

# THE VEGETATION OF THE TE AROHA DISTRICT

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THE UNIVERSITY OF  
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*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

## THE VEGETATION OF THE TE AROHA DISTRICT

**Abstract:** *Pakeha settlers universally admired the mountain's vegetation, and several enthusiasts made botanical surveys. Both because of its intrinsic beauty and also to attract tourists, portions of the mountain were removed from the goldfield and attempts were made to preserve the original vegetation. In contrast, few admired the vegetation in the swamps, which were quickly drained for farming.*

*As thick bush handicapped prospectors, it was burnt to expose outcrops. Miners were permitted to cut the trees on their claims for mining purposes, and settlers required timber for a multitude of purposes. Despite some attempts to control timber cutting, which in the case of kauri required a (small) payment, much valuable timber was wasted because of its abundance. Vegetation was either deliberately or carelessly set on fire, was vandalized by illegal cutting, and was damaged by cattle, deer, goats, and possums. As the bush line retreated up the mountainside, damaged or destroyed areas were replanted in exotic vegetation; in the case of the tramway, gorse (!) was planted to prevent landslips. By the late twentieth century, efforts were being made to protect and restore the original vegetation.*

### ADMIRED

On Christmas Day, 1872, Albert James Allom, a leading official on the Thames goldfield,<sup>1</sup> and Alexander Fox, a Thames doctor,<sup>2</sup> climbed part way up Te Aroha mountain. Allom's observations of the botany, and the way his companion cleared their way, were a foretaste both of later attitudes to and of treatment of the bush by settlers:

The heat of the sun had now become intense, and I was compelled frequently to sit down and rest whilst toiling through tall fern, koromiko, and tupakihi up the steep ascent. Having climbed about 800 feet, a dense smoke with a great roaring and crackling above, afforded evidence that the Doctor was not very far off, and that he had again been using his matches. Another 300 or 400

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<sup>1</sup> See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 423-424.

<sup>2</sup> See letters written by his wife Ellen between 1869 and 1876, in possession of Annette Solly, Hamilton.

feet brought me to the summit of an open ferny spur, forming what I may term one of the main buttresses of the mountain.... With the exception of a few ferny spurs near the foot of the mountain, it is covered with dense forest from base to summit.... The fire had now made a clean sweep of the tall fern and brushwood up a gentle slope for the distance of a quarter of a mile to the bush above. Inside the bush we found plenty of nikau palms (*areca aspidata*), said to be the sole representative of this genus in New Zealand; with the rata (*metrosideros robusta*), and most of the beautiful timber trees, tree-ferns, creepers, and orchidaceous plants characteristic of the mixed forest of this country.<sup>3</sup>

They had climbed Whakapipi, known to Pakeha as Bald Spur, 'so called from the fact of its being the only part of the mountains devoid of the larger forest growth'.<sup>4</sup> Although Allom knew both the Maori and Latin names of some of the plants, thereby revealing an educated interest in them, he made no disapproving comment about Fox's burning of the bush to clear their passage nor asked him to desist. This is an illustration of how many settlers admired the bush yet devastated it for utilitarian purposes. The existence of several 'ferny spurs' indicated that Ngati Rahiri had earlier used fire to clear the lower part of the mountainside, again for utilitarian purposes.

These attitudes can be traced amongst many people who left written records, and can be assumed to have existed amongst those who did not. For example, a 'descriptive handbook' published in 1880 referred to the 'grand old mountain. Bush from head to foot, and intersected by ravines and gullies, Te Aroha presents a picture not easily forgotten'.<sup>5</sup> Waitoa was notable for 'the very picturesque beauty of the surrounding country and landscape. An extensive plain of fertile soil and swamp is stretched before the eye, with patches of totara and kahikatea here and there, the magnificent mountain Te Aroha towering in the east ... and wooded from summit half-way down',<sup>6</sup> another indication of fern replacing heavy bush after Maori fires. An 1889 guide to the district declared that the mountain

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<sup>3</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), pp. 20-21.

<sup>4</sup> S.B. Croker, 'A Trip to the Trig Station at Te Aroha', *New Zealand Graphic*, 16 February 1902, p. 323.

<sup>5</sup> *Descriptive Handbook to the Waikato: Its condition and resources* (Hamilton, 1880), p. 67.

<sup>6</sup> *Descriptive Handbook*, p. 64.

afforded ‘many delightful rambles by the rocky streamlets and dense tangled bush. Some beautiful fern glens are easily reached’.<sup>7</sup> At Waiorongomai, ‘the winding pathway up the glen is the favourite resort of visitors’, who would see ‘magnificent specimens’ of ferns and nikau. ‘Romantic glens and picturesque waterfalls, ferns of great variety and beauty, and exquisite mosses may be found in rich luxuriance’.<sup>8</sup> An Australian mine and battery manager who worked at Te Aroha in the 1890s, Joseph Campbell,<sup>9</sup> lyrically described the vegetation:

The mountain sides, out of which the reefs crop, are clothed with forests. These forests consist of a variety of trees growing closely together, the surface of the ground being thickly overgrown with brushwood bound together by thorns and supple-jack (*Rhizogonum scandens*) forming an almost impenetrable jungle. In the undergrowth is manifested a rich variety of species of plants characterized by their peculiar habits and mode of growth. There are to be seen the large leaved *Alseuosmia* with its pendant fuchsia-like flowers varying from white to crimson; the white-flowered wharangi-piro (*Olearia Cunninghamii*) varying from a bush to a small tree; in rocky places the puka-puka (*Brachyglottis repanda*) with its hoary leaves, and perchance growing amongst it the *Rhabdothamnus* with its fairy-like bells of orange and scarlet - all these, and many more, intermingled in a most promiscuous manner, and bound together by the tough wiry stems of numerous creepers. Then, too, the manner in which nature has garnished the larger trees, among which are particularly to be noticed the totara, the kauri and the rata, is exquisite. Their trunks and branches are laden with epiphytic orchids, small shrubs, ferns, pendent lycopods and mosses, accompanied by large foliaceous lichens, to an extent which it is quite beyond the writer’s powers to describe. One-twentieth of the varieties of ferns found in the world grow in New Zealand, and in the forests where there is no undergrowth of jungle or brushwood a delicate carpeting of various kinds of ferns is met with. The peculiar effect produced by areas of many square feet covered with the pellucid fronds of *Trichomanes reniforme*, or the finely cut *Hymenophyllum demissum*, in the cool open part of the forest can scarcely be imagined by those who have not beheld them. One feels it is almost sacrilege to trample them underfoot; yet it must be done, for it is through these forests that the prospector has to

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<sup>7</sup> Josiah Martin, *Guide to the Thames and Te Aroha* (Auckland, 1889), p. 25.

<sup>8</sup> Martin, p. 29.

<sup>9</sup> See paper on his life.

force his way in order to discover the reefs which are completely hidden from view by the dense foliage.<sup>10</sup>

Again, he revealed knowledge of botany, fascination with the beauty of the bush, and an acceptance of the necessity of damaging it.

What vegetation existed before settlers modified it? In September 1884, James Adams, the future headmaster of the Thames High School, read a paper to the Auckland Institute entitled 'On the Botany of Te Aroha Mountain', based on two visits to the area in January. He did not claim his list was complete, noting that he had missed many orchids because of the season and that a friend had observed several plants that he had missed. Despite these omissions, he provided the Institute with a list of 385 flowering plants and ferns found between the banks of the river and the top of the mountain.<sup>11</sup> A 'popular' account summarizing the trees, ferns, and orchids, written for the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Te Aroha, took 18 pages to describe these briefly.<sup>12</sup> These accounts did not consider the changes to the vegetation over previous centuries, but the discovery of a gumfield in 1880 indicated that a large kauri forest had once existed at the back of the mountain.<sup>13</sup>

Vegetation on the flat land at the base of the range was first described in detail by Allom after he pushed through it in December 1872:

Our track leads round the foot of the Aroha for about four miles, at an elevation of 100 to 150 feet above the Waihou, over a fertile country sloping gently down towards the river on our right. Between us and the river there is a considerable extent of rich boggy land, with splendid feed for cattle and horses.... The vegetation is most luxuriant, principally consisting of fern, phormium tenax, tupakihi (*coriaria sarmentosa*), koromiko (*veronica*), convulvulus, and clematis, growing high above our heads, and which our guide informed us were not of more than two or three month's growth. Here and there we had to cross some black boggy places, which, even in this dry weather, are

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<sup>10</sup> Joseph Campbell, 'The Goldfields of the Hauraki Peninsula, New Zealand', *Transactions of the Institute of Mining Engineers*, vol. 12 (1896), pp. 469-470.

<sup>11</sup> James Adams, 'On the Botany of Te Aroha Mountain', *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute*, 1884, vol. 17 (Wellington, 1885), pp. 275-287.

<sup>12</sup> *Te Aroha and the Fortunate Valley: Pioneering in the Thames Valley 1867-1930*, ed. F.W. Wild (Te Aroha, 1930), pp. 170-187.

<sup>13</sup> *Waikato Times*, 20 March 1880, p. 2.

dangerous for horses. In such amphibious places the raupo (*typha augustifolia*), toe toe (*arundo excelsa*), and the cabbage or “ti” of the natives (*cordyline australis*), are growing in perfection. There is also a rich growth of clover and trefoil, with a mixture of native grasses. We then entered upon a more open terrace country covered with fern, grass, and clover.<sup>14</sup>

The site of the future township was mostly covered with fern and manuka.<sup>15</sup> On the Thames High School Endowment at Waiorongomai,<sup>16</sup> farms were established on land covered with fern, manuka, tupaki, and flax swamp.<sup>17</sup> The earliest farms on the flat lands often had no fencing, permitting cattle to stray. ‘A.B.’ recalled that ‘the children used to go off for the cows, at milking time, through fern so high that you couldn’t see the children for it’.<sup>18</sup> Further from the hills, the vegetation was less pleasing to some, as, for example, ‘Old Settler’ wrote in 1910:

Even the tea-tree extended to no great distance from the hill, though here and there might be found patches of stunted scrub, rarely, however, more than eighteen inches high. At almost any point on the flats there was an unbroken view for twenty miles around. High above the plain, conspicuous from every part, towered Firth’s Folly, a structure fifty feet high,

at Matamata.<sup>19</sup> A reporter travelling across the range from Katikati in early 1880 saw ‘the vast extent of these noble plains stretching forty and fifty miles without a break, and only here and there an isolated island of timber of very limited extent’.<sup>20</sup> The banks of the river at Te Aroha were then, according to one recollection, ‘almost entirely covered with short ti-tree scrub’.<sup>21</sup> In 1890, a visitor described the banks as being ‘bare with the exception of a few small patches of kahikatea and ti palm - the land

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<sup>14</sup> Allom, p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> Recollections of Hugh Ross, *Te Aroha and the Fortunate Valley*, p. 342.

<sup>16</sup> See paper on the Thames High School Endowment.

<sup>17</sup> Thames High School, Board of Governors’ Minute Book, vol. 2, advertisement dated 27 May 1881, High School Archives, Thames.

<sup>18</sup> Recollections of ‘A.B.’, *Te Aroha News*, 9 May 1908, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> ‘Old Settler’, ‘The Beginnings of Te Aroha’, *Te Aroha News*, 24 November 1910, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Bay of Plenty Times*, 14 February 1880, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Recollections of W.W. Maingay, *Te Aroha News*, 9 September 1936, p. 5.

resembling a moorland with swamps in places'.<sup>22</sup> The river could 'be traced winding along the valley by the clump of kahikatea bush growing on its banks'.<sup>23</sup>

The flat land was valued for its practical usefulness alone, and there were no suggestions that any wetlands should be retained. In a typical comment by an advocate of drainage, as the bulk of the land was 'first-class alluvial soil', dairy farmers would be able to make a 'comfortable living' on farms of 70 to 100 acres.<sup>24</sup> In 1879, a local correspondent, George Stewart O'Halloran,<sup>25</sup> in a revealing phrase wrote of the first settlers of Waitoa and Te Aroha bringing in machinery and implements 'to subdue the virgin forest and make the soil fruitful'.<sup>26</sup> The only positive comment to be found concerning the vegetation in the swampy flat land concerned the kiekie. 'To old New Zealanders, Maori or white, it was a familiar food', and 'peculiar among all the fruits of the earth' because it was like 'eating a deliciously sweet flower'. It was 'a choice article of diet to the Maori and the early colonists'.<sup>27</sup> Known to the early colonists as tawara, it was eaten with enthusiasm; Thomas Brunner, for example, ate some when exploring the West Coast of the South Island in the 1840s, and reported it to be 'very luscious, more like a conserve than a fruit'.<sup>28</sup>

The mountain and its vegetation were always admired. An 1880 guidebook to the Auckland Province wrote that the mountain, 'profusely wooded nearly to its base, and with numerous gullies and ravines traversing its slopes', presented 'a continual change of light and shade extremely pleasing to the eye. In fact, one is never tired of gazing upon it'.<sup>29</sup> Te Aroha attracted amateur botanists, being 'considered to be one of the

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<sup>22</sup> C.W. Richmond to E.E. Richmond, 23 June 1890, printed in *The Richmond-Atkinson Papers*, vol. 2, ed. Guy H. Scholefield (Wellington, 1960), p. 558.

<sup>23</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 2 August 1884, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> H.D.M. Hazzard, 'The Drainage of the Piako Swamp, Thames', *New Zealand Mines Record*, 16 April 1902, p. 367.

<sup>25</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>26</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 9 April 1879, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 2 November 1922, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Cited in Geoff Park, *Nga Uruora: The Groves of Life: Ecology and history in a New Zealand landscape* (Wellington, 1995), p. 289.

<sup>29</sup> *Brett's Auckland Almanac ... for 1880*, (Auckland, 1880), p. 58.

finest ferning grounds in New Zealand'.<sup>30</sup> Visitors were encouraged to ride up the upper track to the Waiorongomai mines because 'the lovely glimpse of bush scenery' obtained from it could 'hardly be surpassed anywhere'.<sup>31</sup> A Tauranga visitor informed the *Illustrated New Zealand News* that 'the scenery of this track' was 'remarkably wild and beautiful; masses of nikau and tree ferns and different forest trees' were 'seen on either hand, interspersed here and there with some fine kauris'.<sup>32</sup> A description of a new hotel erected in 1897 noted that it commanded 'an uninterrupted view of the beautiful Domain Reserve, with the striking background of native bush-clad hills'.<sup>33</sup> A man who climbed to the top of the mountain in that year passed through 'some of the prettiest bush scenery to be found in the North Island'. Admirers of 'ferns and moss growths' could 'find an almost endless variety of either species of these cryptogamous plants'.<sup>34</sup> In 1916 the *Te Aroha News* wrote that the Waiorongomai Valley contained 'some of the prettiest bush scenery' to be found anywhere.

Masses of tree ferns and native shrubs are in great profusion. Pretty waterfalls are also to be seen at frequent intervals, and altogether the trip is one well worth making, and it is surprising that more Te Aroha folk do not take the opportunity of seeing the beautiful valley.<sup>35</sup>

Two years later, 'lovers of beautiful bush scenery and bird-life' were advised to 'take a jaunt round' this valley, for 'very few residents have been there'.<sup>36</sup> Even fewer visited the Tui side of the mountain. In 1927, two journalists followed the Tui track to the Peter Maxwell mine near the summit, and described their trip under the headlines 'Wonders of the Bush: Nature at Its Best'. Although they admired the vegetation encountered, they lacked knowledge of it:

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<sup>30</sup> *Illustrated New Zealand News*, 8 June 1885, p. 6, plus illustration of 'Giant Fern Trees, Te Aroha', p.1.

<sup>31</sup> *Waikato Times*, 27 February 1886, p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> C.H. Pening, 'Sketches of the Te Aroha Goldfield', *Illustrated New Zealand News*, 21 January 1884, p. 6; for sketch of the vegetation, see p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 5 August 1897, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> 'Twinkler', 'View From Te Aroha Mountain', *Thames Advertiser*, 11 August 1897, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 19 November 1916, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 23 December 1918, p. 2; note also enthusiastic accounts of the bush on 8 April 1927, p. 5, 7 January 1931, p. 5, 10 August 1938, p. 4.

The higher one went the richer and more varied the vegetation became and we soon began to realise that those whose knowledge of Te Aroha mountain was limited to what could be gained in a climb to the trig via Bald Spur could with less effort enjoy much richer experiences. In one place we passed a veritable forest of nikau palms, and the huge tree ferns were taller, grander and more numerous than is the case along the more familiar paths. What puzzled us was the number of huge trees – many lying prostrate in the last stages of decay, others upright but without tops, either dead or dying, the only signs of life coming from the parasites entwined about the trunks or the ferns and mosses which clung to the exterior. Many forest monsters were apparently quite healthy and continuing their growth, but the names of the trees were unknown to us and so dense was the undergrowth that it was very difficult to see the branches and leaves, which might have been some help in distinguishing varieties.<sup>37</sup>

If locals took the scenery and the vegetation for granted, visitors were most impressed. One wrote, in 1890, that ‘a few beautiful patches of native bush’ remained by the river and ‘the lovely mountain’ was ‘still bush covered to the summit. It looks glorious in the setting sun’.<sup>38</sup> Ten years later, ‘Visitor’, from the Kapiti coast, after regretting that the Rimutaka, Tararua, and Ruahine ranges had not been reserved and saved from ‘the settlers’ fire and axe’, wrote of his delight in climbing Te Aroha after an absence of 15 years and finding that it had ‘retained its imperial beauty and verdure’. This ‘noble mountain giant’ was ‘mantled almost from base to summit by the richest New Zealand greenery, the crimson rata and the graceful tree fern’.

The whole mountain should be set aside as a national park, where no despoiling axe may be allowed to come ... and its glorious beauties preserved from generation to generation for the delight of millions yet unborn, who will thus have, as it were, a glimpse of the landscape of old New Zealand as it appeared in the days when the pakeha was not.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 8 April 1927, p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> C.W. Richmond to E.E. Richmond, 22 June 1890, printed in *The Richmond-Atkinson Papers*, vol. 2, p.558.

<sup>39</sup> Letter from ‘Visitor’, *New Zealand Herald*, 6 February 1900, p. 3, reprinted in *Te Aroha News*, 8 February 1900, p. 3.

As the *Te Aroha News* realized that the bush was ‘one of the main attractions to visitors’,<sup>40</sup> it consistently urged its preservation. In 1950, a member of the Forest and Bird Protection Society noted that Te Aroha residents were ‘proud of their mountain, and well they may be, for it can be said to be part and parcel of the town and is an outstanding feature of the landscape. From a botanical point of view it is of great interest, having on its steep wooded slopes many species of native plants growing in their natural state’, which he proceeded to list. ‘One feature of the climb is that in passing, by gradual stages from virtual sea level to the higher ramparts of the mountain, one encounters plant associations suited to the various heights until finally forest of a subalpine character is met with’.<sup>41</sup>

### PROTECTING THE BUSH

Measures to protect its vegetation began once the mountain came under the control of the Waste Lands Board. In July 1879, it refused two applications to cut timber and four months later agreed to the suggestion of its secretary that a 1,000-acre reserve be formed.<sup>42</sup> This reserve, later known as the recreation reserve, surrounded the summit.<sup>43</sup> A Thames newspaper, in reporting that the reserve would prevent the mountain ‘from becoming denuded or disfigured’, commended the board for ‘preserving this endowment of one of the most beautiful situations in New Zealand’.<sup>44</sup>

When the Waitoa correspondent of the *Waikato Times* first learnt of the discovery of gold, he was

sadly afraid that the face of the now beautiful ranges will present a very dilapidated and scrubby appearance in a short space of time. I well remember how fast the forest-clad hills on the dear old Thames field were cleared off in the wild rush after gold,

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<sup>40</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 4 March 1929, p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> Gordon V. Gow, ‘A Trip to Te Aroha Mountain’, *Forest and Bird*, no. 95 (February, 1950), p. 12.

<sup>42</sup> Waste Lands Board, *Auckland Weekly News*, 12 July 1879, p. 5, 26 July 1879, p. 5, 18 October 1879, p. 5.

<sup>43</sup> Oliver Wakefield (Under-Secretary for Gold Fields, Mines Department) to Harry Kenrick (Warden), 20 November 1880, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/353, ANZ-W.

<sup>44</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 18 October 1879, p. 3.

leaving nothing behind but burnt stumps and unsightly mounds of clay to mark the progress of the diggers.<sup>45</sup>

On the day of the opening of the field, the same newspaper noted that, before extensive prospecting took place, the scrub on the mountain would have to be burnt off:

Beauty will therefore have to yield before the demand of utility, and in a short time probably the great Aroha instead of being the grandly picturesque peak, which we have heretofore known, will become a hideous blackened monster, disfigured by the workings of the vast body of human ants now beginning to deface it. In these times few will say it were better it should be otherwise.<sup>46</sup>

One mine manager, reporting on the find for an Auckland newspaper, noted the recreation reserve 'covered with dense bush, but this will probably be soon cleared away'<sup>47</sup>. As the rush was a duffer, these prophecies were not fulfilled. But to avoid such devastation, steps were taken to protect the vegetation from the worst excesses. Five days before the field was opened, because of fear that it might 'cause unnecessary interference with the trees upon the recreation reserve upon the summit', the warden was asked 'to exercise some discretion in issuing rights to so to avoid any unnecessary destruction of the forest upon this reserve'.<sup>48</sup> The first inspection of their reserve by two Thames High School governors recommended that 'some considerable part' of the timber above Waiorongomai should be reserved,

not only in order to preserve the features of a very fine object, but also because the complete degradation of the mountain would have an injurious effect upon the rainfall by which lands at its base would be rendered more liable to floods and to droughts and less sheltered from the heavy gusts of wind which even now are described as being very severe.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Waitoa Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 19 October 1880, p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> *Waikato Times*, 25 November 1880, p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 2 December 1880, p. 5.

<sup>48</sup> Oliver Wakefield to Harry Kenrick, 20 November 1880, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/353, ANZ-W.

<sup>49</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 11 May 1880, p. 3.

In January 1882, the county council appointed a ranger to preserve the timber on the banks of the river.<sup>50</sup> When bushfires were lit early in 1885, the warden posted a notice: ‘Any Person setting fire to Bush, Fern, or Timber on Government or Native Lands within the Te Aroha Goldfield, will be PROSECUTED’.<sup>51</sup> In 1886, the county chairman, when nominated to be the first conservator of forests for the district, said ‘it was very necessary that something should be done to conserve the natural forest of the county, and being an enthusiast in this matter he would therefore accept the position’.<sup>52</sup> To encourage tourism, the domain board in 1886 wanted the recreation reserve extended to include the ‘prospectors’ spur, bald fern hill’, and other areas immediately behind the township.<sup>53</sup> (Although the land for this was bought from its Ngati Rahiri owners in 1902, the 54-hectare scenic reserve encompassing these areas was not established until 1927.)<sup>54</sup> Josiah Clifton Firth, who as a member of the council sought to protect the scenery, in 1889 recommended that a track should be made to the ‘very pretty glen and waterfall within a few minutes walk of the Domain’. As well, ‘immediate steps’ should be taken ‘to put an end to bush felling in the glen, and for some distance around the waterfall’. If this was ‘not done at once the beauty of one of the prettiest spots in the district will be forever destroyed’.<sup>55</sup> In 1900, when Maori land was being purchased on the eastern edge of Te Aroha township, a Crown agent noted that the upper portion was ‘covered with very beautiful forest which ought to be carefully preserved’.<sup>56</sup>

Local people persistently but unsuccessfully sought permission to clear bush from the lower slopes of the mountain. For instance, an 1893 application for an agricultural lease mostly to the east of the domain was declined because it would encompass the hillside. ‘If these hills were denuded of their natural covering of bush and shrub, the beauty of the township would be seriously diminished and its attractiveness impaired’, which the warden considered particularly relevant because Te Aroha was

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<sup>50</sup> Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 19 January 1882, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 7 March 1885, p. 7; see also *Waikato Times*, 5 March 1885, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 19 January 1886, p. 3.

<sup>53</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 26 June 1886, p. 2.

<sup>54</sup> Memorandum, n.d. [1973?], Te Aroha Mountain Scenic Reserve, 13/196, Land Information New Zealand, Hamilton.

<sup>55</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 16 January 1889, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> Gilbert Mair to Patrick Sheridan (Under-Secretary, Native Land Purchase Department), 14 April 1900, Maori Affairs Department, MA-MLP 1, 1899/234, ANZ-W.

‘mainly kept up as a health resort’.<sup>57</sup> Any destruction of the bush ‘within the boundaries of Lipsey’s Creek and Stoney Creek would be deemed a breach of the law, and would be severely punished’.<sup>58</sup> His decision was supported, unanimously, by both borough council and domain board.<sup>59</sup> For similar reasons, Matthew Paul, the mining inspector, in 1928 successfully encouraged the warden and his department to refuse permission to prospect behind the domain.<sup>60</sup> Not only was this area unlikely to contain payable ore, the ‘lovely native bush and ferns’ were ‘a great attraction to visitors’ and ‘of far more importance and a more valuable asset to this town than the value of any minerals which may be discovered’. He wanted all the bush immediately behind the domain and for half a mile beyond the top of the first ridge exempted from mining.<sup>61</sup> The Commissioner of Crown Lands did remove over 220 acres from the goldfield.<sup>62</sup>

Persistent lighting of fires angered both those who admired the beauty of the bush and those who benefited from it. In December 1914, the Chamber of Commerce drew the attention of the borough council to the increased number of fires on the mountain, ‘a source of beauty to the town, which should be conserved in its entirety’. In response, the mayor promised heavy penalties against anyone lighting fires.<sup>63</sup> Less than one month later, in his capacity as forest conservator, he brought a case, as a deterrent, against George Devey, a carpenter and builder,<sup>64</sup> for starting a fire on his section that destroyed from five to ten acres of ‘verdant forest’. The magistrate, after noting that the maximum fine was £100, only fined Devey £5, but ‘in future he would make the penalty much heavier’.<sup>65</sup> A large fire in

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<sup>57</sup> Warden to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 16 November 1893, Mines Department, MD 1, 94/276, ANZ-W.

<sup>58</sup> Letter from T.C. Bell, *New Zealand Herald*, 13 February 1900, p. 7.

<sup>59</sup> Town Clerk to Minister of Mines, 12 February 1894; Clerk, Hot Springs Domain Board, to Minister of Mines, 27 February 1894, Mines Department, MD 1, 94/276, ANZ-W.

<sup>60</sup> For application, see Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Mining Applications and Complaints 1928, 8/1928, BCDG 11288/9a, ANZ-A.

<sup>61</sup> Matthew Paul to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 29 March 1928, 9 June 1928, Mines Department, MD 1, 6/14, Part 4, ANZ-W.

<sup>62</sup> Commissioner of Crown Lands to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 22 May 1928, Mines Department, MD1, 6/14, Part 4, ANZ-W.

<sup>63</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 18 December 1914, p. 3.

<sup>64</sup> See paper on George Devey and his family.

<sup>65</sup> Magistrate’s Court, *Te Aroha News*, 13 January 1915, p. 3.

January 1928 prompted the local newspaper to editorialise on changing attitudes:

Lighting of fires to the endangering of natural bush close to the town is viewed more seriously as time advances. There was a time when the destruction of native flora caused little concern. It was something that was inseparable from the work of the pioneers and there are parts of the country in which this must still continue. When the destruction of bush is essential to development and production no one complains, but when areas which can serve no other purpose have been reserved because of their scenic and other values not associated with commercialism they should be and are regarded as a sacred possession and any act of carelessness which might lead to the destruction of the bush is seriously viewed. There is little wonder that the people of Te Aroha were aroused to expressions of strong resentment when they saw a fire last week finding its way into one of the most beautiful bush clad ravines we have on Mount Te Aroha. Those who have voiced protests will have general support. Amongst those who are much concerned over what occurred are some of the old pioneers who, having seen many changes, find an unfailing source of pleasure and a strong link with the past in the mountain, which should be so guarded and protected against the ravages of fire or other destructive forces that it will remain for all time the place of beauty it now is.... The control over the hillside is not as complete as it should be and something more effective against the encroachment on the scenic beauties of the mountain should be done.<sup>66</sup>

Ten years later, the newspaper printed a long article arguing for greater protection:

It must be very patent to any thinking person that the beauty and charm of the Te Aroha mountain is due directly to the magnificent covering of native bush that clothes the peak from the level to the plains. Quite apart from this, the bush affords a regular wonderland to the naturalist, who had discovered an intermingling of species at the various levels which is almost unique, even in this country of botanical surprises. The forest on the lowest levels has everything in common with the average New Zealand bush representatives, but as it marches higher it takes on a new aspect, until the smaller birchen forests take a hold and give way finally near the summit to sub-alpine growths, including the mountain daisy and a rare clump of native eidelweiss. All this

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<sup>66</sup> Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 1 February 1928, p. 4.

points unerringly to the need for adequate and permanent protection against an asset the loss of which would be irreparable and a slur on our own sense of responsibility. Much of this mantle of virgin forest is still within the declared goldfield, while huge areas apart from the mountain reserve lie at the mercy of Crown lessees. Every year almost, in the summer, some fresh tongue of land, practically useless from a farming point of view, is denuded of its priceless forest growth. Twice within the last ten years Te Aroha residents have viewed with apprehension fires sweeping up the mountainside and licking through the bush until checked by providence, or an army of beaters. Little by little the bush is encroached upon, and the day must surely come, unless full protective measures are undertaken, when it will be threatened with extinction. The tragedy of the wanton destruction of the beautiful New Zealand bush is written all too widely on our country's past history. More shame then on us if we, at a time when the bush is more appreciated, allow this priceless heritage to be frittered needlessly away. The time is ripe, during the lull in mining activities, to take steps that will ensure Government protection over the whole of the bush land on the Te Aroha mountain and its immediate environs. The Gazetting of this wide area as a State forest reserve would be a protection against destruction of the forest and a guarantee of handing a very unique and unspoilt piece of native bush down to posterity. There is another reason which until to-day has never been realised to the full. This concerns ourselves directly and is vital to the future of the town. The Te Aroha rainfall ... is notorious. The dissemination of this heavy mountain fall is brought about by the presence of the bush on the hills, which acts as an absorbant cushion against the heavy downpours, and also mats the earth together so that instead of an unchecked torrent raging down the hillsides, the flow of water is regulated and modified. Under cloud burst conditions such as we practically experienced last month, and without the influence of the bush-clad mountain, there would be every prospect of the town being subjected to continuous and disastrous floods and washouts. This is of course a practical viewpoint, but the preservation of the forest for the forest's sake is, we feel, the greatest argument which must appeal to our responsibility as today's guardians of the little that is left of our native bush land.<sup>67</sup>

The practical implications of losing the forest was commonly cited when lamenting the beauty that would be destroyed. For instance, a member of the Chamber of Commerce stated in 1936 that forest preservation was 'one of the major questions of to-day':

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<sup>67</sup> 'Te Aroha Mountain', *Te Aroha News*, 10 August 1938, p. 4.

From where his farm was situated out on the plains he saw from time to time the inroads made by fire in the beautiful bush which at one time covered the entire range. It made him deeply annoyed to see such wanton destruction. The levelling of the forest rendered a district subject to floods, as in Hawke's Bay where periodic inundations occurred sweeping the rich top soil away to the sea. That is what would happen here unless firm steps were taken to preserve it. From the scenic and the practical point of view it was most vital that the forest areas be protected.<sup>68</sup>

In 1931, the Commissioner of Crown Lands told the council that any future grazing leases would include a clause forbidding the lighting of fires without the prior consent of his department and the council. The mayor felt this was still inadequate, because people could 'light fires on surrounding leases or on privately owned property'.<sup>69</sup> Partly to deal with the latter worry, land to the south of the tourist reserve had been added to the scenic reserve and part of a lease not suitable for building purposes was to be included in Tui Park.<sup>70</sup> To stop people cutting firewood on public land above Wilson Street, notices forbidding this were erected, and landowners were informed where their sections ended.<sup>71</sup> Alarm that two small kauri groves east of Waiorongomai might be felled for timber led, four days later, to a decision that they be reserved.<sup>72</sup>

Attempts to revive mining after the Second World War worried local officials. Norman Annabell, the borough engineer, opposed the belief of the Auckland Smelting Company that their mining license gave them 'authority to cut bush on the area and use it in the mine', thereby spoiling the scenery and creating a danger of fire.<sup>73</sup> Edward John Scoble, the mining inspector, recommended that this company's plan to build a smelter 'should not be consented to as it would cause the destruction of all forest in the vicinity'.<sup>74</sup> Because of these attitudes, miners had to treat the bush with more care.

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<sup>68</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 23 October 1936, p. 5.

<sup>69</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 1 May 1931, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 1 May 1931, p. 1.

<sup>71</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 17 August 1932, p. 5.

<sup>72</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 4 November 1935, p. 3, 8 November 1935, p. 5, 25 November 1935, p. 4.

<sup>73</sup> Norman Annabell (Borough Engineer) to Te Aroha Borough Council, 30 June 1948, Health Department, YCBE 1900/404a, ANZ-A.

<sup>74</sup> E.J. Scoble to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 6 May 1949, Mines Department, MD 1, 10/27/124, ANZ-W.

Eric Coppard, who prospected Waiorongomai in 1962 for South Pacific Mines, was told by his bosses to cut timber needed for mining selectively, and ‘not to just go willy-nilly cutting trees down on the off chance that we might need them’.<sup>75</sup>

### TRYING TO PROSPECT IN BUSH-COVERED HILLS

Coppard recalled the difficulties of prospecting overgrown workings. It was necessary to cut through the supplejack with secateurs: ‘knives were no good, they just bounced off’.<sup>76</sup> This comment was similar to that of the first Pakeha who pushed through the Waiorongomai bush, James Bodell, who in 1868 toiled for six hours to get across the range:

The Bush Lawyer or Supple Jack was very thick amongst the trees [and] the trees also were covered in their lower branches with bunches of Moss. This collected Water and we were all so wet the same as if we had been ducked in a river. As we toiled up the Hills the Supple Jack would catch your swag and pull you back. I lost one side of my coat and part of my cap.<sup>77</sup>

His reminiscences had muddled bush lawyer and supplejack, by no means the same thing, but both recollections show that for some prospectors and travellers the bush was disliked for its inconvenience rather than admired for its beauty. Several illustrations of this point can be found. In early 1881, ‘several attempts’ were made to prospect between Te Aroha and Ohinemuri, ‘but owing to the want of blazed lines or tracks as guides to prospecting in the almost impenetrable forest that clothes the hills and flats in that region, none of these attempts have been attended with success’.<sup>78</sup> Before mining started at Waiorongomai, another newspaper reported, using the identical phrase, that there was ‘almost impenetrable forest’ in the valley.<sup>79</sup> A reporter who visited when the battery opened could not imagine ‘how any prospectors ever made their way to the locality and looked for gold

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<sup>75</sup> Interview with Eric Coppard, Waihi, 14 August 1985, p. 10 of transcript.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Eric Coppard, Waihi, 14 August 1985, p. 27 of transcript.

<sup>77</sup> *A Soldier’s View of Empire: The Reminiscences of James Bodell, 1831-92*, ed. Keith Sinclair (London, 1982), p. 176.

<sup>78</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 5 March 1881, p. 9.

<sup>79</sup> *Observer*, 15 December 1883, p. 4.

in the mass of vegetation' that covered 'every inch of the steep surface'.<sup>80</sup> In 1908, the directors of one company reported that 'the dense undergrowth has hampered the prospectors very much in their work'.<sup>81</sup>

With thick bush such a handicap, a severe flood could be of assistance. Norpac's General Manager informed his directors that the flood of 1 March 1966 'caused marked cleaning out of stream beds at the higher levels and it was considered opportune before regrowth became established' to send men to explore some of the areas difficult to access.<sup>82</sup> In areas without creeks, prospectors would cut tracks; one prospector in 1888 was praised for doing so near Te Aroha, for 'where the bush has been thick, several chains of good clearings have been formed'.<sup>83</sup>

In 1932, James Jobe, a mine manager who briefly worked at Waiorongomai,<sup>84</sup> wrote that he had always tried to prospect in 'virgin country rock' because it was useless trying to find values in worked-out ground. He suggested that the unemployed be used to clear the peninsula 'of all bush':

It would have the effect of clearing the land for grazing sheep and cattle, and prospecting for values at the same time. This valuable land has never been prospected satisfactorily to my knowledge as yet, for the simple reason is that the undergrowth of the bush makes it almost impossible to get through it in places. I know this to be a fact, as I have tried it myself on more than one occasion.<sup>85</sup>

Faced with the difficulty of tracing quartz reefs through heavy bush and tangled undergrowth, the prospectors did the obvious thing: burnt it. An unnamed prospector who claimed to have secretly explored the Te Aroha area from 1872 to 1874 'found nice gold in pieces of brown quartz lying on the surface after he had burnt off the scrub'.<sup>86</sup> (His prospecting cannot have

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<sup>80</sup> Own Reporter, *Auckland Weekly News*, 15 December 1883, p. 7.

<sup>81</sup> Directors' Report of Waitawheta Gold Prospecting Company, 30 September 1908, Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 222 no. 1314, ANZ-A.

<sup>82</sup> F.J. Handcock, Progress Report 12/1 for period ended 31 December 1966, Norpac Papers, MSS and Archives, Box 5, NMC 19/1, Vault 4, University of Auckland Library.

<sup>83</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 27 October 1888, p. 37.

<sup>84</sup> See paper on Edwin Henry Hardy.

<sup>85</sup> *Thames Star*, 13 December 1932, press cutting in Mines Department, MD 1, 23/1/14, Part 1, ANZ-W.

<sup>86</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 5 November 1880, p. 3.

been very secret if he burnt the bush.) Hone Werahiko,<sup>87</sup> when prospecting Te Aroha in 1880, ‘discovered most of the surface stone by burning off the fern and scrub’,<sup>88</sup> revealing that the area had been burnt previously, by Maori, for any fern and scrub 1,000 feet up the mountain must have been regrowth. Prospecting on the lower slopes immediately behind the township was made easier by the fact that Maori fires had removed the large trees.<sup>89</sup> The scrub and fern that replaced these was easily fired. When the warden first inspected Werahiko’s find, he ‘found about four or five chains of ground cleared and burnt on the steep slope of a spur’.<sup>90</sup> A newspaper wrote that the discovery was on a very steep spur which ‘was a few months ago covered with trees and scrub, but prospects of gold having been obtained, the bush was burnt off in order not to impede the prospectors in their work’.<sup>91</sup> Before the field opened, the prospectors’ claim ‘was easily visible, the whole of the bush having been burnt off’. Higher up the mountain ‘signs of other prospectors were visible in the wreaths of blue smoke rising through the trees’.<sup>92</sup>

After the opening, prospecting immediately started ‘high up the mountain’ and fires were ‘to be seen in all directions’.<sup>93</sup> Earth ‘thrown down the hill’ was ‘conspicuous against the burnt fern’.<sup>94</sup> Burning was likewise used to expose quartz outcrops when Waiorongomai was prospected.<sup>95</sup> Once found, ‘the heavy bush surface’ was cleared ‘from the cap of the reef, in order to more fully test the character of the discovery’ in the Young

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<sup>87</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>88</sup> *Thames Star*, 1 November 1880, p. 2.

<sup>89</sup> Memorandum, n.d. [1973?], Te Aroha Mountain Scenic Reserve, 13/196, Land Information New Zealand, Hamilton; Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Notices of Marking Out Claims, 1881, no. 166, BBAV 11557/1b, ANZ-A; *Thames Star*, 2 November 1880, p. 2.

<sup>90</sup> Harry Kenrick to Frederick Whitaker, 27 October 1880, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/353, ANZ-W; see also *Thames Star*, 15 November 1880, p. 2.

<sup>91</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 1 November 1880, p. 3.

<sup>92</sup> Own Correspondent at Te Aroha, *Bay of Plenty Times*, 11 November 1880, p. 2.

<sup>93</sup> *Thames Star*, 1 December 1880, p. 2.

<sup>94</sup> *Te Aroha Mail*, reprinted in *Waikato Times*, 4 December 1880, p. 2; see also Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Notices of Marking Out Claims, 1880, no. 42, BBAV 11557/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>95</sup> For example, Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Applications for Special Claims 1896, 27/1896, BBAV 11582/4a, ANZ-A.

Colonial.<sup>96</sup> In the early twentieth century, controlled burning took place on and around the tramway to keep it clear of gorse and regrowth.<sup>97</sup>

### USING THE TIMBER

In 1880, speculators trying to sell sections of their planned Ruakaka township advertised that ‘bounteous nature’ had ‘provided in the wooded ranges at the back, an inexhaustible supply of timber for fencing and fuel, of the most valuable description’.<sup>98</sup> The high school endowment included part of the hillside, from which every tenant farmer had ‘the right of cutting firewood and timber for building and fencing purposes’.<sup>99</sup> The school was advised that a ‘considerable part’ of the timber

ought to be reserved, not only in order to preserve the features of a very fine object, but also because the complete denudation of the mountain would have an injurious effect upon the rain-fall by which the land at its base would be rendered more liable to floods than to drought and less shelter from the heavy gusts of wind which even now are described as being very severe.<sup>100</sup>

As usual, this report combined admiration for the beauty of the bush with a practical assessment of the advantages of retaining part of it.

The goldrush combined with the establishment of farms gave timber cutters steady employment. Firewood for the small Te Aroha battery of 1881 fetched 6s 6d a ton,<sup>101</sup> and there were plenty of men ready to meet the demand. Thirty sleeping and working partners in mines were also timber cutters or timber merchants during the late nineteenth century.<sup>102</sup> By July 1881, George Stewart O’Halloran, licensee of the Hot Springs Hotel,<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> *Waikato Times*, 23 May 1882, p. 2.

<sup>97</sup> John Samuel Hill, Waiorongomai Tramway Work/Account Book 1909-1910, entries for 12 November 1909, 30 November 1909; Waiorongomai Tramway Work/Account Book 1910-1912, entries for 21 October 1910, 7 February 1911, 9 February 1911, John Samuel Hill Papers, MSCO116, Hamilton Public Library.

<sup>98</sup> *Thames Star*, 7 December 1880, p. 3.

<sup>99</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 11 May 1880, p. 3.

<sup>100</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 11 May 1880, p. 3.

<sup>101</sup> *Thames Star*, 4 March 1881, p. 2.

<sup>102</sup> Te Aroha Warden’s Court records, far too voluminous to list.

<sup>103</sup> See paper on his life.

reported, with a tinge of regret, that the 'beautiful hills' were 'gradually being denuded of wood, several parties being in the bush cutting firewood, posts, rails, etc'. He had heard of 'a large order having been given for posts, to be delivered at Piako', and concluded that it was 'a good thing to have some industry to fall back on when that fickle jade of gold plays one false'.<sup>104</sup> In 1912, 'considerable activity' was 'being shown by bushfelling parties, and camps are being set up right along the range', including the 'hilly section' above the Waiorongomai settlement.<sup>105</sup>

Under the Rules and Regulations for the Hauraki Mining District, claimholders had the right to use all timber apart from kauri on their claims or on unoccupied ground. To cut kauri required permission from the warden, who would collect £1 5s per tree for the Maori owners and determine fair compensation if miners destroyed any kauri through their fires. All those seeking to cut timber (except kauri) for non-mining uses or for sale had to obtain a timber license costing £5 per year. The holder of a timber license and all his employees had also to hold miners' rights.<sup>106</sup> At least 43 timber licenses (some records have not survived) were issued in the 1880s.<sup>107</sup> Because of this extra cost, cutters were quick to report anyone cutting timber without a license.<sup>108</sup> When one timber merchant had his license renewed in 1889, he complained that 'people had been cutting and selling timber all round him' without taking out licenses, and that men were knocking on doors asking people if they wanted firewood.<sup>109</sup> In 1893 five residents was charged with cutting timber on the Montezuma claim for firewood for their 'own domestic use' without having miners' rights or owning a claim.<sup>110</sup> Such behaviour continued, despite attempts to prevent it. For example, the tourist agent in 1932 was worried about people illegally

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<sup>104</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 19 July 1881, p.3.

<sup>105</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 17 July 1912, p. 4.

<sup>106</sup> Province of Auckland, *Rules and Regulations for the Hauraki Gold Mining District* (Auckland, 1873), pp. 18-19.

<sup>107</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Applications 1880-1882, folios 1, 81, 188, 190, 192, 205, 211, 218, 221, 223, BBAV 11505/3a, ANZ-A.

<sup>108</sup> For example, James Roycroft accused Charles Joy of this offense on 23 September 1882 and Peter Swanston of the same on 19 October 1882: Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1882, BBAV 11586/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>109</sup> Warden's Court, *Te Aroha News*, 26 June 1889, p. 2.

<sup>110</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, 1893 complaints against W. Gooding, J. Robinson, W. McLean, F. Biggs, and H. Smith, Certified Instruments 1893-1895, BBAV 11581/14a, ANZ-A.

cutting timber on the steep hillside above Boundary Street, and wanted the reserve expanded to include this area.<sup>111</sup>

Miners used timber in a variety of ways, starting with pegging out. Before the opening of the field at ten o'clock on the morning of 25 November 1880, 'between 8 and 9 the field was alive with men, and the gully below resounded with the sound of the axe of the digger busily engaged cutting down trees and fashioning them into pegs of the regulation size'.<sup>112</sup> Any type of small tree would do; for underground timber, mine managers were selective. Ernest Feltus Adams, superintendent of mines in the Thames and Ohinemuri areas as well as a mining engineer and surveyor,<sup>113</sup> told the 1914 Royal Commission on the Hauraki Mining District that

for legs, caps, stulls and slabs in the timbering of drives, Kauri is the most suitable timber for many reasons.... Rimu is not a suitable timber underground unless it is sound heart or is kept constantly wet. A considerable supply of bush poles and stulls of a perishable nature are used in stoping etc prior to filling in with mullock.<sup>114</sup>

Hoppers were erected alongside the tramway for storing ore; the one for the Premier mine was 'built of rimu, the best timber available in the neighbourhood'.<sup>115</sup> By January 1884, the plentiful rimu was 'being rapidly cut up for timber to be used in connection with the mines'.<sup>116</sup> Because of the hardness of the reefs, most of the adits at Waiorongomai did not need to be timbered to prevent rock falls, except where driven through 'country rock'.<sup>117</sup> Rata, birch, kauri, and rimu were used to make stulls for this purpose.<sup>118</sup> A mine manager working in the Kuaotunu district, where there was little kauri, told the Land Tenures Commission in 1914 that he mainly

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<sup>111</sup> C.E. Christenson (Tourist Agent) to General Manager, Tourist Department, 16 March 1932, Mines Department, MD 1, 6/14, Part 3, ANZ-W.

<sup>112</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 26 November 1880, p. 3.

<sup>113</sup> See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 482-483.

<sup>114</sup> E.F. Adams, written statement of 22 July 1914, Correspondence re Royal Commission on Hauraki Mining District 1914, Lands and Survey Department, LS 77/2, ANZ-W.

<sup>115</sup> *Waikato Times*, 8 May 1883, p. 2.

<sup>116</sup> James Adams, 'On the Botany of Te Aroha Mountain, *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute*, 1884, vol. 17 (Wellington, 1885), p. 276.

<sup>117</sup> For example, part of the New Find mine: *Te Aroha News*, 21 April 1888, p. 2.

<sup>118</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 3 April 1889, p. 7, 6 April 1889, pp. 2, 7.

used totara and rata for props.<sup>119</sup> When the Aroha Gold Mining Company drove a low level tunnel along the main reef at Waiorongomai in the mid-1890s,<sup>120</sup> it was ‘closely timbered’ by ten-inch by eight-inch sawn rimu, with split slabs. A 20-inch by nine-inch rimu box drain was constructed along the centre, and the rails were fixed to the usual six-inch by four-inch sleepers.<sup>121</sup> Later further timber was added, wastefully: in 1920, the mining inspector found 64 sets of ‘8 x 8 sawn kauri timber’ with legs ten feet long and caps of eight feet. He could not ‘see any reason why this ground was timbered’, as it was ‘hard’ and the timber carried ‘no weight whatever’.<sup>122</sup> This tunnel was 1,247 feet long when abandoned, timbered all the way.<sup>123</sup> The quartz sent to London by the New Zealand Exploration Company for testing was packed in kahikatea boxes;<sup>124</sup> no doubt this cheap and plentiful timber was used by others similarly.

Official concerns about the loss of commercially valuable timber meant that surveyors had to describe the bush within the claims they surveyed. For example, in 1888 one surveyor reported that the Tui claims were in mountainous country ‘covered with inferior forest’, whilst another noted that Stoney Creek was ‘partly bush and fern land’, without kauri.<sup>125</sup> The existence of kauri had to be explicitly noted, for not only were these valuable timber but, if cut on Maori land, the owners had to be paid £1 5s for each one. Usually surveyors reported the timber to be inferior, making it available for use. For example, an 1890 application for ground near the Premier claim included the surveyor’s statement that ‘most of the timber has been used for mining’ and the remainder was ‘only fit for mining purposes’.<sup>126</sup> Six years later, another surveyor declared that the mountain top was ‘covered with dense bush of a mixed nature fit for firewood and

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<sup>119</sup> James Richard Shaw Wilson, evidence given on 28 July 1914, Minutes of Land Tenures Commission, Lands and Survey Department, LS 77/2, ANZ-W.

<sup>120</sup> See paper on the New Zealand Exploration Company.

<sup>121</sup> Warden to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 12 May 1898, *AJHR*, 1898, C-3, p. 73.

<sup>122</sup> Matthew Paul (Inspector of Mines) to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 30 September 1920, Inspector of Mines, BBDO A902, M6, ANZ-A.

<sup>123</sup> *New Zealand Mining Journal and Financial Guide*, vol. 3 no. 5 (July 1898), p. 69.

<sup>124</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 2 September 1896, p. 3.

<sup>125</sup> Memorandum by D.H. Bayldon, 16 July 1888; memorandum by E.A. Pavitt, 21 April 1888, Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Mining Applications 1888, BBAV 11591/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>126</sup> Francis Pavitt to Warden, 29 December 1890, Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Mining Applications 1890, BBAV 11582/3a, ANZ-A.

some perhaps for mining purposes', and no kauri had been seen. Nearby bush was 'of a mixed character with a kauri tree here and there' which were not of 'much worth'. There was 'plenty of timber' available 'for mining purposes which could be cut down without destroying the bush entirely'.<sup>127</sup>

Not only did miners use timber within the mine and for firewood but some of them built whare to use as storehouses or for camping close to their mines. In 1888, John Squirrell, a farmer who briefly became a miner,<sup>128</sup> for the benefit of his relatives in England described how he made a whare for shelter and to store tools:

We finally made some level ground, then we had to cut down a lot of straight young trees in short and long lengths to build our frame with. We took a good straight growing tree about 4 inches thick which we left in the ground and used for one end setting a pole to the opposite end of the ground and nailing a ridge from the standing tree to the pole.... The next day we had to hunt for nikau trees to make our thatch of, at first we didn't run across any but by and bye we found about half a dozen and soon had them down.

I as a new chum bushman distinguished myself by making my tree fall the wrong way on to several other trees the peculiar result of which was that while the bottom end went up in the air the top part which I wanted didn't come down so I had to cut down a few more trees to get at it....

Then we cut off the long leaves and ... made our roof I seating myself astride the ridge pole and tacking them on with nails....

We had put canvas on the roof under the thatch.<sup>129</sup>

Although timber used in constructing batteries and buildings often came from elsewhere, the 1888 battery extensions were made from 200,000 feet of timber taken from 'the kauri bush on the Waiorongomai Creek'.<sup>130</sup> The original hoppers had 'a capacity of over 500 tons of quartz, and over 50,000 feet of solid heart of kauri timber' was used to build them.<sup>131</sup> 'Bed logs' were used as foundations; the bed log for the stamper boxes in the first

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<sup>127</sup> Memoranda by T.G. Sandes, 25 July 1896, 17 August 1896, Te Aroha Warden's Court, Applications for Special Claims 1896, 14, 26/1896, BBAV 11582/4a, ANZ-A.

<sup>128</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>129</sup> John Squirrell, 'Mining at Tui Creek, N.Zd., How I Came to go Mining', (1888), pp. 2-3 of typescript, MS 288, Library of Auckland Institute and War Memorial Museum.

<sup>130</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 4 August 1888, p. 2, 1 September 1888, p. 2.

<sup>131</sup> *Thames Star*, 6 February 1883, p. 2.

Waiorongomai battery was 'solid kauri, three feet square, and 62 feet in length, laid on cross logs 12 inches square'.<sup>132</sup> The extension of the New Era battery had a framework 'all of kauri, and that of a first-class description', cut into flitches one foot thick.<sup>133</sup> At first it was reported that up to 20,000 feet of kauri were needed, 'a large portion of it to 'consist of 12 inch by 4 inch for the construction of a series of tanks'.<sup>134</sup> Within two weeks, that amount had been increased by 10,000 feet.<sup>135</sup> Its original main driving pulley was made from over 1,000 feet of kauri.<sup>136</sup> The framework of the Bendigo battery was chiefly kauri and rimu. The amount of timber required for this small battery was indicated by the dimensions of the main building: 80 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 40 feet high at the front and 20 feet high at the back.<sup>137</sup>

Batteries required water races built of wood, with metal pipes on trestles over gullies. For small races, such as that constructed in 1897 for the Great Western Gold Mining Company, most of the timber came from 'the adjacent bush' alongside the top level of the tramway.<sup>138</sup> For the longer race being built at the same time from Army Creek for the Aroha Gold Mining Company, 90,000 feet of kauri fluming was shipped in.<sup>139</sup> On the water race from the Wairakau Stream, 'the trestles, stringers, and all timber work for crossing the gullies were of best heart of kauri'.<sup>140</sup> The weir for the intake to the first (and main) water race for the Waiorongomai battery was a large kauri log.<sup>141</sup> Building water races meant clearing all timber along its length; for the New Era water race, for instance, the bush was cleared for half a chain.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> *Waikato Times*, 15 May 1883, p. 2; see also 30 May 1882, p. 2.

<sup>133</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 13 October 1888, p. 2.

<sup>134</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 13 April 1889, p. 2.

<sup>135</sup> *Waikato Times*, 27 April 1889, p. 2.

<sup>136</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 29 August 1885, p. 2.

<sup>137</sup> E.J. Scoble (Inspector of Mines) to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 29 April 1943, Mines Department, MD 1, 20/7/23, ANZ-W.

<sup>138</sup> 'Twinker', 'Te Aroha Notes', *Thames Advertiser*, 10 July 1897, p. 3.

<sup>139</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 10 July 1897, p. 3.

<sup>140</sup> 'Old Miner', 'The Waiorongomai Goldfield', *Te Aroha News*, 31 January 1911, p. 3.

<sup>141</sup> Les and Rus Hill (sons of J.S. Hill, tramway foreman), interview with David Bettison, 13 June 1975.

<sup>142</sup> *Waikato Times*, 1 July 1884, p. 2.

## FIREWOOD

In the absence of a cheap source of coal, firewood was burnt in large quantities in batteries, for example for the steam boiler of the Te Aroha one.<sup>143</sup> A contract was let in March 1881 for 100 tons.<sup>144</sup> Firewood from the surrounding bush was used in the furnace of the New Era battery.<sup>145</sup> The furnace at the first Waiorongomai battery used the 'abundant supply of firewood' available locally, although it was expected that the coming of the railway would mean using Waikato coal.<sup>146</sup> However, as firewood was cheaper than coal, it was steadily cut down on both sides of the Waiorongomai Valley; in one month in 1887, 179 trucks of firewood were sent down to the new revolving furnace built to roast tailings.<sup>147</sup>

The total amount of timber burnt in this way is not known, although there were periodic reports of 'very large' quantities of firewood being delivered to the furnace from 'the hill'.<sup>148</sup> The technical improvements added to the battery in the late 1880s required one third of a ton of firewood to roast a ton of ore.<sup>149</sup> By 1890, the fuel used was partly wood and partly coal.<sup>150</sup> At that time, a firewood contractor was experimenting in making charcoal from wood cut at Waiorongomai. The battery manager wanted to support local industry and could use from 150 to 300 bushels of charcoal daily instead of coke.<sup>151</sup> Fortunately for the survival of the bush, the battery soon closed down and the charcoal was not needed. Then, with a revival in mining in the 1890s, the battery acquired a kiln to dry and desulphurize the ore before it was crushed. The ore was 'run by tramway into the kiln, capable of holding about 100 tons', where it was 'built up on layers of firewood, and so thoroughly dried'.<sup>152</sup> Again, the bush was only saved from total devastation by the collapse of this brief mining boom. By comparison,

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<sup>143</sup> *Thames Star*, 4 March 1881, p. 2.

<sup>144</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 16 March 1881, p. 3.

<sup>145</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 29 May 1886, p. 2.

<sup>146</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 1 December 1883, p. 2.

<sup>147</sup> Piako County Council, *Te Aroha News*, 29 October 1887, p. 2; see also *Te Aroha News*, 21 May 1887, p. 23 September 1887, p. 2.

<sup>148</sup> For instance, 'Waiorongomai', *Waikato Times*, 26 February 1889, p. 3.

<sup>149</sup> *AJHR*, 1888, C-5, p. 29.

<sup>150</sup> *AJHR*, 1890, C-3, p. 44.

<sup>151</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 12 January 1889, p. 2.

<sup>152</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 8 October 1896, p. 3.

at Waihi, the countryside was ‘deforested at the rate of five acres per week’, which, according to the *Te Aroha News*, would ‘bring its own penalties hereafter’. The solution was for the government to extend the railway to Waihi so that Waikato coal could be used instead of timber.<sup>153</sup>

Not only batteries used firewood. Flaxmilling, an occasional local industry, needed fuel for furnaces. In the brief 1898 boom, Andrew Farmer<sup>154</sup> erected a mill ‘beside the Manawaru bush, in order to take advantage of the fuel supplies afforded by such proximity; it being Mr Farmer’s intention to use wood in generating motive power, in the place of coal. This will serve a double purpose, clearing the bush and economizing the fuel bill’.<sup>155</sup> Through this and other uses, the Manawaru bush was replaced by grassland.

#### TIMBER USED BY THE TRAMWAY

Tramways used wooden sleepers. In 1879, a *Te Aroha* correspondent reported that ‘several parties have been out in the bush lately exploring the timber suitable for railway sleepers’ and expected to obtain ‘a good supply’.<sup>156</sup> Sleepers were first cut in 1882 for the tramway. The government had offered to provide sleepers from its stock at Paeroa, but the council decided that it would be cheaper to cut them locally.<sup>157</sup> Of 71 kauri growing in the Waiorongomai Valley that were purchased, 33 seem to have been used for the tramway.<sup>158</sup> Not all the initial 4,500 sleepers were kauri; the report of the council’s acceptance of a tender to supply these stated that they would be ‘mainly kauri’, but the contractor had ‘the option of supplying them in six kinds of timber’.<sup>159</sup> The specifications for the New Era tramway, constructed in 1885, required that

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<sup>153</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 12 October 1895, p. 2.

<sup>154</sup> See *Te Aroha News*, 13 July 1889, p. 2, advertisement, p. 7; *Waikato Times*, 25 November 1890, p. 2, advertisement, 2 August 1894, p. 10; *Te Aroha Correspondent*, *New Zealand Herald*, 14 February 1896, p. 6; *Thames Advertiser*, 26 July 1898, p. 3.

<sup>155</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 21 July 1898, p. 2.

<sup>156</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 9 April 1879, p. 3.

<sup>157</sup> Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 4 May 1882, p. 2.

<sup>158</sup> *Te Aroha Warden’s Court*, List of Kauri Trees purchased at Waiorongomai, n.d. [December 1883?], Warden’s Letterbook 1883-1900, p. 17, BBAV 11534/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>159</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 27 December 1882, p. 2.

timber shall be of the best quality, sound free from shakes, knots, or other imperfections, and for general work each side of any scantling shall shew nowhere less than 2/3 heart. No timber from burnt trees shall be used. Timber shall be of Kauri, Black Birch, or other approved kind.<sup>160</sup>

This branch line used 1,000 sleepers, 'principally heart of rimu, and all of excellent quality'.<sup>161</sup>

Only two years after the tramway was constructed, some sleepers had to be replaced.<sup>162</sup> A year later a committee of mine managers noted that water lodged where the line was not well ballasted, causing sleepers to decay.<sup>163</sup> In 1889, when the tramway hands were unable to send quartz to the battery, they were set to splitting sleepers.<sup>164</sup> Sleepers were replaced on Fern Spur in 1890.<sup>165</sup> In 1891 half of those on Butler's horse grade were replaced and the same number were required on the May Queen horse grade, making a total of 943. The manager told councillors that he was leaving the good ones in place, but these were 'very few, not more than two in a chain'. He assured them that the 'very good' replacement sleepers were 'mostly kauri' and would last a long time if water was 'not allowed to lodge on them'.<sup>166</sup> But in 1896 the council had to order 1,700 replacements, again of kauri.<sup>167</sup> Another 300, of heart of kauri, were required two years later.<sup>168</sup> Another two years later, 1,000 were needed, as well as timber to repair the wooden culverts.<sup>169</sup> New sleepers continued to be needed regularly, rimu and totara being the timber usually used in the twentieth century.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Specification for New Era Tramway, 1885, Mines Department, MD 1, 00/1182, ANZ-W.

<sup>161</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 25 July 1885, p. 7, 29 August 1885, p. 2.

<sup>162</sup> Tramway Manager's report, *Waikato Times*, 17 October 1885, p. 3.

<sup>163</sup> Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 5 August 1886, p. 2.

<sup>164</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 24 April 1889, p. 2.

<sup>165</sup> Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 6 February 1890, p. 2.

<sup>166</sup> Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 8 October 1891, p. 2.

<sup>167</sup> Piako County Council, Letter Book 1893-1899, p. 786, 21 September 1896, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

<sup>168</sup> Piako County Council, *Waikato Argus*, 13 July 1898, p. 3, 20 August 1898, p. 4.

<sup>169</sup> Piako County Council, Letter Book 1899-1901, p. 275, 31 August 1900, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

<sup>170</sup> Piako County Council, Letterbook 1902-1903, p. 265; Letterbook 1907-1908, p. 337; Letterbook 1909-1912, p. 804, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

All the wood used for bridges and tunnels soon rotted. By 1890, part of the small tunnel at Canadian Gully needed retimbering.<sup>171</sup> Two years later the decking on the bridge across this gully needed replacing, and the woodwork on the brake-frames was showing signs of decay.<sup>172</sup> The main tunnel was partly retimbered in 1895.<sup>173</sup> Three years later all three brake-frames were rebuilt, as was the large Canadian Gully bridge and some smaller ones; the original kauri foundations were replaced by totara because this was cheaper.<sup>174</sup> After 20 years of use, the main tramway tunnel needed new sets of rimu to stop the roof collapsing, and new kauri trestles for the bridge to the battery and rimu decking for the Army Creek bridge were required.<sup>175</sup> In 1912 the bridge taking the upper track over Fern Spur incline was rebuilt using 'rough heart of totara' in place of the original kauri, in 1919 the main tunnel was timbered with heart of birch, and in 1921 new sleepers were laid using heart of rimu, birch, totara, or matai, with 'birch preferred'.<sup>176</sup> There would have been a far greater impact on the bush if the original plan to use a locomotive on the lowest horse grade was implemented. Firth had argued that it would be cheap to operate because 'fuel, in the shape of good and flammable wood, was abundantly at hand'.<sup>177</sup> As the corners were too sharp, the locomotive was never used.<sup>178</sup>

Trestles for aerial tramways were also built of wood. The Tui wire tramway used 'best heart of kauri'.<sup>179</sup> Other timber was used as well, and within eight years much of it had to be renewed. Some trestles 'had the bed plates renewed with a better class of timber', namely rata, which was 'procurable on the spot' and replaced 'rewarewa and other soft woods which were previously put in'.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Piako Country Council, *Waikato Times*, 6 February 1890, p. 2.

<sup>172</sup> Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 26 November 1892, p. 2.

<sup>173</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 16 March 1895, p. 2.

<sup>174</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 1 February 1898, p. 2, 19 February 1898, p. 2; Piako County Council, *Waikato Argus*, 19 February 1898, p. 4.

<sup>175</sup> Piako County Council, Letter Book 1902-1903, pp. 129, 399-400; Letterbook 1909-1912, p. 804, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

<sup>176</sup> Inspector of Mines, BBDO A902, MM138, ANZ-A.

<sup>177</sup> *Waikato Times*, 24 July 1883, p. 2.

<sup>178</sup> See paper on the tramway.

<sup>179</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 10 April 1889, p. 2, 24 August 1889, p. 2.

<sup>180</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 17 February 1897, p. 2.

## FENCES

Farmers needed timber for post and rail fences. When the railway was being built near the village of Waihou in 1883, tenders were sought to provide posts cut from kauri, matai, totara, titree (as it was spelt), black birch, or puriri, and rails cut from rimu, titree, kauri, matai, totara, black birch, or rata.<sup>181</sup>

## KAURI AND KAHIKATEA

As noted, the favoured timber in the nineteenth century was kauri. Yet at the same time as they felled kauri, settlers admired its beauty. In 1886, for example, readers of the *Thames Advertiser* were told that from the Rotokohu Gorge to Te Aroha there was a 'high mountain range clothed with a variety of timber, amongst which here and there the royal kauri may be seen towering proudly above the surrounding trees and shrubs'.<sup>182</sup> But sentiment was subordinated to economic necessity, and these 'royal kauri' were soon no more. Whilst readily available, kauri was 'the usual timber used in the mining districts', even if it was not the most appropriate. When a tunnel for the baths at the hot springs was planned in 1907, the Tourist Department was told that kauri had 'a life of 45 years as compared with practically double the life if in totara'.<sup>183</sup> The first bridges within Te Aroha were constructed of 'best heart of kauri'.<sup>184</sup> Kauri was used to make trucks for mines and the tramway.<sup>185</sup> Because green timber used for the 30 tramway trucks shrank in hot weather, these needed constant attention, requiring a steady supply of kauri.<sup>186</sup> Not only were sleepers made of kauri, but also the bridges, brake-frames, and the stand for the tank at the end of the main water race.<sup>187</sup> The specifications for the replacement bridge built

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<sup>181</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 16 June 1883, p. 2.

<sup>182</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 11 October 1886, p. 2.

<sup>183</sup> Lawrence Birks to General Manager, Tourist Department, 10 January 1907, Tourist Department, TO 1, 4/355, ANZ-W.

<sup>184</sup> 'Old Settler', 'The Beginnings of Te Aroha', *Te Aroha News*, 29 November 1910, p. 2.

<sup>185</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 15 June 1889, p.2; Piako County Council, Letter Book 1902-1903, p. 129, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

<sup>186</sup> Piako County Council, *Te Aroha News*, 4 April 1885, p. 2.

<sup>187</sup> Interviews with Les and Rus Hill by David Bettison, 13 June and unspecified date in July 1975.

in 1895 over Butler's Incline for the upper track required it to be a 'substantial bridge built of heart of kauri', with 9 x 3 stringers and decking.<sup>188</sup>

Buildings meant to last, such as the Waiorongomai School, were built of heart kauri.<sup>189</sup> Cheaper buildings were usually made from kahikatea (commonly known as white pine), which did not last. In 1892, although the ticket office at the Hot Springs Domain had only been in use for 11 years, it was 'about worn out and rotten'.<sup>190</sup> A 1910 article noted that most local houses were built of kahikatea, 'undoubtedly the worst building timber in existence', for, being soft and odourless, it was palatable to borer, 'hence the prevalence of dry-rot in Te Aroha'.<sup>191</sup> In 1914, one resident commented that most of the buildings there were 'old and wormeaten'.<sup>192</sup> The Premier Hotel at Waiorongomai had been built of kahikatea, like other hotels in new areas, for example the first hotel at Waihou,<sup>193</sup> but by the 1890s the decline in mining meant that a miner and farmer, Robert Job Maisey,<sup>194</sup> rented it as a family home. His wife Jane told her daughter-in-law that, 'with so much borer in it, the floors were quite dangerous'.<sup>195</sup>

## THE TIMBER INDUSTRY

Much timber was shipped upriver, from the mills at Turua in particular.<sup>196</sup> The first settlers on the land to the west of the Waihou River quickly felled most of the scattered timber, mainly kahikatea, on their farms. Near Waitoa, 'with one or two exceptions', all the houses were built

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<sup>188</sup> George Wilson to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 26 July 1895, Mines Department, MD 1, 96/4, ANZ-W.

<sup>189</sup> Thames High School, Minutes of Meeting of Board of Governors held on 28 April 1936, High School Archives, Thames.

<sup>190</sup> James Mills to Minister of Lands, 5 September 1892, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-W.

<sup>191</sup> F. Neve, 'The Flora of Te Aroha', *Te Aroha News*, 30 July 1910, p. 3.

<sup>192</sup> G.J. Parker, Evidence give in Te Aroha to the Land Tenures Commission, 5 August 1914, Lands and Survey Department, LS 77/2, ANZ-W.

<sup>193</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 6 November 1878, p. 2.

<sup>194</sup> See *Te Aroha News*, 27 August 1930, p. 5.

<sup>195</sup> Muriel Maisey, 'Portrait of a New Zealand Pioneer Woman', *Journal of the New Zealand Federation of Historical Societies*, vol. 1 no. 11 (July 1981), p.20.

<sup>196</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 19 April 1882, p. 3.

of kahikatea, 'principally sawn by hand from the logs cut in the adjoining forest'. Local supplies were cheaper than transporting timber up-river.<sup>197</sup> The speedy growth of Te Aroha and Waiorongomai encouraged the establishment of a local timber industry, as illustrated by an announcement in June 1882:

TIMBER SUPPLY - The difficulty in obtaining prompt supplies of timber to meet the ever-increasing demands of the township, has induced a gentleman to order a complete sawmill plant, and timber in bulk being available, no time will be lost in erecting the mill in some suitable locality, and supplying the market with good kauri and white pine cut in the district itself.<sup>198</sup>

From that date, one or more local timber mills, driven by steam power, worked almost continuously.<sup>199</sup> Whole patches of bush were felled; in January 1884 one 'just below Te Aroha township', presumably of kahikatea, was milled.<sup>200</sup> In the same month the Waiorongomai Timber Company advertised 'all kinds of Timber, Posts, Rails, House Blocks, Shingles, Palings, Slabs and Firewood'.<sup>201</sup>

Much of this timber was used wastefully and inappropriately. For instance, one farmer sold 880 kauri fence posts.<sup>202</sup> The appropriately pseudonymed 'Ignoramus' of Waiorongomai asked whether he had to pay Maori for kauri to fence his allotment.<sup>203</sup> When the footpaths were improved in the main streets of Waiorongomai, 'new kauri kerbing' was used.<sup>204</sup> This was quite unsuitable, because kauri placed in the ground lasted only from five to ten years.<sup>205</sup> Rimu would last from ten to 15 years, likewise black beech. The only timber used appropriately was totara, the most durable of the main New Zealand timbers.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Own Reporter, 'Tour in the Aroha, Waitoa, and Piako Districts', *Thames Advertiser*, 3 July 1880, p. 3.

<sup>198</sup> *Te Aroha Mail*, 10 June 1882, p. 2.

<sup>199</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 8 December 1883, p. 3.

<sup>200</sup> *Thames Star*, 8 January 1884, p. 2.

<sup>201</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 26 January 1884, p. 7.

<sup>202</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 4 July 1885, p. 7.

<sup>203</sup> Letter from 'Ignoramus', *Te Aroha News*, 17 August 1889, p. 2.

<sup>204</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 30 June 1894, p. 23.

<sup>205</sup> N.C. Clifton, *New Zealand Timbers* (Wellington, 1990), p. 4.

<sup>206</sup> Clifton, p. 4.

Some timber was recycled. When mining faded at the beginning of the 1890s, the owner of the battery stripped the water race to the Wairakau Stream and resold the timber, as he did with timber from those parts of the battery he demolished. Much of this kauri ended up as farm fence posts.<sup>207</sup> When the Aroha Gold Mining Company's abandoned water race from Army Creek was demolished in 1900, 42,000 feet of timber was reused, partly as sleepers.<sup>208</sup> In 1920 and 1921, it was planned to re-use the timber from this company's low level tunnel to build bins for a state coal mine; being saturated, when dried it would be attacked by dry rot, so was sold, presumably for firewood.<sup>209</sup>

The wastage of good timber was immense. A Crown Lands Ranger estimated that, when sawn into logs, 20 per cent of kauri and over 10 per cent of rimu was lost.<sup>210</sup> No details were recorded of kauri milling at Waiorongomai, but an explanation of the wastage involved in making sleepers from Waitekauri Valley kauri was applicable:

In order to fulfil the terms of the contract agreement a very considerable loss to the public is being incurred of the most valuable timber in the southern hemisphere.... Take a log 49ft long with an average girth of 16ft you find that the number of superficial feet contained amounts to 9408 feet. Now from this are obtained 254 sleepers, each containing 21 feet, making a sum total of 5334 feet or nearly one-half of the contents of the whole. It should be remarked that in this estimate a fair average for sap has been allowed.<sup>211</sup>

By 1884 several Waiorongomai residents earned their living by cutting firewood and carting it down the lower road, to its detriment.<sup>212</sup> Special trolleys were made to bring firewood, from above Fern Spur in particular,

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<sup>207</sup> 'Old Miner', 'The Waiorongomai Goldfield', *Te Aroha News*, 4 February 1911, p. 1.

<sup>208</sup> Piako County Council, Letterbook 1899-1901, pp. 186, 188-189, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

<sup>209</sup> Matthew Paul to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 30 September 1920; Under-Secretary, Mines Department, to Matthew Paul, 16 November 1920; Matthew Paul to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 4 April 1921; Under-Secretary, Mines Department, to Matthew Paul, 12 April 1921, Inspector of Mines, BBDO A902, M6, ANZ-A.

<sup>210</sup> Evidence of Robert Craig Pollok, Crown Lands Ranger, Auckland, 6 August 1914, to Land Tenures Commission, Lands and Survey Department, LS 77/2, ANZ-W.

<sup>211</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 10 March 1880, p. 3.

<sup>212</sup> Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 27 November 1884, p. 2.

down the tramway.<sup>213</sup> Favoured firewood was rata and tawa.<sup>214</sup> Less accessible was the eastern side of the Waiorongomai Valley, but in 1886 a visiting reporter walking up the lower track discovered how this problem had been solved:

About half way up, at the bend of the track, we came on a wire tramway stretched across the gorge from one mountain to the other, a distance of about three hundred yards, which was used for transporting bulk firewood to drays on the track for conveyance to the settlements. About twelve tons of wood pass across in this way per diem.<sup>215</sup>

In April 1888 tenders were called ‘for cutting and delivering on the side of the Waiorongomai Tramway 500 tons Firewood’.<sup>216</sup> One contractor employed over 20 men cutting firewood and conveying it across the stream to the tramway by wire rope.<sup>217</sup> To give access to a kauri grove further up the eastern side of the valley, in that year a branch tramline was built from the bottom of Butler’s Spur to the bank of the stream, where fletches were brought by wire tramway.<sup>218</sup> Once all the kauri had been felled apart from one grove high on the eastern side of the valley, the sawmills cut other timber from further in the hills. In 1914 it was reported that the mill at Waiorongomai cutting ‘mountain rimu’ had a good future, as the supply was ‘sufficient to last a very long time’.<sup>219</sup> In 1920, a Te Aroha contractor supplied the Thames Valley Power Board with thousands of cross-arms from ‘some remarkably fine rata timber’ near Waiorongomai.<sup>220</sup> In 1924 ‘a visitor from the south recently inspected a block of bush within an hour’s

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<sup>213</sup> *Waikato Times*, 27 June 1885, p. 3, 2 October 1886, p. 2; for examples of firewood being conveyed for residents, see Piako County Council, Letter Book 1899-1901, pp. 44, 98, 142, 178, 217, 218, 253-254, 316, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

<sup>214</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 8 August 1888, p. 2.

<sup>215</sup> *Waikato Times*, 27 May 1886, p. 4.

<sup>216</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 14 April 1888, p. 7; see also *Te Aroha News*, 21 April 1888, p. 4; *Waikato Times*, 14 July 1888, p. 2, 25 August 1888, p. 3.

<sup>217</sup> *Waikato Times*, 10 November 1888, p. 2.

<sup>218</sup> Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Hearings 1883-1900, 65/1888, BBAV 11505/1a, ANZ-A; *Waikato Times*, 25 August 1888, p. 3, 10 November 1888, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 8 August 1888, p. 2, 6 October 1888, p. 2.

<sup>219</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 4 December 1914, p. 2.

<sup>220</sup> Waiorongomai Correspondent, *Te Aroha News*, 16 August 1920, p. 2.

walk of Te Aroha' and was 'so pleased' that he took up 1,000 acres containing 'milling bush sufficient for probably twenty years cutting'.<sup>221</sup> And so the cutting went on.... The one use of the bush that was financially unsuccessful was an attempt by a firewood and bush contractor to set up a charcoal business.<sup>222</sup>

On the plains, land was cleared of its original vegetation for farming; for instance, in 1895 one farmer at Te Aroha West cut 13 acres of manuka.<sup>223</sup> Some farmers replaced what to them was useless scrub with exotics, as noted approvingly by a visitor in 1887, who saw on the flat land across the Waihou River 'clumps of native bush, and the pine plantations' which formed 'so ornamental a feature of the estates'.<sup>224</sup>

### DAMAGING THE BUSH THEY ADMIRERD

Even those who loved the bush damaged it. In June 1880, three visitors climbed Te Aroha, were entranced by the view, and came back with souvenirs. 'Some very rare and pretty ferns were brought down by these gentlemen, and were forwarded by them to their friends in different parts of the colony'.<sup>225</sup> Late in the century, a visitor noted that 'many valuable collections have been made' from the mosses and ferns found.<sup>226</sup> Some hoped to make money from them: for instance, in 1883 a resident sought advice about how to successfully export tree ferns to England,<sup>227</sup> and young girls collected ferns for sale.<sup>228</sup> Amateur botanists continued to help themselves to interesting plants in later years, and the bush was regularly used for decorations. The earliest reference to this practice was in May 1881, when a Queen's Birthday dance was held in a boardinghouse. The room was 'very tastefully decorated for the occasion with branches of the fern trees and the charming evergreen shrubs of the neighbouring bush'.<sup>229</sup> In 1888, for a

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<sup>221</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 9 December 1924, p. 4.

<sup>222</sup> Advertisement for experienced charcoal burner, *Te Aroha News*, 22 December 1888, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 14 January 1889, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 2 February 1889, p. 2.

<sup>223</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 6 March 1895, p. 2.

<sup>224</sup> Own Reporter, 'A Trip to Te Aroha', *Auckland Weekly News*, 30 July 1887, p. 29.

<sup>225</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 15 June 1880, p. 3.

<sup>226</sup> 'Twinkler', 'View From Te Aroha Mountain', *Thames Advertiser*, 11 August 1897, p. 3.

<sup>227</sup> Letter from F.W.B., *Auckland Weekly News*, 13 October 1883, p. 25.

<sup>228</sup> 'Te Aroha', *Observer*, 20 October 1883, p. 8.

<sup>229</sup> *Waikato Times*, 26 May 1881, p. 3.

'Grand Fancy Dress Carnival' the Werahiko Hall at Waiorongomai was 'fairly transposed almost into a forest dell with ferns and evergreens', and for the Christmas festivities the exteriors of two hotels were 'tastefully decorated by means of large ferns, nikau, etc'.<sup>230</sup> That such use of vegetation was the norm was indicated by a passing comment in 1891 that, at another monthly Waiorongomai social, 'the hall was tastefully decorated with evergreens and tree ferns'.<sup>231</sup> In 1909, the Waiorongomai schoolchildren 'built a little bush-house upon the model of that to be seen in the Te Aroha Domain. This is well stocked with ferns brought from the neighbouring bush'.<sup>232</sup>

Those charged with the task of protecting the scenic delights of Te Aroha found such practices reprehensible. In 1904, the doctor in charge of the baths complained about destruction of ferns on the track up Bald Spur:

Visitors wantonly break off the fronds and locally they are used for decorations at Xmas etc. I spoke to one lady on the subject - and she indignantly said she had taken the ferns for years and "in the future she would make a point of doing it." So the residents guard their property.<sup>233</sup>

The fact that this bush was part of a reserve did not worry the offenders. At a meeting of the Chamber of Commerce in 1915, a future mayor, Robert Coulter, complained that holiday visitors to the domain destroyed 'bush and fern'. The meeting requested the Tourist Department to stop 'ferns and branches of trees being taken from the reserve by picnic parties and others'.<sup>234</sup> No doubt the department tried, but it probably did not have public opinion on its side, as indicated by a complaint by 'Bush Lover' in 1932 about the 'sacrifice of the beautiful nikau palms in and around Te Aroha'. These were being 'ruthlessly destroyed ... crucified - to wither and die and be an eyesore in a few hours - on a verandah post'.<sup>235</sup>

Also damaging was the tradition of cutting lookouts, sometimes for surveying. A visitor who climbed to the top of the mountain in 1881 found 'a

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<sup>230</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 22 September 1888, p. 2, 2 January 1889, p. 2.

<sup>231</sup> 'Waiorongomai', *Observer*, 26 September 1891, p. 21.

<sup>232</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 14 December 1909, p. 2.

<sup>233</sup> Arthur S. Wohlmann to Acting Superintendent, Tourist Department, n.d. [beginning of October 1904], Tourist Department, TO 1, 31/32, NA.

<sup>234</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 3 March 1915, p. 2.

<sup>235</sup> Letter from 'Bush Lover', *Te Aroha News*, 4 January 1932, p. 5.

small space on the summit ... on which some of the trees had been burnt or felled ... and there in front of us stood the surveyor's trigonometrical pole'.<sup>236</sup> This space was developed as a tourist lookout, with more bush being cleared because of the tradition of boiling a billy for lunch. By 1897 the summit had 'rustic seats, a table, abundance of firewood close handy, and pleasant shelter if required'.<sup>237</sup>

It should be noted that collecting ferns and other vegetation and thereby destroying some of the original beauty of the bush was common not only in New Zealand but also in Australia.<sup>238</sup>

### ANIMALS IN THE BUSH

As well, cattle were allowed to eat the vegetation. In 1881, a reporter exploring the mountain heard wild cattle.<sup>239</sup> There was no record of cattle being deliberately used by prospectors to help clear the bush, but they would not have complained about their depredations. Samuel Cochrane Macky, a mining agent,<sup>240</sup> who was associated with the early days of Waiorongomai mining,<sup>241</sup> noted the value of wild cattle clearing the bush. 'Anyone who knows anything of the impenetrability of virgin New Zealand bush will see at a glance the immense assistance this herd has been to the prospector in the upper Waitekauri'.<sup>242</sup> Without fencing off the hillside there was nothing to stop animals penetrating the lower slopes, and farmers used 'rough grazing' for supplementary feed. In 1950, the borough engineer complained about this use of the 'steep rocky country' above the former Waiorongomai settlement, where stock was 'allowed to wander through the

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<sup>236</sup> *Waikato Times*, 24 May 1881, p. 3.

<sup>237</sup> 'Twinkler', 'View from Te Aroha Mountain', *Thames Advertiser*, 11 August 1897, p. 3.

<sup>238</sup> See Tim Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth* (Melbourne, 2000), especially pp. 102-114.

<sup>239</sup> Travelling Reporter, 'A Scramble Up Te Aroha Mountain', *Waikato Times*, 24 May 1881, p. 3.

<sup>240</sup> See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 465

<sup>241</sup> See Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 1, 46, 53, 54, 56, 88, 107, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

<sup>242</sup> S. Cochrane Macky, 'A Visit to Waitekauri', *New Zealand Herald*, 11 November 1893, Supplement, p. 1.

bush and destroy undergrowth'.<sup>243</sup> This practice continued until the 1990s, when the Department of Conservation fenced the bushline. There were of course worse animals to have loose in the bush, and a government agency was responsible for the introduction of one animal pest. In 1915 it was announced that

a pair of red deer (a stag and a hind) were received in Te Aroha on Friday by Mr H. Holmes,<sup>244</sup> from the Tourist Department. The animals were liberated on the hillside on Friday night, and Mr Holmes has requested us to ask the residents to assist him in protecting the animals. If it is found that the deer thrive on the Te Aroha mountain it is probably that more will be liberated in due course.<sup>245</sup>

They did not need to be liberated by officials, for some had already arrived in the district. In 1900, a Waiorongomai miner told his wife that he had been told that there were 'deer in the hills but they seldom come just here'.<sup>246</sup>

Other animal pests gradually spread through the bush. Goats arrived first. Recalling his childhood at Waiorongomai before his family left New Zealand in 1886, one man said that Buck Rock 'was the favourite camping place for a herd of wild goats'.<sup>247</sup> In 1900, a miner living in the bush near Buck Rock saw 'a herd of goats rambling about here, about 20 of them ... and some little kids'.<sup>248</sup> The first time that goats were recorded in the press as being a problem was in 1935, when the local newspaper wrote an article with the headline 'Menace to Forest':

Trampers who have recently travelled over the range or made excursions into the bush country round the ridges near the Te Aroha peak state that there are increasing signs of the havoc wrought by herds of goats on the native bush. This is particularly

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<sup>243</sup> Norman Annabell (Borough Engineer) to Commissioner of Crown Lands, Hamilton, 4 October 1950, Lands and Survey Department, 8/857, Part 1, Land Information New Zealand, Hamilton.

<sup>244</sup> Not traced.

<sup>245</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 24 May 1915, p. 2.

<sup>246</sup> T.F. Holt to Nell Holt, 18 November 1900, T.F. Holt Papers, Te Aroha Museum.

<sup>247</sup> Recollections of R.J. Raue, *Te Aroha News*, 9 January 1937, p. 5.

<sup>248</sup> T.F. Holt to Nell Holt, 18 November 1900, T.F. Holt Papers, Te Aroha Museum.

noticeable on the younger trees, but not even the older trees have escaped their ravages, many of them being ring-barked....

For some years past, said one resident who makes periodic trips up the mountain, the goats have shown a noticeable increase, until today he estimates that there are at least 500 of them. Given a year or two to multiply, they will quickly become a menace which in spite of all our rigid forest protection laws will not save the beautiful native bush which, when all is said and done, alone makes these mountains the attraction they are. Further, it is claimed that the goats are particularly partial to young kauri heads. On the side of the old Huia gold claim a forest of these magnificent trees is springing up, the majority not being more than 4ft high. The goats have eaten the crowns in most of these clean out, thus killing the kauris' growing power and stunting a tree which should be protected in order that it might become a national asset.<sup>249</sup>

A year later, the newspaper reused the same headline for an article prompted by two forest areas containing 'thriving kauri groves' having been gazetted as scenic reserves at the prompting of the Chamber of Commerce. Members of the chamber stated that increasing numbers of goats 'were eating the hearts out of the young native trees and destroying whole areas'. Possibly 20 square miles of forest were affected. Horace Harold Wood, a timber merchant,<sup>250</sup>

related how when he had inspected the two kauri areas he noticed thousands of young karaka trees, all of which had had the centres eaten off short. "As a forest lover," he said, "it hurt me deeply to see the devastation to the young growth. Only goats could have been responsible for the damage. The Coromandel is one of the finest ranges in the North Island and we should do something to preserve its natural beauty.... There are trees on the range which grow nowhere else in New Zealand.

The government was asked to 'overcome the pest by extermination or any other means'.<sup>251</sup> The *Te Aroha News* had earlier urged that they 'should be destroyed before they develop into a real scourge'.<sup>252</sup> In 1937, £25 was allocated by the government to pay 'a small party of hunters' to shoot them,

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<sup>249</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 4 November 1935, p. 5.

<sup>250</sup> *Tauranga Electoral Roll, 1925*, p. 186.

<sup>251</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 23 October 1936, p. 5.

<sup>252</sup> Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 9 March 1936, p. 4.

each man being required to shoot 36 a day to earn their daily wage. 'As this sum will merely cover the destruction of 1000 goats', a local correspondent reported 'a certain amount of disappointment' amongst residents 'that for so important a work such a small sum should have been allocated.'<sup>253</sup> Wood again lamented that herds of goats were eating 'millions of young karaka trees'.<sup>254</sup> The government's main intent was to protect kauri.<sup>255</sup> In the early 1940s, the waterworks committee of the borough council discussed the issue of goats in its catchment area, but decided against shooting them for fear of polluting the water supply.<sup>256</sup> At Waiorongomai, by 1948 the damage meant that the catchment board was authorised to kill all the goats on the high school endowment.<sup>257</sup> After eight cullers were employed, the officer in charge said that the number of goats had been exaggerated, for in five weeks his men had shot only 700, compared with the South Island, where

four cullers had shot as many as 2,000 goats in one day in country that could really be called goat-infested. The officer in charge said that if there had been a proper survey of the number of goats in the district there would never have been any cullers put on the job. The men were also handicapped by the fact that they were not allowed to shoot on private property.

Mr D.G. MacMillan said that he had some experience with the cullers shooting on his property. He had done all in his power to assist them and given them permission to shoot on his land with certain reservations. Their response had been to shoot the goats which he had fenced in and which he had requested them to leave, and then they had gone off without saying anything to him about it. He would have considerable difficulty replacing the goats and he didn't wonder at property owners being unwilling to allow cullers on their own land.

The Chairman, Mr H.M. Corbett, said that he had almost had enough of the whole business and would be glad to see the last of it.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 6 January 1937, p. 13.

<sup>254</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 17 February 1937, p. 5.

<sup>255</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 9 January 1937, p. 5.

<sup>256</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 26 March 1942, p. 8.

<sup>257</sup> Thames High School, Minutes of Meeting of the Board of Governors of 22 June 1948, High School Archives, Thames.

<sup>258</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 31 August 1948, p. 4.

Some efforts to eliminate goats continued, with only partial success. A 1966 article blamed increasing erosion on the mountain largely on the gradual decrease of trees and undergrowth because of pests. 'The goat population seems to increase each year in spite of the fact that every effort has been made to clear them'.<sup>259</sup> In 1950, a Forest and Bird member was told

that in the last three or four seasons some 1600 goats have been eliminated. This is an impressive figure in its way, but does it represent a sufficient effort? I have been told that in the stretch of wild mountainous country between the mountain and Waihi to the north the damage done is so extensive that it is possible to drive a horse through the bush. On the track up the hill the damage done will not be noticed till one gets up to a height of say 2000 feet. Above that attitude the damage is serious.

It is time public opinion was aroused to an awareness of what is going on before it is too late.<sup>260</sup>

Wild pigs were seen in the hills by the 1880s and were very common by the 1940s.<sup>261</sup> As for possums, the Ohinemuri Acclimatisation Society released black possums in the Waitawheta watershed, between Te Aroha and Karangahake, in 1914, and within ten years these were increasing in numbers. However, the secretary of the society complained in 1924 that he had failed to gain permission to 'liberate them again in other areas'.<sup>262</sup> By 1950, concern was expressed about heavy possum damage to the range.<sup>263</sup> In 1966 'a marked increase in the opossum population' was noted:

This is evidenced by the fact that last Sunday morning a dead opossum was on the main road in the vicinity of the Whitaker-Brick Street intersection. Seldom, if ever before has it been known for opossums to be found so close to the main shopping area of Te Aroha. Several residents in Hightown have noticed in recent weeks that fruit trees have suffered more damage from opossums than ever before.

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<sup>259</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 1 April 1966, p. 4.

<sup>260</sup> Gow, p. 13.

<sup>261</sup> Travelling Reporter, 'A Scramble up Te Aroha Mountain', *Waikato Times*, 21 May 1881, p. 3; *Te Aroha News*, 20 January 1949, p. 5.

<sup>262</sup> *Thames Star*, 29 July 1924, cited in *Te Aroha News*, 4 August 1964, p. 9.

<sup>263</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 6 October 1950, p. 5.

This report called for 'adequate steps' to be taken to trap them, for fear of worse erosion on the mountain.<sup>264</sup>

### DELIBERATELY DAMAGING THE BUSH

The mammal that had introduced these pests was also the one that deliberately caused the greatest destruction. Some residents damaged the bush either from mercenary or malicious motives. In August 1932, for instance, a farmer who let people explore the bush on and above his farm complained that 'some visitors have ruthlessly damaged the native bush'.<sup>265</sup> A week later, the tourist agent showed a reporter the damage caused by illegally cutting firewood on the eastern end of the domain:

From the path which leads to Murphy's Mine another path branches off and follows a ridge towards the back of the Chinese gardens, and it is along this path that the main damage has been done. Here there are some fine specimens of tea-tree, and on a rough estimate a hundred of the best trees have been cut down and removed. The branches have been left to litter up the path in some cases, and not only form unsightly obstructions but add to the danger of fire. The destruction had apparently been going on for some time and has been continued to quite recently, for some of the branches were green. As though it was not enough to cut down and remove trees, a number of trees left standing have received deep cuts from an axe, making the continuation of life very doubtful.<sup>266</sup>

### FIRES

The greatest damage resulted from fires, most of which, apart from the ones needed for prospecting or establishing farms, seem to have been deliberately lit for no other purpose than destruction. In the 20 years after mining began, fires on several occasions endangered mining property. The first one started on 24 December 1885, after a dry season, far up the Waiorongomai Valley near the partly erected New Era battery:

It appears that some men working in the vicinity of the new battery, and engaged in getting out some timber from the bush, in

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<sup>264</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 1 April 1966, p. 4.

<sup>265</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 10 August 1932, p. 4.

<sup>266</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 17 August 1932, p. 5.

order to clear away some underscrub on the track and to save the trouble of cutting it, thought they'd set fire thereto, and burnt it. Nothing further was thought of the matter that day or the next, although as a result of the fire smouldering logs and patches were still apparent, and ... a breeze springing up quickly fanned these into strong flames, with a result that in a very short time the whole hillside was on fire, which continued to spread with great rapidity, and soon reached the lower track and came into close proximity to the New Era battery, which, in a short time, was in very great danger of being totally destroyed by the devouring element, and such would certainly have been its fate but for the exertions of Messrs McCoy and Geo. Fraser, who fortunately happened to be on the spot and had a rough time of it for several hours, as the flames on several occasions gained possession of the dry material and boards lying around the battery. Mr Ferguson<sup>267</sup> and others who were on the hillside above were unable to render any assistance for some time, as a regular sheet of flame and heavy volumes of smoke effectually shut them off until the fire had somewhat exhausted itself. Fortunately no damage was done to the building or works in progress in connection therewith, beyond the burning of some boards. Several of the workmen engaged on the tramway formation, however, got their tools burnt. The fire is still smouldering at different places in the surrounding bush, and may yet spread further and cause considerable destruction to timber.<sup>268</sup>

This fire died out, but the same crisis recurred periodically. Buildings were not usually endangered, but the beauty of the bush behind Te Aroha was, as illustrated by the first big swamp and bush fires, at the end of 1886.

The sky was lit up for many miles by great masses of flame arising from a most extensive fire in the direction of Thames. We have observed on several occasions lately, attempts have been made to set fire to the bush immediately behind Te Aroha township, but fortunately so far the fires have soon died out.<sup>269</sup>

The next major fire, three months later, was started by an unknown resident setting fire to

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<sup>267</sup> For these men, see paper on Peter Ferguson and his New Era.

<sup>268</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 2 January 1886, p. 7; see also *Thames Advertiser*, 28 December 1885, p. 3.

<sup>269</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 1 January 1887, p. 2.

the tall fern on the mountainside immediately above the township. The blaze lit up the country for some distance surrounding, and spread over a considerable portion of the base of the hill, but fortunately the night was calm and the fire died out before reaching the timber in the adjoining gullies. On Saturday afternoon, however, some of the smouldering scrub again blazed up, and before the flames could be extinguished they had spread a little distance inside the boundary domain fence. Although no great injury has been done the fire has left an unsightly black patch which will mar the beauty of the mountain for some time to come.

If it had been lit deliberately, the culprit should be punished: until 'an example' was made of someone, such fires were 'likely to be a not infrequent occurrence',<sup>270</sup> an accurate forecast. In December 1888 the *Te Aroha News* wrote that 'the persistent attempts made to destroy the bush on the side of the ranges in the immediate vicinity' of the township were 'greatly to be deprecated'. It hoped the police would be able to discover the offenders, for setting fire to the bush was 'annually recurring'.<sup>271</sup> One month later it noted the worrying financial implications. After repeating its disapproval of 'the repeated and determined attempts to destroy the bush' through fire, it argued that 'a permanent injury' was being done to Te Aroha because the bush was 'quite one of the attractions to visitors'. It was pleased that steps were being taken to bring those responsible to trial.<sup>272</sup> It was of course very difficult to identify those firing the bush and few were charged. Possibly threats of prosecution encouraged them, for they had the additional thrill of 'getting way with it'.

Almost immediately after this warning, someone deliberately set fire to scrub close to Waiorongomai:

During the past two or three days the fire has been raging on the face of the hill, uncomfortably near the Battery, and on Tuesday evening last it was observed to be in close proximity to the trestle-work that supports the large tank at the termination of the Company's water race. A number of the Company's employees were at once despatched to the scene, and after some hard battling succeeded in preventing its further progress in that direction. But the fire is now travelling southwards, and a number of the Company's men are continually on the watch,

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<sup>270</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 29 March 1887, p. 3.

<sup>271</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 15 December 1888, p. 2.

<sup>272</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 19 January 1889, p. 2.

night and day, to prevent any damage to the trestle-work along the water-race.<sup>273</sup>

This fire burned for weeks 'along the face of the ranges, and in the bush at Waiorongomai'.<sup>274</sup> A dramatic account was written by a Waiorongomai correspondent:

The fire, which started near the Lower Hill Track, crossed the tramway line on Saturday last, and the first to suffer thereby was Mr [William] Darby. It appears Mr Darby came down from his work at the mines about 4 o'clock, and before leaving home for Waiorongomai for his pay he took the precaution to damp the roof of his house by throwing a few buckets of water on it, he then proceeded down to the Te Aroha S & G M Co. office, and meeting Mr Thos. Goldsworthy he (whose house is only a short distance from Darby's) remarked that they had better return home again with as little delay as possible on account of the fire in the bush. Mr Goldsworthy acquiesced, and they both hurried back, but only to find that during his absence Mr Darby's house and contents had been completely destroyed. Mrs Darby only succeeded in saving a very few things, and many valuables were lost. Such as a good collection of books that cost £20, also a silver cornet valued at £8, many articles lost being such as cannot be easily-replaced. For Mr and Mrs Darby widespread sympathy is expressed on all sides, and I hear that the ladies of Waiorongomai are arranging a sewing bee for the purpose of assisting them; as even the children's clothing was nearly all burnt. The houses of Messrs Thos. and H[enry] Goldsworthy<sup>275</sup> were also in great danger from the bush fire, but with the kind assistance of neighbours and friends from the flat by constant watching were saved. Mr Alfred Scott's<sup>276</sup> house, which also is close to the tramway, was likewise imperilled; so much so that everything was carried outside, the family taking refuge in a building on top of Fern Spur. Messrs [Thomas] Kirker,<sup>277</sup> [William Henry] Andrews,<sup>278</sup> and [James Joseph] May,<sup>279</sup> were also occasioned much anxiety owing to the spread of the fire; as on Monday night it came very close indeed to their properties, the wind blowing the sparks repeatedly on the

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<sup>273</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 26 January 1889, p. 2.

<sup>274</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 30 January 1889, p. 2.

<sup>275</sup> See paper on the Goldsworthy brothers.

<sup>276</sup> A miner: see *Te Aroha Electoral Roll, 1890*, p. 30.

<sup>277</sup> A miner: see Mines Department, MD 1, 92/34, ANZ-W.

<sup>278</sup> A miner who died in June that year: see *Te Aroha News*, 22 June 1889, p. 2.

<sup>279</sup> Another miner: *Tauranga Electoral Roll, 1887*, p. 16.

roof of their houses, some of which had been composed of thatch, constant watching was a necessity. Those mentioned moved everything out of their house, and when assisting in the removal, Mr [John M.] Booth,<sup>280</sup> while helping to carry out a stove, fell and cut his upper lip very severely. A quantity of firewood, belonging to the Te A. S. & G. M. Co is stacked adjacent to the line, and the tramway hands have been keeping watch along the line night and day since Saturday last to prevent its being burnt. About 11 o'clock on Monday the fire had somewhat subsided near the Fern Spur, but was raging with great fury near the tramway bridge. Here were placed a number of men prepared for any emergency, with ropes, buckets, and axes. I'm glad to say, however, that the bridge did not catch fire. The fire has now pretty well burnt itself out, being confined principally to stumps and barrels of trees. About 1 o'clock yesterday sparks from the bush fire were blowing onto Mr D[avid] K[err] Young's<sup>281</sup> house, which is situated in the gully, at the first sharp turn on the Lower Hill Track, leading to the New Era Battery. Mr Young was at the time playing cricket at Waiorongomai, and before he got home the house was burnt to the ground. I understand, however, most of its contents were saved, several small detached rooms and sheds also escaped the destroying element.<sup>282</sup>

Darby, a blacksmith who briefly owned one claim,<sup>283</sup> immediately rebuilt his house, with financial assistance provided by miners and other residents.<sup>284</sup> Young, a miner,<sup>285</sup> rebuilt in Waiorongomai.<sup>286</sup>

No more major fires occurred until December 1895, when 'some evil-disposed person started a fire amongst the fallen timber' on the now largely-

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<sup>280</sup> A carpenter: see *Te Aroha News*, 3 November 1883, p. 2, 9 August 1884, p. 2, 29 August 1885, p. 2, 23 January 1886, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 23 August 1894, p. 2.

<sup>281</sup> See chapter on private lives.

<sup>282</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 2 February 1889, p. 2.

<sup>283</sup> See Birth Certificate of William David Darby, 14 March 1884, 1884/11400; Death Certificate of William Darby, 2 July 1914, 1914/4712, BDM; *Te Aroha News*, 18 October 1884, p. 7, 25 June 1887, p. 2.

<sup>284</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 6 February 1889, p. 2, advertisement, 13 February 1889, p. 7, 6 March 1889, p. 7.

<sup>285</sup> See Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 142, 146, BBAV 11567/1a; Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 143, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A; *Te Aroha News*, 8 August 1885, p. 7, 12 May 1888, p. 2, 2 June 1888, p. 2.

<sup>286</sup> *Te Aroha News*, Waiorongomai Correspondent, 2 February 1889, p. 2, 27 February 1889, p. 2.

cleared Fern Spur, 'which rapidly spread and for some time the trestle work of the tramway bridge was in danger of destruction. The fire has spoiled the look of the hill'.<sup>287</sup> The following September, a fire lit near Bald Spur destroyed 'a considerable patch of bush', and residents were reminded of the 'heavy' penalty 'for firing the bush, within the boundaries of the Domain, wilfully'.<sup>288</sup> Four months later, a fire to the north of Bald Spur 'brilliantly illuminated' the hillside at night.<sup>289</sup> Then in March a fire, possibly started by a careless match, started a fire near the Aroha Company's water race; despite a strong gale, it was saved.<sup>290</sup>

In the twentieth century, although occasional fires swept the lower Waiorongomai Valley, they were not regarded so seriously, as mining was only episodic. Any large-scale resumption of mining would have been hindered by these fires, which over the years damaged the lower portion of the tramway. In 1920, a fire at the top of the Fern Spur Incline 'burnt the sills and bottom portion of the uprights carrying the brake gear'.<sup>291</sup> In the summer of 1949-1950, large fires spread from the bushline to Army Creek, where either then or later in the 1950s the tramway bridge burned down.<sup>292</sup> Behind Te Aroha, fires occurred during most summers, with particularly large and dangerous ones in 1914 and 1928.<sup>293</sup> Quite apart from the difficulties of containing the fires and protecting property, the impact on the scenery angered some residents. In 1928, 'Punga' advocated 'a very extensive campaign against these vandals who seem to find amusement, or fiendish glee it may be better called I suppose, in such wanton destruction

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<sup>287</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 29 December 1895, p. 2.

<sup>288</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 23 September 1897, p. 2.

<sup>289</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 15 January 1898, p. 2.

<sup>290</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 10 March 1898, p. 2.

<sup>291</sup> Matthew Paul to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 15 July 1920, Mines Department, MD 1, 21/2/4, ANZ-W.

<sup>292</sup> Norman Annabell to Secretary, Hauraki Catchment Board, 14 September 1950, with map, Lands and Survey Department, 8/857, Part 1, Land Information New Zealand, Hamilton.

<sup>293</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 19 January 1914, p. 3, 27 January 1928, p. 4, 10 February 1928, p. 1, 13 February 1928, p. 5; but see letter from William Beatty, *New Zealand Herald*, 28 January 1914, p. 11.

of our greatest assets - natural beauties - and that when caught a severe penalty may be imposed'.<sup>294</sup>

Who were these vandals? Some were farmers or owners of small sections whose fires to burn off scrub, blackberry, or gorse spread into the bush, usually through carelessness rather than 'fiendish glee'. Such people are known to have caused fires in 1911, 1913, 1914, and twice within one month in 1928.<sup>295</sup> In 1939, the *Te Aroha News* reported a fire in the water catchment area, which was 'strictly protected against trespassers'. During the past week there had been 'cases of deliberate interference with the water pipeline, and then later what appears to have been an intentionally started fire', indicating 'a type of irresponsible person who has no respect for public property'.<sup>296</sup>

The attitude of many small farmers was characterized in 1950 by the borough engineer in a letter concerning lessees at Waiorongomai: they 'repeatedly set fire to gorse growing on their holdings' and were 'unconcerned about damage to the hillside bush through fires spreading'.<sup>297</sup> Careless picnickers often did not properly extinguish campfires.<sup>298</sup> Young boys were probably a common cause but were only referred to once, when the mining inspector explained that gorse on Fern Spur had been set alight 'by mischievous boys, who seem to delight in roaming the hills on Sundays setting fires'.<sup>299</sup>

## REPLACING BURNT BUSH

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<sup>294</sup> Letter from 'Punga', *Te Aroha News*, 1 February 1929, p. 8; for details of this fire, see *Te Aroha News*, 10 February 1928, p. 1, 13 February 1928, p. 5.

<sup>295</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 14 March 1911, p. 2; *Auckland Weekly News*, 6 February 1913, p. 48; *Te Aroha*; George McGirr (Tourist Agent) to General Manager, Tourist Department, 14 December 1914, Tourist Department, TO 1, 31/32, ANZ-W; *Te Aroha News*, 27 January 1928, p. 4, 10 February 1928, p. 1.

<sup>296</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 6 March 1939, p. 5.

<sup>297</sup> Norman Annabell to Commissioner of Crown Lands, Hamilton, 4 October 1950, Lands and Survey Department, 8/857, Part 1, Land Information New Zealand, Hamilton.

<sup>298</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 19 January 1914, p. 3; *Auckland Weekly News*, 22 January 1914, p. 21; C.E. Christensen (Tourist Agent) to General Manager, Tourist Department, 6 February 1928, Tourist Department, TO 1, 31/32, ANZ-W.

<sup>299</sup> Matthew Paul to Under-Secretary of Mines, 15 July 1920, Mines Department, MD 1, 21/2/4, ANZ-W.

Burning the bush led to the spread of weeds. Ragwort, declared a noxious weed in 1910, had by then spread along all the cleared land at the foot of the hills, and continued to spread vigorously.<sup>300</sup> At Fern Spur and beyond, much of the hillside had been cleared both deliberately by timber cutters and semi-unintentionally by fire, to be replaced by gorse, broom, ragwort, blackberry, and briar, which infested nearby farms. In 1913 the hillside was planted with grass after the weeds were burnt and but the problem continued until regenerating bush gradually reclaimed the area after the Second World War.<sup>301</sup>

In addition to encouraging weeds, burning and cutting manuka and other vegetation on steep slopes caused erosion.<sup>302</sup> To protect the tramway, gorse had been planted along it 'to keep the cuttings from slipping'.<sup>303</sup> The consequence was that by 1918 it was 'overgrown with gorse' in some places five feet high.<sup>304</sup> Nearly a year later, gorse made 'close inspection of the rails and sleepers impossible'.<sup>305</sup> All the tramway was cleared in 1920 to allow access for prospectors and timber cutters, but by 1932 much of it was covered by an 'impenetrable growth of fern and gorse'.<sup>306</sup> The following year, prospectors found it very difficult to reach the mines, for the upper track was 'almost from end to end ... well grown over with gorse, blackberry and

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<sup>300</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 5 November 1910, p. 2; Thames High School, Minutes of Meetings of Board of Governors of 28 April 1936, 22 March 1938, High School Archives, Thames.

<sup>301</sup> Thames High School, Minutes of Meetings of Board of Governors of 6 November 1906, 7 November 1911, 1 April 1913, 26 July 1932, 28 April 1936, 22 March 1938, 22 October 1940, 14 August 1943, 22 March 1947, High School Archives, Thames; Norman Annabell to Secretary, Hauraki Catchment Board, 14 September 1950, Lands and Survey Department, 8/857, Part 1, Land Information New Zealand, Hamilton.

<sup>302</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 24 June 1922, p. 2.

<sup>303</sup> Matthew Paul to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 25 July 1918, Mines Department, MD 1, 21/2/4, ANZ-W; confirmed by Les Hill, interviewed by David Bettison, July 1975.

<sup>304</sup> Matthew Paul to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 25 July 1918; see also Matthew Paul to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 18 October 1918, Mines Department, MD 1, 21/2/4, ANZ-W.

<sup>305</sup> Matthew Paul to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 15 April 1919, Mines Department, MD 1, 21/2/4, ANZ-W.

<sup>306</sup> J.F. Downey (Inspector of Mines) to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 25 July 1932; see also Matthew Paul to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 15 July 1920, Mines Department, MD 1, 21/2/4, ANZ-W.

scrub'.<sup>307</sup> The old mining tracks were 'barely discernible under the dense blanket of gorse'.<sup>308</sup>

Hillsides covered with gorse and ragwort were of no economic value. From the early days of settlement there were proposals to replace the destroyed bush with more profitable trees: indeed replanting was seen by some as a necessity. At the first Arbor Day, in 1892, the chairman of the school committee, James Mills,<sup>309</sup> told the children that the trees they planted would maintain 'our glorious climate, so that we should not suffer as other countries had done from droughts caused by the destruction of the forest trees'. This 'beautifying of their native place' meant that the children enthusiastically planted exotic trees.<sup>310</sup> In 1888 a shopkeeper announced that he had obtained wattle seed, which he recommended as a profitable tree to plant because of its good quality wood and the usefulness of the bark for tanning.<sup>311</sup> Other exotics were planted as soon as the township was established, but the choice was not always popular with visitors or residents. A tourist complained in 1890 that 'the lower hills have been in many cases planted with the lugubrious pine and pinaster, and there are long rows of the same trees round the homesteads'.<sup>312</sup> In 1895, the domain board decided 'to plant the Bald Spur with wattles to provide shelter and improve the picturesque appearance of the Domain extension'.<sup>313</sup> But the predominant tree behind the domain was the pine. When a State Forester inspected in 1898, he urged that these 'sombre and greedy' trees be thinned out because they were 'not in keeping with the genius of Te Arohean scenery. The tree has no pretensions to being ornamental and its utility is questionable for its greediness is notorious. Nothing thrives in its vicinity', but if thinned the native bush would regenerate.<sup>314</sup> In 1950 a conservationist noted 'one discordant feature' on the hillside, namely 'the presence of numbers of exotic pines on the lower slopes immediately above

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<sup>307</sup> J.F. Downey to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 10 February 1933, Mines Department, MD 1, 21/2/4, ANZ-W.

<sup>308</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 11 April 1932, p. 5.

<sup>309</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>310</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 13 August 1892, p. 37.

<sup>311</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 8 August 1888, p. 2.

<sup>312</sup> C.W. Richmond to Emily E. Richmond, 22 June 1890, printed in *The Richmond-Atkinson Papers*, vol. 2, p. 558.

<sup>313</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 5 June 1895, p. 2.

<sup>314</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 16 June 1898, p. 2.

the Domain grounds. These alien trees are out of place here and not in keeping with their surroundings. It is pleasing to record, however, that they are being removed gradually and native trees are coming back into their own instead'.<sup>315</sup> By the early twenty-first century, many pines along with privet, wattle, and other 'alien trees' remained to be removed.

Some miners living in the bush made their own additions to the vegetation, as one living near Buck Rock told his wife in 1900. 'All round our shanty there are columbine, foxgloves and forget-me-nots growing in the grass.... Further up the track there is an amount of musk growing'.<sup>316</sup>

After a large fire in 1907 destroyed the vegetation on Bald Spur, one resident recommended replanting with wattles, for these were evergreen and their flowers were 'very beautiful'.<sup>317</sup> The head gardener of the domain agreed, suggesting larch and eucalypts as well.<sup>318</sup> The *Te Aroha Mail* approved, adding that heather could be planted underneath, for these quick growing trees could recover quickly from fire. New Zealand flora did not 'possess the powers of recuperation ... of other countries. Fire in our bush does not merely destroy; it virtually eradicates. The process of recovery is so slow as to be, for all practical purposes, negligible'.<sup>319</sup> Large slips on Bald Spur prompted the *Te Aroha News* to hope that the Tourist Department would soon plant the bare slopes with 'wattles, etc', and thereby 'greatly enhance the appearance of the hill'.<sup>320</sup>

In July 1910 a big landslide on Bald Spur provoked this newspaper to urge immediate planting 'to prevent the continual breaking away of portions of the hillside'.<sup>321</sup> Despite a recommendation from the head gardener to plant 5,000 eucalypts because they would survive fire and stop slips on the '15 acres of barren stoney ground with small patches of charred manuka in a state of decay' that was Bald Spur, the Tourist Department decided to take no action.<sup>322</sup> Not till two years later was permission given to

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<sup>315</sup> Gow, p. 13.

<sup>316</sup> T.F. Holt to Nell Holt, 18 November 1900, 27 November 1900, T.F. Holt Papers, Te Aroha Museum.

<sup>317</sup> Letter from 'Resident', *Te Aroha News*, 14 April 1908, p. 2.

<sup>318</sup> H. Dalton to G. Kenny, 5 August 1909, Tourist Department, TO 1, 31/32, ANZ-W.

<sup>319</sup> Editorial, *Te Aroha Mail*, 31 August 1909, p. 2.

<sup>320</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 11 September 1909, p. 2.

<sup>321</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 5 July 1910, p. 2.

<sup>322</sup> H. Dalton to G. Kenny, 3 July 1910; recommendation of Director of the Division, 17 August 1910; Tourist Director, 22 August 1910, Tourist Department, TO1, 31/32, ANZ-W.

plant its face with eucalypts and wattles.<sup>323</sup> 'It was intended to plant about 9000 trees, but it was found that the cost would be too great. It was then decided to sow several varieties of gum tree seeds, one of which, *Eucalyptus ficifolia*', was 'a very rare and beautiful gum'.<sup>324</sup> In 1913, between 25,000 and 30,000 gum saplings were planted.<sup>325</sup> After another fire, in 1914, members of the Chamber of Commerce debated whether to plant the burnt area in grass, wattle, or oak trees.<sup>326</sup> Blue gums were planted on the summit of the spur in 1921.<sup>327</sup>

Over the resistance of some residents who wanted only native trees, in the 1930s unemployed men planted *pinus radiata* in burnt areas above the suburb of Ruakaka. As restoring the native bush was 'impracticable', it was necessary to cover up 'those areas in the possession of fern and other unsightly growths'.<sup>328</sup> The *Te Aroha News* was certain that they would create beauty spots.<sup>329</sup> Ten thousand more pines were planted in 1935, and such plantings continued, using unemployed labour, throughout the 1930s.<sup>330</sup> For variety, groves of tree lucerne were planted on Bald Spur.<sup>331</sup> The newspaper praised this planting and the 1936 decision to plant 'mixed gum trees'. These varieties would 'become a distinct asset to the town scenically, and from a utility standpoint as well'. The 'main object' was to provide nectar for native birds during winter, when they were semi-starved and easy prey. Lucerne groves and flowering gums would help the native birds, 'which unfortunately are becoming all too rare', thereby adding to 'the attractiveness of the reserve' for visitors.<sup>332</sup>

## THE NEED TO RETAIN BUSH COVER

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<sup>323</sup> *Te Aroha Mail*, 25 July 1912, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 1 August 1912, p. 2, 17 August 1912, p. 2, 14 October 1912, p. 2.

<sup>324</sup> *Te Aroha Correspondent*, *Auckland Weekly News*, 12 September 1912, p. 48.

<sup>325</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 19 January 1914, p. 3.

<sup>326</sup> *Te Aroha Correspondent*, *New Zealand Herald*, 29 January 1914, p. 9.

<sup>327</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 27 April 1931, p. 2.

<sup>328</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 27 May 1932, p. 1, 14 September 1932, p. 5.

<sup>329</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 9 January 1933, p. 5.

<sup>330</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 30 August 1935, p. 4, 27 July 1938, p. 4.

<sup>331</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 19 July 1935, p. 5.

<sup>332</sup> Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 14 August 1936, p. 4.

In September 1913, the borough council received a letter from the Lands Department concerning the 2,342 acres surrounding the mountain 'set apart as a State forest reserve. It has been reported that this land is of great importance as a catchment area for water supply purposes', and should be controlled to prevent damage to the forest. The mayor was willing to become the forest conservator.<sup>333</sup> Over 20 years later, an editorial quoted the views of 'two well-known Auckland business men' about the scenic delights of the range. 'Vast sweeps of natural bush, leaping from the dead level to a height of two thousand feet', an underestimation of the height of the mountain, were 'a veritable fairyland of delight to the tramper from the city'.<sup>334</sup> Always there was a combination of the practical and the 'sentimental' when arguing for the retention of the bush, as in a 1936 article:

"The person responsible for that fire wants to be hung." The above remark was made by a visitor to the town yesterday when he observed a thin wisp of smoke stealing up from the bush above Waiorongomai. The fire appeared to be in the heart of fairly heavy bush some 500ft up the mountainside.

It is needless to emphasise the danger attending a bush fire on these ranges in view of the natural upward draught which is so easily created. Within the past ten years Te Aroha has experienced three such conflagrations, and each has been deplored at the time by every resident in the town. Fire will not only deprive the mountains of their natural charm and beauty, but it also brings about it an attendant danger of landslides from the loosened soil on the denuded mountain flanks, which is no longer held together by the root cushion of the native bush. Furthermore, the rainfall, which is given a certain amount of regularity by the existence of a plentiful bush surface, is not in any way diffused over a bare area, and thus creates a tendency to sudden floodings and sweeping inundations which may be responsible for considerable damage to the lower levels.

Apart from any sentimental reasons, it will be seen that there are other very real ones why the utmost care should be taken to preserve for the Coromandel ranges the beautiful cloak of native bush which now lends them so much grace, dignity and charm.<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> 'Te Aroha', *New Zealand Herald*, 1 September 1913, p. 4.

<sup>334</sup> Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 31 January 1936, p. 4.

<sup>335</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 12 February 1936, p. 4.

The following month it quoted a long extract from the annual report of the Forest and Bird Protection Society lamenting the loss of the forest, which the newspaper considered applied 'in a large measure to Te Aroha, in view of its mountain and bush scenery, and its potential value as a scenic and tourist resort'.<sup>336</sup> An editorial in the subsequent edition argued that these views provided

food for very serious thought in the minds of not merely nature lovers, but all who may feel a sense of responsibility towards the future. To Te Aroha, a town situated at the foot of an elevated mountain reserve, the towering peaks of which are clothed with native bush of an amazing variety, the sanctity of preservation of our forest life should be regarded as a sacred trust. Every day scientists and experts who have studied this question of our native flora are arriving at the joint conclusion that there could be no greater catastrophe befall this Dominion than the effacement of its forests.

It warned of landslips on cleared hillsides reducing 'the range to a series of monstrous reef outcrops, the crumbling soil baring its unsightly flanks year by year as it washed away'. The conclusion was in 'sentimental vein': 'Our mountains are our heritage, their beauty our inspiration. In their virgin state, under their green mantle of native bush, they are an everlasting asset of which we can as New Zealanders be proud. They must be protected'.<sup>337</sup>

### RESTORING THE ORIGINAL VEGETATION

In the 1940s, there were plans to establish a pine plantation on the lower hillside at Waiorongomai, but the Forestry Department did not proceed with these.<sup>338</sup> Throughout the years that exotics were planted, some people wanted them thinned or removed so that the original vegetation could be restored. As early as 1898 the *Te Aroha News* called for the removal of pines on the hillsides above the hot springs to enable the original

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<sup>336</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 6 March 1936, p. 5.

<sup>337</sup> Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 9 March 1936, p. 4.

<sup>338</sup> Thames High School, Minutes of Meetings of Board of Governors of 22 October 1940, 14 August 1943, 22 March 1947, High School Archives, Thames; *Te Aroha News*, 29 May 1941, p. 5, 22 July 1943, p. 4, 16 October 1947, p. 4.

bush to reappear.<sup>339</sup> In 1910, it quoted a letter from a visiting artist ‘urging the replacing of the ubiquitous pines and willows with native bush’ and repeated its contention that ‘the heterogeneous planting of foreign trees in this country jars on the taste of the traveller, and completely destroys New Zealand’s national characteristics’.<sup>340</sup> Such calls were ignored, and nothing was done until there was an urgent reason to spend the money required. For example, after branches of mature pines were torn off in a 1947 gale, endangering the public, some of these on Bald Spur and in a belt at its base were removed.<sup>341</sup>

Given time, the bush recovered after fire. Two years after one bad fire it was noted that Nature was ‘quickly healing the scars and removing the blemishes made by fires on the mountainside. The black unsightly area of many acres’ was ‘now covered with fern and ti-tree’ and looked ‘as green as ever’.<sup>342</sup> At Waiorongomai, by 1932 prospectors found workings blocked with ‘vigorous young saplings and vines’.<sup>343</sup> After these were cleared away, the area was again abandoned, and by 1948 was ‘a tangled wilderness’ visited occasionally ‘only by pig and goat-hunters’. A party of trampers found that ‘in some places the going was particularly heavy and tracks through the bush had to be cut’.<sup>344</sup> A mining company director who hoped to restart mining there reported in 1950 that the mines were ‘impossible of access due to overgrowth’.<sup>345</sup>

In 1928, a resident who was ‘adverse to the planting of any trees other than native’ urged the planting on the burnt hillsides of coprosmas, pittosporums, and wineberry.<sup>346</sup> The council sought the advice of the State Forest Service Department, to be told that planting would be slow, difficult and, if plants needed to be purchased, expensive. Suitably discouraged, the

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<sup>339</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 16 June 1898, p. 2.

<sup>340</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 24 September 1910, p. 2, 1 October 1910, p. 2.

<sup>341</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 11 April 1947, p. 4, 29 August 1947, p. 4.

<sup>342</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 13 April 1931, p. 4.

<sup>343</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 11 April 1932, p. 5.

<sup>344</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 29 January 1948, p. 5.

<sup>345</sup> B.J. Dunsheath to Minister of Mines, 6 February 1950, Mines Department, MD 1, 23/2/1218, ANZ-W; for an assessment of how the forest recovered after mining ended, see David O. Bergin, *Forest Succession in Waiorongomai Valley, Kaimai Range, New Zealand* (M Sc thesis, University of Waikato, 1979).

<sup>346</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 17 February 1928, p. 1.

council took no action.<sup>347</sup> Plantings on any large scale did not take place till much later, and first required the removal of exotics. In 1967, for example, 1,000 native trees were planted on the lower part of Bald Spur ‘in the fairly large area where tall pine trees were removed’.<sup>348</sup> In 1972, after the building of a television repeater station on the summit destroyed the only alpine herb-field in the northern part of the North Island apart from the one on Moehau, the Waikato branch of the Forest and Bird Protection Society arranged for its replanting with the assistance of local service clubs.<sup>349</sup> Inspection of the summit today suggests that this was not a success.

## CONCLUSION

And so by the late twentieth century the cycle was complete. From admiration of the beauties of the vegetation, to a sometimes-regretted exploitation of it, to destruction through carelessness or mischievousness, to replanting with exotics, to natural regeneration occasionally assisted by plantings so that the vegetation (possums and the like permitting) could start to return to a state similar to that of 100 years before. That the mountain remained clothed in its original if damaged vegetation was due to its topography in particular: it was not suitable for farming, and its natural appearance attracted tourists. Picnics in gullies, fern collecting, and bush walking and the like required that the vegetation be preserved in as unmodified a form as possible, the clear economic benefit of attracting tourists outweighing any alternative uses. Firewood cutting and mining had taken place only on limited parts of the mountain, and was banned immediately behind the hot springs, for this practical as well as ‘sentimental’ reason, a practical reason that still attracts visitors to the district.

### *Appendix*

*Figure 1:* Portion of Te Aroha mountain, from the railway bridge, n.d. [1890s?], showing damaged done to the bush by mining. Bald Spur on left of photograph, with Prospectors’ Spur in the middle of it; Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, C18,872; used with permission.

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<sup>347</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 30 April 1928, p. 4.

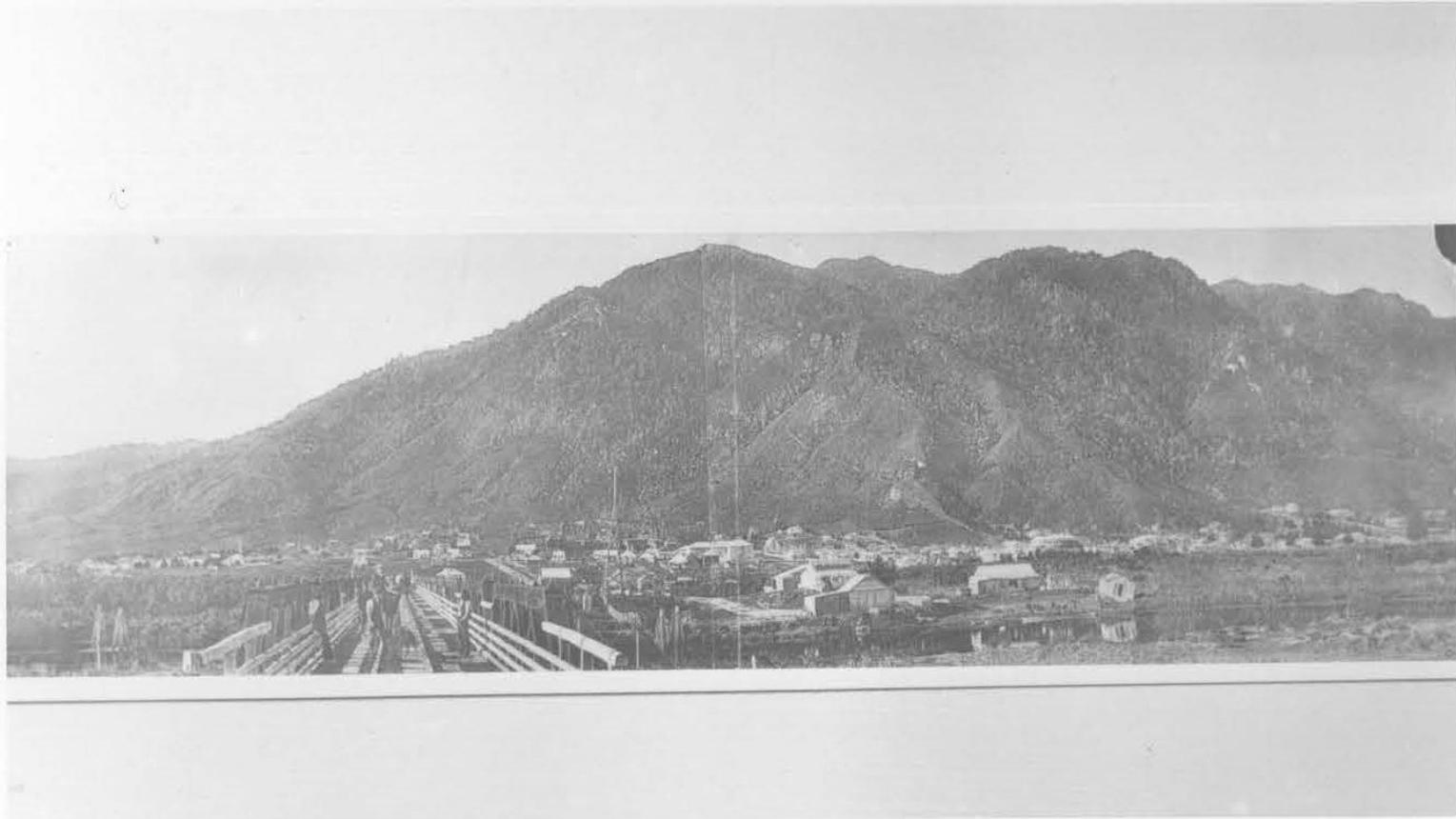
<sup>348</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 13 July 1967, p. 1.

<sup>349</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 21 September 1972, p. 1.

*Figure 2:* Te Aroha mountain, photographed from the railway bridge, n.d. [early twentieth century?], showing the damage done to the bush after settlement. Prospectors' Spur, with signs of the initial mining on the mountain, is on the right of the photograph, with Bald Spur in the middle and the Tui portion of the goldfield on the left. Te Aroha and District Museum; used with permission.



*Figure 1:* Portion of Te Aroha mountain, from the railway bridge, n.d. [1890s?], showing damaged done to the bush by mining. Bald Spur on left of photograph, with Prospectors' Spur in the middle of it; Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, C18,872; used with permission.



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