

The Denniston Rose

Jenny Patrick

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The bleak coal-mining settlement of Denniston, isolated high on a plateau above New Zealand's West Coast, is a place that makes or breaks those who live there. At the time of this novel - the 1880s - the only way to reach the makeshift collection of huts, tents and saloons is to climb aboard an empty coal-wagon to be hauled 2000 feet up the terrifyingly steep Incline - the cable-haulage system that brings the coal down to the railway line. All sorts arrive here to work the mines and bring out the coal: ex-goldminers down on their luck; others running from the law, or from a woman, or worse. They work alongside recruited English miners, solid and skilled, who scorn these disorganised misfits and want them off the Hill.

Into this chaotic community come five-year-old Rose and her mother, riding up the Incline, at night, during a storm. No one knows what has driven them there, but most agree the mother must be desperate to choose Denniston; worse, to choose that drunkard Jimmy Cork as bedfellow. The mother has her reasons and her plans, which she tells no one. The indomitable Rose is left to fend for herself, struggling to secure a place in this tough and often aggressive community. The Denniston Rose is about isolation and survival. It is the story of a spirited child, who, in appalling conditions, remains a survivor.

The Denniston Rose Details

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Author : Jenny Pattrick

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Annalise says

I really enjoyed this story set in New Zealand's South Island coal fields of the 1880s. Denniston was an excellent setting - isolated, hostile and an artificial community where everyone was new to the place. The social divide between management, skilled miners and labourers was clearly defined. Patrick has created a rich cast of characters, many with secrets to hide. They are vividly portrayed and there is a warmth towards all but the most reprehensible. Patrick is also looking at how a community is formed and the responsibilities that a community carries. There is a flavour of the American West about this novel, seeing as it is set in a pioneering environment. Bought myself a prequel to read on the plane on the way home from NZ.

P.D.R. Lindsay says

Most enjoyable tale set in New Zealand's South island. It's a historical story and the Rose is a lass of character and determination. A book for a cold winter evening to read beside the fire.

Linley says

Having just visited Denniston (in sunshine and rain) I had a feel for this awesome place. The book brings the heartache and hard work to life. I enjoyed having the chapters from Eva Storm's point of view as well as the other characters. The book could have been twice as long for me and I would still have enjoyed it, however Patrick has created a wonderful book that is not too long and with a great storyline. I found it very hard to put down.

Recommended to Y11 to adult. Great themes and great NZ history.

Marion says

I was born on Denniston as was my Mother. My Father was a miner who left Scotland to escape a life in the mines for a better life in New Zealand, but arrived just as the depression was beginning, and mining was the only job he could get! I know from both my parents how hard life still was on Denniston much later than the era Denniston Rose was set in.. I loved this book and could picture it all in my mind. Great story, well researched background detail. We moved to Waimangaroa when I was four, and remember climbing the incline to Denniston with my sister one Sunday when I was 11. Arriving home to our Mother afterwards covered in coal dust to the roots of our hair, and every pore on our skin, left no way to lie our way out of what we had spent the day doing!

Amelia says

A devastating book. Bleak and upsetting, yet also riveting in its way.

I've wanted to read this book ever since I first heard of it.
And I still really want to visit Denniston itself - this has only heightened that desire.
The characters were vivid and well drawn.

Bree T says

Set in the town of Denniston in the 1880's, a mining town on the western coast of the South Island. The town itself was based around the coalmine there, accessible only up an almost vertical incline – the Denniston Incline. This made life for those that worked the mine, and for their families, incredibly isolated as not only could the journey down to the town of Westport not be made on a whim, it was also incredibly difficult for ladies to make. The method of transportation up to the mine/town was empty wagons returning up to the mine for more coal. There were no seats, and the going was rough. Mostly, when people arrived in Denniston, they stayed in Denniston until death. And then, because the ground was mostly solid rock, the people were unable to dig graves. The deceased had to be sent back down the Incline to be buried at a nearby cemetery.

On a storming night in 1882, Con the Brake is working manning the controls that pull the wagon up and down the incline. When one set reaches the top, he notices that a woman and child are on board. He starts, because the woman is familiar to him, but he prays that it cannot be. The woman, who has gone by many names, calls herself Eva Storm and asks after Jimmy Cork. She is directed to Jimmy's tent where she finds him much changed from the man she knew some 5 years ago. Claiming he is the father of her small daughter Rose, Eva moves herself and Rose into the tent with Jimmy and begins life in Denniston.

It's a hard life on Denniston for many, with the miner's underpaid and often overworked. You get to know a handful of the characters as Rose comes into the contact with them and her life intertwines with those of the locals. The narrative jumps between third person generally, with the odd chapter thrown in containing Eva's first person point of view which was a bit jarring but not entirely offputting. There is much made of the geography of the area, you get a real sense for the isolation, the misery of the weather, the storms and driving rain. There's also detailed description on the mining of the coal and the system used to move it (and people) down the Incline. To be honest, that mostly went over my head but I'm sure anyone with a touch of engineering knowledge or understanding would appreciate it.

The characters are varied, and there were some truly likable ones. It's hard not to feel for the poor little Rose and the terrible life she must endure due to the bad choices and the lack of care taken by her mother. Eva herself is one of the least redeeming characters I've come across in a novel in recent times. Her selfishness in putting what she wants ahead of all else, including what is best for her daughter, manifests in some truly terrible things happening to Rose which are unforgivable. She knows that Rose is in danger and she does very little, if not nothing to stop it. She has no respect for the marriages of others and sets out to destroy one from the time she arrives in Denniston.

Unfortunately, the biggest negative of this novel is the pace. It is -excruciatingly- slow. The first 100 pages drags by so slowly with hardly anything happening except a lot of description that I almost gave up on it more than once. It does pick up after that but it still crawls too slowly for my personal taste! While I enjoy an author that has good knowledge of their subject and likes to share that, there definitely is such thing as too much information and sometimes it was just warning: Mining/Engineering Infodump Ahead. For a long time I actually wondered what the story actually was because I couldn't see one. While I eventually did come to quite like the storyline, and the portrayal of that mining community, I was still a bit...detached. I didn't care for the characters as much as I think I was supposed to. When horrible things happened I kind of went 'oh well, that's sad' and turned the page and didn't think twice about it. I think if more time was spent on making

me care for the characters, and less on what it's like to have a system that pulls a wagon up an almost vertical incline, I would've enjoyed this book a lot more.

Ineke says

A wonderful book to read. The way the chapters followed each other was a different take on the usual way of storytelling. Each new chapter the author gave a character the opportunity to tell the story from their point of view. In the end, the whole story interweaves with the different ideas of each character. The historical background makes it feel for real. I am looking forward to reading the follow-up.

Edith says

Loved this book. History of Denniston and coal. Love the characters.

?????? ?????????????? says

Absolutely beautiful narration, enjoyed it from the beginning to the end. Recommend it to everyone who wants to know more about how New Zealand was formed - what kind of people came to South Island, what kind of relationships were formed.

Fiona Story says

A brilliant nz book. Look forward to reading others from this author.

Kiwi Begs2Differ \ says

A splendid novel set in Denniston, a small mining community of NZ in the 1880s. It is a great story and the characters so three-dimensional that pop out of the pages. I loved this book and highly recommend it. 4.5 stars

Edited to add some pictures

The incline

The settlement and the people

More pictures available at [West Coast NZ History website](#)

Moira says

When Jenny Patrick's latest book, "Leap of Faith" came out, it started me on a re reading of "Denniston Rose" and "Heart of Coal. "Leap of Faith" is about the engineering of the Raurimu Spiral, an amazing piece of railway construction, high in the air built as a spiral as the terrain is so steep. This echoes the extraordinary steep access to the coal fields of Denniston on the West Coast of the South Island of New Zealand. Rose is in both books. The area is the setting of Eleanor Catton's "The Illuminaries" I also read the illustrated edition of Denniston Rose and Heart of Coal. I had always had trouble imagining this landscape and welcomed an illustrated portrayal. Included are many vivid historic photos of the area. I found these very unsettling - how could anyone live in such a difficult, inhospitable area, in such tiny, flimsy wooden huts?

It says much for Jenny Patrick's talents and depth of research that she builds convincing and gripping worlds.

Dee ~ Funny Cat Reading says

This book was written by our own very talented New Zealand author, Jenny Patrick. What an incredible story of the heartaches, hardships, and soul stirring lives of the men, women, and children, who endured the cold Denniston plateau, in their search for a better life, while working in it's unforgiving coal mines! Rose, a young girl arrives one cold, dark, stormy night, with her mother, and instantly captures the hearts of all, with her beautiful voice, and happy smile. Then follows stories of life there each day, and a series of incidents, which will change the lives of everyone in Denniston forever!

Joan says

Excellent story to set the scene before a visit to Denniston. Made the trip up there come alive.

Kiwiflora says

On a recent trip to the West Coast, on a bleak, drizzly, cold spring day, we drove up the steep and windy hill to the plateau where a hundred years or so ago around 2000 people lived in the mining town of Denniston. It was a busy little community, with churches, shops, pubs, a school, people coming and going. I can't imagine what the place looked like or how thriving it was, as there was nothing about it that was remotely attractive the day we went! We went to the Coal museum in Westport, where there is lots of history about Denniston and other mining communities. The woman there suggested I track this book down, as it gives a very vivid picture of what life was like in this place. And so I did and very glad to have done so.

Places like Denniston, with their inhospitable environment and living conditions, places with difficult or impossible access, places with few women and children to provide those qualities of civilisation, attracted a certain type of person. Generally desperate, broken physically or mentally, impoverished, entrepreneurial, risk takers, but above all tough. One night a young woman with a colourful past and her five-year-old daughter, Rose, ride the crazy journey in a coal wagon up the mountain to the tiny settlement of Denniston. The mother, Eva, is after her man and his supposed stash of gold that she wants a slice of. Young Rose has spent her whole life being on the run with her mother, so Denniston is just another ugly, uncivilised dump that she finds herself in. But being a five-year-old girl with a smile and charm that can melt the toughest miner, she quickly finds her way into the hearts of the locals, and ultimately finds her place in this tough and lonely place.

But a lot of West Coast rain has to fall before things come right for Rose. The coal mine is at the centre of this story: without the mine and the miners there is no Denniston. How the small community deals with accidents, death, fires, industrial action, the rise of the unions were the sorts of things going on in many frontier towns and communities at this time. The West Coast in New Zealand has a reputation for breeding them tough, and this outstanding story, based on real lives and events, deserves to be read and enjoyed simply to gain a greater understanding and appreciation for where many NZers have come from.
