers noted that they have changed their views about snow ‘on the tops’ in May; they now think of their ski industry friends and the uplift in the general economy. Respondents commented that snow is no longer the ‘bloody nuisance’ of the past. Come May and everyone in the town begins ‘freaking out’, will there be any snow? And at the other end of the season the approach of spring brings the question ‘will nor’westers take the snow early?’ The district’s dual economies are therefore highly reliant on climate. They are both vulnerable to weather patterns over which they have no control. “*When Mt. Hutt is closed by weather during the season the township is chaotic*”, and “*The dependence on the mountain and the climate mean that in bad years there is a sense of gloom and depression everywhere*”. Queenstown may still be the tourist Mecca in winter, but Methven competes with snow. It is the first ski field to open and the last to close. When Queenstown is slow to start or has a poor season the impact on Methven can be an increase of a third over the usual seasonal patronage.

DEMOGRAPHIC FEATURES AND SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Demographic characteristics

Unlike many rural communities, and the rest of Ashburton District, but similar to other rural communities with a tourism base, the population of Methven has increased noticeably since 1986.

⁵

The trade name is also used to access the Company’s website at www.nzski.com.

Table 1 Methven - Population changes 1981-1996

Census Year	Methven		Ashburton District	
	No. of Persons	% Change in Population	No. of Persons	% Change in Population
1981	918	-	24,910	-
1986	918	0	24,840	-0.3
1991	972	5.9	24,710	-0.5
1996	1071	10.2	25,180	1.9

Just half (49%) of Methven's residents in 1996 (see Table 2) indicated they were living at the same address as five years before, while 28 per cent of them had moved to the township from other parts of the District. There was also an influx of newcomers to Methven from outside Canterbury, with 18 per cent of the township's residents reporting they had lived outside Canterbury in 1991. It should be noted that the census is held in March, well outside the snow season, therefore it does not capture data on seasonal workers.

Table 2 Place of residence of Usually Resident Population of Methven - five years before 1996

Place of residence	Methven Per cent of Population
Same usual address	48.5
Same territorial authority	28.3
Same regional council, different territorial authority	5.4
Different regional council, same Island	3.6
Different regional council, different Island	2.1
Not specified - New Zealand	3.3
Overseas	9
Total number of Persons	996

The age-sex structure of Methven's population in 1996 (Table 3) was a little different from the national population with fewer young people and more elderly. The township had a similar dependency ratio to New Zealand as a whole (0.52 cf. 0.53 for NZ). Males predominated in the 15-64 age group, and females in the 65 plus age group.

Table 3 Age-sex structure of the population of Methven 1996

	Methven		New Zealand	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
% 0 - 14 years	20.8	20.7	24.1	22
% 15 - 64 years	68	63.7	65.7	65
% 65 years & over	11.2	15.6	10.3	13.1
Total Number of Persons	534	537	1,777,464	1,840,839

Sex ratio M/F 1996: 0.99 (Methven), 0.97(NZ).

Dependency ratio 1996: 0.52 (Methven), 0.53 (NZ).

Data for Usually Resident population.

Social characteristics

Other census statistics illustrate social characteristics of the population of Methven. Half of the families (49 per cent cf 45 percent for NZ) were two parent families (Table 5). There were also proportionally more couple-only families, and fewer one-parent families (12 per cent cf.18 per cent for NZ).

Table 4 Family Types in Methven 1996

Family Type	% of families	
	Methven	New Zealand
One parent family	11.5	17.7
Two parent family	49.0	44.9
Couple only	39.6	37.3
Total number of families	288	949,497

The level of education was slightly less than for New Zealand as a whole (Table 5).

Table 5 Highest educational qualifications held by the residents of Methven - 1996

Highest educational qualification	% of residents	
	Methven	New Zealand
University & other tertiary	24.3	25.8
Secondary	25.4	26.5
No qualifications	35.9	32.2

The distribution of household incomes shows Methven is notably higher than the national population in the middle range, but markedly less in the upper income range (Table 6).

Table 6 Distribution of Household Incomes in Methven - 1996

Household income range	% of households	
	Methven	New Zealand
\$20,000 & under	19.6	22.9
\$20,001 - \$50,000	48	32.9
\$50,001 & over	15.8	27.1

Thirty-two per cent of the residents of Methven (aged 15 years & over) received at least one form of income support in 1996 (cf. 35 per cent for NZ). The main forms of income support they received were national superannuation (56 per cent of total benefits cf. 40 per cent for NZ), the unemployment benefit (17 per cent of total benefits cf. 20 per cent for NZ) and accident compensation (7 per cent of total benefits cf. 6 per cent for NZ). Fairweather and Campbell (1990, p.55) note the presence in Methven of welfare beneficiaries (unemployed and domestic purpose) from Christchurch in the late 1980's, who had been encouraged by the Department of Social Welfare to shift to rural areas at that time. Since then the unemployment situation appears to have eased.

INDUSTRY, WORK AND OCCUPATIONS

The district of Methven supports two distinct industries, agriculture and tourism, yet labour is exchanged between them. The traditional industry of agriculture, in addition to pastoral farming, has a particular emphasis on cropping of small seeds, cereals, and seed potatoes. There are also the breeding and raising of standard and thorough bred race horses. The relatively new industry of tourism is dominated by recreational activities based on the snow at Mt. Hutt. There is also recreational tourism based on the natural environment, including, fishing, golf, ballooning, horse racing, river sports and boating, farm tourism, tramping, and climbing. Labour crosses easily between tourism and agriculture. Workers are resourceful, moving between such diverse occupations as relief teaching, taxi driving, seed cleaning, coach driving and grain laboratory work. In the winter they are shuttle bus drivers, in the summer they are in the freezing works or driving heavy farm equipment⁶.

The employment status of the Methven workforce in 1996 (Table 7) shows that there are high proportions of both wage and salary earners and self employed and employers of others. Unemployment was relatively low. The participation rate in 1996, including full and part-time work, was high at 69 per cent (cf. 59 per cent for NZ).

Table 7 Employment status of the residents of Methven 1996

	Wages & Salary %	Self Employed & Employer of others %	Unemployed %	Full-time %	Part-time %
Methven	48.1	13.8	2.8	48.1	20.9
New Zealand (TLA)	43.5	11	4.9	45	13.6

One of the most significant features of Methven's workforce is the large proportion of residents pursuing white-collar occupations: administrators/managers, professionals, technicians and clerks, for instance, and the higher proportions of machine operators, trades workers and elementary workers in its labour force.

The major sources of employment of Methven's residents by sector in 1996 were wholesale/retail and hospitality (up to 27 per cent from 24 per cent in 1991), the community/social/personal services (down to 22 per cent from 27 per cent in 1991), and agriculture/forestry and fishing (little changed since 1991). The diversity of the township's economic base is also demonstrated by the fact that significant proportions of residents were employed in manufacturing, transport/communication and construction (Table 8).

Analysis of people who work in Methven itself shows a somewhat different story. Work of people whose workplace is in the township is dominated by work in the wholesale/retail/hospitality and community/social/personal services sectors (Table 8).

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Further detail of multiple job holding in the agriculture sector in the Ashburton District is available in Taylor and McCrostie Little(1995).

Table 8 *Sectoral distribution of the workforce of Methven - 1996*

Sector	Residents of Methven	Persons whose workplace is at Methven	New Zealand Workforce
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	15.4	10.5	9.2
Mining	-	-	0.3
Manufacturing	10.3	9.0	14.3
Electricity/gas/water supply	0.5	-	0.5
Construction	5.6	4.5	5.8
Wholesale/retail/hospitality	26.7	36.0	22.3
Transport/communications	8.2	3.8	5.3
Financial/business	3.1	5.3	13.1
Community/social/personal	21.6	27.9	23.0
Total number of persons	585	399	1,630,812

Agricultural services and labour

Historically Methven was a market town servicing a distinct district known for its crop production (Henderson, 1976). Such specialised agriculture has required increasingly heavy and technologically sophisticated machinery, and a stable and skilled work force for some five to six months of the year. This labour tended to be drawn from the town and skills were generational; even today many of these families still reside in Methven contracting their labour out. It is unusual to find a small rural town that has retained its core families in the manner of Methven. The town was described by respondents as formerly being ‘working class’, providing the manual labour for the agricultural industry.

In spite of its agricultural wealth the district has not been protected from the national restructuring of service industries. The number of stock and station agents servicing the district has been reduced from five to two. However major stock sales (e.g., ewe fair, calf sale, merino sale) although reduced in number and size, are still held. Rural service industries in Methven like those specialising in farm machinery, with both a sales and servicing department, suffered during the rural downturn. These businesses reflected what was happening in the rural hinterland and as opposed to other businesses they had few opportunities to diversify. Today their staff numbers, often reduced to half through non-replacement after natural attrition, have not returned to their original size.

Nevertheless, an informal survey of the local industrial estate reveals a strong agricultural service presence with at least four heavy vehicle and machinery specialists. The industrial estate is sited on what was Railway Reserve. The estate was initially leasehold; more recently free holding opportunities have been taken up.

The local transport operator came into the district as a stock and station agent and built up his business from a one-truck spray contracting business to the operation of a trucking fleet of some 40 trucks. The business employs a staff of forty plus and as well as the truck fleet runs a workshop, which handles 90 per cent of the fleet maintenance. Employment is not seasonal and the greater majority of staff live in Methven. A major influence in the development of this business was the deregulation of the transport industry, which allowed the operator to move into activities like bulk grain carrying and the transportation of logs to the local timber mill. The operator was keen to diversify the business away from total dependence on agriculture, weather and the rural downturn into more commercial operations. The diversity of the sub regional economy has permitted that, although the transport operation has no formal business relationships with Mt. Hutt.

Two businesses based in Methven specialise in processing small-seeds, including legumes, cereal, clover and grass-seeds. One factory is new. An interview with one of these businesses showed they employed 15 permanent workers, in shifts, and three supervisors. There is an increased demand for workers during the summer season. Operations and administration employ a further six staff. As well there is a team of some 12 field managers and staff. At present the company covers the South Island from Cheviot in the north to the Waitaki and Clutha valleys. Throughout this area can be found pockets of 'niche climates' suitable for the growing of specialist seeds. It is also important for crop integrity that they are grown in some isolation, not surrounded by other crops, to protect the purity of the strain. Field managers are required to have tertiary training and already the business is attracting specialists, quality controllers who often travel internationally, working seasonally around Northern and Southern Hemisphere summers. The nature of the work is 'hands on'. Initially the field managers have learned the trade as field or factory workers while they were tertiary students, and they returned to take permanent positions following graduation.

Ski field employment

Employment on Mt. Hutt peaks in July, August and September, when some 260 people are working on the mountain. Two hundred of these are full time with the remaining 60 being employed at the weekend or during holidays. Some 40 percent of these workers are from countries other than New Zealand, 10 per cent are local and the balance comes from areas outside Methven. There is a dramatic reduction of staff to nine full time employees during the summer. A culture has evolved within the company of staff returning for seasonal jobs. Some 60 per cent return annually to work and ski. The snow workers/skiers are transient. They take on seasonal snow-related work to maintain their life of 'travelling to ski'. The ski/travel/work cycle revolves seasonally around New Zealand, Australia, Korea, Japan, USA and Europe.

While there is no lack of seasonal workers, it is often difficult obtaining the skills needed on the mountain. Skilled instructors are always being sought. Mt. Hutt is also in direct competition with the food and beverage sector of the hospitality industry in Methven, who also seek experienced, permanent, seasonal staff.

Hospitality services and labour

Hospitality services have grown alongside the burgeoning snow tourism industry. The hospitality industry comprises two distinct components, food/entertainment and accommodation.

At the height of the snow season there are some 26 restaurants open for business in Methven, including two 'resort' hotels, two 'pubs' and the stand-alone restaurants and cafes. A number of these restaurants are purveyors of fine foods. There are also two lodges outside Methven that offer restaurant and bar facilities. Most of the town's restaurants market into snow tourism and as a consequence they close when the season closes. The two 'locals', the Blue Pub and the Brown Pub provide bar service, meals and accommodation. One pub described a seasonal trade with 90 percent being local between October and May but only 40 per cent being local during the winter months. Australians, Japanese and North Islanders comprise their winter tourist trade. The patronage of 'regulars' brings in farmers and farm workers, local truck drivers and freezing workers.

It is almost an understatement to say that Methven residents have responded to the need for ski accommodation with enthusiasm. Houses have been renovated and adapted for paying guests or rental occupation, and motels, lodges and cottages built. At the height of the winter season the township of Methven can provide 2,500 tourist beds.

A review of brochures on the shelves of the Methven Visitors Centre revealed 24 local accommodation places. The accommodation that they advertised ranged from farm stays, ski lodges, motels, 'alpine' chalets, backpackers lodges, guest houses and home stays. They offered bed, bed and breakfast, or dinner, bed and breakfast rates. The accommodation network spreads as far as Lake Coleridge and Pudding Hill. Hotel-

resort styled accommodation within Methven is offered by the Sovereign Resort Hotel and Brinkley Village. Bickley Village is advertised as “an international ski and country club” with a restaurant, a range of leisure facilities, self-contained studio units and two-bedroom apartments. Apartments are also available there for timescale purchase. When it opened Brindle doubled the available resort accommodation overnight. The Terrace Downs Country resort and golf club is heavily advertised and is being built on the north east side of the Rakaia Gorge, ‘over the river’. As yet only the golf course is a reality.

Whatever the type of accommodation it generates employment, ranging from receptionists, to cleaners, waiters, grounds people, chefs, bar and kitchen staff. The majority of workers in the accommodation industry are women and many work part-time.

During the field research the point was made several times that the new schedule of school holidays, now in blocks of two weeks, means that accommodation demands are more concentrated, rather than being spread, which results in the town being totally booked out - and then empty. There is an obvious flow-on effect on the highly seasonal nature of employment.

Adventure and other tourism activity

Evolving in parallel with the ski industry, and hospitality and accommodation industry, has been outdoor recreation and adventure tourism. The Methven Visitors Centre carried some 18 brochures advertising local tourist activities. Winter based tourism included held skiing, rock and ice abseiling, sky diving and snow safaris. Year round activities included hot air ballooning, trout and salmon fishing, and river jet boating. There were also a number of farm-based tourist ventures like farm yard activities and a harness racing experience. With an excellent local golf course, there are some 7 golf courses in the subregion, plus the new Terrace Downs golf course ‘over the river’, so Methven is well suited to attract golf tourists. Golf and skiing are seen as ‘affiliated’ tourism sports, providing activities on ‘nor west days during the ski season, as well as the summer season. Summer tourism, like snow tourism, stimulates the demand for local accommodation. For instance, groups hot air ballooning from Methven usually require ‘beds’ for two nights.

Methven is host to the second largest hot air ballooning company in the country. The business has a close relationship and good rapport with the rural community. A regular rural box newsletter identifies the right of farmers to decline landings on their properties but they are also invited to the traditional champagne breakfast when the balloon does land! Then visitors and farmers meet. Rural tourism of this kind cannot exist without the support of the farming community. Unlike much rural tourism, which typically has a low capital requirement (Warren and Taylor, 1999) ballooning requires \$NZ90,000 for each, new, USA-made balloon. The business works co-operatively with other local, adventure, tourism activities, like jet-boating. This entrepreneur suggested that Methven could become New Zealand’s hot air ballooning capital, and he added that ballooning attracted 12,000 visitors annually to Alice Springs.

Another adventure tourism enterprise provides mountain climbing and abseiling along the lines of the English rock and ice schools. At first this business focused on the Japanese tourist and the ski markets generally but the numbers were not there and the market disappeared in the summer months. A platform was built on the mountain for abseiling but the idea did not capture support despite extensive advertising. The enterprise then refocused on the conference circuit of adventure tourism, rock climbing and team building. Today the firm has extended that focus to corporate and conference clients with programmes of team building. The Outdoor Pursuits programme that they run for Mt. Hutt College is their ‘bread and butter’ while the summer months of October to April are now the enterprise’s high season.

Training and conferences are another diversification. The Methven Summer School is in its 13th year. Utilising Mt. Hutt College facilities during the January holidays it attracts some 160 students annually. All of the students are accommodated locally and each year some \$7,000 is returned to the community in project grants. Brinkley Village and the Sovereign Hotel are responsible for bringing conferences into the district.

Brinley have attracted a summer trade of up to 30 conferences. But the virtual closure of the township during the summer months could threaten further conference development and the Sovereign Hotel has struggled to achieve viability.

The above tourism activities are interdependent and the growth of tourism on the ski field. Together they offer a range of employment types from casual, to part time to full time, seasonal and permanent. They each require a knowledge of their specialist part of the tourism industry and demand varying levels of skills. They offer local people the opportunity to live in and be employed in their local district.

Workers in the district have learned skills that enable them to cross occupations according to the season and the industries' needs. A characteristic of work in the district therefore is that a core of workers moves in and out of industries as required. The pattern changes with regard to the mountain. Here the majority of workers come into the district from overseas. They are transient skiers in their 20's and early 30's who follow the snow around the world, skiing and working. Economic activity has built up around these ski workers - providing accommodation, food and entertainment.

However, there was criticism from within the industry that in some quarters there is a lack of professionalism and commitment. There is an increasing recognition that standards must be pitched to a high level of accomplishment, with increased professionalism, if the industry in Methven is to continue to compete for the tourist dollar. Respondents noted that the standards of the 1970's entrepreneur would not necessarily survive into this century. And the question must continually be asked, if Methven town persists in closing for the summer, how can summer tourism be positively marketed? Concern was expressed that the district was not being marketed as a total tourist entity, making the advertising dollars of single enterprises go further. The Methven/Mt. Hutt District Promotions Association, however, promotes year round rather than seasonal activities tied only to the snow. They have already planned some 19 events for the year 2000.

Women and work

There were few paid work opportunities for local women before the development of the ski field. The tourism industry is now a major employer, particularly of women, who move between hotel, motel and restaurant cleaning and cooking jobs and working on the mountain. Furthermore, the education, retail, commercial and health sectors are all major employers of women, and these sectors have generally grown as a result of the Mt. Hutt ski field.

Mt. Hutt employs slightly more men than women, more than half the management team are women, with women also operating ticket sales. Women are more prominent than men as equipment operators and ski instructors. Men dominate maintenance positions. While only 10% of the mountain's winter work force (of 260) is local, 26 local workers plus the in-coming workers makes it a major local employer. As noted, work allied to snow tourism is seasonal, so for the majority of women their work is both part time and seasonal. However hours can be long during the season and pay packets reflect the increased work load.

Part-time hours are attractive to working mothers and most local families are supported by two income earners. The majority of primary school children had mothers in paid work. As well as working part time some women also run their own enterprises, such as B & B businesses. Farm women used to rely on off-farm work for extra income but today, it was suggested, they are more likely to be running a small business from their farm base than working for others off the farm⁷.

⁷

Taylor and McCrostie Little (1995) and Taylor et al. (1997) have shown that additional sources of income, whether from off-farm employment or alternative enterprises on farms, are important to the viability of family farming.

Attitudes to the short earning season varied, some earned sufficient to cover themselves for the remainder of the year while others were concerned at their inability to save on a seasonal work regime. Everybody said that they were better off financially than they had been prior to the development of the ski fields.

Training

For some in the hospitality sector the “challenge is finding good professional staff”. Skills can be in short supply at the height of the snow season. While it is not difficult to attract seasonal workers, skilled workers can be at a premium. Within the industry, competition for skilled workers between the mountain and the town, particularly in the food sector, means that skilled staff are always being sought. Methven, it was argued, is a less attractive location than Queenstown for staff seeking employment. Some hotel workers, after graduating from training in Christchurch, only stayed in Methven for three months. The dilemma then becomes the need for continual training to supply workers for each new season.

An agricultural firm, a major summer seasonal employer, intended experimenting to retain staff by offering them back to back employment in conjunction with the ski industry across seasons, thus reducing the continual demands and interruptions of skills training. The common denominator between the two industries is the need for both to use mechanically oriented and trained staff. The two industries combined would be able to offer 12 months employment for a number of people.

Within the different tourist sectors skills training was largely ‘in house’ but small businesses in the hospitality sector often sought skills through Kiwi Hosts courses. Other entrepreneurs attended tourism courses and seminars and at the same time as learning new skills they took the opportunity of advertising their enterprises within their industry. Otherwise the nearest tertiary training facilities are in Timaru, Christchurch and Ashburton - with a very wide range of courses available there. One company is involved in tourism courses run by Aoraki Polytech, Massey and Otago Universities.

Of particular interest is the adventure tourism course run by the Aoraki Polytech in Ashburton. The annual course offers places for 16 students who come from throughout New Zealand. The relationship between the Polytech and the mountain is formal. The Polytech has an agreement with Mt. Hutt management to employ their course students during the winter vacation. In the 1999 season one student, on course completion, was offered seasonal employment as a lift operator. As well as work experience the adventure tourism course offers study from a broad perspective. Students take part in a range of adventure tourism activities; they must review each operation and how the business works. While this only gives the students a superficial view it does enable them to identify the business infrastructure that underpins tourist operations. No students from Methven were on the 1999 course although there were enquiries from Methven for the year 2000. So it cannot be said that either the presence of the mountain or a course in Ashburton stimulates Methven students into career choices in adventure tourism.

REGIONAL AND LOCAL ECONOMY

The case study has found two major, inter-related clusters of economic activity in the Methven area, based on agriculture and tourism. Furthermore, there are other important areas of economic activity, each driven by its own singular characteristics but whose viability depends on the activity generated by the two major industries. If either part of this dual, over-arching economy suffers a negative impact, then that impact flows into the rest of the economy. On the other hand, for every dollar spent in the tourism industry there is a flow-on effect into the local economy. Henderson (1976) recorded the immediate early impact of the ski field on the town of Methven in terms of new businesses servicing ski activity and direct employment created.

Alternative farm enterprises

Since European times mid Canterbury has earned a rightful reputation for innovative farming. Experimental crops soon to become commonplace frequently saw their first summer sun on these plains. However, pastoral and cropping farmers in the area were not immune from the agricultural ‘downturn’ of the mid 1980's. Here, as elsewhere in New Zealand, farm families sought to earn income off their farms to protect their farm equity, or they initiated new business enterprises that could either be land based or have no land-use connection (Taylor et al., 1997). In the Methven district a number of farm families turned to river-based recreational enterprises (e.g., jet boat touring, fishing guiding with national/international clientele), or land-based enterprises like farm stays, including farm yard activities. Others have become tourist entrepreneurs, providing tour booking outlets, tourist information and transport, or they administer essential services like the postal franchise. This current study identified families whose new tourism enterprises have been so successful that they have left farming and now play a leadership role in the district, influencing its economic direction from a different resource base.

A farm-stay host considered that it was no longer sufficient “*just to have some spare beds*”, that the tourist trade had become sophisticated and many farm businesses could not afford the alterations required, to provide private facilities for guests and bring the house up to the expectations of the market. Therefore today there tend to be fewer farm stays but they operate at a higher standard than in the past. The impact of OSH was also cited by respondents as being responsible for the demise of many farm-stays: “*tourism is regulated by rules*”.

Individual farm-stay operations also evolve over time. For one operator an early focus, in the early 1980's, was on summer guests, river fishing and adventure tourism. The community reaction to the enterprise was negative and it was incorrectly assumed the farm was in financial strife. The business was opened because the operator wanted to get into the business of farm tourism and have “*international guests at my dining table*”. Later, with a smaller property and a custom re-built house, there was more emphasis on ‘hands on’ farm activities for guests. Both summer and snow-season guests are now accommodated, including snow season guests from the North Island and international guests, from the UK, USA and Japan throughout the year. Some are regular guests, with families coming every year for a week to 10 days in winter. Other guests frequently stay on the first and the last nights of their tour: “*they don’t want to stay in a city on those nights*”. The operator works co-operatively in the tourism market with allied attractions like river fishing, jet boating and ballooning. Marketing strategies continue to be re-assessed on the basis of visitor numbers and nationalities. The internet, free-phone, fax and e-mail facilities mean new technology communications are taking over from the printed word for promotion and bookings. Travellers are rejecting heavy accommodation guide books and instead retrieve the information they need on their laptop computers!

Other farm-based tourist businesses provide ‘farm-yard’ experiences. One couple, from generational farming families, had always enjoyed hosting visitors to their farm. On retirement they bought a ‘mini’ farm on the outskirts of Methven and turned it into a tourist enterprise. The objective was to give tourists a ‘hands on’ experience of farm animals. The enterprise was run in conjunction with a small museum displaying vintage cars and memorabilia from past farming days. Many of the exhibits are working models which can be activated by the museum visitors. Young Japanese students also ‘home stay’ with the operators. With no previous experience of working ‘with the public’ the operators wanted to ensure that their tourists enjoyed themselves. They sought knowledge and training through the tourism industry and attended seminars run by Ashburton Tourism and by attending a Kiwi Host course. After learning Japanese, at the age of 62 years, one of the operators can now welcome Japanese visitors in their own language.

Another enterprise near Methven provides experience of the racing industry. Methven has a traditional reputation of excellence within the horse breeding and racing industry. This breeder and trainer has taken that reputation a step further and has extended the business to include a tourism enterprise, offering the public the opportunity to race standard bred horses. A tandem sulky was designed and patented and a market

defined that includes tourists, corporates, and conferences. The development sells itself by proximity to Mt. Hutt in the winter and Christchurch and the convention market in the summer. A number of locals are hired to help with large groups, as well as caterers from Christchurch, Methven or Ashburton.

Property and building

When making comparisons between the past and present, residents always compared the ‘before’ and ‘after’ of pre and post ski field days. An indicator frequently used to describe economic growth in the district was growth in the property and building sector since the establishment of the ski industry. The rapid growth in the property sector reflected the rapid growth being experienced by Mt. Hutt as both visitors and workers ‘poured’ into the district for the snow, creating both a short-term and seasonal demand for accommodation. The result has been an increase in subdivision and land sales and the rental of previously empty houses and cottages on surrounding farms. Many houses were renovated for renting to skiers in the winter (Henderson, 1976, p.113).

Prior to the closure of the railway (1976) New Zealand Rail owned a stock of houses in Methven. One of the bonuses of the ski field development was the revitalisation of the housing market to absorb underused housing stock as well as an ‘explosion’ of new building permits. Older-style houses were redecorated and converted into attractive homes by investors attracted into the rental market. There remains a high proportion of rental dwellings compared to the Ashburton District as a whole (Table 9). It was suggested by a respondent that local residents may not appreciate how the appearance of the town has improved as a direct result of tourism. The town today, especially the suburbs, is attractive, houses and gardens are well kept, and an increasing proportion of the housing stock is in the upper-market bracket. In terms of being a rural town Methven does not represent its peers. There is no sense here of hard economic times reflected in the majority of New Zealand’s rural towns today.

It is not generally appreciated outside Methven that a number of Australian and Japanese families who came either to work on the ski fields or to ski, today have their own permanent homes in Methven. Some families live in their homes for the snow season and then return to their national country, while others live in Methven permanently. The attraction for them is not just the ski field ‘but the way of life’.

Table 9 Tenure of Dwellings in Methven - 1991

Form of Tenure	Methven % of dwellings	Ashburton District % of dwellings
Provided rent free	3.5	5.9
Rented	22.6	15.5
Owned with a mortgage	40.0	37.6
Owned without a mortgage	33.0	39.5
Total Number of Dwellings	351	9,084

Government valuations have risen markedly since development of the ski field over twenty years ago. Today an average 850 sq. metre section in the suburbs sells at around \$35,000. Sub-divided land is still available with a new development of 20 sections and another three blocks of 70 sections available. There is always a good supply of houses for sale as well, around 10 per cent of the housing stock, or between 30 and 40 houses, at any one time. House sale prices commonly fall between \$100,000 to \$150,000.

The number of local building firms has grown from two to five. One employed five permanent builders. The industry tends to be seasonal for the pragmatic reason that concrete can’t be worked if temperatures drop too low. Peak building time therefore is during the ‘eight months of summer’. Firms frequently seek work out of the district during winter months. Ashburton builders also work in the area so the industry is competitive.

Builders seek a wide client base that ideally incorporates farmer, local residential, ski field and overseas residential clients.

Retail

The combined economic force of a vital agricultural and tourist industry has not protected Methven township from retail drift. The township has lost retail outlets and there are now fewer shops than before the development of the ski fields. So while the service or hospitality sectors have blossomed retail trade has retracted and withdrawn.

“But, while we have twenty-six restaurants I can’t buy a pair of pyjamas here. I can buy something with ‘Mt. Hutt’ stamped on it but I can’t buy a pair of pyjamas.”

Local, owner-operator businesses cannot withstand the retail magnet of chain stores in the major towns and city, with their cheaper or cut prices and seemingly limitless choice. One commented, *“they want discount store prices and we can’t compete”*. Furthermore, rural society is now highly mobile, so Methven people shop in Ashburton, and Ashburton people shop in Christchurch! As well, rural New Zealand’s retail buying power has not recovered from the agricultural downturn of the 1980’s decade. Therefore in terms of retail trade, Methven resembles other rural towns, retail business either is present and depressed or has withdrawn.

As an additional problem, the relatively short main commercial season, July to September, is vulnerable to any downturn in visitor numbers. Nor can the assumption be made that snow tourists necessarily create a retail market. The Methven experience shows that the turnover for clothing like jeans was not sufficient to support a full range of casual clothes, beyond ‘snow gear’. A store selling good quality winter sports clothing found the market was too small to recoup after ‘the bad years’, when the snow season is short or there is an international glitch in the tourist market like that following the ‘Asian crisis’. It was also suggested that the snow tourists were not interested in retail shopping. They come to ski or snowboard, not to browse clothing stores: *“people come here to ski, ski, ski, not to shop”*. During the first ten years of the ski fields operation the ski stores experienced rapid growth reflecting the expansion of snow tourism at Mt. Hutt. Today the situation is probably commercially more realistic.

The major supermarket is a family enterprise that has ‘grown’ from a 7-day dairy. The store was recently extended to include a bakery, and refurbished to include computer check-out scanning. A test usually failed by most rural supermarkets, because of distance and the limitations of transport, is the freshness of fruit and vegetables. This supermarket presents fresh vegetables because the owner travels twice a week into the Christchurch market at three am, returning with fresh produce. Buying patterns can change considerably between summer and winter, when a more sophisticated approach is required in response to the influx of international residents. For instance, one business employs a Japanese woman for the winter to advise on consumer needs. There is also a speciality market created by local restaurants during the season.

Retail businesses that cater for the snow industry, ski and snow board hire and sales, close once the season is over. During the snow season, however, retail businesses, like the hospitality sector, are open for extended hours, which includes working full weekends and weekdays into the evening until about eight pm. But as a business owner who is ‘full on’ from May until October pointed out,

“Businesses cannot sustain only four months of good business out of twelve. It’s hard. The general public don’t realise retail is struggling. The town will battle through to the next winter and then the winter is over.”

Similar comments were made by the owner of another business, established more than 30 years ago. The business *“scratches a living between the end of September and the middle of May”*. During the snow season

turnover is anything from a half to two thirds up on the 'non season'. The shop is open seven days a week when wholesale buying also changes, catering for a different clientele.

Methven businesses have responded positively and with some flair to the changed retail market that revolves around snow tourism, but the seasonality of income creates pressure. This unevenness of seasonal business income is another factor that emphasises the similarity of the two dual economies of agriculture and tourism.

In spite of the influx of tourists and their banking requirements, the growth of the tourism economy and the maintenance of the agricultural economy, Methven lost one of its two Banks in 1999. Westpac attracted bad publicity following the closure of the Methven branch but ultimately the closure was as a result of central policy little influenced by the local situation. The closure of the bank created problems for their clients who were advised to travel to Ashburton, Geraldine or Hornby. Many believe that if one bank hadn't closed, then the other would have. The fear that in time the remaining bank would also close was almost universal.

Health businesses

As rural depopulation escalated, 're-structuring' closed rural railways and post offices, and government services withdrew, residents watched with firm belief that there would never be another doctor in Methven. Today, there is a fully equipped Medical Centre. There are two full time doctors and a weekend locum during the snow season, a visiting dentist two days a week and a weekly optician. The frontline medical service rests with a team of four practice nurses working out of the Medical Centre.

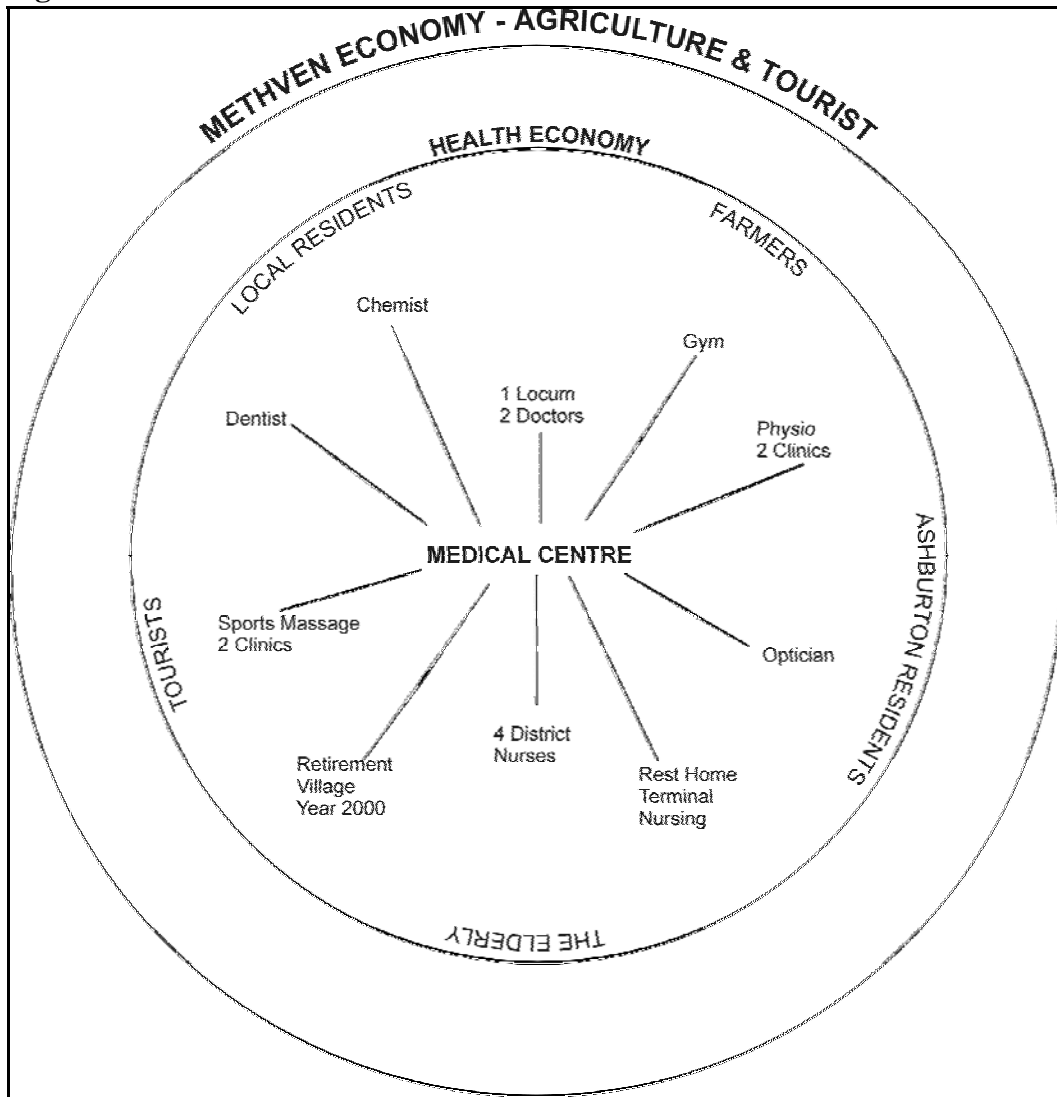
Because of the presence of the doctors, Methven has retained its pharmacy and chemist shop. Like the retail businesses already described the chemist is open extended hours, that include the weekends, during the snow season, but also must survive the summer season and slow returns at that time. Two thirds of the turn over is made between the months of May and September. The township also boasts two physiotherapy clinics, an acupuncture clinic, a sports massage clinic and a fully equipped gym.

The level of services provided by the clinics was demonstrated by the gym which offers sports physiotherapy, orthopaedic rehabilitation, domiciliary physiotherapy, spinal pain and neurological physiotherapy and acupuncture. While there is a small reduction in hours between the seasons the gym does not close for the summer. Summer months find the gym busy with local residents, sports people and farmers as well as clients who travel up from Ashburton. The gym also offers exercise classes at both the gym and the Rest Home for elderly or frail clients.

In 1977 the Ashburton Hospital Board's maternity annex was bought by the community and turned into a rest home. The community's financial support of the Home has been unfailing and continues today. Another voluntary group has formed a 70-member Friendship Club as a social support for the district's elderly. The Home contains 12 beds as well as two independent but serviced residential flats. The Home provides full care and terminal nursing. Part-time nurses and nurse aides are employed and the manager is a career-trained nurse. It would be impossible for this facility to exist without the medical centre and its resident general practitioners. It would be difficult to exist without the services of a local pharmacy and the local services of trained physiotherapists who add to the well-being of the elderly patients. A further potential feature of Methven's health economy is the proposed Retirement village to be built on the outskirts of the town during the year 2000.

All these facets work together to form an integrated health economy as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1



PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Methven and its districts are administered by the Ashburton District Council based in Ashburton. The township is linked to Ashburton by State Highway 77 running 34 kilometres to the East.

An elected Community Board of six members that includes the two local sitting District Councillors, represents the views and needs of Methven at the District Council. The Board also has infrastructure responsibilities for an overview, amongst others, of road works, water supply, sewage, stormwater drainage, parks and traffic management. The Board is responsible for the preparation of an annual submission to the District Council's budgetary process.

Predictions suggest that the winter population of 2,500 is likely to rise to an annual winter population of 3,500 during the next decade. Cyclical population patterns impact on waste-water flow. During the summer this is estimated to be some 250m³ per day but it increases to 625m³ daily during the snow season. It becomes imperative that essential infrastructure can cope smoothly with such seasonal fluctuations. A report was completed in March 1998 that recommended the upgrading of the Methven waste-water treatment and disposal systems. Tenders have been accepted and the work has been programmed to finish in the current

1999/2000 financial year. The town's water reticulation was recently up-graded to a double pipe line, nevertheless water use restrictions are applied during January and February.

Transport

Mechanised transport came to the district in 1878 with the construction of the branch railway line from Rakaia and the main trunk line to Methven. This line was operated until its closure two years short of its centenary. It brought industry and workers into the district. It carried stock and grain out and brought in machinery and spare parts, and it carried passengers. By the 1960's few of the district's roads were sealed. One interviewee noted that from their farm the first road to be sealed took them to Christchurch, the second to Ashburton and only the third to Methven.

Midland Motors, which had a network of services throughout the province, carried passengers between Christchurch, Ashburton and Methven. They also carried 'small parcel' and household freight as well as Methven's milk (today Methven has town milk supply). Midland's withdrawal from transport operations began in the mid-seventies. Today there is no formal passenger transport link between Methven and Ashburton. While the mobility of society and cheap cars has made such links appear superfluous, transport concerns can arise for the elderly or the non-driver.

Today tourist coaches, shuttlebuses and hire cars bring tourists to the mountain and Methven. The local transport company brings in a range of heavy freight. Mail and freight couriers provide a service into town three times daily and a daily service up to Mt. Hutt.

Housing

As noted above, the Methven housing market and accommodation industry are directly linked to the development of the ski fields. The town suburbs are smart and well kept. Neglected older homes bought by investors, many of whom were local, were renovated and hired out as ski accommodation. Ski field staff can expect rentals between \$60-80 per bedroom while visitors can expect to pay more. High rental costs can put pressure on the budgets of workers, restricting other spending. Rents are also tied to the length of rental, for instance in the snow season a short term rental would be twice the weekly rent of longer hire. According to one respondent:

"The rental market is tight, property values, compared with Christchurch are relatively high and many landlords are rapacious."

When the ski field was first opened there were no houses in Methven available for rental. Today there is a great variation in the standard of houses in the rental property market. Rents are determined by the time of the year not the standard of accommodation. Nevertheless there is a summer rental market and although smaller than the winter demand it tends to be taken up by contractors or builders. Tenure of dwellings at the time of the census in 1996 (end of the summer season) is shown in Table 9. It can be seen that the proportions of rental dwellings and homes owned with and without a mortgage are similar to New Zealand as a whole.

Table 9 Tenure of Dwellings in Methven - 1996

Form of Tenure	% of dwellings	
	Methven	New Zealand
Provided rent free	5.9	3.7
Rented	20.0	22.9
Owned with a mortgage	41.0	35.2
Owned without a mortgage	28.2	31.1
Total number of dwellings	405	1,276,332

The negative impacts of the buoyant rental market include the number of empty houses ‘out of season’. It is also notable, from the 1996 census, that almost a quarter of private dwellings were unoccupied (Table 10).

Table 10 Unoccupied Private Dwellings in Methven - 1996

	Number of Occupied Private Dwellings	Number of Unoccupied Private Dwellings	Total Private Dwellings	Unoccupied Dwellings as per cent of Total Private Dwellings
Methven	408	120	528	22.7
All Rural Centres	29,349	6,275	35,624	17.6

It is financially more difficult, because of ‘soaring prices’, for local residents to buy or rent; and property owners only invest in short term ‘realistic’ rentals between seasons so that they can capitalise on their real estate during the snow season. After the snow season a reasonable amount of rental space comes on the market and it is sought after by young people ‘leaving the nest’ and single men or ‘young marrieds’. Some, especially younger residents, spend their time looking for cheap rentals and they are often constantly on the move as rentals fluctuate with the season.

Underpinning the housing market is a network of private property managers holding portfolios of houses for rent. They may own the houses in these portfolios outright, sometimes totalling up to 40 beds, or more likely they run a mix of their own properties and others that they rent on behalf of absentee owners. Generally the portfolios provide for a range of needs, from cheaper to up-market. One entrepreneur, who focused on providing up-market accommodation, reported that increasingly the season is changing from a six to a twelve-month commitment as the business makes inroads into fishing tourism and the agricultural industry. The definition of a ‘permanent’ resident was given by one respondent as ‘anyone who owns a house in Methven’. However, some owners only live in their houses during the snow season.

Education and youth

There are three schools in Methven: Methven Primary School, Our Lady of the Snows Catholic Primary School, and the district’s secondary school, Mt. Hutt College. The three schools stand on adjoining ‘open plan’ sites and there is free access between them. The distinctive line that differentiates between town and rural school is shifting, and while the character of rural children may be changing as society is more mobile and they are open to wider influences, the children of both secondary and primary schools were described as relatively mature and well behaved. Despite the temporary nature of many people coming into the community the overall character of the school children indicates a background of reasonably settled family lives.

The Methven Primary School had a roll in 1999 of 255. Earlier it fell from 250 in 1970 to 182 in 1976 (Henderson, 1976). The roll then fluctuated to 198 a decade later and down to 146 in 1992. For the past eight years the rise in student numbers has been steady. In 1997 the school experienced an Education Development Initiative (EDI), and amalgamated with Lyndhurst, a small school some 10 minutes from Methven. Buses

now bring students from a catchment that includes Staveley and Winchmore. The Primary School goes to Year 6. The teaching staff comprises 10 full time teachers, plus teacher aides who job share, and administration staff. There are also special needs and reading recovery specialists. The majority, seventeen, of the staff are women. Most of these women are married to local men, some of whom are in Methven because of the mountain. Many women came into the district originally as teachers and took up their teaching careers again as their families grow up.

During the snow season ‘incoming families’, from Australia, the North Island and Japan, settle into the town and enrol their children in school. The parents are often in “management” on the mountain. Once their children reach secondary school age the families no longer come for the duration of the season and they are replaced by other families with young children and the cycle begins again. There are also permanent local Japanese families, their children are bi-lingual and are joined during the winter by other Japanese children who attend the school annually. Teachers noted that they used to know everyone, all the students, but today during the snow season they don’t. However they also noted that the in-coming children settled into the school well with little disruption. The school still counts itself as a rural school and as such has had few social problems. However, the community struggles to get a ‘fair’ representation on the Primary School Board that includes the ski field workers.

Our Lady of the Snows Catholic Primary School had a roll stands of 65 in 1999 and the school has three full-time teachers, a principal’s relief, one teachers’ aide and a school secretary. The teachers are all local and some are from generational Methven families. The school fulfils its 3 per cent Protestant non-preference criteria. The parents of these Protestant children have rejected a secular education and seek an education based on religious principles. A small proportion of children move on to boarding schools; the majority stay in Methven. The mountain took some time to influence the school roll because initially those who came for the snow were single. Then these ‘singles settled down’ and stayed, and in some instances they brought extended families with them. The school society reflects Methven society with Australian, American, Dutch, German, Welsh and Niue parentage. The children accept the added new dimension these cultures bring to the school.

Mt Hutt College (formerly Methven High School) had 250 students from years 7-13. The teaching staff total 32, the majority of whom are full time, and there are two administration staff. The staff is almost exclusively local. Growth predictions reveal the potential for 300 students by the year 2001. Half of the College students bus to the College from outlying farming areas. Many are children of sharemilkers, farm managers or farm workers. Single parent and transient families appear to be increasing in the district but Mt. Hutt alone has negligible impact on the school roll, although the district’s capacity to provide leisure and adventure tourism, of which Mt. Hutt is one part, does impact on the school.

For the past three years the College has run a successful Outdoor Pursuits Programme for senior students. Mt. Hutt is the major attraction for these students, who are mainly drawn from outside the region and typically come from the North Island, Auckland in particular. The Programme is balanced between an academic and an outdoor pursuits schedule. The tourism enterprise Rock and Ice work in partnership with the College and students live in their lodge. A minimum of five subjects must be studied. Course fees include school and pursuit fees, food and accommodation. The school is also host to an annual Japanese Ski School. These students attend the College for two or three days English Language immersion. The College also has established connections with Japanese schools. In spite of this Japanese influence and several Japanese families who live permanently in Methven, the Japanese language can only be taught at the College through correspondence courses.

All College students go on either to tertiary education or to jobs, no students ‘go on to nothing’.

“Nevertheless while the snow season brings in the young, our young must go out for further education and often for the jobs they want”.

Fairweather and Campbell (1990, p. 55) record that the recession in farming over the 1980's had a significant effect on the composition of the local population. The tightening labour market for farm workers led to a decline in the number of farm cadets, labourers and married couples resident on farms, and some young farmers were forced off the land. This out migration depleted the population in the 18-30 year age group in particular. Whereas in 1980 more than 50 per cent of school leavers obtained employment in Methven, by 1989 as few as 25 per cent were remaining, with many leaving for work in other areas, including the Australian farming industry.

Opportunities for employment have increased with the development of the snow industry within the sectors of accommodation, hospitality/entertainment, resulting in cooking and cleaning jobs for students. A comment was made that young people have every opportunity for work experience, the danger is that out of school hours paid work becomes *"the be all and the end all"*. While it is accepted that some must work if they are to continue their education some are also likely to *"burn themselves out"* and then they are too tired to study⁸. The students from single parent families are most under pressure to work after school.

Law and order

The Police have a 'two officer' station and residents directly attribute their good fortune at having two police officers to the presence of the mountain. There are between 200-300 offenses and incidences⁹ annually. The Police Crimes Register for 1992, the latest statistics available, showed that basic offenses that year comprised theft 183; drugs/antisocial behaviour 53; and violence 11. Crime has increased over the years as the population increased. Because the town offers relatively high rental accommodation during the snow season it does not attract those seeking low-cost beds. Neighbouring townships, Mayfield, Mt. Somers and Rakaia offer rentals between \$60-70 and attract crime. The low-cost accommodation becomes a hideaway. There has been an increase in use of drugs and some are grown locally. According to the officer interviewed the schools are 'free' of drug use but he cautioned that it would be naive to believe that some students were not experimenting outside school hours. He suggested that *"anyone with drugs in the schools would be discovered within a week, because the community is still relatively close knit."*

The College principal also noted that the social life of the community is considerably affected by the annual influx of skiers, snow boarders and ski workers. Access to alcohol and cannabis is easier and the use of cannabis is reasonably widespread amongst these in-comers, so general use rises during the snow season. According to a community leader this has been a *"downside"* as tourism developed. In the beginning, ski transients introduced drugs into the High School. The *"ski bums from Auckland, driving Mercedes were drug pushers"*. He recalled that the introduction of a different society, the snow tourists, into an insulated naive rural community was traumatic. Another community leader suggested that the mountain may have *"got sense into the booze barn era"* - people were too busy skiing. She reported that much community work had gone into the hotels with 'don't serve under ages' campaigns.

In spite of several of the 'old' families moving away from Methven, the community image is still of two parent families. The town doesn't experience 'domestics' as such. When and if there are any such incidences they involve 'out of towners' or young people living together.

Initially there was some resistance to the Japanese tourists but today they are appreciated as honest people. They are a cash society and don't use credit cards or cheques. Sadly, because they are honest, they are often the victims of petty theft.

⁸ There was a similar finding for the tourism community of Te Anau, Working Paper 27.

⁹ An 'incidence' is an action not followed by a charge.

RESOURCE AND ECONOMIC PLANNING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Tourist marketing

A respondent commented, *“Rain and fertiliser are to a crop as advertising is to a business, stimulating quality”*. There is an easily defined hierarchy of marketing responsibility that begins at the local level.

Methven/Mt. Hutt Promotion Association
Summer Marketing Group
Ashburton District Tourism Board
Christchurch and Canterbury Marketing
The New Zealand Tourism Board.

Until recently the Summer Marketing Group (SMG) was known as the Winter Marketing Group. The name change recognises the need to encourage summer tourism so that the district can benefit from twelve, rather than the present five, months of tourism activity. The thrust is to promote the area on an all-seasons basis rather than just those seasonal activities allied with Mt. Hutt. The Methven/Mt. Hutt Promotion Association (MPA) has some 19 events planned for the year 2000. Their focus is on the ‘shoulder seasons’, March/April and October/November and their objective is for a twelve-month tourism industry.

There is no generic name for mid-Canterbury, which is a problem when it comes to advertising. Methven/Mt. Hutt is associated with Ashburton District. Many advocated a stronger association with Christchurch and Canterbury. This would mean that Methven/Mt. Hutt would be advertised alongside Akaroa, Arthur’s Pass and Hanmer Springs to present Canterbury’s ‘face’. Respondents maintained that there is strength to be found in becoming a component of a Canterbury tourist ‘package’. At a local level too the ‘package’ marketing of Methven has vocal advocates particularly amongst tourism entrepreneurs who were critical that the district was not being marketed ‘in total’. They maintained that there was little co-ordination or presentation of Methven/Mt. Hutt as a tourist entity. These tourist entrepreneurs have invested the twin resources of money and time to ensure their place in the market. They work co-operatively with other tourism activities, so that they can present an attractive ‘package’ - if limited by not being inclusive of the whole district. There was a call for more ‘leadership’ of local marketing networks, better understanding of the principles of marketing and increased spending.

Marketing and promotion costs individual tourism enterprises considerably and the Summer Marketing Group is restricted by its funding base. Some of the small business, such as small accommodation places, benefit from successful marketing strategies for the area but do not contribute financially. The larger businesses have their own comprehensive marketing strategies, for markets such as Auckland or Australia. One hotel employs its own marketing manager. Their policy is to capture the potential market outside of Mt. Hutt, which takes care of itself, especially in a good snow year. There is potential for the hotels in the conference market and recreation tourism. Overall, the accommodation market is ‘difficult’ because of Methven’s proximity to Christchurch, and the district cannot be promoted as a ‘remote’ destination package. Their experience has shown, however, that it is not difficult to market Methven as long as it is done in a package.

Local Government

In 1989, at the time of Local Government reform, Methven Borough was absorbed to become a component of the new Ashburton District Council(ADC). A designated Community Board was established and at the first elections 18 candidates stood for the five seats. Initially the relationship between the Board and the ADC was strained and communication between them was poor. As the grounds for a Strategic Plan were formulated, a Methven interest group was set up comprising community leaders who energised the community to the extent that funds were allocated from the ADC budget for a facilitator to carry through the Strategic Plan consultation process. It was critical that the Strategic Plan clearly defined adequate,

empowering and easy to administer terms of reference for the Community Board. As this consultation proceeded the ADC became less estranged from the ideals and objectives of the Methven community, with increased communication and mutual respect. Today's Community Board works closely with the Council. While the over riding strategy of the ADC is 'to encourage economic growth', there are those in the community who question whether

"it is the body with the vision and drive to develop Methven, particularly if Methven is to emulate Queenstown. There is an almost urgent need for autonomy."

However there is a general acknowledgment that there has been a 'major attitudinal change' within the ADC that recognises the potential of Methven and Mt. Hutt.

The ADC's relationship with the development of Methven has been chequered. Stories were recalled of how overseas investors, one with a "million dollar" enterprise, have become "fed up" with Council "disinterest" and "delay tactics" and invested in Queenstown where they were welcomed with "open arms". Concern revolves around the notion of unnecessary "throwing the regulation book" at developers. However it was also argued that today the "mind set" of the Council has relaxed and in fact the ADC was "inordinately helpful" with the plans for the Retirement Village, were working with the community on the re-development of the town centre, and now supported the Methven Information Centre.

Strategic Plan

In September 1997 the Methven Community Strategic Plan was released. The concept was initiated by one local leader who attracted other like minded people. The Plan was the result of local discussions and debate that were ultimately taken to the level of the Community Board and the District Council. The Plan formally acknowledged that as a result of the 1989 reformation Methven was not always adequately represented in Council decision making and administration.

Since amalgamation in 1989 there has been a feeling in Methven that its wishes are not taken into account, that it gets little reaction to complaints and concerns, and it is not always adequately represented in Council decision making and administration. This leads to periodic outbursts in the newspaper which reflects a deep sense of frustration held by the Community Board because it seemingly has little ability or power to control matters in its own town. At the same time the Community Board has at times appeared to be divided and unsure of its own wants, particularly what is best for the future of the Methven Community (Methven Community Strategic Plan 1997, pp12).

It was against this background and with a Community Board elected in 1992 that today's Plan had its origins. The Plan identifies five areas of focus for the Community. It then develops five goals (p.7) "(1) Upgrade the appearance of Methven and plan for its future growth. (2) Develop and maintain the distinctive character of the Methven community. (3) Raise the profile of Methven, locally, nationally and internationally. (4) Maximise opportunity for business/recreational development and employment which enhances the character of Methven. (5) Effective representation in District Council decision making." Each goal contains detailed strategic actions, and practical tasks and identifies a desired outcome and performance measures. While acknowledging that the major investment will be the time given by residents, costings have been made and divided into two funding categories, public and industry.

The final goal sought both a broader community-based representation on the Board and a more effective liaison between the Board and the District Council - liaison that included speaking rights on Methven matters at committee and full Council meetings. The Strategic Plan has been endorsed by the District Council.

Methven Mall Development

At the same time as the ski field was being developed by local visionaries in the early 1970's, a group of local activists formed a private company to revitalise the then town centre. Giving generously of their time and finances, the “*lawyer, builder and shearer*” built the new shops, today’s Mall. They redeveloped the shopping centre to coincide with the development work proceeding on the mountain.

Recognising the need for a “*sharper*” town to attract commercial development, a Community Board member spearheaded the current discussions to redesign the town centre. The discussion, consultation, planning and design phases are now completed. Work was originally intended to be carried out over a three-year cycle beginning in the 1999/2000 financial year. However, a delay in final costings and attracting suitable tenders further delayed the project. Costings were expected to rise some 20 per cent over the original \$1.6 million estimate. The project is funded 55 per cent from Methven rates and the balance from the District’s General rate. It appears that while local frustration built up with the initial delay, the project may now be completed in two, rather than the original three years. Some interviewees commented that there was a fairly high level of apathy for the project amongst shop keepers who ‘sit back and wait’ in spite of the fact that the new Mall is designed for pedestrian/shopper traffic. The concept has been driven by tourism entrepreneurs, and the Community Board.

COMMUNITY

The character of Methven town and district has changed dramatically since the development of the Mt. Hutt ski field. It was in response to the 1970's global rural depopulation syndrome that the community pursued the development of the ski field. Depopulation affected Methven as it did all other rural towns. Firstly, a loss of population, a withdrawal of services and the negative impact of a constricted rural economy on the town’s economy included the closure of small local agricultural-based businesses. A local agricultural response to the 1980's downturn, brought about by the removal of subsidies and the restructuring of the industry, was the number of pastoral farmers who at this time joined the traditional core of small seed, cropping and seed potato farmers. Local conditions are such that there is always an excellent return for whatever labour and capital is invested in this sector of agriculture. The district’s reputation for innovative farming continues to be enhanced. Today pastoral and cropping farmers have been joined by a smaller but no less effective sector of dairy farmers.

Methven, before the development of the ski field, was variously described as a “*sleepy village*”, an “*inward looking society*” with small country attitudes to life and people. The ‘way Methven does it’ was always the right way. Methven people were small contractors, tradespeople, shearers, truck drivers and railway workers. The Bank still had a hitching rail outside and there was a Post Office. Important events were the rugby, the racing and trotting days, and the Agricultural and Pastoral Show. There were choral, operatic and drama societies. In spite of being an ‘inward looking society’ there was good community spirit that initiated and supported such groups as pre-school/play centre, scouts/guides, netball and golf. Methven always had social ties with Ashburton reinforced by links with professional advisers, accountants and lawyers. Before the development of the ski field there was a general air of ‘a dying town’. According to residents of the day ‘you could shoot a gun down the main street and not hit a thing’. This air of decay made fund raising to create the original ski field company difficult. Yet the company was well supported by the community.

Cultural values and local identity

Methven has another characteristic that places it apart from other rural towns where the social infrastructure has so changed that there are few residents who can claim generational ties with their town. Not so Methven, where the descendants of many of the old families still live and work. Several such descendants took part in this current research. Their generational links with the town give Methven a sense of stability. Yet in the

1970's rural depopulation saw a number of the 'old traditional' families leave Methven. They have been replaced by workers associated with the ski fields who do not necessarily "*participate in the community*", and can be seen as "*reluctant*" to "take any community responsibility". During the summer harvest some work as casual farm labour, or in other types of casual employment. New comers can be seen to fill and create employment, but have little or no community interest or commitment. These new comers may swell sports club membership and enjoy the facilities but not "*appear at working bees*" or "*take any part in fund raising activities*".

A respondent commented that when the agriculture industry was stripped of farm workers/couples the community "*lost its backbone, they supported community activities, sports and working bees*". One community leader identified the change amongst the leadership since the 1980's downturn. At this time the survival of the farm family became paramount and there was no surplus energy left for community affairs. He suggested that in a way people became more selfish, having to concentrate on the immediate family and the farm business meant that eventually responsibilities outside the family became insignificant. While there are "*natural leaders*" who come with the snow industry "*they are not here all the time and they are not here long enough to establish their credibility*".

School staff, primary and secondary, have regular community roles, often within sports clubs, and school facilities are used by the community. The grounds are used for sporting fixtures, the buildings for community organisations. The Golf Club was described as the "*social leveller*", a "*door*" through which to enter the community, and an "*integrator*". There are a number of voluntary organisations in Methven covering a range of social, support and care organisations. Volunteers are a small group of people all of whom lead busy lives. Today there are fewer in the district willing to take on the responsibility of voluntary work so the pressure becomes greater for the handful who work for the community. As a result the number of community leaders is diminishing. Those who remain 'do everything' and are fast running out of energy. One such leader also noted that "*achievers still are not looked on favourably*" and some have "*given up*" and "*moved on to be progressive elsewhere*".

The church is active in the community and it is supported by its rural parishioners, particularly landowning farming families. The community has adapted to the changes resulting from the ski field, and farming has become less dominant in the community and economy, nevertheless the older farmer lobby is still strong. There is a sadness that still prevails, that the community lost ownership of Mt. Hutt and the sadness re-emerged as a double jeopardy for this rural community when the company was bought out by Japanese interests and ownership had passed out of New Zealand hands.

The mountain has become part of the town culture. For one family the presence of the mountain was their reason to retire from the farm into Methven. They had purposely taught their children to ski "so that they would always come back to visit 'the olds'". For this family the mountain always attracted parents teaching children family values and 'doing things together'. However a contemporary family of four don't go skiing together anymore as the cost per day is over \$200. They content themselves with 'the good deal' the children get through the school because 'it is important they go up the mountain'.

Initially there was some tension between the local residents and the tourists. "*It took a while for the locals in the pub to realise that what was happening was good for the district*". Today attitudes to the new permanent residents and the transient snow tourists are more positive. It was agreed that Methven has benefited by the social integration of international families. Methven is now a rural town with a diverse cultural population. Nationalities from the USA, U.K., Australia and Japan maintain permanent residences. Respondents commonly spoke of this new multi-cultural Methven with pride. They knew of the five permanent Japanese families and everyone spoke of the inter-marriages that had taken place. As well, several of those taking part in the research had initially come for the snow or the jobs offered by the mountain to stay, to marry and in turn set up another enterprise that enriched the local economy.

If anything is to be gauged from the food buying patterns of the international new comers, it may be that the cultural assimilation has been more of the way of the host country. When Japanese skiers first came to Methven their food purchases were simple, rice and noodles. Today, the contents of their shopping baskets are no different from those of local shoppers. The Japanese have assimilated a new food culture. During the snow season individual members of the retail trade and the Information Centre employ Japanese staff to act as translators and to assist their Japanese customers. The link between Methven and Japan is further endorsed by the actions of a Japanese philanthropist who has set up a fund to bring Japanese students to Methven on yearly excursions. The students experience skiing, abseiling, farm yard activities, hot air ballooning and English lessons. They stay in local homes. The philanthropist has also contributed directly to the community by donating to local farmers in 1992 the year of the 'big snow' and recently for the purchase of flowering cherry trees.

Within the snow industry snow boarders and skiers represent two different dimensions, one more 'moneyed' than the other, but the focus for both is still the snow. Snow boarders attract more community comment with their "grunge and dented cars". Snow boarders are also usually younger than skiers and at least one retailer found some youths "*rough, and they act badly*".

One couple, who set up their business a decade ago, in competition with two other local generational businesses said they were considered newcomers although she had been in the district for ten years and he for a year. Methven, according to them is still a small town, there is always gossip and everyone knows what is going on. Another interviewee indirectly affirmed this when she commented that township society set the standards for immaculate houses and gardens: "*an untidy garden risks judgment*". She argued that "*it's a myth to say the town is rural. It's a slower job today getting to know people, and there are social distinctions*". Pointing out that the Mt. Hutt College Board are all landowners she suggested that these are still the most confident and articulate members of the community. The 'best' street used to be Morgan Street with an unspoilt view of Mt. Lochhead but today the new subdivisions are considered the most attractive or 'best'. Others argued that there were no social class distinctions and that while not really being egalitarian, perceptions of class were broken down by sport which encouraged people to mix socially. It was agreed that there were not the social constrictions in Methven that can be found in cities. A recently arrived young professional woman, now a Methven home owner, with neither farming roots nor skiing interests, found Methven "*a small caring community*". None of these comments are incompatible. Methven is a town with a ski mountain and a multi-cultural society. It is caring and gossipy, apathetic and innovative, and in the streets its people smile at you.

"The people are not rich, they have nice houses which they enjoy - it is a middle of the road community."

CONCLUSION

Methven is favoured with a dual economy. The high seasons of snow tourism and agriculture are not in conflict but are complimentary presenting an advantage of round the year employment. Workers appear to move easily between seasonal occupations and have attained a spectrum of skills. Unemployment is not a concern.

The dual economies are not as distinctly separate as they may first appear. Each is vulnerable to climate and each is dependent on international markets, the commodity market for agriculture and the tourist market for the snow economy. They are bound together by the flow of labour between the two sectors. There is also an affinity between land-based recreation tourism and farming. Activities like skiing and rock climbing sit comfortably alongside a farming culture. Farmers may themselves be running activities such as river tourism, fishing and jet boating. Like the dual economies, the dual cultures of farming and snow/land-based tourism therefore complement each other.

The district is favoured with a climate, topography and fertile soils sympathetic to farming, plus accessible water via the Rangitata Diversion Race. Pastoral farming in Methven suffered under the negative impact of restructuring and uncertain international markets during the 1980's. The cropping, seed potato and small seeds sector remained relatively buoyant, continuing the reputation of innovative farming attached to this district. Following the agricultural downturn many pastoral farmers have switched to cropping or made the change to dairy farming. Seed cleaning and new seed growing, cleaning and exporting is a valuable and growing, local sub industry.

The presence of Mt. Hutt and the ski fields have stimulated many enterprises providing accommodation and hospitality, information and transport services, and allied tourism ventures, plus winter sports coaching and adventure tourism schools and sports goods hire and sale shops. During the winter months Methven provides some 2,500 beds for snow tourists. That figure is predicted to rise to 3,500 in the next decade.

Women play a major role in the accommodation industry either as workers in hotels, motels and backpackers' lodges or they are running their own accommodation units and 'Bed and Breakfast' enterprises. Several also act as property managers, running a string of accommodation units, often for absentee owners, alongside their own. In another example of the complementarity between farming and tourism, women are also to be found front running farm stays and farm hosting enterprises. They are to be found in the hospitality sector serving in and running cafes and restaurants. Women also comprise the majority of teachers at the three local schools.

While snow tourism dominates, summer tourism is in the ascent. Formal organisations like the Methven Promotions Association and the Summer Marketing Group are promoting summer and 'shoulder' tourism attempting to create a twelve-month tourism culture. The critical players in summer tourism are the tourism entrepreneurs who provide the activities and the focus to visit Methven out of the snow season. These include those hotels and motel complexes who seek out and encourage conferences and corporate bookings. However, there are tensions. Entrepreneurs complained that there was no co-ordination between activities so in terms of marketing they 'go it alone'; hoteliers complained that there was no sense of marketing the district as a package and that too many services lack professionalism; other entrepreneurs were critical of 'a lack of commitment' and 'a variety of standards' amongst their peers. There was general criticism from sectors of the community of a 'lack of leadership'. However criticism of leadership or its lack is not helpful, especially as the leaders are drawn from such a small core group. In effect the district needs greater participation by these interest groups.

It was apparent that within the district competition must become co-operation. In the accommodation sector, for instance, different providers saw each other as 'competition'. Package marketing is only effective if based on co-operation. Summer or 'shoulder' tourism in Methven faces a seemingly impenetrable obstacle. While the town has two thousand beds to offer summer tourists and a range of summer activities from golf, to river fishing, to hot air ballooning, many in the hospitality sector "walk", with most restaurants closed. In the summer the town has an air of abandonment. Any serious marketing of Methven summer tourism will be at risk unless it is supported by all the local service providers.

Mount Hutt and Methven are tied into wider tourism markets. Queenstown is Methven's tourism rival. While Mt. Hutt provides earlier and more dependable snow, Queenstown is seen as a resort town with many 'add-on' attractions. Any such advantages Queenstown may have, have been increased following the promotion of Ski New Zealand projects. It was noted that the Tourism Board will not disclose the level or scale of spending on marketing but there was general agreement that the Board spends on Queenstown as the place to go 'above New Zealand'. On the one hand the promoters of Methven/Mt. Hutt could be criticised for their pre-occupation with Queenstown, while on the other the position of Queenstown could be the very catalyst to promote the unique nature of Methven/Mt. Hutt tourism, based on land recreational sports such as golf or racing, festivals, conferences, and adventure tourism as well as good winter snow. The marketing problem centres on linking Methven/Mt. Hutt with Christchurch to capitalise on the advantages of advertising

alongside Akaroa and Hanmer Springs as ‘the face’ of Canterbury. Such a move would take Methven away from an Ashburton focus, with its lower tourism profile, into frontline advertising with Christchurch.

Snow tourism has not protected Methven from contemporary rural retail drift. Retail businesses are fewer today than ‘before Mt. Hutt’. Few rural retail businesses are able to withstand the depletion of their local market as a mobile consumer society travels to seek discounted goods or ‘on sale’ shopping at urban chain or warehouse type stores. Methven shoppers travel to Ashburton, Ashburton shoppers travel to Christchurch. During the snow season existing retail businesses work seven days a week, often a ten to twelve hour day and they frequently employ extra staff. It would appear that on average some two thirds of their annual income is gathered during the five to six months of snow tourism. Retailers were uncomfortable and concerned about this unevenness of earning power. Obliquely there is a complementarity here with seasonal variations in farming incomes, farmers work a twelve-month year, but their earnings are returned over a shorter or seasonal period.

The over arching tourism economy has spawned nests of interconnected economic activity. One of these, health services, has grown up around the retention of the Medical centre. Methven had faced the loss to Ashburton of its medical services, however, early in the days of the ski field development these services returned and quickly expanded. The health services are based on the population increase during the snow season, and the medical and physiotherapy services required by skiers and snow boarders; on the general health needs of the local residents; and on a small but vital geriatric care industry. Without the snow tourists the health services would not exist. Other interconnected economic activity includes real estate/accommodation and hospitality. All this economic activity has further flow-on effects in the form of employment and expenditure.

The cultural life of Methven no longer reflects the social patterns of small town rural New Zealand. Residents eagerly adapted to ‘café’ culture and enjoy the variety and style of restaurant dining introduced to meet the needs of snow tourists. They have come to appreciate the different values of the newcomers to their community and they are proud that Australians, English and Japanese families now have permanent residency in the town - people who came “*not just for the snow but for the lifestyle*”. While there were some tensions between ‘locals’ and tourists particularly Asian tourists these barely exist today. Rather, descriptions were given of the social and economic contributions, both formal and informal, made by the newcomers to the community.

The development of the Mt. Hutt ski field was a community driven vision. Community financed, district ownership expanded to public ownership in 1974. By 1986 the need for further development required greater financial input than the public company was willing to sustain and the ski fields passed into foreign ownership. For a decade ownership remained in foreign hands, ownership structures were frequently complicated and not always successful and there were long periods when little development money was spent on the mountain. Today the ski fields are owned by Air New Zealand. The community expectation is that money will now be spent on development of the ski fields, and this has been the case with major investment over the 1999-00 summer. The relationship of the community with the mountain is important not only to the economy of Methven but also to all the allied tourism entrepreneurs. If the ski field facilities are not developed or maintained to their highest standard visitor numbers will decrease and their loss will impact on all the economies. Entrepreneurs are continually assessing and investing in the maintenance and development of their enterprises, which could be adversely affected if a similar commitment is not made by the owners of the Mt. Hutt ski field.

Residents are well aware of the benefits brought into the community by Mt. Hutt. The telling of changed economic times or changed social trends in the community were all prefaced either with ‘before’ or ‘after the mountain’ (the development of the ski field). It is likely that the mountain will continue to be a major factor in community formation and change in Methven.

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