

# THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE TE AROHA DISTRICT

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## THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE TE AROHA DISTRICT

**Abstract:** *Pakeha settlers and visitors delighted in the mountain and its vegetation, and to attract tourists some efforts were made to protect the portion behind Te Aroha township from disturbance by mining. Prospectors and those constructing mining tracks and the tramway struggled to cope with the rugged terrain, but the steep mountainside proved to be advantageous for mining. The topography worsened the impact of severe weather, in particular the gales and heavy rainfall which damaged buildings and caused regular problems for those maintaining tracks and tramways. Over summer months batteries often had to cease work through having insufficient water power. On the flat land, because swamps made transport difficult, the river provided the main access route until the railway line was constructed. Drainage created productive farmland and, coincidentally, partly relieved the mosquito and sandfly scourge.*

### DELIGHT IN THE SCENERY

In April 1898, a visitor to Te Aroha felt compelled to write a poem:

Te Aroha! name which lingers softly on the tongue,  
 Te Aroha! fount of healing, peace, rest, love.  
 Thy name is love; thy fern-decked glades are rest;  
 Healing, thy springs; and peace, thy solitudes.  
 Thy mountain solitudes and shades where reign  
 Silence unbroken, but for the babbling rill,  
 The rushing cascade and the whispering breeze.  
 Or the shy Tui from thy wooded depths  
 Uttering one flute-like note, which echoing back  
 From a yet still softer note, as if afraid  
 His haunt may be discovered and disturbed.  
 What tho' thou art but in thy rustic garb,  
 Thy springs unshaped, thy rills still unadorned,  
 Years will smooth out thy ruggedness, and shape  
 And utilise thy gifts to men's desire.  
 But may he spare thy native fern clad founts,  
 We desecrate thy shades wherein may dwell,  
 Gnomes, satyrs, wood-nymphs, taniwhas, and elves  
 In the soft trill of waters hear their voice,  
 In the articulate murmur of the breeze their laugh,  
 In the soft hour of silence hear their sigh.  
 Te Aroha! I have rested in thy shades,

Wandered within thy solitudes, and felt their peace,  
 Bathed in the sunlight, and thy healing springs,  
 Te Aroha, farewell.<sup>1</sup>

Local residents shared this fulsome enthusiasm. In 1908 the *Observer* quoted, probably maliciously, the *Te Aroha News*'s tribute:

Our glorious mountain, with his infinite repose, his unassailable calm, his "trailing clouds of glory," with the down dripping amber of his tui melodies by day; and the ringing note of the mopoke overflowing the mystic silver of his moonlight glens by night, is a presence to be loved and remembered with keen delight.<sup>2</sup>

Such examples of genuine appreciation by Pakeha can be dated to the beginnings of settlement, for example three days before the proclamation of the goldfield:

Those who admire rugged mountains, extensive plains, and winding rivers should pay a visit to Te Aroha – the mountain of Love, beloved of the Maori. The surrounding scenery is truly grand and romantic, and under the very shadow of the mighty mountain is now springing up the fortune city of the Plains. Already the lark, sweet harbinger of morn poised high in air at Heaven's gate, trills forth its sweet English song, out-rivalling the mellow piping of the dark-winged tui. "Them mosquito birds is terrors," I hear a new chum, just fresh from home, remark, to which another party standing by, evidently a son of Alma Mater, dryly remarks that they are more than terrors – they are rara avis in terr(a)ora.<sup>3</sup>

This combination of the landscape and native vegetation with species that reminded them of 'Home' was particularly significant to transplanted Europeans. The beauties, with or without imported birdlife, impressed all settlers and visitors. The *Te Aroha Miner* in February 1881, rhapsodizing on the view from the top of the mountain, believed that 'the rugged grandeur' of the Waiorongomai Creek in its 'wooden glen' would 'doubtless be the theme for painters and poets'.<sup>4</sup> In 1889, a guide to the district stated

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<sup>1</sup> G.M., 'Te Aroha', *Te Aroha News*, 30 April 1898, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Te Aroha News*, n.d., reprinted in *Observer*, 5 December 1908, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Star*, 23 November 1880, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Te Aroha Miner*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 28 February 1881, p. 2.

that the mountain offered ‘many delightful rambles by the rocky streamlets and dense tangled bush. Some beautify fern glens are easily reached’.<sup>5</sup>

This appreciation was not solely aesthetic; there was money in scenery, and from Te Aroha’s earliest days tourists and invalids were encouraged to enjoy the views and partake of the healing waters. At Waiorongomai, ‘the winding pathway up the glen’ was reportedly ‘the favourite resort of visitors’. There they could admire ‘magnificent specimens of tree ferns and Nikau palms, romantic glens and picturesque waterfalls, ferns of great variety and beauty, and exquisite mosses ... in rich luxuriance’.<sup>6</sup> In 1895 the editor of the *Te Aroha News* published a pamphlet entitled *Te Aroha, New Zealand: The Sanatorium of the Million: The Most Popular Health Resort of the Southern Hemisphere: A Guide for Tourists and Invalids to the Thermal Springs and Baths*. He wrote that ‘a bridle track to the top of the mountain’ was ‘contemplated, by which the most delicate could enjoy an easy ride through sylvan glades to the trig station’. As well, ‘the numerous gullies and ravines, which abound in the neighbourhood, offer facilities close at hand for the enjoyment of Picnic and Gipsy Parties in the bush’.<sup>7</sup>

As such attitudes did not fit well with mining, the hillside behind the domain was always protected. Although miners periodically applied for permission to prospect, the warden refused all applications and increasingly large portions were removed from the goldfield. Mining officials, normally anxious to assist mining, valued the mountainside behind the township, in part for financial reasons. In 1928 the mining inspector, when fending off another application, told the under-secretary that, having lived in Hauraki before the goldfield was opened, he believed the scenery was more valuable than any minerals that might be found.<sup>8</sup>

## TOPOGRAPHY

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<sup>5</sup> Josiah Martin, *Guide to the Thames and Te Aroha* (Auckland, 1889), p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> Martin, p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> Charles F. Spooner, *Te Aroha, New Zealand: The sanatorium of the million: the most popular health resort of the Southern Hemisphere: a guide for tourists and invalids to the thermal springs and baths* (Te Aroha, 1895), no pagination.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew Paul (Inspector of Mines) to Under-Secretary of Mines, 9 June 1928, Mines Department, MD 1, 6/14 Part 3, ANZ-W.

The steepness of the mountainside was not only attractive to the eye but also in some ways useful for miners. Although the backdrop to Te Aroha was saved from mining (as no find of significance was ever made there, this did not become controversial), parts of the beautiful Waiorongomai Valley were intensively mined. A mine manager's report stressed that the deep gorge made it easy to drive short tunnels to intersect all the reefs and obtain 'backs' of over 1,000 feet.<sup>9</sup> A mining reporter noted that, 'being very precipitous', it was 'eminently suited for a goldfield', as for many years there would be 'no necessity to sink shafts'.<sup>10</sup> But it would be necessary to construct a tramway, whose construction was handicapped by the topography.<sup>11</sup>

This might please mine managers; for prospectors and miners, the steep hillside made their work both difficult and sometimes dangerous. The mountain's peak, the highest of the Hauraki Peninsula, was 3,126 feet, 'at a distance of only 120 chains from the level Hauraki Plain'.<sup>12</sup> Modern maps give the height as 953 metres, the plain being 20 metres above sea level. Reporting on the opening of the goldfield, one correspondent described the early morning climb up the spur to peg out claims as 'no laughing matter, and as the day was a bit warm everyone perspired freely, and were not sorry when the summit was reached'.<sup>13</sup> Visitors had 'an hour's stiff climbing' up 'a very steep spur'.<sup>14</sup> When a woman climbed the mountain, it was reported in both mock-heroic and admiring terms:

#### SENSATIONAL TERMINATION OF A HONEYMOON

A lady visitor from the South, via Waikato, performed the most noteworthy feat of modern times the other day. She rode over from Hamilton with her liege lord ... and set her affections upon scaling the summit of this Mountain of Love, as a fitting termination of the honeymoon she had been spending. Nothing daunted by the exclamation of surprise which escaped those who knew the extent of the undertaking she bravely set out. Her

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<sup>9</sup> Report by F.C. Brown, 1 March 1906, Mines Department, MD 1, 23/4/54, ANZ-W.

<sup>10</sup> Special Correspondent, 'A Trip to Te Aroha', *New Zealand Industrial Gazette and Pastoral and Agricultural News*, 15 January 1884, p. 29.

<sup>11</sup> See paper on the tramway.

<sup>12</sup> John Henderson with John Arthur Bartrum, *The Geology of the Aroha Subdivision, Hauraki, Auckland: Geological Bulletin No. 16 (New Series)* (Wellington, 1913), p. 88.

<sup>13</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 25 November 1880, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 1 November 1880, p. 3.

attendants strove to dissuade her all in vain, and she declined to return until she had completed her labour of love, to the astonishment of her friends and her husband. Scaling the prospectors' rugged heights is no mean undertaking, but she accomplished this en passant by way of giving zest to the remainder of the scramble. To say that the hill is as steep as a house-side, and almost as difficult to scale in some places, is but slight exaggeration.<sup>15</sup>

The difficulties of this climb was described in May 1881:

Te Aroha, or "the mountain of love," is a very respectable hill to travel up to anyone who may derive satisfaction from the feeling of being some 3500 feet above the level of common humanity.... Just at the back of the diggings the range juts out into a peculiarly cantankerous looking, nearly perpendicular hill of about a 1000 feet in height with two or three sharp narrow spurs running down to the plain by which one has to scale the first step in the ladder of the ascent of Te Aroha. I did get up so far with tolerable comfort some weeks ago, by careful selection of my path and an elaborate system of zig zags, but on the present occasion my companion with the enthusiasm of youth and new chuminess, got off the easy track that would have led to the top and got onto about the most unpleasant and dangerous one to be found leading more certainly to the bottom and a broken neck than to the top. He being a seafaring man accustomed to shinning up main masts and the hauling of reefs in his bow line and all the rest of it, thought nothing of this, maybe, and I being a too rashly confiding weakly trusting creature of forty-seven actually felt bound to follow where another man led. I could faintly bless my optical organs and puff more and more frantically as my boots slipped from under me in the moist greasy clay and I looked giddily down a precipice of 800 or 900 feet deep on my left down which a stone that I set rolling in my struggles bounded and tumbled as if hinting how my body would go if I lost my hold for a moment. On the right was a similar roll for me if I preferred that and down behind me the path was a series of steps cut in a spur not much wider than the back of a knife that made me giddy and seasick having to look down, not to speak of trying to slide or scramble down. The descent was not to be thought of now, and there was absolutely nothing for it but to go on, though in front a rock projected over the path and the hill above it rose for 100 feet at about the angle of the side of a steeple.... I am unable to say exactly what happened next, there was an interval of some 15 minutes of horrible scrambling on hands and knees, holding on by

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<sup>15</sup> Special Reporter, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 November 1880, p. 3.

tufts of fern or the bare earth with nails and teeth and toes or boots, and then I stood in a cold sweat on the summit, a broad level terrace that looking down on wooded gullies that appeared beautiful enough from this point may be, but were enough to turn a noble hero's flowing black locks as white as snow when hanging over them only by his nails.

From there, the top of Bald Spur, they climbed through 'almost impenetrable bush', marking their trail with scraps of newspaper,

scrambling over trunks of trees, swinging ourselves up by roots or creepers, dabbling in mud on knees or feet whichever seemed most convenient, with the dew pouring down like rain from the trees till we were wet to the skin, but there was no want of foothold or something to grasp and hang on by and I was thankful.<sup>16</sup>

Their slow progress made them worry they might have to spend the night on the mountain.

We could hear wild cattle in the bush, and we had heard terrible legends of ferocious old man-eating wild boars, who range this particular bush, and of one old monster in particular who is known by being without ears or tail, and who had ripped every dog they'd ever brought against him, and did not wait to be hunted, but charged every man he met, and had chased one victim to a tree, and had kept him there for many hours regardless of revolver bullets, which glanced off his tough hide as they would off plates of steel, and we smole a sweet sad smile, and drew comfort from another sip of our flask. Certainly, nothing could be found in its way more beautiful than a thick New Zealand forest of giant pines, palms, and the hundred different varieties of ferns, from the little tree parasites to the noble spreading fern tree, the graceful and elaborate fretwork of the tiny lichens; the brilliant blue, crimson, and brown fungi of all shapes and sizes, and all the luxuriant of vegetable wonders around us. By way of antidote to our enjoyment, one of us would slip in a hole or tumble headlong over a supplejack, and roll in the mud, or have to crawl over a log on hands and knees, to haul ourselves from stone to stone up a steep bank, scrambling and climbing more like the monkeys of our respectable ancestors than men innocent of that useful appendage, a tail which would have been of inestimable service to us just then.

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<sup>16</sup> Travelling Reporter, 'A Scramble up Te Aroha Mountain', *Waikato Times*, 21 May 1881, p. 3.

After reaching the top, they rested and admired a ‘sight worth going up 3500 feet of scrambling and tugging to look at, but like all rewards’ it required ‘hard work to gain’. Then came

the downward rush that must be accomplished in two hours on pain of perhaps death, and off we started. My fiery youth naturally rushed wrong at first start, and it cost us half-an-hour to get back to the top and start afresh. Then with the aid of my caution we got right and on to our paper track and bounded down the slopes as much like young does as we could afford to be. I could see my companion’s legs all in the air at once every now and then as he lay feebly on his back across a log or in a hole, and all I feared was that I might have to carry his corpse in addition to my own allowance of flesh. Sometimes he would hear wild yells, profane language and looking back would find his amiable friend in a similar position or sliding down an unusually steep and slippery bit on his trousers and even on his back.

After reaching the top of Bald Spur, they had to ‘bump or slide down as the fates ordered’, for the writer’s ‘legs positively refused further work. Not to dwell upon the harrowing tale we reached the end without any decidedly fatal accident, and after tea and warm ablutions could talk with considerable pleasure of our trip’.<sup>17</sup> Later, to attract tourists it was claimed that for ‘ardent pedestrians’ ascending the mountain via Waiorongomai and descending to Te Aroha was ‘no very difficult task – but take provisions’.<sup>18</sup>

Occasionally newspapers mentioned people being in danger on the mountain, as when a lost man ‘fell over a precipice, but fortunately sustained no serious injury’.<sup>19</sup> There was no serious injury in the next example either:

A newly-married couple who went up to Te Aroha in the sweet September weather to shiver through their honeymoon spell got “bushed” while rambling round the gorges and gullies, and had to make a bridal bower of a slime-covered rock and cover themselves with leaves, and do the “Babes in the Wood” act all through a bitterly cold and cheerless night.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Travelling Reporter, ‘A Scramble up Te Aroha Mountain (No. 2)’, *Waikato Times*, 24 May 1881, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Martin, p. 29.

<sup>19</sup> *Waikato Times*, 29 March 1888, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Observer*, 28 October 1905, p. 16.

When mining started on Prospectors' Spur in 1880, one investor returning from visiting his claim stumbled where the track ran 'along the edge of a precipice', and but for the intervention of a miner would have fallen 200 feet 'and been probably smashed to atoms on the boulders in the creek'.<sup>21</sup> Another visitor reported that the track to the Prospectors' Claim traversed a spur 'resembling the side of a house', with 'notice boards on which were painted the ominous words "Beware of Boulders" '.<sup>22</sup> A correspondent was 'requested to caution persons going up the Prospectors Creek to beware of boulders from the Bonanza and Aroha claims'. As stones from them were 'continually rolling into the creek', visitors 'should keep a good look out when ascending either of the spurs or the creek'.<sup>23</sup> That this warning was necessary was illustrated in December, when a miner, William Dodd,<sup>24</sup> was wheeling a barrow of quartz from the lower drive in the Don when 'two visitors descending the spur loosened a boulder of five pounds, which rolled down with great rapidity and struck him on the top of the head, knocking him senseless'. His 'somewhat serious' wound meant he was 'unable to resume work for a week'.<sup>25</sup>

The same danger occurred in the Tui district, where in January 1881 two men walking up the Ruakaka Creek heard 'a crashing noise'. Looking up,

they espied a tremendous boulder descending the declivity at a great rate, and rushing towards them. One of them ran up the opposite side of the spur, but the other one not being so nimble only had time to leap on a rock in the creek 'ere the huge boulder struck the mass he was on, and slightly injured one of his legs besides shattering the rock.<sup>26</sup>

The mouth of the Waiorongomai Valley was also being explored in that month. The first discoveries, two and a half miles from Te Aroha, were so

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<sup>21</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 27 January 1881, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> 'The First Coach Trip to Te Aroha', *Waikato Times*, 20 November 1880, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 15 January 1881, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> See *Thames Advertiser*, Ohinemuri Correspondent, 24 April 1875, p. 3, 12 February 1876, p. 3, 23 September 1876, p. 3, Warden's Court, 21 September 1885, p. 3; *Te Aroha News*, Paeroa Magistrate's Court, 18 May 1889, p. 2, 26 October 1889, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 23 December 1880, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 21 January 1881, p. 3.

inaccessible that about five miles of rough country had to be traversed to where 'a mass of basaltic rock, quartz and sandstone' outcropped 'for fully one and a half miles, the immense reef standing 200 feet above the surface, while from wall to wall its breadth cannot be less than 150 feet'.<sup>27</sup> (This was the outcrop later known as Buck Rock, because it was barren.) Another account of reaching this find gave the distance as 'fully six miles, the latter half' being through 'dense bush' and 'rough country' on a 'very narrow' track, the whole journey being 'most difficult and trying'.<sup>28</sup> John McCombie, an experienced prospector,<sup>29</sup> also went to investigate:

After an hour's sharp walking, we reached the prospectors' camp, where we were informed that if we wanted to visit the prospectors' claim there was still a two hours' up-hill journey before us, which assertion proved to be only too true. From this point the track leads up and over a spur, which towards the top was so precipitous that we were obliged to cling, like so many parasites, to its rugged face. In due course we reached the summit, where we paused to gaze upon the wonders of nature. From here we looked down into a deep gorge through which flows the Waiorongomai stream, and on every hand was a charming view of rocky buttresses and thickly wooded heights. We now turned our attention to the object of our visit, namely, to find the prospectors' whereabouts - no easy matter - considering that we were about to enter the heart of a dense forest, seemingly impenetrable to man or beast, with no guide other than that afforded by a scarcely perceptible blazed line, which led up a steep spur, bearing off at an angle to the one we had just traversed. Upon gaining the summit of this spur, we were confronted by the outcrop of an immense reef.<sup>30</sup>

When Hone Werahiko discovered gold further up the valley, at a height of about 2,000 feet above the plain, the mining inspector reported that the track to his New Find went 'up the bald spur and on in the most direct line to the summit of the mountain and from there down a spur leading to the eastward until the claim is reached, the time taken by parties who walk over without a load is from 3 to 4 hours'.<sup>31</sup> Miners had a vertical

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<sup>27</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 21 January 1881, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 22 January 1881, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 471.

<sup>30</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 29 January 1881, p. 9.

<sup>31</sup> George Wilson (Inspector of Mines) to Harry Kenrick (Warden), 15 October 1881, Mines Department, MD 1, 81/1118, ANZ-W.

climb of 3,080 feet before descending the spur to this discovery.<sup>32</sup> It took one mine manager 14 hours to reach and return from the Colonist claim, near the New Find.<sup>33</sup> Warden Kenrick reported that, as the locality was ‘so difficult of access’, everything had to be carried on miners’ backs, and until a track was made ‘very little work will be done’.<sup>34</sup> The first reporter from the *Thames Star* to reach the New Find reported that ‘the only track’ was

by the top of the mountain and down its eastern side, which means full five hours walking. To enter into particulars of that awful journey is too much for human nature, the memory of it shall remain green. I heard one of the party express an opinion that he would not undertake the journey again for £50, and he and I are one in sentiment.... About seven o’clock our party returned to Morgantown, weary, wet, hungry, and generally miserable.<sup>35</sup>

Another visitor described the country as

simply terrible to get about in, being broken and precipitous, and heavily timbered, and the toil and trouble of getting tools and tucker up is simply awful. The present track goes over the extreme summit of the Te Aroha Mountain, and then down an immense ravine. It requires one to hold on with hands, feet, and teeth to get along at all, but still the miners go out with swags an ordinary man would think a good load on level ground.<sup>36</sup>

John O’Shea, who joined the Te Aroha rush at the age of 21,<sup>37</sup> in 1940 recalled climbing ‘right to the top’ of the mountain before scrambling ‘about 1000ft down the other side’. As ‘the ascent was so rough, and there was no track’, it was ‘impossible to use pack-horses and everything had to be carried up, the distance eight or nine miles, through dense bush and over steep precipices. In 1881 I carried an anvil strapped to my back. I think it

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<sup>32</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 31 January 1911, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> *Brett’s Auckland Almanac, Provincial Handbook, and Strangers’ Vade Mecum for 1884* (Auckland, 1884), p. 120.

<sup>34</sup> Harry Kenrick to Under-Secretary for Mines, 17 October 1881, Mines Department, MD1, 81/1118, ANZ-W.

<sup>35</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 12 October 1881, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Bay of Plenty Times*, 26 November 1881, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> See *Te Aroha News*, 30 June 1883, p. 2, Ohinemuri County Council, 11 February 1888, p. 2; *New Zealand Herald*, 28 November 1930, p. 8.

took me seven or eight hours to get there with it'.<sup>38</sup> A fellow miner recalled this anvil as weighing 70 pounds.<sup>39</sup>

The first surveyor to survey the new claims requested an extension of time because the ground was 'very much more difficult to survey than I had at first imagined & the weather has hindered me very much'.<sup>40</sup> A Coromandel reporter described the hillside as 'rough beyond any conception for those who have not been in the back country', and the old gum diggers' track would have to be replaced.<sup>41</sup> A pack track, known as the upper road, was soon constructed to the main workings, from 1800 to 2500 feet above the flat.<sup>42</sup> But to reach claims above it was difficult. When it reached nearly as far as the Diamond Gully claim, a correspondent took an hour to reach this claim from the road's end. The climb required 'some previous training in climbing up house walls and dropping down wells'. After swinging over 'perilous ravines' and other hazards, he found he had gone too high, and had to descend 'over an apparently endless series of breakneck dips and precipices'.<sup>43</sup> A visitor saw two miners near the Premier 'on the face of an exceedingly steep spur' and then walked to the New Find over 'some of the roughest country it has ever been my lot to encounter'.<sup>44</sup>

Surveying the line for the tramway took five months. The engineer in charge explained to an impatient council that the 'side slopes' were sometimes so steep 'that a very small variation in positions affects the works heavily; and the lines have to be gone over repeatedly in order to get the best position'. The 'configuration of the country' meant selection 'proper level portions for terminals and junctions' of the inclines 'a work of much trouble'.<sup>45</sup> Whilst the tramway was being built, a worker slipped and 'literally rolled down, head over heels a distance of more than a hundred feet on a steep incline, studded with stones and boulders'.<sup>46</sup>

In 1883, a South Island reporter described riding up the top track:

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<sup>38</sup> Recollections of John O'Shea, *Te Aroha News*, 28 November 1940, p. 5.

<sup>39</sup> Recollections of John McSweeney, *Te Aroha News*, 5 December 1930, p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> G.H.A. Purchas to Harry Kenrick, 26 October 1881, Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1881, BBAV 11289/8a, ANZ-A.

<sup>41</sup> *Coromandel Mail*, 29 October 1881, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> *Waikato Times*, 4 February 1882, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> *Waikato Times*, 31 January 1882, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> Paeroa Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 4 February 1882, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 29 August 1882, p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 16 June 1883, p. 2.

The roads were in a terrible state, but our motto was “nil desperandum,” and we toiled up the steep, narrow cutting. As we rose higher the most picturesque views were disclosed; deep sudden descents covered with beautiful foliage, openings with panoramas of the plains beneath, and outside the ranges charming uncommon views that would make grand water-colour drawings; natural, wild, and beautiful cascades of water pouring over the ridges, and then falling in volume with force into little gullies, and as if to take a short rest, running calmly but swiftly to another deep ravine, and falling over with a rush, were lost in the far depths below. Although the weather suffered from intermittent fits of rain and sunshine, and the riding was very hard work, I thoroughly enjoyed the trip.... The whole way up you pass great masses of quartz standing out in all directions.<sup>47</sup>

When prospecting was done near Buck Rock in the mid-1880s, the Inspecting Engineer for the Mines Department noted ‘the whole of the country’ there as being ‘very rough and precipitous, and also densely timbered’. Unless tracks were constructed ‘no really legitimate work’ could be done.<sup>48</sup> Once off the main tracks, walking was very difficult. One visitor in 1888 walking to the mines from Quartzville, the settlement near the New Find,<sup>49</sup> ‘ploughed my way through slush, stones, rotten stumps, etc,’ on a track not only ‘disagreeable under foot, but on a finger-post were the words “Look Up, Beware of Boulders” ’.<sup>50</sup> In the 1890s, the *Te Aroha News*’ warning that investors were deterred by ‘the inaccessibility of some of our claims, and the want of pack-tracks’, was confirmed by a visiting ‘Westralian and Transvaal man’:

The advisability of the construction of a good pack-track beyond the Premier, at present on the carpet, is daily becoming more and more apparent. It really seems absurd to ask a mining expert, accustomed to the flat Westralian and Rand country to go scrambling up our terrible hills, a work of hours, and then ask him to form an opinion of a hundred acre block. Provide a good track and mount him on a sure-footed mountain pony, with a substantial luncheon basket tacked on behind, and the result will probably be that instead of arriving on the scene tired out and

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<sup>47</sup> *Lyttleton Times*, 24 October 1883, p. 5.

<sup>48</sup> H.A. Gordon to Minister of Mines, 4 May 1886, *AJHR*, 1886, C-4, pp. 2-3.

<sup>49</sup> See paper on this settlement.

<sup>50</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 16 August 1888, p. 2.

surly he may be in such a frame of mind as will enable him to examine the ground without prejudice.<sup>51</sup>

According to a local miner, these visiting experts should have used the methods of experienced prospectors:

It is easier to descend through thick bush than to force one's way through it uphill. I have seen experts make this mistake - beginning their examination of a property at the low level, instead of at the highest, which can often be reached by a direct track, from whence they can descend after a spell at their leisure. Experts are usually men of full habit [of heavy build], and it is painful to witness their distress at times, while toiling after, and swearing (under their breath) at the nimble footed bear-leaders, Most of them are as game as a pebble, and persevere to the bitter end - with the assistance of a pocket flask.<sup>52</sup>

An illustration of difficulties created by steep and rough country was a 'remarkable story' that told of a prospector who worked in various Waiorongomai claims in 1889, earning good money and converting his nest-egg into sovereigns which he carried with him because of not trusting banks:

One day, when proceeding home from his work, he noticed a peculiarly shaped stick, which he cut and fashioned into a walking stick.... Having no inclination to mix much with his fellow workers, [he] led a fairly lonely life. So he took up the hobby of carving and whittling away at sticks and wood, getting quite proficient at the occupation. One Sunday afternoon, when wandering about in the bush sorting out uncommonly shaped twigs and branches, he discarded his coat on account of the warmth, and placed it beneath some fallen leaves at the foot of a large tree. He wandered about a good deal, going ... a good deal further afield than he had any idea of. Dusk came on, and he had not found the coat. The anxious part of the business was the fact that he had his small hoard of sovereigns stowed away in a canvas bag in an inside pocket of his coat. However, he had to return to his camp, minus his coat, and decided to say nothing about the loss, but have a further search when opportunity offered.

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<sup>51</sup> *Te Aroha News*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Advertiser*, 23 January 1897, p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> 'Werahiko', 'Our Te Aroha Letter', *New Zealand Mining Standard*, 6 March 1897, p. 5.

He kept searching at every opportunity, without success, and eventually settled in the King Country, where he later told his nephew of his loss. In 1925 the nephew visited Waiorongomai, and, on the basis of his uncle's recollections of where he had lost the coat and of conversations with several old-timers, he made several explorations of the hillside above the New Era battery site before 'the remarkable and hundred to one chance occurred! Poking around in the bush one day, he came upon the remains of an old coat, and delving down, found the sovereigns - 42 of them... Practically nothing was left of the coat - a few bone buttons and powdery flakes of material'.<sup>53</sup> That nobody else had found the coat despite many prospectors exploring the area over 36 years indicated the difficulties created by the terrain.

In 1885, gold was found at the head of the Tui Stream in an area that, 'owing to its extreme roughness and the almost impenetrable nature of the bush', had previously been 'a terra incognita to all save very few'. A pack horse would be unable to 'reach within a mile' of the discovery, and until a track was made 'everything will have to be carried on men's backs'.<sup>54</sup> Visitors to the 'almost inaccessible' find had to climb 'one of the long and difficult spurs', taking 'fully two hours to accomplish the ascent'.<sup>55</sup> It was difficult to get ore samples down the 'precipitous country. Once they tried a bullock, but he slipped over a declivity', taking the quartz with him.<sup>56</sup> The first track to the workings was 'a steep rugged dangerous track with a gradient of about one foot in 8'.<sup>57</sup>

Even in the twentieth century prospecting remained difficult. When the Mangakino Valley, heading down to the Waitawheta Valley on the eastern side of the ridge, was explored, prospectors had 'a rather uphill battle'. The topography was 'against them and the want of a track even more so', for 'to get supplies on to the ground' made 'the cost well nigh prohibitive'. One prospector carried 84 pounds of 'tucker' in on his back.<sup>58</sup> The Waitawheta Gold Prospecting Company's shareholders were informed that the area was 'most inaccessible, on account of its altitude, the dense

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<sup>53</sup> 'A Remarkable Story', *Te Aroha News*, 17 July 1925, p. 5.

<sup>54</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 26 September 1885, p. 3.

<sup>55</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 26 September 1885, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 8 May 1886, p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> H.A. Stratford (Warden) to Minister of Mines, 2 February 1887, Thames Warden's Court, Letterbook 1886-1893, p. 16, BACL 14458/2b, ANZ-A.

<sup>58</sup> Waiorongomai Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 30 December 1907, p. 1.

bush, its deep ravines, and its distance from supplies of every kind, making it necessary for the men to have their food etc, packed to them at considerable cost'.<sup>59</sup> Bert McAra, mine manager in the late 1940s for the re-opened Tui mines,<sup>60</sup> recalled all prospecting, on foot, as 'a very arduous job carrying tools and gear on one's back to No. 4 level, that is 1800 feet up, across the Saddle about 2200 feet high to the head of the Mangakino Stream and to Copper Creek about 2000 feet on the side of Mount Te Aroha, all in rough, steep bush country'.<sup>61</sup>

The rough topography clothed in heavy bush made pegging out claims difficult, causing disputes through encroaching into other claims, as illustrated when one prospector sought to register a claim pegged out near the top of the mountain:

Difficult to find position. Have to trust to luck good deal in the bush.... It is all very dense bush. Very hard to climb.... All done by guess.... I pegged out by pure guess.... Can't tell if our Special Claim is the same as the prospecting area. Had to go a good deal by chance.<sup>62</sup>

A 1951 geophysical survey found the ground to the west of the main Waiorongomai reef was 'very rough', and it took many hours to carry equipment above the Tui mines.<sup>63</sup>

### BAD WEATHER

In the summer of 1884 a visitor noted the 'hard and wet ground' and commented that living near the mines in winter 'must be very trying' because it was 'so thickly timbered, and so elevated' that there were 'very

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<sup>59</sup> Report of the Directors of the Waitawheta Gold Prospecting Company for the year ending 31 December 1908, Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 222 no. 1314, ANZ-A.

<sup>60</sup> See paper on the Auckland Smelting Company.

<sup>61</sup> J.B. McAra, 'Recollections of my Association with the Tui Mine, Te Aroha, 1950-1973' (typescript, 1985), p. 3.

<sup>62</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1909, 142/1909, BBAV 11289/20a, ANZ-A.

<sup>63</sup> J.B. Misz, 'Te Aroha Mountain Geophysical Survey' (typescript, 1952), p. 8, Mines Department, MD 1, 23/2/1218 Part 2, ANZ-W.

few' dry days even in summer.<sup>64</sup> Occasionally snow fell; in August 1883 from nine to 18 inches halted construction of the highest tramway level.<sup>65</sup> Heavy rain could cause large landslips, although these were not in areas where mining (as opposed to prospecting) took place.<sup>66</sup> Government-assisted prospectors exploring the top of the range above Tui in the 1930s were sometimes hampered by fog and rain; their supervisor felt that 'the altitude and the heavy nature of the bush' meant this area was 'only suitable for surface prospecting in the summertime'.<sup>67</sup> Two men who spent three winter months prospecting the Mangakino Valley often could not work during 46 'wet and foggy' days.<sup>68</sup> The working of the Tui aerial tramway high was handicapped until electrical signals enabled the brakemen to keep in touch; 'formerly it was impossible to see to signal in misty weather'.<sup>69</sup>

Earthquakes were liable to cause landslips, though the only severe one recorded during the mining era, at Tui in January 1972, did not damage any underground workings. However, combined with numerous subsequent tremors it 'certainly aggravated' the instability of a stope in the Champion section.<sup>70</sup>

One speculator familiar with the region, Josiah Clifton Firth, believed 'there was generally more rain and heavy gales about Te Aroha than anywhere in the province'.<sup>71</sup> The latter were experienced from the very first days of settlement. In August 1880, the local correspondent of the *Thames Advertiser*, George Stewart O'Halloran,<sup>72</sup> wrote that 'we have had some very high winds lately. Some of us are nearly bald in consequence'.<sup>73</sup> But the

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<sup>64</sup> Michael Landers, 'A Trip to Te Aroha and Ohinemuri Districts', *Freeman's Journal*, 28 March 1884, p. 13.

<sup>65</sup> *Waikato Times*, 28 August 1883, p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> For example, *Te Aroha News*, 4 May 1928, p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> Report by Hugh Crawford, February 1937; Hugh Crawford to Under-Secretary for Mines, 3 May 1937, Mines Department, MD 4, 11/2/18, ANZ-W.

<sup>68</sup> W.J. Gibbs to J.F. Downey (Inspector of Mines), 22 August 1932, Inspector of Mines, BBDO A902, MM224, ANZ-A.

<sup>69</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 10 March 1897, p. 2.

<sup>70</sup> Frank Handcock, General Manager's Report 1/7 for period ending 22 January 1972, Norpac Papers, MSS and Archives, Box 6, NMC 19/8, Vault 4, University of Auckland Library (hereafter Norpac).

<sup>71</sup> *Waikato Times*, 18 August 1883, p. 2.

<sup>72</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>73</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 13 August 1880, p. 3.

wind was not always something to joke about, as illustrated in mid-December 1880, when 50 or 60 men had their tents blown down.<sup>74</sup>

A gale of unprecedented fierceness passed over the township last evening, carrying destruction everywhere, frail canvas and wooden structures disappearing before it like matchwood. Over a dozen tents were torn, two were blown clean away, and several were razed to the ground. By 9 p.m. it blew a perfect hurricane, accompanied by showers of rain. Small stones and shingles, and, in some instances, whole planks might have been seen flying across the flat.

One office, 'a substantial structure, was shifted a distance uphill of several feet, and would undoubtedly have been blown over but for the fact of it being well ballasted by several weighty individuals'.<sup>75</sup> Periodic gales caused damage; for instance, in March 1882 one smashed 'some of the big panes of glass'.<sup>76</sup> Fourteen months later, another 'caused a considerable amount of damage, fences being blown over and small houses moved and overturned'. Two-thirds of the Waiorongomai battery's roof was blown off, and a two-roomed house near Stoney Creek occupied by a married couple and another man suffered the most damage:

Mr McLeod states that although he heard the wind blowing very hard he did not feel any cause for alarm. However, shortly after 5 o'clock on Friday morning, he was suddenly awakened by being thrown out of bed and up against the side of the house, receiving a severe blow on the head. He felt himself immediately afterwards thrown against the ceiling; then there was a great crash, and he became for a time insensible. On coming to himself a little, he found his wife near him unhurt, and he soon managed to release himself from the ruins of the house amongst which he was lying. On looking round for the other man, they found him jammed amongst the *debris*. After a great deal of trouble they managed to get him clear, when it was found that he was severely wounded about the small of the back with a nail. The house was entirely destroyed. Mr McLeod thinks that it was turned completely over by the wind, and that when the roof got downwards the whole building went in pieces and the wind scattered it about. On visiting the wreck after daylight the two sides of the rook were found apart, about three chains from where

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<sup>74</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 16 December 1880, p. 3.

<sup>75</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 17 December 1880, p. 3.

<sup>76</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 4 March 1882, p. 2.

the house stood; two portions of the walls lay about a chain away, and the remainder was scattered about on the other side of the road. The inmates were very fortunate in escaping in the manner they did. Mrs McLeod was tossed about and thrown clear of the wreck without a scratch, but the two men are severely injured.<sup>77</sup>

Early one June morning in 1898,

Te Aroha was visited by a fierce south-easterly gale, accompanied by a heavy rain storm, which did considerable damage to both property and fences. Several two and three-roomed cottages were blown over, while larger houses had their roofs carried away. Much of the damage to houses was caused through the chimneys being blown down, and falling through the roofs. Some very narrow escapes were experienced.... In the main street considerable damage was done, Mr A[lexander] W[atson] Edwards, draper,<sup>78</sup> being unfortunately a heavy loser. All his verandah on the Whitaker-street frontage was carried away, and several of the shop windows were blown in, and this led to the destruction by the rain of all the millinery and drapery stock in the windows. Some sheets of iron were blown off the roof, and the rain pouring in through the aperture did great damage in the interior of the shop.... An alarming feature was the sudden flooding of [the] creek, which runs through the township. It broke away completely from the usual channel, and for a time it seemed as though nothing could prevent the destruction of several shops in the front street. Fortunately, a large gang of willing workers, with picks and shovels, were soon collected, and working up to their knees in water, they managed to divert the course of the water, but not before considerable damage was done. A seven-roomed cottage ... which was in course of renovation, had completely disappeared, nothing being left but the floor; and a coach-house ... has been totally wrecked. The Catholic Church was shifted about 2ft off its blocks.<sup>79</sup>

Waiorongomai suffered from the same winds; indeed in July 1883 the storm was even stronger than at Te Aroha. In addition to the usual unroofing, the framework of a partly constructed hotel was blown down, one shop was 'completely wrecked', a small house rolled 20 yards and ended upside down (without breaking any windows), and the school was shifted

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<sup>77</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 15 May 1883, p. 2.

<sup>78</sup> See paper on Ani and Alexander Watson Edwards.

<sup>79</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 2 July 1898, Supplement, p. 1.

ten yards.<sup>80</sup> Similar damage occurred in March 1885, when a two-roomed house ‘was taken off the blocks and turned completely over, bottom up’. A three-roomed house was completely wrecked: the husband was still in the building ‘when it gave way during a violent gust, and was blown into the chimney space, thereby escaping injury from the falling timbers, and got off with a few bruises’.<sup>81</sup> At nearby Wairakau, in 1892, a farmer was standing by his stable door ‘when the door was blown violently against him, knocking out some of his teeth, and inflicting severe injuries to his head’.<sup>82</sup> In 1897, the new Family Hotel took precautions: ‘In anticipation of wind and storms, the balcony and verandah have been rendered extra strong by means of iron bolts which fasten the pillars, blocks, beams, rafters and balcony floor securely together’.<sup>83</sup>

High winds made travel dangerous. One settler recalled seeing a Irish coachman ‘coming along in a howling gale with a load of posts. “What are you doing with them?”, I called as he passed. “Sure, if I didn’t have ’em I’d not be able to keep the coach on the road,” he called back’.<sup>84</sup>

Although nobody was seriously injured in these storms, those without insurance suffered considerable financial loss. Damage to miners’ huts at Quartzville or in the bush was not recorded but must have occurred, as was implied by a report of a heavy gale at Waiorongomai in 1885. ‘At the mines a number of large trees were torn up by the roots, and heavy limbs were snapped off from others, but fortunately no harm was done to person or property’.<sup>85</sup>

Gales were usually accompanied by rain, but once the swamps were drained dry weather could create a different problem. In December 1896, after some weeks without rain,

a stormy wind from the north-east blew all day, which, after the long spell of fine weather, raised the dust to such an extent that it will not soon be forgotten. During the whole of the day the town was hidden by the disturbed dust, which found its ways into houses in spite of closed doors and windows.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 28 July 1883, p. 2.

<sup>81</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 21 March 1885, p. 7.

<sup>82</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 29 August 1892, p. 2.

<sup>83</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 5 August 1897, p. 3.

<sup>84</sup> Recollections of Charlie Garlick, *Te Aroha News*, 7 April 1937, p. 5.

<sup>85</sup> *Waikato Times*, 17 March 1885, p. 2.

<sup>86</sup> *Te Aroha News*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Advertiser*, 21 December 1896, p. 2.

In the mid-twentieth century, the meteorological office calculated that Te Aroha's mean average rainfall was 54.98 inches. The wettest month was July, with a mean average of 6.51 inches and the driest was December, with 3.41.<sup>87</sup> Heavy rain was always a problem. The directors of one Tui company reported that work during the summer of 1903-1904 was 'desultory owing to the extremely bad weather, felt more fully on these high ranges where indeed the rainy season' was 'almost always with us', even when there was sunshine in the valley.<sup>88</sup> A geophysical survey made at the end of 1951 took 28 days, for on 16 'continuous heavy rain made field work impossible, and of the remaining twelve, seven were cut short by early afternoon downpours. On only three days did the field party return from the mountain with dry clothes'.<sup>89</sup> The worst areas for prospecting and mining were the highest. William Morris Newsham,<sup>90</sup> for instance, who in September 1909 had the Pick claim close to the top of the mountain, had to stop work 'owing to the incessant rain. It was found impossible to make the necessary tracks, etc, to allow for pushing the work ahead'.<sup>91</sup>

#### DAMAGE CAUSED BY HEAVY RAIN

Tracks constantly needed repair because of heavy rain; for example, in mid-1897 the mud on some Waiorongomai ones was 'about knee-deep'.<sup>92</sup> Records from the Norpac years (1966-1973) provide examples of the disruption rain could cause. Shortly after midnight on the morning of 1 March 1966, the mine manager reported, 'excessive rainfall brought down slips in to the Tui streambed above the road to 3 level. The blockage let go and brought down a big rush of water with rock and other debris, which came down past 4 and 5 levels. No drain pipes could have coped'. The hut at No. 4 level was damaged, with one side of the drying room stoved in, 'filling

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<sup>87</sup> J.M. Warrington, 'Report on Metalliferous Deposits at Te Aroha, North Island, New Zealand' (1951), p. 1, Mines Department, MD 1, 23/2/1218, Part 1, ANZ-W.

<sup>88</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 8 January 1904, p. 2.

<sup>89</sup> J.B. Misz, 'Te Aroha Mountain Geophysical Survey' (typescript, 1952), p. 1, Mines Department, MD 1, 23/2/1218, Part 2, ANZ-W.

<sup>90</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>91</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 9 September 1909, p. 2.

<sup>92</sup> 'Werahiko', 'Te Aroha Letter', *New Zealand Mining Standard and Financial News*, 24 June 1897, p. 4.

it with debris to the roof. The road to one mine entrance was blocked, some pipes and trestles were carried away, and 450 gallons of diesel were lost through a tap being knocked off. The mullock dump at No. 5 level was carried away, 'leaving a deep gulch. Rails outside the portal were left hanging, necessitating the making of a new portal entry'. The road to the mines was damaged by scouring and a slip and left in a 'slushy condition'.<sup>93</sup> Miners had to re-make roads and culverts and blast shelves into the hillside to create flat areas for buildings.<sup>94</sup>

A deluge of nine inches fell on the night of 2 and 3 July 1971:

Considerable damage has been experienced in the form of washed out road between 4 and 5 Levels. Washed out base and foundation of 4 Level hut. Flooding of the 100 h.p. electric motors which necessitated the removal of two of them to town ovens for drying, thus affecting production for a whole week. The 5 Level yard also experienced a washout on its southern edge and a tree fell on the workshop roof damaging same.

Dislodgement of the gabions in the stream below Level 5 has also caused a run of waste.... The mine was without electric power for over 12 hours in the afternoon and night of the storm.<sup>95</sup>

In late October that year, 5.75 inches fell between 6 p.m. and 4 a.m., with possibly 4 inches between 3 a.m. and 4 a.m.:

Intensity of rainfall at 4 a.m. ... prompted mill shift boss to shut down operations and concentrate on keeping water away from concentrate floor - this was achieved - no damage occurred at tailings area, though pondage rose several inches....

At Level 5 it was a repetition of the July 2nd/3rd flood aggravated by a slip coming down off the area above the Champion Reef passing over the bifurcation in the road.... The deposition of 7 to 8000 yards of spoil into the Tunakohoa Stream blocked the water way at Level 5 facilities and resultant high water flooded compressor shed, workshop and store.

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<sup>93</sup> R. Sproge, Progress period for the period 1-15 March 1966, Norpac Papers, Box 5 NMC 19/2, Norpac.

<sup>94</sup> F.J. Handcock, General Manager's Progress Report for period to 7 April 1966; R. Sproge, Progress Report for period 16-30 April 1966, Norpac Papers, Box 5, NMC 19/2, Norpac.

<sup>95</sup> F.J. Handcock, Report 7/6 for period ending 10 July 1971, Norpac Papers, Box 6, NMC 19/6, Norpac.

Drying out of the 3 - 100 h.p. compressor motors, and clean-up of yard and building commenced 8 a.m. 24/10/71. Mine production was dislocated and mill without ore over Labour Weekend.<sup>96</sup>

It was estimated that losses from this storm amounted to \$37,000.<sup>97</sup>

Heavy rain not only affected the surface. One Norpac miner recalled that, after a few days of rain, conditions became much wetter as water seeped through the rock.<sup>98</sup> This is confirmed by a report that after 5.13 inches of rain in 12 days underground conditions in the Champion section were 'the wettest experienced'.<sup>99</sup> Because of mining in an area with an annual rainfall of 100 inches the 'run of mine ore feed to mill' had 'an average moisture content of 4.56%'.<sup>100</sup>

As heavy bush meant haulage roads did not dry out after prolonged rain and soon deteriorated, vegetation was cut back to assist drying.<sup>101</sup> The contract to make the first Waiorongomai pack track required bush to 'be cleared half a chain on sunny side'.<sup>102</sup> The first Tui track had vegetation cleared back by ten feet on the upper side and four feet on the lower.<sup>103</sup> When making the track from Waiorongomai to Waitawheta, bush was to be cut back 'not less than 32ft' on both sides.<sup>104</sup> Ten years later, the council's

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<sup>96</sup> F.J. Handcock, Report 11/6 for period ending 30 October 1971, Norpac Papers, Box 6, NMC 19/6, Norpac.

<sup>97</sup> Directors' Report for period ending 31 December 1971, Norpac Papers, Box 6, NMC 19/6, Norpac.

<sup>98</sup> Interview with Eric Coppard, Waihi, 8 December 1985, p. 29 of transcript.

<sup>99</sup> F.J. Handcock, Report 10/3 for period ending 5 October 1968, Norpac Papers, Box 5, NMC 19/3, Norpac.

<sup>100</sup> F.J. Handcock to Alister Griffith, 1 August 1969, Norpac File 4 [Office file], Norpac Papers transferred to Mineral Resources and held at Union Hill, Waihi [I am indebted to Eric Coppard for giving me access to these files, now destroyed].

<sup>101</sup> F.J. Handcock, Report 7/5 for period ending 11 July 1970, Norpac Papers, Box 6, NMC 19/5, Norpac.

<sup>102</sup> Piako County Council, Minutes of Meeting of 1 February 1882, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

<sup>103</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 31 October 1885, p. 2.

<sup>104</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 16 January 1897, p. 2.

specifications for tracks there required clearing bush back for five feet on each side.<sup>105</sup>

To illustrate the impact of the weather on transporting people, supplies, equipment, and ore between the mines and the flat, the building and repairing of the tramway and the main tracks during the 1880s will be summarized. The nature of the country combined with bad weather meant constructing the tramway took far longer than anticipated. Slips hindered the work throughout 1883, for even in summer heavy rain damaged the earthworks, so much so in February that the first section had to be remade.<sup>106</sup> In April, heavy rain not only stopped almost all work, but ‘a large land-slip’ to the north of the bridge over Army Creek

destroyed a large portion of the first horse grade, which was already completed. The slip extended from the line up the bridle track near the saw-pit, the whole of the surface and timber slipping bodily for a width of about 2 chains; in fact, the mass of rubbish is so great that there is every reason to believe no attempt will be made to remove it from the line, and it is the opinion of those connected with the work that it will be the best method to drive a tunnel through the solid rock for a distance of 200 feet - there is no doubt that the tramway would thus be protected from future slips at this part if it was made in a tunnel instead of through a slip, which at any time would easily be moved in wet weather, and destroy the road.<sup>107</sup>

It was later estimated that over 1,000 tons of earth had slipped.<sup>108</sup> A tunnel was indeed driven at this point, increasing the cost but not solving the problem completely, for after a couple of weeks of bad weather slips blocked both ends.<sup>109</sup> Heavy rain delayed clearing these and other slips along the tramway.<sup>110</sup> Then in September, after work was delayed by a foot

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<sup>105</sup> Piako County Council specifications, n.d. [1909], Mines Department, MD 1, 08/1289, ANZ-W.

<sup>106</sup> *Waikato Times*, 24 February 1883, p. 2.

<sup>107</sup> *Waikato Times*, 17 April 1883, p. 2.

<sup>108</sup> Piako County Council, *Te Aroha News*, 9 August 1884, p. 2.

<sup>109</sup> *Waikato Times*, 19 July 1883, p. 3, 24 July 1883, p. 2, 31 July 1883, p. 2.

<sup>110</sup> *Waikato Times*, 7 August 1883, p. 2, 18 August 1883, p. 2; for other details of slips, see *Te Aroha News*, 20 June 1883, p. 2, 28 July 1883, p. 2.

of snow, rain caused the embankment on Butler's Spur 'to move bodily down the gully'.<sup>111</sup> In October 'exceptionally bad weather' stopped all work.<sup>112</sup>

Once completed, the tramway required constant repairs, often because of damage caused by bad weather. In 1884, small slips occurred in March,<sup>113</sup> but most slips occurred in winter. In June it was blocked at the tunnel near Butler's incline,<sup>114</sup> and in August 48 hours of continuous rain created slips and a washout that took a week to clear.<sup>115</sup> After more slips came down, mine managers had to provide men to make repairs.<sup>116</sup> In 1885, after heavy slips to the south of the same tunnel 11 men worked day and night for a week to clear the line. The tramway manager then built a 'covering of heavy logs' over it so that any future slips would go 'over the top instead of filling up the line'; if not done, slips would block the line 'after heavy rain all winter'. He recommended spending two days each week on repairs (because of wear and tear as well).<sup>117</sup> In July 1887 there were two slips on the branch to the Success mine which, 'having taken place underneath the line, the rails were suspended, and the line rendered impassable'.<sup>118</sup>

A branch tramway constructed down a spur to the New Era Battery in 1885 suffered less damage because it did not go around the hillside, although one period of heavy rain made the built-up portion 'very considerably subside' and 'large quantities of earth ... filled up the cutting in various places'.<sup>119</sup>

The condition of the upper pack track was often dangerous, prompting many complaints and petitions to the council.<sup>120</sup> A slip in July 1883 took half a day to clear, and by September it was 'positively dangerous', needing

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<sup>111</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 1 September 1883, p. 9; *Thames Advertiser*, 7 September 1883, p. 3.

<sup>112</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 13 October 1883, p. 2.

<sup>113</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 15 March 1884, p. 2.

<sup>114</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 21 June 1884, p. 2, 5 July 1884, p. 2.

<sup>115</sup> *Waikato Times*, 19 August 1884, p. 2, 21 August 1884, p. 3; *Te Aroha News*, 23 August 1884, p. 2.

<sup>116</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 30 August 1884, p. 2; *Waikato Times*, 27 September 1884, p. 3.

<sup>117</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 11 July 1885, p. 2; *Waikato Times*, 25 July 1885, p. 3.

<sup>118</sup> Piako County Council, *Te Aroha News*, 9 July 1887, p. 2.

<sup>119</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 17 October 1885, p. 2.

<sup>120</sup> For example, Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 23 December 1886, p. 2, 17 April 1888, p. 2.

two men constantly working on it.<sup>121</sup> In mid-June 1884 ‘a week or two of wet weather’ would make it ‘almost impassable’, as some were one week later. ‘One or two slips’ on the lower side narrowed it so much that it was ‘difficult for a loaded horse to pass’.<sup>122</sup> A gale in March 1885 blew trees down ‘at two or three places, and especially at the Werahiko camp, where an enormous prostrate rata tree completely obstructs the way and causes a large amount of inconvenience to packers and others who with their horses are compelled to climb the steep and difficult ground above’ it.<sup>123</sup> In May, traffic was ‘completely stopped by a couple of trees sliding across the road close by the second waterfall’.<sup>124</sup> Two months later, on Fern Spur rain ‘cut a deep channel on the hillside, leaving but a narrow ridge for horses to walk upon’.<sup>125</sup> A laden packhorse slipped on this portion ‘into the deep cutting caused by the large volumes of water that poured over this track during the recent flood, and was with considerable difficulty rescued’.<sup>126</sup> Further up the hill, horses were unable to pass slips and blown-down trees.<sup>127</sup>

After a couple of years without major problems caused by rain, in March 1888 one miner complained that the track near his claim was ‘too narrow to get along in safety’ and that trees had fallen across it.<sup>128</sup> In August, ‘since the recent heavy rainfall’ the condition of the track had become ‘much worse, and was ‘almost impassable, and positively dangerous, horses sinking almost to their knees in some places’.<sup>129</sup> In August the following year, a packhorse fell 100 feet into Diamond Gully from a part of the track where, ‘owing to slips’, the track was ‘now only about four feet wide, sloping towards the gully, and altogether in a very dangerous condition’.<sup>130</sup>

A lower road, constructed to transport machinery to batteries and to sledge timber, was periodically blocked by slips and fallen trees and was

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<sup>121</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 30 June 1883, p. 2, 8 September 1883, p. 2.

<sup>122</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 14 June 1884, p. 2, 21 June 1884, p. 2.

<sup>123</sup> *Waikato Times*, 24 March 1885, p. 3.

<sup>124</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 9 May 1885, p. 2.

<sup>125</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 4 July 1885, p. 2.

<sup>126</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 18 July 1885, p. 2.

<sup>127</sup> Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 23 July 1885, p. 3.

<sup>128</sup> Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 17 March 1888, p. 2.

<sup>129</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 8 August 1888, p. 2.

<sup>130</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 7 August 1889, p. 2; see also Piako County Council, 14 August 1889, p. 2.

dangerous after heavy rain because of washouts and ‘some very slippery places which invited a fall sheer down into the rocky depths below’.<sup>131</sup> Sometimes repairs were washed away by further rain.<sup>132</sup> The very steep track to the Tui mines was made more difficult by bad weather, and regularly was reported as, for example, ‘almost impassable’ or ‘simply abominable’.<sup>133</sup>

Too little rain was also a problem, for the batteries were driven by water and in summer there was often a water shortage, causing problems for residents and farmers as well. For instance, Stoney Creek, close to Te Aroha, was in April 1887 ‘a creek only in name’ as its bed was ‘absolutely dry’.<sup>134</sup> Waiorongomai residents in January 1887 and February 1889 held meetings and appealed to the warden for an adequate domestic water supply.<sup>135</sup> In January 1889, as many wells in this township were completely dry, water was carted from the creek to hotels and to some houses.<sup>136</sup> Smaller creeks near Waiorongomai were still totally dry three months later.<sup>137</sup>

Shortage of water meant either a restriction of the number of stampers being used or the battery shutting down. During 1881 the small Te Aroha battery could never use more than half its stampers, and in May had to cease because of ‘long continued want of rain’.<sup>138</sup> When a 40-head stamper battery was proposed for Waiorongomai, it was confidently predicted there would be sufficient water in summer ‘to keep 80 head of stampers going, and in winter double that number’.<sup>139</sup> A water race tapped the lower Waiorongomai Stream and its tributaries, and in 1887 another brought

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<sup>131</sup> *Waikato Times*, 27 May 1886, p. 4; see also *Te Aroha News*, 31 March 1885, p. 7, 11 July 1885, p. 2, 8 August 1885, p. 2, 17 April 1889, p. 2, 5 June 1889, p. 2, 3 July 1889, p. 2.

<sup>132</sup> Piako County Council, *Te Aroha News*, 10 July 1889, p. 2.

<sup>133</sup> For example, *Te Aroha News*, 21 November 1885, p. 2, 3 July 1886, p. 3, 12 March 1887, p. 2, 15 October 1887, p. 2, Ohinemuri County Council, 8 June 1889, p. 2.

<sup>134</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 16 April 1887, p. 2.

<sup>135</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 15 January 1887, p. 2, 22 January 1887, p. 2, Warden’s Court, 6 February 1889, p. 2, Warden’s Court, 20 February 1889, p. 2.

<sup>136</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 5 January 1889, p. 2, 26 January 1889, p. 2.

<sup>137</sup> *Waikato Times*, 27 April 1889, p. 2.

<sup>138</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 30 April 1881, p. 3; *Waikato Times*, 5 May 1881, p. 2, 31 May 1881, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 1 June 1881, p. 3.

<sup>139</sup> *Waikato Times*, 25 February 1882, p. 2.

water from the Wairakau Stream.<sup>140</sup> Despite this, for most of February to May 1884 half the stampers had to be hung up and the remainder could only operate at a slow rate.<sup>141</sup> In November, ‘profiting by the experience of last summer, and in anticipation of a similar falling off in the water supply during the coming dry season’, a hurdy gurdy wheel replaced one turbine because it would give an equal amount of power using a third less water.<sup>142</sup> Despite this adjustment, three months later ‘scarcity of water’ meant the battery was ‘going at slow speed with half the stampers hung up’.<sup>143</sup> In December 1885, dry weather meant only 30 were working, at reduced speed, and by January the following year all were hung up and only a few berdans were working.<sup>144</sup> Heavy rain in late February meant all stampers were working again, but within a week some were hung up as the water pressure dropped off, and during April and May half were hung up.<sup>145</sup>

Even if there had been sufficient water in January 1887, because fallen trees smashed the fluming the battery had to stop.<sup>146</sup> Until heavy rain fell in early May, it normally used a quarter of its stampers, often at half speed.<sup>147</sup> There was the same partial shutdown in the summer of 1888.<sup>148</sup> The following year, an extension to the water race was constructed further up the Waiorongomai Valley, but in July heavy rain over three days

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<sup>140</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 7 November 1882, p. 3; *Waikato Times*, 25 November 1882, p. 3; *Thames Star*, 6 February 1883, p. 2, 24 February 1883, p. 6; *AJHR*, 1883, H-5, p. 15; *Te Aroha News*, 26 March 1887, p. 2, 21 April 1888, p. 2.

<sup>141</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 23 February 1884, p. 2; *Waikato Times*, 28 February 1884, p. 3, 26 April 1884, p. 2, 8 May 1884, p. 2, 17 May 1884, p. 2.

<sup>142</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 15 November 1884, p. 2.

<sup>143</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 28 February 1885, p. 2; see also *Waikato Times*, 21 February 1885, p. 3.

<sup>144</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 19 December 1885, p. 2, 9 January 1886, p. 2; *Waikato Times*, 21 January 1886, p. 2.

<sup>145</sup> *Waikato Times*, 23 February 1886, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 27 February 1886, p. 2, April 1886, p. 2, 29 May 1886, p. 2.

<sup>146</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 15 January 1887, p. 2.

<sup>147</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 29 January 1887, p. 2, 12 February 1887, p. 2, 19 February 1887, p. 2, 26 February 1887, p. 2, 5 March 1887, p. 2, 12 March 1887, p. 2, 26 March 1887, p. 2, 2 April 1887, p. 2, 9 April 1887, p. 2, 16 April 1887, p. 2, 23 April 1887, p. 2, 30 April 1887, p. 2, 7 May 1887, p. 2.

<sup>148</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 28 January 1888, p. 1, 25 February 1888, p. 2, 10 March 1888, p. 2, 21 April 1888, p. 2.

caused about 40 slips, one of which broke away part of a trestle.<sup>149</sup> As for the New Era Battery, built well up the valley, it was ‘placed in such a position that for the greater part of the year there would not be sufficient water power available’.<sup>150</sup> In practice, this was not a problem, for it soon failed because its process did not work.<sup>151</sup>

## SWAMPS

To encourage settlement, just before gold was found potential farmers were told the land was ‘good, the swamp land particularly rich, and reclaimable to a great extent’.<sup>152</sup> A traveller on the Waihou River in 1879 saw, after the kahikatea forest above Paeroa, ‘one of the most glorious panoramas which it is possible to imagine. The eye cannot reach the limits’ of ‘the boundless extent of the most luxuriant growth of fern, flax, native grass, etc, which shows that the land is first-class, and when in proper hands will be made to produce something more payable than its present crop’.<sup>153</sup> ‘Proper hands’ not being Maori hands, of course. The latter point was emphasized two years later by a *Thames Star* reporter who from the top of Primrose Hill at Paeroa in 1881 saw ‘an immense plain, as level as a billiard table and containing hundreds of thousands of acres of good land which only awaits the hand of the practical farmer to be made reproductive. As we look we cannot help thinking “What a grand country; what a glorious future the place has before it”’. He had already contrasted one such farmer’s ‘fine field of oats’ with the ‘large field of docks and thistles’ on Maori land alongside.<sup>154</sup>

Te Aroha was on the edge of a 200,000-acre swamp filling most of the valley between the hills and the Firth of Thames.<sup>155</sup> One who visited in

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<sup>149</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 6 July 1889, p. 2; see also 5 June 1889, p. 2, 3 July 1889, p. 2, 14 September 1889, p. 2.

<sup>150</sup> *Thames Star*, 12 December 1890, p. 2.

<sup>151</sup> See paper on Peter Ferguson and his New Era.

<sup>152</sup> *Brett’s Auckland Almanac, Provincial Handbook, and Strangers’ Vade Mecum for 1880* (Auckland, 1880), p. 58.

<sup>153</sup> Own Correspondent, ‘Te Aroha District and Hot Springs’, *Thames Advertiser*, 4 February 1879, p. 3.

<sup>154</sup> Special Reporter, ‘Paeroa and Owharoa’, *Thames Star*, 21 January 1881, p. 2.

<sup>155</sup> H.D.M. Haszard, ‘The Drainage of the Piako Swamp, Thames’, *New Zealand Mines Record*, 16 April 1902, p. 366.

1877 recalled, 46 years later, standing on a ridge near Waitoa looking towards the hills over

a dreary unbroken stretch of swamp. As the moaning of the wind through the rushes was brought to me on the morning breeze, I could not help asking myself what induced the settlers to face the privations and hardships of a pioneer's life, settling in such a desolate wilderness.

My thoughts were quickly answered as Mr [Frederick] Strange<sup>156</sup> joined me with a remark, "dreary looking, is it not: but look at the possibilities of the picture? The time will come when the whole of this great plain will be covered with farms and villages. The land, when drained, will be some of the richest in the world."<sup>157</sup>

Before being drained, swamps had to be crossed with care. One man recalled the most difficult and dangerous part of the road to Te Aroha was 'the morass known as Long Swamp', where the track 'was always covered with about three feet of water'.<sup>158</sup> John Carne Bidwill, traveled between Tauranga and Matamata in 1839, considered the plain to be 'the most splendid piece of country I have met with for the purposes of colonization'. Its 'main fault' was 'its excessive wetness – about one half is a complete marsh', but it could be easily and cheaply drained using the 'deep water-courses running through the plain in all directions much lower than the marshy spots'.<sup>159</sup> He crossed it in March:

The longest marsh we had to cross to-day was about four miles; the natives wanted to carry me as they had previously done, but I was afraid of their falling with me and making me dirtier than I should be in wading through the mud without their assistance. I nearly stuck fast several times, and was obliged to tie my shoes with flax, in order to keep them on my feet: the mud was in many places three feet deep, of a soft custard-like consistence, and of a light brown colour, from the decomposed vegetable matter. I was heartily rejoiced when I was told we were near the end, when suddenly a bunch of reeds on which I had relied gave way, and I

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<sup>156</sup> See *Te Aroha News*, 29 October 1917, p. 2, 12 October 1927, Supplement, p. 1.

<sup>157</sup> Anonymous recollections, *Te Aroha News*, 15 February 1923, p. 4.

<sup>158</sup> Recollections of D. Robertson, *Te Aroha News*, 20 April 1912, p. 2.

<sup>159</sup> John Carne Bidwill, *Rambles in New Zealand* (Christchurch, 1952 [first published 1841]), pp. 102-103.

sunk up to my middle, so that I was obliged to call [for] assistance to get out.<sup>160</sup>

In late October 1843, Bishop Selwyn and his party walked overland from Te Rua Kowhaha, a landing on the Waihou River, towards Matamata. The 'endless' plain was 'dotted with small woods', one, 'at a great distance', being at Matamata. At first 'the walking was excellent, with the exception of an occasional swamp of small size and depth'. When they reached the first Matamata swamp, an offer by Maori to carry them for 'nearly a mile in all, through a quagmire', was declined because of 'the risk of a worse immersion by breaking through the under crust of the swamp by the double weight'. They walked through three swamps and what Maori described as 'half swamps', being 'of less breadth and depth, and found them much better than we expected. None were so deep as the hips; the general depth a little above the knee; and the water from the late rains was so pure, that it was little more than wading a river'.<sup>161</sup>

Sir George Grey and his party crossed the plain to the south-east of Te Aroha in mid-December 1849. After leaving the only patch of bush, at Manawaru, they found that the stories they had been told about the swamps

turned out to be by no means exaggerated. We had to encounter four of these, the average depth of the first three of which was between the knees and the waist, and the distance across varying from a quarter to rather better than half-a-mile, with an interval, upon the average, of about five hundred yards of terra firma between them. Then came Manga pouri (rightly called the black swamp), last but certainly not least of all. This is a regular raupo swamp of the worst description, and from the late rains was full of highly odoriferous black water; it is about half-a-mile in breadth. We were lucky enough to find a small canoe which took us safely across, four at a time. Our finding this canoe, the natives told us, was a very fortunate circumstance as the swamp is, it seems, infested by a very wicked Taniwha called Rito, whose favourite food is pakehas (he never eats maories), whom he draws under the water as they cross the swamp, and devours bones and all in his hole in the mud. The natives who waded and dragged the canoe across, sunk to their chins in the mud and water in the centre of the swamp....

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<sup>160</sup> Bidwill, p. 103.

<sup>161</sup> *Church in the Colonies no. VII: New Zealand Part II: Journal of the Bishop's Visitation Tour, from August to December, 1843* (London, 1847), pp. 24-26.

The plain over which we crossed between Manawaru and the first of these swamps - a distance of about twelve miles - is bleak and without any indications of good soil, being covered with stunted fern and manuka.<sup>162</sup>

Ten years later, Ferdinand von Hochstetter crossed the plains near Matamata, and noted that from the Waihou to the Mangawhero, its last tributary, a distance of three miles, 'we were obliged to wade almost without interruption in stagnating water, and it was not until reaching the Tirau range ... that we stepped once more upon dry ground, where we could rest for dinner'.<sup>163</sup>

In 1875, Edward Reginald Chudleigh visited in search of land to purchase. He recorded that, although the land was of good quality, the roads were 'bad' and the streams 'very nasty to cross, deep with soft steep sides'.

I had to swim my horse over a deep creek, the Waitoa. I got over on a fallen tree. [William] Moon got a rope across the stream and then stock-whip and hauling got him in. He took a wild jump into the water went clean out of sight and came up half way across. Moon took in the slack of the rope and Bobie got out all right.<sup>164</sup>

Moon, who already owned land there, in 1923 recalled that the Waikato was cut off from Te Aroha and Ohinemuri by 'three bottomless creeks and about two and a half miles of swamp absolutely impassable for either horses or cattle. You could wade across to the Aroha on foot up to your armpits in water'.<sup>165</sup> In 1877 Moon assisted a party travelling to Te Aroha from Hamilton across the swamps beyond the site of the future Morrinsville. They had chosen a shorter way with 'a little water upon the road' because evening was approaching.

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<sup>162</sup> George Sisson Cooper, *Journal of an Expedition Overland from Auckland to Taranaki by way of Rotorua, Taupo, and the West Coast: undertaken in the summer of 1849-50, by His Excellency the Governor-in-Chief of New Zealand* (Auckland, 1851), pp. 54, 56.

<sup>163</sup> Ferdinand von Hochstetter, *New Zealand: Its physical geography, geology and natural history* (Stuttgart, 1867), pp. 448-449.

<sup>164</sup> *Diary of E.R. Chudleigh 1862-1921*, ed. E.C. Richards (Christchurch, 1950), pp. 238-239.

<sup>165</sup> William Moon, untitled memoirs, written 1923, p. 28, MS 551, Library of the Auckland Institute and War Memorial Library, Auckland.

We had not gone far before we discovered that the water upon the road was not a little deep, but frequently up to the horses' knees, with mud holes many. However, we pushed on, when, suddenly we found out horses drop into water up to the saddle flaps, which caused some of us to carry wet trousers, and boots full of water to the end of our day's journey. We were very sorry now we had elected to take the short cut. However, nothing daunted, we continued to hurry on, having yet some four or five miles to go and the sun beginning to set. All at once our guide struck off into the fern calling after us to follow, saying here is the bridge (over the Waitoa river), we saw no track but followed implicitly. We had not gone far before we were brought to a standstill, and were beginning [to] lose confidence in our guide, for, behold, in front of us, at the bottom of a steep cutting a ravine of about eight chains broad covered with some two to four feet of water, but we saw no bridge. We thought our friend was taking us another of his short cuts with a little water &c, but no – this was really the best and only road – we could see no bridge, nothing but an expanse of water running at some three or four knots per hour, and a quantity of grown timber, but he assured us this was not the bed of the river but as we were through it we should come to the bridge – so saying he plunged in. Of course we were forced to follow, we moved along slowly, having to stop every now and again to back our horses so that the ti-tree which had been used as fascines might drop off the hind legs of our horses between which it had settled itself. After traversing some eleven chains of this delightful road we manoeuvred the bridge standing as an island (it was totally surrounded by water). On the further side the water was deeper and the dip of the bridge sudden.<sup>166</sup>

The following day, after leaving Moon's farm they came to a bad patch they were warned would prevent them crossing. Although 'not more than three yards long', it was very dangerous. We dismounted, and our guide kindly offering to try his own horse through it first. He did so, and the horse sank to his belly, but, with a plunge, threw forefeet on to firm ground, and jumped out'. They succeeded in crossing safely.<sup>167</sup> The 'great swamp' closer to the Waihou consisted of 'mostly rich vegetable peat, from eighteen inches to two feet deep, and, unlike the swamps upon the delta, it contains little or no timber'. The road then being constructed ended in 'a very wet rush

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<sup>166</sup> 'A Trip from Hamilton through Piako to the Thames Valley and Back Again', *Waikato Times*, 27 February 1877, p. 2.

<sup>167</sup> 'A Trip from Hamilton through Piako to the Thames Valley and Back Again', *Waikato Times*, 27 February 1877, p. 2.

swamp' in which horses were liable to become inextricably stuck.<sup>168</sup> On their return, they came to another 'fording place':

It did not look so bad. My friend said, we would venture it. I told him, I thought it was rather deep on the further side of the creek. Oh, he did not think so. Let us try. My politeness would not allow me to go first, so I gave way to my friend, whom I followed, at a respectful distance. He was delighted to find the water so low. He said, "Come along, it is scarcely up to the horse's knees. O, come along, and ---" but I heard no more, his voice ceased. I looked in front of me, and saw something which appeared like a gigantic float belonging to a fishing line, It was my friend, whose horse had sunk over his back in deep water.... He did not complain. Some would have sworn and got angry – not so my friend, his patience is proverbial. He only said it was a little wet.<sup>169</sup>

In December 1872, a court official travelled from Thames to Te Aroha overland. For the last 12 miles,

The track for a mile or two follows the right bank of the Waihou, passing through a small belt of bush on the river side, consisting of light mixed forest. As the track is not much used, we frequently found ourselves in the clutches of the "bush lawyers".... This bramble occasionally scratched our hands and faces most unmercifully.... The Waihou is here a fine stream, about two chains wide, with banks about 9 or 10 feet high, and a strong current. The land is liable to occasional floods, and is evidently very fertile. Emerging from the bush, we are now able to canter rapidly through level tea-tree scrub, intermixed with sweet-briar, tupakihi, clover, &c, and finally over ferny plains, the road taking an easterly directions towards the hills to avoid extensive swamps. We now reach an alluvial terrace country, with land of good quality, generally, about here, covered with fern. These terraces are a very peculiar and characteristic feature of the eastern side of the valley of the Waihou. Varying in width from one to two or three miles, in some places occupying the whole of the space between the eastern range and the river, and in others extensive plains and swampy land intervening between them and the Waihou.

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<sup>168</sup> 'A Trip from Hamilton through Piako to the Thames Valley and Back Again', *Waikato Times*, 1 March 1877, p. 2.

<sup>169</sup> 'A Trip from Hamilton through Piako to the Thames Valley and Back Again', *Waikato Times*, 24 March 1877, p. 2.

After riding for three or four miles ‘over the terraces, which are much broken by gullies from the mountains, making the crossings in many places swampy and difficult in winter’, they arrived at Te Aroha’s hot springs.<sup>170</sup>

The dangers of the swamps and scrublands were illustrated in an October 1882 report about the Grant and Foster settlement at Shaftesbury, near Waiorongomai,<sup>171</sup> and the swamp near the small Waihou settlement:

Two children, belonging to some of the newly arrived immigrants on Grant and Foster’s block, had a narrow escape of being lost in the bush last week. Julia Smith, aged nine years, and Annie Brant, aged seven, were sent to a store about a mile and a half distant at four o’clock in the afternoon. In coming home again they lost the track, and wandered away in the scrub. Not arriving home before dark, the settlers turned out with lanterns in search parties, but failed to find them that night. Next morning, about nine o’clock, they were found at the Wairakau Creek, about two and a half miles from their homes. It rained heavily throughout the night, but the children appear to be none the worse for their exposure, though they were crying bitterly when discovered.

Another accident happened on the 18th to a boy named Fred. Brompton, who attempted to bathe in one of the large drains, and, unacquainted with the nature of the soil, commenced sinking in the soft bottom of the drain. Fortunately, another lad, named Crisp, was with him, and, throwing the lad’s coat to him, to which he clung, succeeded in pulling him out before he sank in the yielding soil of the swamp.

John Harrison, who was lost some two months since in returning from Missen’s Hotel [at Waihou] one dark night to the camp on the Waitoa Flat, has never yet been heard of. There can be no doubt but that he stumbled into one of the swamp creeks, and was drowned.<sup>172</sup>

(No death certificate for John Harrison was issued in 1882 or 1883.) A recollection of the first train trip to Te Aroha on 1 March 1886 described the view across the plain:

My impression of the dreary waste of swamp, with rushes 6ft high on each side, was heightened by the fact that the train made the

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<sup>170</sup> Albert J. Allom, *A Holiday Trip to Maungatautari, Being the Journal of a Tour to the Waikato, via Ohinemuri and the Upper Thames* (Thames, 1873), p. 9.

<sup>171</sup> See paper on special settlements.

<sup>172</sup> Own Correspondent, ‘Waitoa and Upper Thames’, *Auckland Weekly News*, 7 October 1882, p. 21.

grade the whole way over the plains. You see, the ground had not consolidated under the rails, and the engine caused a definite hollow to the line as it progressed. As a result it was going uphill all the way. But what I remember best of all was the manner in which the rushes, also affected by the weight of the train, bowed in towards it as though doing obeisance to the first train. It was rather remarkable. The whole of the flats ... presented just an unlimited waste of wild swamp growth.<sup>173</sup>

The swamps were partly man made. An observer believed nearly all had 'been made at a recent date by the damming of the natural water-courses - a plan which has been extensively adopted by the Maoris for the purpose of fishing'.<sup>174</sup> In the creeks running through the Te Kapara swamp, near the Waitoa River, 'a large number of eel-weirs were found'.<sup>175</sup> Draining Te Aroha West was handicapped by the Waiwhero Stream being blocked by these.<sup>176</sup> An early settler there noted that one creek 'must have been a large one before it was dammed up with eel weirs and other obstructions, as there were about 15 chains along the course of the drain which the contractors who made the drain informed me they were not able to bottom with a long rod'.<sup>177</sup> The Piranui Creek was blocked by 'some score' of weirs obstructing what had been 'a water-course of very considerable size, and, in fact, the outlet for the larger portion of the vast swamp lands'.<sup>178</sup> A later account of travelling on the river recalled that 'in some places large pieces of timber were driven into the river and to these the Maoris attached their eel-catching devices. The upper portion of the timber was beautifully carved'.<sup>179</sup>

The swamps covered a former kahikatea forest. In 1879, when a ditch was being dug alongside the road from Morrinsville to Te Aroha, the swamp 'appeared to be one mass of roots, a proof that an extensive forest had grown

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<sup>173</sup> Recollections of H. Cropp, *Te Aroha News*, 6 December 1937, p. 5.

<sup>174</sup> Waitoa Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 16 September 1880, p. 2.

<sup>175</sup> 'Agricola', 'Ten Days in the Waikato', *Auckland Weekly News*, 28 June 1879, p. 13.

<sup>176</sup> Hamilton Correspondent, 'Te Aroha Drainage Works', *Auckland Weekly News*, 18 February 1882, p. 23.

<sup>177</sup> Thomas Taylor to Auckland Waste Lands Board, 30 May 1882, printed in *Thames Advertiser*, 2 June 1882, p. 3.

<sup>178</sup> Hamilton Correspondent, 'Te Aroha Drainage Works', *Auckland Weekly News*, 18 February 1882, p. 23.

<sup>179</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 12 October 1927, Supplement, p. 1.

there at some remote period'.<sup>180</sup> Digging the first drainage ditches on the Aroha block was delayed by 'a great deal of timber'.<sup>181</sup> When the Alameda shaft was sunk on the edge of Waiorongomai at the end of the 1880s to cut the main reef on the flat, buried kahikatea trees were struck at a depth of 65 feet.<sup>182</sup>

The potential of the drained swamps was high, and was seen as an Anglo-Saxon civilizing mission to transform the land. As one commentator wrote in 1881 about the Piako County,

Auckland looks on this district as Canterbury does upon its plains, as a choice piece of property destined to be one of the future investments of the country richer than goldfields and more fertilising than black diamonds; but this country is far richer than the Canterbury Plains in the quality of the soil and is in fact the perfection of all New Zealand's most perfect endowments of soil, climate and beauty of scenery.... There is a tale told by the depth of the rich black vegetable surface soil, the stratum of peat or limestone, and the heavy clay subsoil that, like homely worth, is better than good looks and a rich fortune to the fortunate inheritors of the next generation's acres. A few years ago only, these were trackless waters, only passable to a few sad blood-thirsty savages, whose sole happiness was supplied by mutual extermination, and whose utmost limit of human sympathy was the absorption of a fellow-being's life with his body into another being's belly.... The land possesses all the usual qualities of the best level or swamp land, such as rich deep vegetable surface deposit, with an inexhaustible clay subsoil, that grows fine grain, root crops of an almost incredible weight and soundness, or permanent pasture, such as even an English model farm could not beat. It is wonderfully easy to work, and if only managed with the slightest system or consideration requires no outlay worth mentioning on manure as Nature if only allowed will replace by each crop all she takes out of the land in the crop before.<sup>183</sup>

## INSECTS

Swamps were a breeding ground for mosquitoes. In December 1849, when Sir George Grey and party camped two miles above Te Aroha, they

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<sup>180</sup> 'Agricola', 'Ten Days in the Waikato', *Auckland Weekly News*, 28 June 1879, p. 13.

<sup>181</sup> *Thames Star*, 24 May 1880, p. 3.

<sup>182</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 2 March 1889, p. 2.

<sup>183</sup> Travelling Reporter [S.E. Smith], 'The Piako County', *Waikato Times*, 3 May 1881, p. 2.

set to work to regale the mosquitoes with as great a quantity of tobacco smoke as we could conveniently raise. The Thames mosquitoes must however have differently constituted lungs from others of the species, as they seem rather to enjoy the smoke than otherwise, or else perhaps they bit us all the harder in revenge - be that as it may, we scarcely had a wink of sleep the whole night.<sup>184</sup>

Two explorers had similar experiences in December 1872:

A night of misery from mosquitoes such as I have never before experienced; the air was full of them. They wedged their way within our blankets, got between our lips, penetrated the passages of our ears. In vain did we get up, shake ourselves, put green ti-tree on the fire, and stand in the dense smoke thus evolved. It was a mere trial of endurance between man and insect, and the insect, as at every other time during that fearful night, achieved a most complete victory.<sup>185</sup>

Returning to Te Aroha shortly afterwards, they camped near the hot springs, to be again attacked:

Our tent was useless, for we dared not go near it. The malicious little wretches took possession of it by millions. For some time after dark, we walked about in utter, hopeless misery. To sit or lie down was impossible. Then a bright idea struck Dr Fox, of setting fire to the dry fern and brushwood around. This gave us temporary relief, and also something to do to protect ourselves, tent, saddles, and horses from the fierce blaze. But when the fire had exhausted itself, our miseries re-commenced, and what we suffered during the remainder of that fearful night, I shall not attempt to describe.<sup>186</sup>

In December 1880, an Aucklander amused his friends by telling them that he had struck, not gold, but 'an immense reef of mosquitoes'.<sup>187</sup> The following month, a Thames paper, 'for the benefit of our Te Aroha friends', published a 'welcome recipe for the extermination of those troublesome insects, the mosquitoes', namely to burn powdered Persian chamomile

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<sup>184</sup> Cooper, pp. 24, 26.

<sup>185</sup> Allom, p. 10.

<sup>186</sup> Allom, p. 20.

<sup>187</sup> 'Waikato Whisperings', *Observer*, 18 December 1880, p. 126.

(*pyrethrum roseum*).<sup>188</sup> Despite draining the swamps, in 1898 the local newspaper reported: ‘Once more the “pestilence that walketh in darkness” is with us, and the familiar “ping” of the mosquito enlivens the watches of the night’.<sup>189</sup> In 1976, a woman recalled that in the late nineteenth century ‘mosquitoes, which swarmed around when lights were turned on, necessitated blinds to be put down and windows to be shut. An old saying: “Te Aroha mosquitoes climb up the trees and bark!”’<sup>190</sup>

And then there were the sandflies (were some of the reported mosquitoes really sandflies?). Although not recorded in early Te Aroha, in 1909 they were noted as a disincentive to visitors because they attacked English tourists.<sup>191</sup> New Zealand has seven species of sandfly, the prevalent one at Te Aroha being *Austrosimulium australense*. The *Te Aroha News* explained that in its ‘mild climate’ the pest bred ‘all the year round, being more prolific during the warmer months’. Breeding on ‘herbs, rushes and branches that hang down in the water’, the bloodsucking females were most active ‘during the warmest hours, or before and after rain, when the air is saturated with moisture’. Their destruction was very difficult; whilst clearing watercress and aquatic grasses and rushes from the river might help, the extensive fishing of whitebait was removing a natural predator.<sup>192</sup> In 1976, a 96-year old woman could still remember teenage experiences with sandflies ‘which bit us through our open white work stockings, leaving the patterns nicely traced on our legs as we sat in the Domain’.<sup>193</sup> Only in the late twentieth century, with the removal of willows along the river, has the sandfly problem eased.<sup>194</sup>

## CROSSING THE WAIHOU

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<sup>188</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 7 January 1881, p. 3.

<sup>189</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 10 May 1898, p. 2.

<sup>190</sup> Recollections of Amy MacPherson (formerly Amy Salmon), *Te Aroha News*, 12 October 1976, p. 16.

<sup>191</sup> *Te Aroha Mail*, cited in *Observer*, 11 September 1909, p. 17.

<sup>192</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 25 November 1927, p. 4.

<sup>193</sup> Recollections of Amy MacPherson (formerly Amy Salmon), *Te Aroha News*, 12 October 1976, p. 16.

<sup>194</sup> Kevin Wells, *A Postcard from Te Aroha: An account of taking the waters at Te Aroha’s Hot Springs Domain* (Auckland, 2003), p. 74.

Before Pakeha settlement began, the ford used by travellers heading from Thames to the Upper Waikato was upstream of Te Aroha, where the Wairakau Stream joined the Waihou River. Although the river there was ‘not much more than a chain wide, with banks 15 to 20 feet high’, the current was ‘strong, the ford deep (the water reaching up to the horses’ withers), and dangerous in a freshet’.<sup>195</sup> Those taking stock between Thames and Waikato used the ford at Mangaiti, downstream from Te Aroha. In 1921 one early settler recalled that ‘the river bed up to about 1880 was fine, but since then the sands were shifting and the crossing became increasingly difficult, there being a moving mass of sand. He had lost cattle in the sands there’.<sup>196</sup> In January 1880 some visitors took three hours to get their horses across the river at Omahu.<sup>197</sup>

### USING THE RIVER AS A HIGHWAY

Before the railway, the river was the main traffic route to the town and the mines. Several steamers travelled from Thames to Te Aroha and occasionally to Waiorongomai, and passengers’ experiences depended on the weather, the companions, and even on religion, as one traveller explained:

Te Aroha, fourteen miles from Paeroa by road, and nearly double that distance by water, was the next place on my programme, and as I heard a lot about the beauties of the scenery along the Waihou River, and the day being warm and far spent, I elected to go by steamer and was lucky enough to catch the ‘Waitoa’ at the junction. It runs a very tortuous course for several miles from the junction with the Ohinemuri, and is rather shallow in places, but there are several fine reaches of water of a bright azure hue. The scenery is all that the most imaginative could depict, the rich umbrageous foliage on the river banks, the ever-varying landscape, the light and shade of the perspective, heightened by the warm rays of the sun in a cloudless sky, made up a panorama that would delight the heart of a Kalizotic Society,<sup>198</sup> and baffle the skill of a Salvator Rosa to paint. During our trip up the river, the skipper, practical man that he is, ran the craft quite

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<sup>195</sup> Allom, p. 11.

<sup>196</sup> W.F. MacWilliams, evidence to Rivers Commission, *Te Aroha News*, 10 August 1921, p. 1.

<sup>197</sup> *Thames Star*, 20 January 1880, p. 2.

<sup>198</sup> A society formed in Melbourne in the late nineteenth century to encourage a love of the beautiful” Google provides many details.

unconcerned against the bank and made fast to a tree. The reason of such a strange procedure was soon apparent, as the old man with some of the hands were seen going ashore provided with empty cases, sacks, etc, to make a raid on a peach grove. The passengers followed suit, and we had a lively time of it going from tree to tree to secure the most luscious-looking fruit....

Very seldom or ever have I felt the inconvenience of being a Holy Roman as I did the day of my trip up the Waihou, which happened to be a Friday. There was nothing for dinner but roast beef, and, as my appetite was sharpened by the keen invigorating breeze on the river, I felt an inordinate desire for something substantial to eat. I wished that I had lost my reckoning, and if I turned heretic for the nonce I was afraid that a lump of beef would stick in my throat. There was nothing for it but to fast, peaches being a poor substitute to appease the cravings of nature. The slow progress we were making, about four miles an hour, had still a greater tendency to make me feel wretched. The river scenery had no charms for me now, which before, on a well filled stomach, looked all that was bright and cheerful, in fact all the romantic sentiment with which I was imbued in the morning was completely knocked out of me. I managed though to live through that trying ordeal, and staggered ashore at Te Aroha.<sup>199</sup>

A new steamship in 1882 reduced the journey to seven and a half hours.<sup>200</sup> Some boats travelled up at least part of the river in the dark; in 1900 a miner described the journey between Thames and Paeroa: 'The electric light was used as a search light to show the way & the effect was very pretty. The light thrown on the willows and cabbage trees bordering the banks looked like the fairy scene of a pantomime'.<sup>201</sup>

One reason for the slow journeys was the strong current. The first steamer to reach Te Aroha, in December 1874, 'had her bows swung right down the stream several times by its force, and if it is so at this season it must be much stronger in floods, or wet weather'. Despite being 'able to keep close into the bank out of the direct current', a canoe took two and a half days to reach Te Aroha from the junction of the Ohinemuri and Waihou

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<sup>199</sup> Michael Landers, 'A Trip to Te Aroha and Ohinemuri Districts', *Freeman's Journal*, 28 March 1884, p. 13.

<sup>200</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 20 April 1882, p. 3.

<sup>201</sup> Thomas Franz Holt to Eliza Helen Holt, n.d. [September-October 1900], Thomas Franz Holt Papers, p. 8, Te Aroha Museum.

Rivers.<sup>202</sup> The swift current above this junction meant steamers carrying heavy cargo had particular difficulties. In 1930, one passenger recalled the 'Vivid' being 'so shockingly overladen with goods and passengers that at the sharp bends, failing to answer her helm quickly, she again and again drove her nose into the bank. A line had then to be carried in the dinghy to the opposite bank, and the ship hauled clear'.<sup>203</sup>

In the early 1870s, 'the river above Ohinemuri junction was only navigable for canoes. Even they often came to grief in one or another of the innumerable snags or rapids of which the river was then so full'.<sup>204</sup> An 1873 map marked rapids at and above the junction.<sup>205</sup> In December 1874, an engineer on the first steamer trip to Te Aroha counted 124 snags after it, 50 of them 'very bad'; he was sure there were more under the water.<sup>206</sup> A published account provided more details:

After turning one or two sharp bends ... we came in sight of the first eel weirs that some of us had ever seen. They are rather picturesque looking objects, made of strong poles standing eight or ten feet above the water, and firmly lashed together with cross ties, made in a very ingenious way to withstand the force of the current. The weirs are all 12 feet apart so there was ample room for the "Fairy" to steam between them without touching or doing any damage. The river above the junction is of course much narrower than below it, but it is not affected by the tide, except in a slight "backing up" of the waters, so that there is always a strong current running down - probably a three-knot one in many parts....

There are, I may observe, some very sharp turns in a few places in the river, and we found ourselves describing a semi-circle pretty often, until we came in view of the mountain.... Our view of the mountain was rudely disturbed by the sticking of the steamer in the mud, at [Mangaiti,] a ford well known to the Maoris as the

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<sup>202</sup> James N. McLaren to Superintendent of Auckland Province, 27 January 1875, Auckland Provincial Government Papers, Box 28, Session 30, MS 595, Auckland Public Library; see account of this journey in *Thames Advertiser*, 30 December 1874, p. 3.

<sup>203</sup> Recollections of W.H. Taylor, *Te Aroha and the Fortunate Valley*, p. 341.

<sup>204</sup> *Brett's Auckland Almanac, Provincial Handbook, and Strangers' Vade Mecum for 1880* (Auckland, 1880), p. 55.

<sup>205</sup> Map of proposed Thames to Waikato railway, Legislative Department, LE 1, 1873/146, ANZ-W.

<sup>206</sup> James N. McLaren to Superintendent, Auckland Province, 27 January 1875, Auckland Provincial Government Papers, Box 28, Session 30, MS 595, Auckland Public Library.

only place between Shortland [the southern portion of Thames] and the Aroha where horses can be forded. We had got on the shallow side of the river, and to get into deep water again was now our principal anxiety. This was soon accomplished, in spite of orders being given by every person on board, which must have strangely confused the unfortunate engineer for a time. But Providence was kind, and by dint of pushing with long poles and the use of the screw, we got into deep water and went over the ford with ease; and immediately afterwards ... jolted over a nasty-looking snag, and broke the top of it off, as it was partly rotten. We proceeded a few hundred yards further up the river, when the little steamer went jolt, jolt, jolt, over another snag. A third one was met with and scraped a little further up, but fortunately no damage was done, and we had now passed the worst portion of our journey.

On the journey back to Thames, two snags were hit.<sup>207</sup> In 1876, a traveller wrote:

In the long reaches of the stream, and at somewhat critical bends in its course, huge trees, washed down by the floods of years, present gnarled roots and sharp branches dangerous to both steamers and boats where haply the snags are just a little below the surface, and difficult to discern as some who have boated down the river in the brief twilight or the deceptive moonlight have had reason to remember.

Between the junction of the Waihou and Ohinemuri rivers and the Ngati Rahiri settlement at Omahu were many snags and sandbanks.<sup>208</sup> One impatient passenger wrote in January 1882 of 'the great number of shallows, frequent turnings and windings, and narrow banks' above the junction, his trip being 'a succession of bumps, thrusts, go-aheads, and asterns'. One boat stuck 'hard and fast' had to be unloaded onto barges which were then towed upstream by smaller steamers.

Even these sometimes get beaten, as on our return at a place known as the Willows the river is wide, but the channel exceedingly narrow, and we were sticking in the only channel, and the little 'Fairy' in attempting to pass got aground several

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<sup>207</sup> Own Correspondent, 'Navigating the Thames River: A Holiday Excursion', *Thames Advertiser*, 30 December 1874, p. 3.

<sup>208</sup> 'Road Making in the Upper Thames', *Auckland Weekly News*, 21 October 1876, Supplement, p. 13.

times, being obliged to let go the barge and pick it up again; at last we also got clear by using a warp ashore.

If going up river was 'bad', returning was 'even worse', with 'sundry swings and polka-like turnings'.<sup>209</sup>

### PAKEHA SETTLEMENT

The first acts of Pakeha settlers was to drain the swamps, snag the river, and construct roads, bridges, and, soon, a railway, for without these neither farming nor mining could prosper.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> 'Mud Lark', 'A Holiday Trip up the Waihou', *Thames Advertiser*, 21 January 1882, p. 3.

<sup>210</sup> See paper entitled 'Developing the Te Aroha District Until c. 1910'.