

Edmund Norman

English/New Zealander, 1820-1875

Burkes Pass

1875, pencil on paper, 14x24 cm
Purchased, 1996



About the work

Edmund Norman was trained as a surveyor and his landscape drawing reflects the detail and accuracy he would have needed for that work. Burkes Pass, which is at an altitude of 670 metres, is in the Southern Alps. It is seven kilometres west of the rural town of Fairlie in the MacKenzie Country, South Canterbury. Norman arrived in the area in 1862 when he was hired as a boundary-keeper by the Teschemaker brothers who ran sheep on Haldon Station.

Although working on the sheep-station, Norman continued to sketch and paint in his spare time and he travelled widely with his sketchbooks to the upper Waitaki, Burkes Pass and Tekapo area.

Norman's drawing makes an interesting record of Burkes Pass in 1875. It is notable for its attention to detail and accuracy, characteristic of topographical works. These qualities were necessary because the drawings were intended as a precise record of the landforms and the vegetation of a specific place and were important for mapmakers. Here the countryside is still raw and Norman shows the road that weaves through it in the

middle ground of the drawing. Two of the buildings were cottages but the largest building is typical of a colonial hotel, which would have been a resting place for travellers and their horses.

Norman has shown the rolling hills at the back of the dwellings and in the far distance he has used shading to indicate the snowy-covered mountains. He has used a much stronger line for the rock outcrop, the bracken and the spiky grasses. Putting clearly identifiable vegetation in the foreground was typical of his drawings.

Norman, along with others, was trained as a surveying cadet under S.C. Brees on the sea voyage out to New Zealand in late 1841 / early 1842. Norman also spent time employed as a surveyor and draughtsman in Wellington and the Manawatu region during the early 1840s. His drawings varied little throughout his career and he maintained a keen sense of accurate observation.

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About the artist

Norman was born in Devonport, England in 1820. In February 1840 he was appointed as an 'improver' by the New Zealand Company. An improver was someone who worked for a low wage, or sometimes no wage, while learning - or 'improving'. His ship, the *Brougham*, arrived in Wellington in February 1842 and, by August, Norman was working in the Manawatu region in the North Island. The following year he worked in Wellington copying maps. However, in February 1845 the entire surveying staff based at Port Nicholson (as Wellington was then known) had their employment terminated.

In 1852 Norman was employed by the Government to carry out surveying work in Kaikoura, but by 1854 he was settled in Lyttelton where he advertised as a draughtsman willing to reproduce accurate sketches of Lyttelton, the Plains or any part of the Canterbury Settlement. In 1856 a large panoramic view of Akaroa Town and Harbour was published in the *Lyttelton Times*. The drawing had been done by Norman and it had been painted by the architect Samuel Farr (1827-1918). Norman also had a drawing reproduced in C.F. Hursthouse's book *New Zealand or Zealania, the Britain of the South*.

Norman moved to the MacKenzie Country to work at Haldon Station in 1862. On 3 June 1875 he was found dead on the side of the road just south of Burkes Pass, his sketchbook close at hand.

Other works by the artist in the Collection

Lake Alexandrina

c. 1870, pencil on paper
Purchased 1996

Further reading

Edmund Norman, 1820-1875, *Drawings of Early South Canterbury*, R.D.J. Collins, Aigantighe Art Gallery, Timaru, 1985.

'Edmund Norman, 1820-1875', R.D.J. Collins, *Art New Zealand*, No. 35, 1985, pp. 54-57.

