

PROSPECTORS' WORKING LIVES IN GENERAL AND AT TE
AROHA IN PARTICULAR

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Abstract: *The lure of gold attracted some men to suffer hardship in the hope of making their fortune by discovering a rich deposit. Prospecting was a skilled occupation, requiring an understanding of geology that many hopefuls lacked, and as the easy discoveries had been made by the twentieth century required increasingly systematic and scientific work. Although many who believed in the romance of gold hunting argued that prospectors were born not made, the amateurs often failed to understand what they discovered. Many examples can be given of enthusiastic but incompetent prospectors, who hastily marked out ground but equally hastily abandoned it once tests had proved any ore found was unpayable.*

Some men preferred the life of the prospector to that of the miner, feeling themselves free to come and go and always seeking a new find; it has been argued that for some the search was more important than the financial reward. The search involved very hard work tracing outcrops and reefs through burning the heavy bush or following streams or even probing for the lode with gum spears. When old workings existed, these would be checked as well. Samples had to be taken for later testing. Working far away from families and supplies was difficult and dangerous, requiring carrying heavy packs in usually rugged areas with few tracks and working in any weather. As an example of prospecting, a detailed case study is given of enthusiastic amateurs exploring Waiorongomai in the 1960s.

Those who worked for themselves could spend years in isolation, sometimes with some success. By the twentieth century few young people wanted to follow their example, commonly seeing them as 'hatters' willing to live a hard life in hope of making their fortune; William Tregoweth was an example of one such 'sanguine' man. But they were genuine in their efforts to find gold, unlike many subsidized prospecting parties. When good finds were made, prospectors made little profit when they sold their discovery to investors, and overall they felt themselves to be badly treated despite their crucial role in developing new fields.

THE LURE OF GOLD

By way of summarizing the achievements of most prospectors, an old Cornish saying:

Where he be,
There he be;
Where he b'aint,
There be I.¹

Despite such lack of success, the lure of gold enticed many men into trying their luck as prospectors. One journal commented that men would 'go anywhere and endure anything for the yellow metal called gold. No more potent talisman exists the wide world over', and wherever gold was found men rushed there. An 1897 article considered this was 'best exemplified in the case of the miners of the old school':

Bent with age and rheumatism, let them but hear of a new goldfield, and ... they long to shoulder their picks and be off to the New El Dorado, aye, even though it lies at the confines of the globe.... Failure never daunts the true gold-seeker, though success may spoil him. His present poverty but whets his appetite. He is essentially a dreamer, and like all dreamers has pleasures of the imagination we poor practical creatures never know.... Talk with such men and you will see that it is not actualities that they live on and concern themselves about, but future possibilities and might-have-beens. I was never more struck with this characteristic of theirs than the other day when speaking to an old miner. He had read that gold had been discovered in some almost inaccessible peak in the Southern Alps some thousand feet above the snow line. He was firmly persuaded that if he, poor decrepit mortal, could only get there he would find a magnificent fortune awaiting him. I ventured to point out the relative accessibility of the Thames goldfields: but no, his heart was fixed on higher things.... The Auckland goldfields were too near at hand, too well-known to suit his romantic taste.²

In 1890, a man who had prospected in Otago wrote about what had motivated his party:

No one can form any idea of the feelings of a party of adventurers going on an errand of this kind in an unknown region; the hopes that animate the breast that it might be their good fortune to strike something very rich, and of the possibility of becoming the possessors of untold wealth. All these kinds of feelings run through the covetous heart, and nerve a poor, wretched sinner to

¹ Sam Chapman, *Coromandel in the 'Golden' Days* (Hamilton, 1975), p. 36.

² *New Zealand Graphic*, 3 April 1897, p. 402.

endure all sorts of hardships whilst in the pursuit of this phantom.³

A ROMANTIC VIEW

An 1888 survey of the Hauraki goldfields included a typical view about prospectors:

The prospecting genius seems to be inborn with some, and seems to run in families, the McNeills,⁴ the McIsaacs,⁵ and the McWilliams⁶ being some of the best prospectors in the peninsula, fine hardy daring young fellows, of sound wind and lithe of limb, brought up in the bush, knowing it as well as the native, full of courage and dauntless energy. The mining industry could not get along without such. They are the advance guard, the pioneers, to them civilization owes much: quiet, inoffensive, unobtrusive men, who love the solitude of the bush, far from the heat and turmoil of the busy town life. They seem wedded to toil and hardship, and their years are spent in quietly and unobtrusively working out their own ideas as to how and when and where the reefs which carry the hidden treasure are located. I know of no finer man than the genuine prospector, in every sense of the word, truthful, honest, upright, fair and square in all their dealings. Their battle is with the rugged forces of nature, not with the schemes of visionary men; their daily toil is amongst God's noblest works, not with the handicraft of man's fallen nature; their eyes behold the pure, the noble, and the beautiful; to them the meaner ways of a

³ Andrew Bools, *The Wonders of Providence and Grace, as illustrated in the life of the author, while doing business in deep waters, in travels on sea and land, and over the gold fields of Australia and New Zealand* (London, 1890), p. 74.

⁴ Alexander McNeill briefly participated in mining at Waiorongomai: see Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 15, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

⁵ John McIsaacs participated in the Te Aroha rush: see Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 603, issued 25 November 1880, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 1533/1e; Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 176, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

⁶ Often spelt MacWilliams, as in the death certificate of William Francis MacWilliams, 18 January 1931, 1931/736, BDM. Commonly known as 'Daldy', he was a partner in Our Boys, one of the first claims pegged out at Te Aroha in 1880: see Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 167, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 26 November 1880, p. 3; *Thames Star*, 22 December 1880, p. 2, 24 February 1881, p. 2. Also see paper on the Daldy McWilliams 'outrage'.

false and shallow civilization are alike unknown and uncared for. We rejoice in numbering amongst our warmest friends some of these heroic fellows, men with whom we would willingly share our last shilling, men with rough exterior, but beneath whose breast beats a warm and honest heart.⁷

AN UNROMANTIC VIEW

John McCombie, a prominent mine manager who was one of the first prospectors of Waihi,⁸ de-romanticized this notion of toiling amidst the glories of ‘God’s noblest works’ by writing about how, although he still admired the scenery, being a prospector had changed his attitude to the beauties of nature:

At one time I could admire a stream for its natural beauty, but now I do so for its artificial usefulness. When looking at a waterfall over which some people would go into ecstacies of delight, I calculate with my mind’s eye the probable fall and volume of water, with the view to ascertaining the actual amount of motive power available for machinery purposes. Whenever I see a bold mountain range, which some would admire for its lofty or rugged grandeur, I endeavour to estimate the quantity of timber growing on its thickly-wooded slopes; and I guess at the amount of “backs” [vertical height of reefs] it would afford, presuming the formation of which it is made up to be auriferous.⁹

The needs of prospectors to clear the bush to expose quartz outcrops led to a most unromantic assault on the vegetation. After prospecting was permitted in Ohinemuri at the beginning of 1875, the former Maori landowners were soon ‘making great complaints respecting the reckless way in which prospectors are firing the bush. They allege that in many cases it is done willfully, and that the effect is to destroy a large quantity of valuable kauri timber’.¹⁰ As with the prospector’s outlook described by

⁷ Thomas M. Humphreys, *Handbook of the Auckland Goldfields, New Zealand* (Auckland, 1888), p. 17.

⁸ See *Cyclopaedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 471.

⁹ ‘Aboriginal’ [John McCombie], ‘A Retrospect of Ohinemuri Goldfield’, *Auckland Weekly News*, 22 April 1893, p. 21.

¹⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 20 January 1875, p. 2.

McCombie, such men sought financial reward and only rarely considered their environmental impact.¹¹

SKILLS REQUIRED

In another article, McCombie wrote that ‘prospectors, like poets, are born, not made to order, and there is not one man out of every hundred men possessed of the qualifications necessary to success’.¹² A columnist specializing in mining matters concurred:

Prospectors are born, not made, and from necessity they must be both hardy and venturesome. The successful prospector invariably is a man of intelligence, with sufficient knowledge of geology to enable him to distinguish the difference between volcanic and alluvial formations. Then again, he should know enough of metallurgy to recognize the matrix of gold and silver in every form, as well as that of other metals having a commercial value.¹³

Even assuming that the oft-repeated view about prospectors being born not made was correct, the knowledge of geology required for success was formidable. James Alexander Pond,¹⁴ a speculator at Waiorongomai and other fields,¹⁵ and owner of the last battery at Waiorongomai,¹⁶ was appointed Provincial Analyst in 1882 and Colonial Analyst in 1893.¹⁷ With

¹¹ See paper on the vegetation of Te Aroha area.

¹² ‘Aboriginal’, ‘Gold or Bullion’, *Auckland Weekly News*, 8 April 1893, p. 35.

¹³ ‘Obadiah’, ‘Shares and Mining’, *Observer*, 27 June 1903, p. 20.

¹⁴ See paper on his life.

¹⁵ For investments at Tui and Waiorongomai over many years, see for example Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Mining Applications 1896, 119/1896, BBAV 11582/4a; Mining Applications 1909, 27/1909, BBAV 11289/20a; Mining Applications 1923, 43/1923, BCDG 11289/1a, Mining Applications 1928, 11/1928, Mining Applications 1929, 12/1929, BCDG 11289/2a, ANZ-A; for investments in both North and South Islands in 1882, see *New Zealand Gazette*, 19 January 1882, pp. 90, 91, 9 February 1882, p. 245, 20 July 1882, p. 988, 21 September 1882, p. 1311, 19 October 1882, p. 1522, 14 December 1882, p. 1886, 21 December 1882, pp. 1915, 1916.

¹⁶ Annual Report of the Waiorongomai Gold Mining Co. Ltd., 30 September 1935, Eric Coppard Papers, Waihi.

¹⁷ *Freeman’s Journal*, 6 October 1882, p. 10; *Observer*, 2 December 1893, p. 18.

a life-long interest in treating ores, in 1883 he provided advice on how to find gold for the 'Hints for Prospectors' chapter in *Brett's Colonists' Guide and Cyclopaedia of Useful Knowledge*:

In the search for the precious metal, the skilled miner or prospector pays close attention to the water-courses, the majority of the finds being brought to light by the action of streams cutting through older alluvial beds, and thus exposing that which was placed in position long ages ago, or by the deterioration of the outcropping reefs and their gravitation to the water-courses. For this purpose, no better instrument can be used in the search than the miner's prospecting dish; though in the absence of this, a shovel, a basin, the lid of a billy, or even a plate will be effectual, in skilled hands, in detecting the specks of the precious metal, if present to any appreciable extent. In choosing a spot in a stream from whence to *pan off* for a trial, the miner seeks some part of the stream below a junction with another water-course, or where, in rushing over a precipice, the stream has brought down a large portion of gravel, and here, temporarily turning the stream, he takes a dishful from the gravel, as deep down as possible below the surface, where it is compact; or a false bottom may be found, and by carefully washing the *debris* and casting out the stones, he at length brings the force of gravity to bear, and reduced the quantity until only a small portion of the dishful is left, composed chiefly of black iron-sand or pyrites. In this small surplus his attention is concentrated to perceive whether or not the precious metal is present; and here the practical miner has a great advantage, as nothing but experience will tell at a glance whether the material is gold or some of those substances - copper-pyrites, or yellow mica - which frequently accompany the gold, and so closely resemble it, that a few methods for detection may be of use. One of the most simple expedients is to bring the *prospect* on to a morsel of biscuit (unglazed porcelain) and press it with a penknife. In the event of the material being pyrites, the particles are brittle, and crush, and a black streak is left on the biscuit, while mica will crush to a dull yellow powder; but gold, under the pressure of the knife, assumes its metallic lustre, which is so well known, and cannot be mistaken. In the event of the material being heavy, and the particles, apparently gold, being too fine to isolate, a very simple and exact method is to place the prospect in a test tube, with a little warm water and a globule of quicksilver. Vigorously shake the tube, keeping it stopped with the finger. On removing the mercury to a porcelain capsule, the half of a tobacco pipe bowl (broken longitudinally) will do, and gently heating it, the quicksilver will volatilise, leaving the gold, if any was present in the prospect, when it may be brought to a bead before the blow-pipe, on a morsel of charcoal; or, if not sufficient for this purpose,

the pressure of the knife will give the characteristic lustre of gold, as already stated. This method is very delicate, and several dishes can be panned off, the prospects combined, and thus dealt with, care being taken that the mercury was free from gold in the first place. The same method can, of course, be applied to rock specimens, portions of reef, etc, after they have been brought to a coarse powder, and washed in the dish.¹⁸

In the light of this advice, meant to encourage the amateur to try his luck, an ‘excellent story’, as the *Observer* described it, of prospecting during the Te Aroha rush was both relevant and ironic:

Mr Pond fossicked around for specimens, and one evening was engaged discussing the geological formation of the ground, when an unlearned but practical miner came to him and presented him with a piece of metal, fresh from the retort, for his examination. The *savant* held it up in the twilight, and after gravely adjusting his spectacles, examined it closely. He scraped it with his pocket-knife, placed it close to the candle, and afterwards put it in his mouth. After tasting it and biting it, he held it up, with the air of a man “who knows, you know” said, “I should consider that this mineral is sulphide of lead”. “Sulphide of lead be d---d!” said the impolite exhibitor, “it’s retorted gold!”¹⁹

There were many such stories, especially during the 1890s when overseas experts inspected New Zealand mines: the ‘practical’ miner always won over the ‘expert’.²⁰ It illustrated that practice was harder than theory; many amateurs announced discoveries of reefs and rich specimens in areas containing neither.²¹

Henry Hopper Adams, junior, was briefly associated with Waiorongomai mining.²² A son of Henry Hopper Adams,²³ a leading figure

¹⁸ *Brett's Colonists' Guide and Cyclopaedia of Useful Knowledge*, ed. Thomson W. Leys (Auckland, 1883), pp. 720-721.

¹⁹ *Observer*, 1 January 1881, p. 144.

²⁰ See papers on skills and on financing miners and mining companies.

²¹ For instance, near Ngaruawahia: ‘A Waikato Gold Find’, *New Zealand Herald*, 18 January 1895, p. 6.

²² H.H. Adams to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 27 December 1949, Ministry of Commerce, AATJ 6090, box 237, 18/65; Under-Secretary. Mines Department, to Director of Health, 17 May 1951, Health Department, YCBE 1990/524a, ANZ-W.

²³ See paper on his life.

in Hauraki mining, in 1933 he gave advice designed to encourage prospecting, but the details may have discouraged those without prior experience:

The gold-seeker cannot expect to find gold in the same manner as was done in the past; he has to search more diligently, work harder, use better methods and drop a lot of the old idea.

My advice to the prospector is to begin his search, firstly, in the beds of creeks which intersect gold-bearing country; secondly, in the sidelands leading into these. He must look for unaltered and altered andesite, because where the one is found the other is not far away. The unaltered andesite will be found to have some bearing on the existence and course of any veins found. The direction traversed by the unaltered andesite should be carefully noted, but it is the altered rock that offers the best possibility of containing gold-bearing veins.

Hints to Fossickers

When he is satisfied that he is in the right location, the prospector should do the following:- (1) Gather samples of moss or any fibrous matter found in the creeks, burn these, and pan off – gold is very often caught and found in this manner. (2) Follow up and test ironstone veins – these sometimes make gold when they intersect other veins. (3) Cracks and vughs should be scraped out and the material obtained tested – if gold is found I warrant he is not far from the source. (4) Veins of any kind whatever should be traced up – sometimes it is found that clay, or pug seams, bands of iron-stained country, and cracks lead to or turn into quartz veins; a mere crack may be the wall of a gold-bearing vein. (5) Follow up the faults and test for gold or quartz – if any are found, look out for the intersection of a vein. (6) Ascertain the direction traversed by any known lodes adjacent to the area being prospected and let this be a guide as to the direction in which cuts and tunnels are projected. (7) Be careful to pound all samples very finely and take care that the prospecting dish is properly cleaned, free from grease and is nicely blackened.

Cleanliness is essential in the washing-off of a sample. Use only clean water, especially when the material being panned off contains a lot of tough clay, as this contains a lot of alumina and is very light. Great care is necessary to prevent this substance from floating the gold out of the dish. All material discarded should be washed perfectly clean. A small ball of clay allowed to roll around the dish, and then discarded, is sufficient to rob the sample of the whole of its gold content, and in this manner a good chance may be passed over.²⁴

²⁴ H.H.A[dams], 'The Search for Gold. Hauraki Opportunities. Advice to Prospectors. Where to Seek for Traces', *New Zealand Herald*, 10 January 1933, p. 12.

John Henderson, when director of the Geological Survey Office in 1930, warned that prospectors were in a very different situation to early ones, requiring much more detail about the ‘size and value of the deposit’ before capitalists were interested.

To ascertain this is in many cases a serious and costly undertaking. Thus the old type of prospector, with his independence, his indomitable courage, his perseverance, and his more or less rule-of-thumb methods, is now but rarely successful. All the goldfields have been so thoroughly searched that all, or nearly all, the deposits the old prospector is likely to find, even with luck, are already known. Only a few of the old type of prospector survive. In the early days of all the goldfields so many genuine prizes were to be found and so many prospects could be sold at a profit that the lottery of prospecting and supporting prospectors was sufficient: but now for many years business caution has taken the place of speculative optimism, and prospecting offers but a precarious livelihood to those who will not abandon the life they love. The times require a new type of prospector who has not only substantial financial backing, but also extensive knowledge of the different kinds of auriferous deposits and of the geological conditions that effect their economic value.²⁵

Pamphlets and books were produced to advise prospectors. For example, S. Herbert Cox, who had investigated the geology of Te Aroha after the first gold discovery there,²⁶ published a ‘practical handbook for prospectors, explorers, settlers, and all interested in the opening-up and development of new land’ in 1898.²⁷ At the end of the 1890s mining boom, the *Ohinemuri Gazette*, fulfilling its role as a ‘Goldfields Journal’, published extracts from *The Prospector’s Handbook* explaining the tools and

²⁵ John Henderson, ‘Gold in New Zealand’, *New Zealand Journal of Science and Technology*, vol. 12 no. 3 (December 1930), p. 163.

²⁶ S. Herbert Cox, ‘On Certain Points Connected with the Geology of the Auckland District’, in *Reports of Geological Explorations During 1881* (Wellington, 1882), pp. 96-97; Cox, ‘Gold Fields of the Cape Colville Peninsula’, in *Reports of Geological Explorations During 1882* (Wellington, 1883), pp. 5, 15-16, 37.

²⁷ S. Herbert Cox, *Prospecting for Minerals: A practical handbook for prospectors, explorers, settlers, and all interested in the opening-up and development of new lands* (London, 1898).

techniques needed, and the type of ores in the Hauraki region. It concluded with encouraging words, presumably written by its proprietor, Edwin Edwards,²⁸ an investor in mining at Tui and elsewhere:²⁹

Let the prospector be not discouraged; his is a hard life, we know, but he may be sustained by hope and faith; by the proud knowledge of his pioneership, “something attempted, something done” and that love of battle innate in our race of resisting Some Thing from Some One, which remains with us. Civilized and unsavaged as we are supposed to be, Nature, dear virgin Nature, here in our goldfields coyly holds her charms from us. She wants us to make them out own (Nature is always spoken of in the feminine, please note.) We, the prospector must, therefore woo her, with all our heart. We are doing so. We think she is yielding. We love to hope so.³⁰

In 1895, an exponent of the theory that the true prospector was ‘born, not made’ described those prospecting at Thames as not scientific but as having ‘a good eye for the make of the country’.³¹ According to another view, written three years later, probably by William Green, a Thames miner,³² the true prospector was

a great observer of Nature, reading the rocks with a passing glance, and almost unnoticed by himself, receiving a favourable or an unfavourable impression of the country he is passing through to be easily remembered again for further operations.

Unlike the ordinary “practical” miner, whose fitness to prospect the country for reefs and minerals is usually gauged by his ability to trace the winding of a reef underground, the “born” prospector would barely take weeks in the same field where the other would take years to obtain practical results....

²⁸ See *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 2 June 1909, p. 2.

²⁹ For examples of his investing in the Tui area, see Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Mining Applications 1896, 18, 27/1896, BBAV 11289/14a; Plaints 1901, 25, 28/1901, BBAV 11572/2a; Plaints 1903-1907, 1/1903, 1, 2, 9/1904, 37/1905, 7, 8, 22/1906, 5/1907, BBAV 11572/3a, ANZ-A.

³⁰ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 5 September 1896, p. 4.

³¹ Special Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 26 October 1895, p. 28.

³² See *Thames Electoral Roll*, 1897, p. 26; *Thames Star*, Warden’s Court, 19 February 1901, p. 2, 5 June 1901, p. 4. Could he be the William Green who was a prospector and geologist in Otago? See *Thames Advertiser*, 3 October 1887, p. 3.

But the times are changing, and the old type of the brave, independent prospector is passing away....

The methods of working are also changing. And the somewhat aimless, haphazard style of running about knapping stones here and there, is yielding to a more comprehensive and systematic search for minerals based on scientific principles, giving profitable and speedy returns when faithfully followed up.³³

Using science would have avoided much wasted energy, as illustrated by an unexpected discovery in Te Aroha in 1936. When an owner of one of the original miners' cottages lifted the linoleum in one room he found a trap door, under which was a length of drainpipe containing 'a rather fine collection of quartz specimens'. Upon examination, though some contained gold, the majority were what was 'commonly known as "new chum's gold," or "iron pyrites" and "peacock ore," that pretty attractive stone which had fooled so many a tenderfoot, and which even to-day gives rise to golden hopes in the hearts of the uninitiated'. The discovery of this cache, undisturbed for decades, led to this peroration:

There is about the little haul a certain atmosphere of romance, and one can imagine the fossicker of the past arriving at his hut in the evening, closing the door and carefully examining the finds of the day, lifting the door to his trove and adding the day's contribution to the pieces of quartz already deposited in a gleaming heap in their hiding place.³⁴

One can, indeed; but, less romantically, one can also imagine the fossicker eventually realizing the worthlessness of most of his specimens and abandoning them. Perhaps he was one of those who participated in the 'considerable amount of prospecting' on the eastern side of the Waiorongomai Creek in the 1880s without finding 'even traces of gold';³⁵ no gold was ever found there.

ENTHUSIASTIC BUT INCOMPETENT PROSPECTING

³³ W. Green, 'The Prospector's Quest', *Thames Star*, 27 August 1898, p. 2; reprinted in *Thames Advertiser*, 29 August 1898, p. 4.

³⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 18 November 1936, p. 5.

³⁵ Matthew Paul (Inspector of Mines) to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 25 July 1911, Mines Department, MD 1, 6/61, ANZ-W.

There were many examples of incompetent prospectors, particularly during rushes, which attracted men lacking geological knowledge or mining experience. For instance, during the Ohinemuri rush of 1875, a correspondent recorded the following spectacle:

A few days ago a number of miners assembled at the reserve to clean out an old trench, for the purpose of testing to their satisfaction the payable character of the reef. The cutting is on the spur, and running east and west. On the eastern end the reef, measuring from 2 to 3 feet, underlying about 1 in 3, could be plainly seen by anyone who understood the nature of a reef. Being cleaned out, a *miner* jumped into the workings and proceeded to sink, choosing for his starting-point about 6 feet from the lode, consequently he was sinking in the country [worthless rock], and threw all his debris in the eastern end of [the] cutting, completely burying up the reef. He occasionally examined the strata through which he was sinking (mullock) with such an air of geological importance that many present looked upon his decision as final for the prosperity or failure of Ohinemuri. He explained that he was perfectly satisfied that there was no gold there.³⁶

In contrast, another correspondent's report, published in the same issue, revealed there was gold to be found and revealed the conditions that prospectors had to endure:

It rained hard all day, and myself and companion, an experienced old digger who was with me, came in for as good a ducking as our worst enemies, if we have any, could have wished us. We commenced operations in the Rotokohu basin, and followed for a long distance one of the most unpromising-looking creeks for gold to be found in a day's march. Not a particle of quartz could we find in the bed of the creek, and the prospects resulted, as we expected, in nil; at last we came to a waterfall, which from an artistic point of view was no doubt very beautiful, but to us was commonplace, there being no indications of reef or gold, so we successfully scaled it, and passed on further up the creek, country still the same sandstone rock, and no quartz; at last between two sandstone boulders we tried a dish of clayey mullock, and to our astonishment there glistened at the bottom of the pan a speck of yellow gleaming gold about the size of a pin's head: further on a better prospect could be obtained, until at last we suddenly came upon a party of diggers prospecting their claim; it is Smith and

³⁶ 'From a Correspondent', *Thames Advertiser*, 16 March 1875, p. 3.

party,³⁷ and the locale is christened Smith's Flat; here a good show of loose gold and rubbly quartz has been found.... By this time the afternoon was beginning to wane, and having a good few miles to travel over a rough country before we could reach our tents, we were obliged to retrace our steps, which we did at a smart pace, and were very thankful when we could cast off the clothes that had been clinging to us all day like a wet swab.³⁸

Failures were inevitable, not simply because of incompetence but because of the absence of payable ore in most areas examined. In 1895, for instance, a miner, William George Sheriff Jeffrey,³⁹ was one of two prospectors employed by the Cadman Prospecting Association to test its Waiorongomai ground.⁴⁰ They tested abandoned claims, mainly by surface trenching and sampling reefs exposed in old drives, but found nothing of any value.⁴¹

HASTY INITIAL JUDGMENTS

Prospectors of new ground often had to make hasty judgements about the value of their finds. In 1888, it was claimed that stone was 'not judged by its colours of gold'; as 'few' prospectors understood mineralogy, they sought to discover a reef in an area 'with a name for good rich ore'. Only rarely did a prospector 'risk waiting until he has tested the ore and found it payable before applying for a lease. The chances are that if he did, he would be jumped'.⁴² To protect their interests, prospectors had to notify the warden's office of marking out ground they often held only briefly. For

³⁷ James Smith (or Smyth) was a prominent prospector at Ohinemuri and elsewhere on the Hauraki Peninsula: for his exploring of Ohinemuri up to and including 1875, see *Thames Advertiser*, 16 February 1875, p. 3, 13 March 1875, p. 3, 15 March 1875, p. 3, 16 March 1875, p. 3, 10 April 1875, p. 3.

³⁸ 'From an Occasional Correspondent', *Thames Advertiser*, 16 March 1875, p. 3.

³⁹ See *Te Aroha News*, 26 September 1885, p. 2, 13 February 1889, p. 2, 23 January 1895, p. 2, 6 February 1895, p. 2, Waiorongomai Correspondent, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Advertiser*, 13 February 1897, p. 2.

⁴⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 20 February 1895, p. 2.

⁴¹ William Jeffrey to James Mills (Chairman, Cadman Prospecting Party), 16 March 1895, 13 April 1895, Mines Department, MD 1, 97/1072, ANZ-W.

⁴² *Auckland Weekly News*, 2 June 1888, p. 36.

example, William Quinn, a part owner of several Waiorongomai claims,⁴³ on 21 February 1882 pegged out the Hopeful, but abandoned his interest on 31 February.⁴⁴ William Shakespeare, a participant in the Te Aroha rush,⁴⁵ marked out the Little Wonder on 3 October 1882 but abandoned it 13 days later.⁴⁶ And John Watson Walker, a leading mine manager,⁴⁷ marked out five claims at Waiorongomai in 1882, abandoning four within ten days and one within 18.⁴⁸

PREFERRING TO BE PROSPECTORS RATHER THAN MINERS

One reason why some men did not develop their discoveries was that prospecting, not mining, was their life. John McCombie wrote that ‘the free life and self dependence, together with the fact the one never knew today what tomorrow would bring forth, had an attraction of its own that can only be understood by those who have had similar experiences’.⁴⁹ Another writer stated that it was

surprising how strongly the habit of prospecting holds a man. Many a one has tried to change his nomadic sort of life and settle down to some other pursuit, but finds it impossible to do so for long, and soon returns to his gypsy mode of life again. Hence the saying, “once a prospector always a prospector.”⁵⁰

⁴³ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 252, BBAV 11567/1a; Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 41, 65, 103, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

⁴⁴ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Notices of Marking Out Claims 1882, February, no. 25, BBAV 11557/2a, ANZ-A.

⁴⁵ See Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 189, 201, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

⁴⁶ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Notices of Marking Out Claims 1882, October, no. 19, BBAV 11557/2a, ANZ-A.

⁴⁷ See paper on his life.

⁴⁸ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Notices of Marking Out Claims 1882, March, no. 71, May, no. 116, BBAV 11557/2a, ANZ-A.

⁴⁹ John McCombie, ‘Looking for Gold’, *Thames Star*, 3 May 1902, p. 6; reprinted in John McCombie. ‘The History of the Waihi Mine’, *Mining Magazine*, vol. 8 (1913), p. 136.

⁵⁰ W. Green, ‘The Prospector’s Quest’, *Thames Advertiser*, 29 August 1898, p. 4.

Many seemed reluctant to settle down to the more mundane life of a miner. One journalist wrote, in 1895, that, after a prospector found a reef, ‘he rarely sticks to it. He sells out, and starts to look for something else’.⁵¹ Another observer concurred: ‘When the prospector has found a reef he does not as a rule care for the drudgery of “opening it up,” but looks around for a buyer, and then generally sells his “find” too cheap’.⁵² This was a universal phenomenon; a historian referred to a Canadian man as ‘the classic prospector for whom the search was more important than the rewards, even though the dream of riches was what kept him going’.⁵³ Such men were ‘not seeking a job for wages, like the contemporary army of young men who work the world’s oil rigs’.⁵⁴

METHODS OF DISCOVERING LODES

To expose outcrops hidden in dense bush, the vegetation was burnt. In 1887, one prospector with 20 years’ experience of cutting through ‘impervious undergrowth’ called for government assistance to form tracks to provide access to the interior of the peninsula. ‘I for one cannot blame prospectors and others, whose avocations take them into the bush, for clearing their way by means of fire’ despite ‘the risk of destroying a deal of valuable standing timber’.⁵⁵ Where there were no outcrops, as on the eastern side of the Te Aroha ranges, where access was provided in the 1890s by new pack tracks between Waiorongomai and Tui and between Karangahake and Katikati, tracing supposed reefs was even more difficult. A mining correspondent, who inspected this area (‘about as difficult of access as can well be imagined’) observed ‘quantities of boulders and float stones, from which gold is readily obtainable by crushing and panning. The difficulty in locating the parent lode is enormous, and the work of probing the country with gum spears monotonous to a degree’.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Special Reporter, ‘The Thames District’, *New Zealand Herald*, 1 November 1895, p. 3.

⁵² W. Green, ‘The Prospector’s Quest’, *Thames Advertiser*, 29 August 1898, p. 4.

⁵³ Douglas Fetherling, *The Gold Crusades: A social history of gold rushes, 1849-1929*, rev. ed. (Toronto, 1997), p. 176.

⁵⁴ Fetherling, p. 6.

⁵⁵ Letter from ‘Prospector’, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 February 1887, p. 3.

⁵⁶ ‘Werahiko’, ‘Te Aroha Letter’, *Mining Standard*, 13 May 1897, p. 4.

The most common method of finding reefs was to follow creeks. James Williams, in a prize-winning essay published in 1907, described the work of the ‘old-timer’:

He was a man of great perseverance, and stamina. His usual method of working was what he called “following float.” As he travelled slowly along the creek-bed he continually turned over the shingle in search of “shoad-stones,” pieces of quartz, say, with traces of mineral attached. Having found some he would trace them up the creek, picking his way along until he could see no more. He would then conclude that he had passed the outcrop from which the pieces of float had been broken, and would examine the banks till he found it. Often he had to remove much soil and undergrowth before his perseverance was rewarded. Sometimes he had to sink shallow pits, sometimes to trench, but he usually succeeded in bringing to light a block of “stone.” From this he would break off likely looking pieces, powder them between two flat stones - or in a mortar, if he had one - and wash the powder in a dish. The lighter stuff would be swirled away under his manipulations, and finally there were remain some greyish sand, which might or might not contain a speck or two of gold. He did not concern himself greatly about any other metal, and his methods were undoubtedly primitive, yet it is really extraordinary to an outsider to see how close to the actual gold-content of a lode the ignorant prospector with his old-fashioned tin dish could arrive.

These “old-timers” were invariably patient and painstaking men, their time was their own, they travelled over the ground very slowly, and throughout the day their minds were fixed on “float.”⁵⁷

In 1895, a report on Hauraki mining noted that anyone who had attempted to penetrate the bush anywhere on the peninsula ‘must have felt surprise how prospecting could have been carried on’. Prospecting ‘may be said to have been all these years confined to the small pieces of country beside the creeks’. Fortunately there were ‘a good many streams, and prospectors have been able to crawl along their beds, and find reefs where they cropped out in the cuttings made by water’.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Essay by James Williams, in *Three Prize Essays on the Present Condition and Future Prospects of the Mineral Resources of New Zealand, and the Best Means of Fostering their Development* (Wellington, 1907), p. 186.

⁵⁸ Special Reporter, ‘The Thames District’, *New Zealand Herald*, 1 November 1895, p. 3.

Even in the mid-twentieth century, the absence of roads made prospecting in such country very hard work, as Bert McAra, mine manager for the Auckland Smelting Company when the Tui mines were reopened in the late 1940s,⁵⁹ recalled:

All the preliminary prospecting had been done on foot and proved a very arduous job carrying tools and gear on one's back to No. 4 level, that is 1800 feet up, across the Saddle about 2200 feet high to the head of the Mangakino Stream and to Copper Creek about 2000 feet on the side of Mount Te Aroha, all in rough, steep bush country. These reefs had to be located by compass survey and shown on sketch plans and the samples carried down to the office at Te Aroha and sent away for assay.⁶⁰

Once the outcrop of the reef was found, it was necessary to 'trace the line of the reef for, say, five hundred feet along the top. And you observe the depth of a reef and estimate the depth, it might be seventeen degrees from the horizontal, then you just project the line through it to the bottom'. To ensure that prospecting crosscuts hit the reef at a lower level, surveys were made: 'it was all compass work and the needle couldn't tell lies, could it?'⁶¹

SAMPLING

As an example of how prospectors took samples, one geologist's notes have survived of his work between 2 and 5 December 1887. On the first day he took six samples of weathered rock near the first grade of the Waiorongomai tramline and on the following day two from between Te Aroha and Waiorongomai. On 4 December he walked up a gully with 'rocks exposed in side-cuttings', taking 11 samples and recording where they were taken. He then took one sample from the Colonist mine, without comment, and five from the New Find:

C 14: V poor quartz. Much of specimen is gray or dirty bluish or greenish. This gray part is not considered to be an indication of any value at Te Aroha.

⁵⁹ See paper on the Auckland Smelting Company.

⁶⁰ J.B. McAra, 'Recollections of my Association with the Tui Mine, Te Aroha, 1950-1973' (typescript, Waihi, May 1985), pp. 2-3.

⁶¹ Interview with Bert McAra, Waihi, 4 August 1985, p. 46 of transcript.

C 15: Good quartz. Best part is where the rock is porous, apparently partly decayed and stained with much iron oxide and black matter.

C 16: Good quartz. Pure white milky quartz is considered a good indication at Te Aroha when surrounded with black stains etc. At Thames it would be thought very hungry.

C 17: Poor quartz though not so poor as next lot C 18 or C 14.

C 18: V. poor quartz.

He made no comment on his last sample, from the Galena, nor did he note anything about the one sample taken on his last day, at Tui.⁶² Despite being a professional geologist working at Auckland University College, he was imprecise about their mineral content, relying on laboratories to identify what the colours meant. As surface indications could not show whether there was sufficient payable ore it was necessary to examine it at depth. As a prospector told the warden in 1910, after doing some work in the Great Western at Waiorongomai, ‘surface prospecting is waste of time. Proper way is to put in low level prospecting tunnel’.⁶³

Often prospectors revisited abandoned mines. One such prospector at Te Aroha and Tui, John Wallace,⁶⁴ stated in 1896 that for a year he had been prospecting, off and on, in the Taranaki, including cleaning out ‘old workings where slips had occurred in some of the drives. In doing this and other work he had a barrow, pick, and shovel, pestle and mortar, and dish always on the ground’.⁶⁵ After a drive was reopened or a new one had cut the reef, samples were taken. In the case of a reef ten feet wide struck by McAra in the reopened Tui mine, samples were taken at the normal three feet intervals, ‘put in bags, and labelled and sent to the DSIR in Wellington and they produced the return’.⁶⁶ In earlier days, prospectors or mining

⁶² Algernon Thomas, Notebook 5, ‘Journey to Waiorongomai 1-5 December 1887’, Algernon P.W. Thomas, Further Papers, MSS and Archives 89/15, Auckland University Library.

⁶³ Evidence of John Tallentire, 22 November 1910, Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Mining Applications 1910, 88/10, BBAV 11289/20a, ANZ-A.

⁶⁴ For his earliest involvement in claims at Te Aroha and Tui, see Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 225, 282, 285, 304, 305, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; for mining at Tui in the 1890s, see Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Mining Applications 1895-1896, 16, 17, 67, 95/1895, 27, 120/1896, BBAV 11582/4a, ANZ-A; *Te Aroha News*, 28 September 1895, p. 2.

⁶⁵ *Auckland Weekly News*, 21 November 1896, p. 20.

⁶⁶ Interview with Bert McAra, Waihi, 4 August 1985, p. 16 of transcript.

companies did their own testing, or arranged for assays to be made by a School of Mines, which could lead to unrepresentative or fraudulent results being obtained to manipulate share prices.⁶⁷

Also in earlier days, it was difficult for those driving a prospecting tunnel to anticipate when the reef would be cut or its likely value. As diamond drills were not used in Hauraki in the nineteenth century, miners were never certain whether they were on the verge of making a fortune or were wasting both time and money. A great deal of wasted effort was spent exploring areas high in the hills, as noted by Alistair Isdale when prospecting above the main Tui mines in the 1960s. 'When using electronic means to follow the course of quartz reefs in the area, usually hidden under surface leaf mould etc, time after time in the wildest country the little pits and trenches of unrecorded prospectors were found'.⁶⁸

A DESCRIPTION OF PROSPECTING AT THAMES

No descriptions of prospecting at Te Aroha or Waiorongomai in the nineteenth century, if written, have survived, apart from John Squirrell's account of prospecting at Tui.⁶⁹ However, a miner's 1870 description of early mining at Thames was applicable for any part of Hauraki, except for the numbers of those hunting the prospector:

Should a rumour get abroad that some prospector had been showing some good specimens it generally ended in a rush. The fortunate prospector would be shepherded, or watched, till he made off back to his find. No matter how quiet he kept, information would leak out, and when he made tracks with his digger's lantern (a bottle with the bottom knocked out and a candle dropped inside) hundreds would follow. The wily prospector would generally take the trail in the night, and the scene on the hills was something to remember - hundreds of miners, mostly all merry through waiting about the hotel bars for the word - trailing up hills and down gullies, through the supplejacks, bush-lawyers [plant named after 'argumentative layman claiming legal expertise']⁷⁰ and waitabits [plant with

⁶⁷ For example, paper on prospectors and investors in the 1930s.

⁶⁸ Alistair Isdale, 'Waiorongomai Valley, Mt Te Aroha' (typescript, 1986), p. 24.

⁶⁹ See paper on his life.

⁷⁰ *New Zealand Pocket Oxford Dictionary*, 2nd edition, ed. Tony Deverson (Auckland, 1997), p. 130.

sharp hooked thorns or similar],⁷¹ climbing the steep sides of the hills, or scrambling and falling down the other side. It generally rained heavy on these nights and blew great guns, but men would hang on to the hunt and follow the trail to the whare close to the find. Once there, the business of pegging off a claim had to be attended to, each claim had to be marked by pegs standing at least two feet out of the ground. The prospector would have taken care that his claim was properly marked off, and these coming later would mark off their ground as they arrived, so those earliest on the scene would get nearest the prospector's claim. Each claim required two pegs at the top and bottom of their ground along the reef and one at each corner of the ground. After the pegs were in no one else could touch the ground, provided that the owners were not absent for more than twenty-four hours at a stretch. Small rushes like this were of frequent occurrence, the majority of them ending in disappointment, which, however, was forgotten when the next rumour of a find was circulated round.

Two classes participated in these rushes, genuine miners who would work and prove their claim to be what it was worth, payable or a duffer, and claim sharks who simply held on while the others did the work.

Each man was allowed 50 feet along the line of reef and 150 feet on each side. This would make a claim of six men's ground 300 feet square....

The first business our genuine miner would do after making a shelter to bache in, would be to either drive or sink to cut the line of reef from the prospector's claim. If the reef could be reached by driving and the party had sufficient funds to work the ground in the most scientific manner, the drive would be put in at as low a level as possible, so that when the reef was reached the ground could be worked out upwards and the mullock or valueless stone left in the bottom. But prospectors were not always in funds, and their object was to get to the reef as soon as possible and in the easiest manner. So after making a barrow to run the mullock out with and cutting timber to support the weak spots it was straightforward work, hard but healthy. But all reefs could not be reached by driving, and sinking was necessary, a slower and much more expensive experiment. A supply of timber was easily procurable close at hand, as the hills in the early days were covered with bush. A rough windlass would be made up from material about, a nail-can or oil drum fitted with a handle made a good bucket, and a rope to join the two made satisfactory gear for lifting out the bottom of the shaft. Shafts were made in all sizes, from the round well to the orthodox timbered 6 x 4 oblong pattern....

⁷¹ *The Free Dictionary* (Google).

Should our miner friends be successful in striking a reef in their ground the next proceeding was to find out if there was any gold in the reef, for all reefs do not contain gold in payable quantities. Sometimes the gold is quite visible, in which case it is a rich find, and can be taken out in specimens. But oftener a payable reef does not show the gold so plainly, and to find out, the stone is crushed with a pestle and mortar and the dust "panned off" in a prospecting dish, by flooding the dirt with water, and gently twisting the dish to give the contents a rotary motion, and allowing the lighter material to float off with the water. The gold, being heavier than the crushed stone, will then remain in the bottom. Patient, careful manipulation of the dish will leave at the finish a small lot of the heaviest materials, with any gold that may have been in the stone. Two or three specks of gold to a dish would warrant further work on the reef.

If the reef warranted a further test, a quantity of stone would be broken out and taken to the battery for treatment....

The amalgamators then took charge of the products of the clean-up, treated it, and passed the result over to the expectant miners who had been patiently watching the process, and who would now find out whether they had a prospective fortune on the hills or were a little more out of pocket than before.⁷²

NOT REVEALING THE LOCATIONS OF DISCOVERIES

The discretion of the prospector about any finds was often commented upon. For example, when some 'splendid stone' was obtained from 'a recently-discovered reef' in the Cadman at Waiorongomai in 1895, a local correspondent pointed out that it was not really a new find, for 'some years ago' one prospector, John Hawkins,⁷³ had 'found some nice payable stone, and had some good crushings from it. Before he died he confided to a friend the position of the reef, and it is supposed to be his old reef that is now being unearthed'.⁷⁴ A 1932 prospectus for a company planning to mine at Tui stated that little or no prospecting had been done there since the 1880s, 'except by one or two old-timers, who did not reveal where they were

⁷² *The Thames: 1867 to 1917: Fifty years a goldfield*, comp. Old Thames Boys' Association (Thames, 1917), pp. 19, 23, 25.

⁷³ For his career at Waiorongomai, see *Te Aroha News*, 26 September 1885, p. 2, 6 February 1887, p. 2, 23 June 1888, p. 2, 26 March 1890, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 21 August 1893, p. 2, 6 February 1894, p. 2, 2 August 1894, p. 2; Thames Hospital Board, Register of Patients 1884-1901, folio 61, YCAH 14075/1a, ANZ-A.

⁷⁴ Waiorongomai Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 19 August 1895, p. 6.

working until they were too old to do any more'.⁷⁵ One such old-timer, William Morris Newsham, prospected and mined on various parts of Te Aroha mountain from 1891 almost until his death in 1921.⁷⁶ In 1932, the story was recounted of how, after the start of the First World War 'this dogged old prospector had sufficient faith to remain on the job for some years and during that time discovered some fabulously rich leaders'. Although he died without revealing where he found these, 'traces of his old cuttings, drives, shafts, etc' had just been rediscovered.⁷⁷ Whether tales of his fabulous discoveries were accurate was questionable, for no later prospectors discovered anything worthwhile where he had worked. John Wallace, who first mined at Te Aroha in January 1881,⁷⁸ in 1932 gave the under-secretary 'the benefit of his knowledge and experience' at a meeting about subsidizing unemployed men to prospect. Having worked in the All Nations, at Stoney Creek, he claimed the New Find lode reappeared there, making the ground 'very valuable'; 'he knew the place and had kept it quiet for 25 years'.⁷⁹ No finds were made on the basis of his firmly held but incorrect beliefs, despite much searching.⁸⁰

DIFFICULTIES AND DANGERS

One journalist wrote of Hauraki prospectors

living in tents or nikau whares back in deep ravines among tangles of thorny lawyers and interlacing supplejacks and mungamunga, not a single comfort or pleasure, food generally tinned meat and camp bread cooked after a day's labour digging through tough clay and even tougher roots, worried by mosquitoes in summer and drenched daily in winter by the ever wet bush.⁸¹

⁷⁵ Prospectus of Te Aroha-Karangahake Gold Mines Limited, 25 November 1932, p. 4, Eric Coppard Papers, Waihi.

⁷⁶ See paper on his life.

⁷⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 9 December 1932, p. 5.

⁷⁸ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 1725, issued 13 January 1881, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1881, BBAV 11533/1h, ANZ-A.

⁷⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 12 October 1932, p. 5.

⁸⁰ See paper on the Depression years.

⁸¹ 'The Warrigal', in *Press* (Christchurch), 30 September 1897, cited in David Grant, *Bulls, Bears and Elephants: A history of the New Zealand Stock Exchange* (Wellington, 1997), p. 44.

These were not the only hazards, as a 1933 tale about ‘a party of amateur Te Aroha prospectors’ illustrated. They set out one weekend to peg out a claim above the town at a place reported to contain rich ore, but when they started to explore it,

one of them, a well-known civil servant, detected the ominous grunts of wild pigs coming from a nearby gully. There were obvious traces of animals on all sides, and after holding a council o’ war, with the grunts and crashing of the undergrowth coming nearer every minute the three heroes decided to judge discretion the better part of valour, and took to their heels. They are naturally reticent about their rumoured gold find.⁸²

Professional prospectors were not so easily put off, instead living in the hills, where they ‘often endured great hardships’.⁸³ Precise details of these are now hard to uncover except in the case of Billy Nicholl.⁸⁴ Newspapers sometimes gave somewhat jocular accounts (such as the pig story) that both illustrated and played down the harsh realities. Another story came from the Te Aroha rush, when a surveyor, William Corless Breakell,⁸⁵ was left behind in the bush in the dark when clad only in a shirt and trousers. ‘Caring not to proceed for fear of accident, William cut a sufficiency of supplejacks, which he twined round the adjacent trees, and lay down’. Being bitten on his brow by mosquitoes, he took off his shirt ‘and wrapped it round his head, saving that portion of his anatomy at the expense of his body, which suffered acutely’ until heavy rain drove them away. ‘Strange that the mention of “supplejacks” should be so unpleasant to W.C.B.’⁸⁶

⁸² *Te Aroha News*, 29 March 1933, p. 4.

⁸³ Comment by a councillor at meeting of Piako County Council, *Te Aroha News*, 22 November 1933, p. 5.

⁸⁴ See paper on his life.

⁸⁵ For his work as a surveyor at this time, see *Waikato Times*, 5 February 1880, p. 2, 14 February 1880, p. 2, 25 July 1882, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 5 October 1880, p. 3, 12 April 1881, p. 3; for his draining swamps, see *Auckland Weekly News*, 26 February 1881, p. 22, 22 December 1910, p. 36; *Waikato Times*, 6 September 1892, p. 2; *New Zealand Herald*, 22 February 1923, p. 8; for his prospecting Te Aroha in 1880, see Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 182, BBAV 115671a, ANZ-A; *Observer*, 4 December 1880, p. 99.

⁸⁶ *Observer*, 4 December 1880, p. 99.

Prospectors usually worked far from mining settlements and their families. For instance, in December 1907 William Wilson, aged 44, left his family of six children, aged from 11 years to 22 months,⁸⁷ at Hukerinui, near Whangerei, while he headed a prospecting party working for the Waitawheta Gold Prospecting Company. As their camp was from four to five hour's walk from Waiorongomai, he walked to the Waiorongomai Hotel once a week to collect stores and tools and to check on any mail from his employers. Once he returned to his camp on the same day, but every other time he stayed for one night at the hotel (and one night it burnt down and he died).⁸⁸ A correspondent reported the difficulties facing his party:

The party of prospectors engaged in exploration work on the other side of the “divide” appear to have a rather uphill battle to fight. The physical configuration of the country is against them and the want of a track even more so. I understand that to get supplies on to the ground under existing conditions renders the cost well nigh prohibitive. In this connection I might mention that at least one member of the party, a Mr Wilson, has negotiated the through trip “carrying weight” in the shape of “tucker” to the tune of 84lbs.⁸⁹

Another example, from Puriri, of the difficulties of getting in supplies was revealed when Robert Worth, who was briefly involved in the Te Aroha area in 1910,⁹⁰ asked the council to make a road to his Hit or Miss claim. As this was two miles from Puriri, he had to cross the creek 18 times to get to his camp; if the creek was flooded he faced a detour of from seven to eight miles.⁹¹ He was aged 33 at this time, and while he prospected at various places, but in particular Puriri, Komata, and Waitekauri, his steadily increasing family (there were to be 13 children) remained in Waihi, financially supporting themselves by selling milk from their small farm.⁹²

⁸⁷ Death Certificate of William Wilson, 26 January 1908, 1908/908, BDM.

⁸⁸ Inquest on William Wilson, January 1908, Justice Department, J 46, 1908/146, ANZ-W.

⁸⁹ Waiorongomai Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 30 December 1907, p. 1.

⁹⁰ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1910, 76/1910, BBAV 11289/20a, ANZ-A.

⁹¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 7 March 1895, p. 2.

⁹² Marriage Certificate of Robert Worth, 5 October 1886, 1886/2753; Death Certificate of Robert Worth, 5 April 1930, 1930/3034, BDM; Mines Department, MD 1, 92/649, 96/2063, ANZ-W; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 7 September 1895, p. 3, 11 July 1896, p. 2; N.S. Climie, ‘Pre Borough Times’, in *Waihi Borough Council: Diamond Jubilee 1902-1962*, ed. Climie (Paeroa, 1962), pp. 10-11.

Working in out-of-the-way places meant carrying gear on their backs. When the Golden Cross mines were discovered at the head of the Waitekauri Creek in 1893, the Inspecting Engineer of the Mines Department could not 'help admiring the pluck and energy of the men in forcing their way through a dense bush, where everything had for a long time to be carried on their backs, crossing and recrossing the Waitekauri Creek about nine times, travelling over steep spurs with dense undergrowth entwined with supplejacks, rendering swagging a very laborious undertaking'. At another discovery in this valley there was 'nothing but a series of ridges and gorges; no sooner are you over one than another stares you in the face. These, with the dense undergrowth, fallen timber, supplejacks, and lawyers (*Robus australis*), renders progress very difficult when one has a swag to carry'.⁹³ 'Daldy' McWilliams claimed, 50 years after the event, that he had packed supplies weighing 130 pounds on his back from Paeroa to the top of the nearby ranges 'when the old Maori tracks were the only roads'.⁹⁴ When a leading Waiorongomai mine manager and occasional prospector, Thomas Gavin,⁹⁵ sought government funding for a prospecting track in 1900, he stated that without it his party would 'have to carry our provisions and tools on our backs for two miles'.⁹⁶ Miners in other districts also sought government assistance to make such tracks.⁹⁷ In suitable terrain prospectors must have used packhorses. Swags were common; two teenage labourers imprisoned at Te Aroha in 1882 had swags 'containing clothing and cooking utensils'.⁹⁸ One man, who briefly prospected in the South Island in the 1860s, for the benefit of overseas readers described his swag:

As our swags were a fair specimen of the usual burden which every man carries in the colonies when on the tramp to a diggings, or for a week's prospecting, I will briefly enumerate the contents of one of them. The blankets did duty as a carpet bag,

⁹³ H.A. Gordon to Minister of Mines, 8 June 1893, *AJHR*, 1893, C-3, p. 68.

⁹⁴ *Te Aroha and the Fortunate Valley: pioneering in the Thames Valley 1867-1930*, ed. F.W. Wild (Te Aroha, 1930), p. 315.

⁹⁵ See paper on his life.

⁹⁶ Thomas Gavin (Chairman, Piako County Council) to Minister of Mines, 27 September 1908, Mines Department, MD 1, 08/1023, ANZ-W.

⁹⁷ For example, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 February 1887, p. 3.

⁹⁸ Armed Constabulary Force, Report of Charges taken at Te Aroha Lock-up 1880-1903, nos. 22, 23, 4 July 1882, in private possession.

holding pieces for patching, buttons, needles and thread, etc, tobacco, matches, and tucker, the latter comprising almost anything within the province of food. The roll of blankets was made as tight as could be, and tied with blades of the flax plant, so as to keep the contents from falling out; a couple of strings, also made from flax blades, secured the swag to the shoulders of the bearer; a shovel was attached to each swag, and a pick, tin dish, and billy were also part of our load.⁹⁹

As only a limited amount of food could be carried in a swag, prospectors' diets were poor. For instance, when tenders were called in 1862 for provisions for prospectors, they were to receive flour, potatoes, salt beef, salt pork, tea, sugar, and tobacco.¹⁰⁰ Later, tinned meat became available. William Nicholl's prospecting indicated the amount of hard work he did on what would be regarded today as a very inadequate diet.¹⁰¹

The hardships varied with the seasons and the topography:

Summer is the proper season for prospecting, yet at low elevations the work can generally be carried on in open country without much loss of time even through the winter months, if good camping accommodations are handy. But bush country offers the advantage of better shelter in the winter, and it has besides greater attractions in its surroundings than the bleak hills and downs swept by piercing sou'-west winds.

The drawbacks to prospecting in bush country in winter are mostly found in the extra rainfall and the bad state of the tracks, but these troubles are in a measure compensated for by the greater mildness of the season experienced under the shelter of the trees, and by the comfort derived from a good fire without the cost of being burdened with the fuel while tramping the last weary mile to the camp at night.

While there are, to be sure, hardships and privations peculiar to this kind of life, still the "roughing" is not usually considered worse than that experienced by new settlers in back country.

Comparing the New Zealand prospector's lot with that of his counterpart in Australia, the former had personal risks 'of a milder nature and less dangerous' than the latter, who was endangered by snakes and

⁹⁹ Charles L. Money, *Knocking About in New Zealand* (Melbourne, 1871), p. 23.

¹⁰⁰ *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 1862, vol. 10 no. 9, p. 60.

¹⁰¹ See paper on his life.

lack of water. The true prospector was ‘not easily daunted by natural difficulties, nor discouraged even when worn out with fatigue’.¹⁰²

PROSPECTING WAIORONGOMAI IN THE EARLY 1960s

Eric Coppard, the last mine manager of the Tui mine after Norpac went bankrupt, recorded the only detailed account of prospecting at Waiorongomai. He did not prospect on his own behalf, but for South Pacific Mines, later the ‘pac’ in ‘Norpac’. In January 1962, when aged 18, he was working as a farm labourer, but as some of his family had been miners or battery workers, and having always been interested in mining and in collecting mineral samples, he gladly agreed to work for the company.¹⁰³ His first task was to re-open and do some preliminary prospecting in mines last worked by Malcolm Hardy in the late 1940s.¹⁰⁴ His recollections provide a vivid account of some rather amateur and under-funded work.

First he had to clear the old upper track with another young man, Neil Arden.

It was very overgrown with blackberry, gorse. In fact we spent about two months afterwards digging the jolly stuff out of our fingers. It was extremely hot. It was the end of January, and we had about two weeks solid doing that. You had to carry gallons and gallons of water because you perspired so much.

Once having cleared the track through ‘hot, barren, land’ to the bush line, ‘the ground was fairly easy going, was fairly open’. All their work ‘certainly paid dividends because when we were carrying samples out and packs out it made life a lot more comfortable’.¹⁰⁵ Next, they were instructed to reopen Hardy’s 1400-foot level, named for being that height above the battery, where the Hero portal had collapsed. ‘The only tools we had were a few hand tools that we could carry in and a little bit of ingenuity’. After investigating Hardy’s small ore-crushing plant, still standing close to the portal, Coppard was challenged to prove he could pan for gold from the crushed ore lying around:

¹⁰² W. Green, ‘The Prospector’s Quest’, *Thames Star*, 27 August 1898, p. 2.

¹⁰³ Interview with Eric Coppard at Waihi, 4 August 1985, pp. 1-3, 7-8, 23 of transcript.

¹⁰⁴ See paper on Malcolm Hardy.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Eric Coppard, 4 August 1985, pp. 1, 3 of transcript.

I had no pan, but what I did have was the lid of an old thermos flask which was one of those big soup-type of flasks and as a result I used that thing and panned it and I got the biggest shock of my life because I got a tail of gold. Later on I had it assayed, not the tail of gold, but the rock that was lying there and it was going just over an ounce of gold to the ton. That's about 34 ppm [parts per million] of gold which was quite interesting, so obviously it was coming from somewhere in the mine.

Although the building housing Hardy's plant was deteriorating, it became their lunch spot. Although Hardy's former hut was nearby, 'a beautiful little home in the bush', they did not stay in it, instead walking to and from work, taking from one and a half hours to two hours each way; their eight-hour working day included this time. 'Later on when we were carrying samples out we thought it might have been better to stay in there and perhaps come out twice a week and bring a great load of samples with us but the way things worked we didn't'.

The mine manager, Lance Fallon, paid weekly visits to keep an eye on these two novices. Instructed to clean out the portal and put in timber once it was opened, 'being a complete greenhorn to this I had no idea of what was involved in putting in mine timber and he would come up and spend a couple of days with us to get us started'. The collapsed portal was a

mixture of earth and rock. The whole lot had just come down in a big jumble. There was wood in there. Fortunately it worked out that the railway lines were still there - the old little rails from in the mine - and we were able to find outside the wheels and part of his little mine truck, so with a little bit of sawing and banging and nailing we were able to get that back into use, and as a result use that, and we established a little tip head there and we just dumped the stuff over the other side of the bank along the edge of the stream.

To prevent the new portal collapsing, they took timber from the bush; they were instructed 'not to just go willy-nilly cutting trees down on the off-chance that we might need them'. Some of Hardy's old hardwood sleepers were used as well. To reduce the amount of timber used they removed rails from the tramway, a short distance above where they were working. 'We would select the lighter one of these lines, and with a hacksaw we had to cut them through. We'd cut them about three-quarters of the way through, nick the outside edges of the flat flanges of it, and then find a big rock and

drop them on it and let nature do the rest so they'd break'.¹⁰⁶ Driving rails overhead provided protection, and a few were driven

down the side and we only had to stand a few sets - it was only just a short distance, ten, 15 feet of actual blockage - and we were able to get through. Once we got in there the rest of the mine was in perfect order. There was nothing wrong with the mine itself. It was beautiful. It had a little bit of water in it - nice, clean water, it wasn't dirty, it wasn't rusty or muddy, and we were able to let that flow out. It certainly didn't discolour anything.... The afternoon that we broke into the workings the mine manager, Lance Fallon, was there and he was tickled pink, of course, to see that we'd achieved it. From a working point of view we were doing about two feet per day of actual tunnelling and that included putting in the timber and cutting railway lines and that sort of thing. So in actual work even though our day might have been short our actual working was quite acceptable. They were more than happy with that. So once we got through we came up through to the Hero reef.... On the northern side of the reef there was a fairly large stope, I don't know how high up it went, it seemed to go for ever, but we only had small carbide lights so you couldn't see, it didn't illuminate it particularly well, but it went up fairly high, it would have been about, probably, 40, 50, 60 feet long, maybe six, seven feet wide, and on the hanging wall of the reef there was still sulphides. You could see the sulphide ore left behind.... Also underneath that stope there was an underhand stope, one in the floor, which was full of water, and we had quite an interesting experience here. We took a tape measure in one day, tied a rock to the end of it, and threw it down into the water to see how deep it was, and it was seventeen feet deep, or at least that's where the rock finished anyway, and as I say that was nice ice-cold mine water. Now about eight feet from the edge of the ... drive, across the stope there was a wooden platform which went from wall to wall, there was just a staging that you could stand on and by very carefully working your way along the edge of the water you could actually stand on the rock and get yourself over to the wooden platform, walk along it, and then jump off the other side. Well, we did this a couple of times, and we weren't too happy about it because there was the risk of falling down, so we found an old ladder outside and we put that down. We didn't use the ladder for walking on, we used that purely as a handrail, and that was quite good except when Lance Fallon ... decided that he wanted to get across to the other side and ... walked straight across this ladder. Now he would have been probably about 12, 13 stone in weight at the time, and I was about the same, and I

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Eric Coppard, 4 August 1985, pp. 4-11 of transcript.

thought, "Well, if he can do it, I can." I got about half-way across and the jolly ladder started to break, so I got back on to solid land as quickly as I could, and seeing that there was not much use for three of us being on the other side anyway, I sang out to them and said, "Look, just be careful coming back, come along the wall." Well, you just wouldn't believe it - Neil came back and walked along the edge of the wall, and Lance walked straight across that ladder again. I don't know how he did it....

On the map that we had showing this particular part of the mine, it showed that the drive itself continued some distance further on, but in actual fact it was purely a little bit of paper work. It didn't exist in real life.¹⁰⁷

Another incident involving timber and water was not observed by Coppard, for, when the head geologist arrived from Canada to inspect the workings, 'of course we were the workers, we were told: "Okay, get your gear out of it, let the men have a look now" '. While they de-watered a drive on the Colonist reef Fallon took the geologist to see workings on the other side of a winze about 12 feet deep. To get across they always climbed down to a plank just above a pool of water one foot deep and then up the other side:

Lance, because of his charmed existence I think, he decided that this was too slow. He stood at the top and jumped, landed on the board, the board broke and he ended up to his ankles in water. I unfortunately missed the whole drama, but Neil assured me that there was a fair bit of swearing and yelling and arm waving.¹⁰⁸

As South Pacific Mines had obtained information from Hardy about these mines, including plans showing where tests that been made in the 1930s and the values and percentages of metals found, those re-opening the level knew where to investigate.¹⁰⁹ 'We spent quite a bit of time sampling, taking chip samples across the roof, and there ... was one large room in there that we took samples off all the rock that was lying there and made up one big bulk sample'. They had to be careful not to take samples just from the softer rock, for the harder quartz might have higher values. This was 'quite hard going' and 'tedious work, especially if it's overhead. If it's over you, your arms get tired trying to swing a four-pound hammer and

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Eric Coppard, 4 August 1985, pp. 11-13 of transcript.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Eric Coppard, 4 August 1985, pp. 17-18 of transcript.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Eric Coppard, 4 August 1985, pp. 15-16 of transcript.

hold a chisel, and then somebody doesn't watch what they're doing and you've got blisters and bleeding knuckles'. Two men did this work:

One can hold the chisel, or perhaps one person does the hammer and chisel and the other one tries to hold the bag underneath so that the material falls down straight into that.... Once it falls into the mud it's gone. And if it falls on the ground really you shouldn't pick it up, because unless you really know the piece that fell down you may be picking the wrong piece up and you end up with misleading results.

They worked for from four to five weeks opening up and sampling the 1400-foot level. The samples were assayed at Waikino, and only once were they told the results, after they found a reef outcropping high up in Diamond Gully:

It would have been about ten feet wise in the creek. It was on top of a small waterfall which was about 12, 15 feet high.... There was sort of a waterfall on a waterfall, the large waterfall was approx. 100 feet high, rather awe-inspiring, and we were working on the top of the small one and ... if we wanted to drill and put some explosives in we used the hand steel which was virtually a cold chisel and a hammer and this was an art that we learned, we were sort of given a few pointers by Lance how to go about it and the practical part was done by ourselves.... What we wanted to do was to drill the hole deep enough to put some explosive in and then shatter it, and then we could get our sample or get deeper down into the reef.... At the most we were using half a plug, maybe a plug if we were really fortunate.... We'd put ... this plug of gelignite into the drill hole, blast it, and then see what was a little bit deeper down. And in this particular case where we were working on this reef on the surface where the stream had been flowing over there was about a inch wide little band of sulphide ore, mainly galena or lead sulphide. And the deeper down we actually drilled, and when we blasted, the wider this little band got, and I think when we'd finished it was something like, two, three or four inches wide, a quite good galena, a beautiful looking ore. In actual fact that was the only time we were really told an assay result at that stage, and we were led to believe that it was going approximately two ounces of gold and somewhere around 40 or 50 per cent galena or lead.... But it's still there. We never did any more than that. We just purely prospected it. It was recorded down on some of the plans that they drew up and that would have been it, and we moved on from there.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Interview with Eric Coppard, 4 August 1985, pp. 20-22 of transcript.

Coppard had been given rudimentary training in using explosives, but as the mine manager sometimes kept some of the tools needed to do the work safely they had to extemporize when crimping the detonators. ‘We didn’t really beat them to death with a stone, but we certainly had to use the claw part of a claw hammer to push down on the aluminium capsule’.

We tended to be a little bit impatient and because there was nobody else up there and we could both go in opposite directions along the track to prevent anybody walking in on it by accident, we would have a shortish fuse of maybe about two or three feet at the most, and it’s surprising the amount of ground you can cover in even that short period of time. That gave you about half-a-minute or so of time to get out of it.¹¹¹

‘We were then given a free hand to go anywhere in the Waiorongomai Valley, to sample anything that looked even vaguely interesting, record it onto a plan they had given us ... and make certain that everything was well labelled’.¹¹² Once they had finished exploring the main part of the field, they were sent to check a new possibility. ‘The map that we had showed on it a reef system on the top western ridge of the reef’ between the main Waiorongomai reef and Stoney Creek. On this map was written ‘six inch lead’, and they were not certain whether the last word meant the mineral or a band of quartz leading to a reef:

The company of course was very excited thinking it was lead, six inches of lead showing up there, so we decided that we would go up there one day. So we went up and found these workings, but it was just a six-inch leader. It didn’t have anything in the form of sulphide ore.... We just fought our way through the overgrowth and undergrowth. Supplejack was our biggest curse. That was our main problem, and we found the easiest way round that was to take some secateurs with us and just cut your way through. Knives were no good, they just bounced off, it was too springy.¹¹³

They found several places literally by accident. Unfortunately, even with a lot of the mining maps, their accuracy isn’t the best or some workings have been done after the map was drawn, and so the maps we

¹¹¹ Interview with Eric Coppard, 4 August 1985, pp. 23-24 of transcript.

¹¹² Interview with Eric Coppard, 4 August 1985, p. 25 of transcript.

¹¹³ Interview with Eric Coppard, 4 August 1985, p. 27 of transcript.

found were only good for a certain period of time. Earlier workings weren't even on it'.¹¹⁴

The dangers of exploring old workings were illustrated by their next experiences, when they inspecting the New Find stope from the surface and bowled rocks into its 100-metre depths.

We decided that we would climb up over the workings and see them from higher up or to see if there was something beyond them again. Now there was one section there that you could walk quite comfortably across, it wasn't dangerous, it was quite a wide section, so we walked up there, but there was a fair bit of scrubby growth, young trees coming up, in general just junky sort of bush, and we decided that we couldn't see where we wanted to, so we would come back, but instead of coming back exactly the same track we thought, well, no problem, we'd just make a new track down. We started to do this and the hill got rather steep, in fact it got steeper and quite a bit steeper, and, for no particular reason, it stuck in our minds that there was a toitoi bush stuck on the side of the hill there, and later on we realized why it stuck in our minds, but we decided that we didn't like the feel of the way things were going, so we backtracked up and found our original track, came down that, and then we headed south again a little bit, and we came out into a large quarry face where they'd actually open-cast part of the New Find reef, and we looked up and this particular toitoi bush was right on the edge of this precipice. We didn't know it at the time, but it was just one of those little things that stuck in our minds.¹¹⁵

Next, they explored the Premier section of Hardy's Mines:

Five level was right at the end of the tramway. The tramway came along, the Premier Stream cut across the tramway, there's some trestling left and you could see what would have been a hole in the ground where these lines would have gone straight into, but it was all collapsed and at this stage we weren't going to worry about opening it up. We climbed the hill and we found a level above it, oh, some 100-odd feet vertically above, and we went into this one ... [and] on the eastern wall, there was a small crosscut that went out and it went into a small chamber, and anyway we acted the fool a little bit in there, yelling and hearing our voices echoing, and then we looked down on the floor, and we saw a little dark spot, much like as if a stone had been kicked and had just left a little shadow area. We got curious, and we got

¹¹⁴ Interview with Eric Coppard, 4 August 1985, p. 28 of transcript.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Eric Coppard, 4 August 1985, pp. 28-29 of transcript.

down and we had a look and we found that this wasn't just a spot, it was actually a hole in the ground. So we found a smaller stone, and we dropped it through it, and we waited to a while, and then we heard this splash, and so we very carefully scratched around and we found we were standing on top of an old wooden stage. We very quickly removed ourselves from there.¹¹⁶

(Wisely, for some years later this staging, weakened with age, fell into the level below.) Coppard also discovered the 1100-foot, or McLean's, level, the lowest one in Hardy's Mines, which gave access to the lowest level of the Hero and Colonist lodes. The portal, beside the base of a waterfall, was partly blocked by debris.

You walked up into water up to about your waist from the portal, extremely cold.... Of course the further in you walked, the shallower it got.... You'd actually walk right out of water and then you'd come to another rock fall, and of course there'd be a reasonable depth of water, maybe up to knee level in there, but the water was excruciatingly cold. The first couple of seconds in, you felt cold, and then your legs almost went numb, you just about screamed with the pain in the joints, and then they went - oh, after about five minutes ... I suppose they were so numb it didn't hurt any more, but they tended to have a warm feel about them.

About 700 feet from the portal, they came to a corner, and another 100 feet further on the roof had collapsed. 'It was an interesting drive, perfectly straight. You could from that corner look back out and you could just see daylight'.¹¹⁷

They explored all the old workings they could find:

Wherever possible we'd take samples. We would try walking down some of the streams sometimes, but we promptly gave that away very early.... Especially in the Diamond Gully section, it was just so unreal, the waterfalls that were in there, and the size of them. No, we had an immense amount of fun there.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Eric Coppard, 4 August 1985, pp. 30-31 of transcript.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Eric Coppard, 4 August 1985, pp. 33-35 of transcript.

They later re-opened a couple of drives in Diamond Gully, but in all their exploring ‘the only gold that we actually found was when we did that panning at Hardy’s little workshop’.¹¹⁸

LONE PROSPECTORS

When aged 18 and 19, Coppard’s experiences had been enjoyable; even the dangers were exhilarating, and they had been paid a regular wage even though no gold was found. In earlier times, prospectors had usually worked for themselves, and unless subsidized by sleeping partners soon ran out of money if they failed to find anything worthwhile. And usually they had worked alone, their solitary life fascinating those who led a more comfortable, mundane, one. In 1908, a photograph was published of a prospector’s small hut near Neavesville which had been lived in for over 35 years.¹¹⁹ In 1933, the *Te Aroha News* reported that ‘for many months, and even years, lone seekers of gold have wrestled with their claims high on the mountainside in the upper end of the Waiorongomai valley.

Little or no assistance was forthcoming and with only the faith in their own patch of rocky mountain land and in the silence of the dense native bush they have toiled the long tedious hours of the day away making their way home at nightfall for the rude comfort of a digger’s hut and a tin fire chimney. Truly a piece of pioneering that calls to mind the earlier days of colonization.¹²⁰

In 1934, another newspaper noted that in the past some ‘lone-handlers’ had ‘lived in the mountains for many days, and returned laden with gold-bearing stone sufficient to yield them a handsome return’ from locations they did not reveal.¹²¹ These lone prospectors were regarded as a dying breed. As early as 1892, the warden, in referring to ‘the class of people who generally go prospecting’ noted that ‘it was only the old men who were engaged in this most important work’.¹²² Three years later, a special correspondent was told that ‘few of the young men take kindly to prospecting work’ because it was ‘too lonely and solitary’, with ‘too many

¹¹⁸ Interview with Eric Coppard, 4 August 1985, pp. 36-42 of transcript.

¹¹⁹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 19 November 1908, Supplement, p. 15.

¹²⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 12 April 1933, p. 4.

¹²¹ *Waihi Daily Telegraph*, 13 January 1934, press cutting in Eric Coppard Papers, Waihi.

¹²² Warden’s Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 22 April 1892, p. 2.

hardships. It is said that if you see two prospectors panning off a prospect in the bed of a creek, you will find they are two grey-haired men'.¹²³ In 1898, another writer commented that 'the old type of the brave, independent prospector is passing away'.¹²⁴ An essay on the present state and future prospects of mining published in 1907 agreed.

The modern youth cannot fail to notice that the old prospector is invariably a lonely, half-starved, and disappointed man, and he very sensibly refuses to drop steady work to go prospecting. When otherwise employed, or camping out at holiday times, he may wash a dish of dirt in an amateurish kind of way. He had, however, neither love nor aptitude for the work.¹²⁵

Old settlers complained of the inadequacy of the younger generation. For example, in 1941 William Hetherington, a contractor who had invested in the May Queen at Waiorongomai,¹²⁶ claimed that there was still plenty of gold in that area, but 'the present generation' was 'too tired to look for gold'.¹²⁷ Perhaps later generations had heard too many tales of the hardships.

Henry Andrew Gordon, Inspecting Engineer of the Mines Department, in his *Miner's Guide* of 1889 gave his view of the qualities needed by a prospector:

To be a good prospector a man must have plenty of energy, concentration of purpose, and a hopeful disposition; for even the most experienced men will meet with disappointment time after time. Indeed, to be a good prospector in New Zealand, where a great portion of the country is covered with dense bush and underscrub, and is of a very broken and precipitous character, a man must have a strong constitution, and be prepared to undergo a great many hardships and fatigues, carrying his swag and provision for miles through the bush, crossing large rivers and mountain-torrents, climbing steep ranges, and sleeping at nights

¹²³ Special Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 26 October 1895, p. 28.

¹²⁴ W. Green, 'The Prospector's Quest', *Thames Advertiser*, 29 August 1898, p. 4.

¹²⁵ Williams, in *Three Prize Essays*, p. 187.

¹²⁶ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 28, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A; *Waikato Times*, 17 June 1882, p. 3, 22 May 1883, p. 2; *New Zealand Gazette*, 29 November 1883, p. 1704.

¹²⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 6 January 1941, p. 1.

in a small tent or *mia-mia*,¹²⁸ many a time with wet bedclothes. These hardships can only be borne by strong, resolute men, possessing strong constitutions; and even a few years of this life are sufficient to make them look like old men, and many of them die at a premature age, of diseases of which the seeds were sown by undergoing the hardships of a digger's life.¹²⁹

The hardships were often emphasized. One unnamed prospector claimed to have prospected in the Te Aroha district between 1872 and 1874, accompanied by a Maori mate: 'both suffered great privations, the effect of which our informant is now feeling in the shape of rheumatism'.¹³⁰ In 1888, Frederick Jeune, who until the previous year had been a carpenter in Auckland,¹³¹ from his house in the bush near Coromandel complained about his life since leaving there. Many a cry I've had since my seclusion in this bush trying to obtain a little Gold to redeemed myself and for a little comfort of this life. Althought living with a bit of dry bread mastin with a drop of water is very heard indeed'.¹³²

In contrast, many accounts were positive, and some men made prospecting their career. The *Thames Star*, attempting in 1901 to inspire young men to prospect at Waiomu glorified the life:

The miner proper is a prospector, a seeker after gold, an ambitious man, always worshipping at the shrine of Dame Fortune, and dreaming of the days when the "treasures which lie down below" are within his reach, and the pleasures of hope end in realization. He is never a servant of another man, he is not a labourer for a weekly pittance, but a free man, who glories in a free life in the woods and by the streams, and on the mountainsides. And to a free man what life is more glorious than a life in the bush, where fresh and unpolluted air fills the lungs, pure water ... is always within reach, and where a man can feel that he is not circumscribed to his wanderings by the fear of

¹²⁸ Misspelling of maimai, derived from the Australian Aboriginal 'maya-maya', meaning a bark hut, which in New Zealand became the name for a duck-shooter's hide: *A Dictionary of Modern New Zealand Slang*, ed. Harry Orsman (Auckland, 1999), p. 83.

¹²⁹ Henry A. Gordon, *A Miner's Guide* (Wellington, 1889), p. 72.

¹³⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 5 November 1880, p. 3.

¹³¹ *Auckland Central Electoral Roll*, 1887, p. 14.

¹³² Frederick Jeune to Sir George Grey, 18 June 1888, Grey New Zealand Letters, vol. 20, p. 48, Auckland Public Library.

walking on another man's land, or craving from his fellow man permission to work.¹³³

Some of those used to comfortable living standards considered the solitary prospector was a 'hatter'. This could mean that, having no wife or children, 'his hat covers his family', but usually carried overtones of being 'as mad as a hatter'.¹³⁴ People who knew them realized they were usually content with their chosen lot, and that living far from 'civilization' was not a sign of madness. In the late 1950s, Ann Bale and her family became friendly with Harold Sparkes, the last prospector to live at Maratoto.

We all considered it a privilege to know him. I often wondered why he searched for gold for it seemed to me that gold in itself as money was not so important to him. To us he had pitifully little yet he was strangely content.

I got a clue when every now and then he brought out a piece of bullion to show us. His eyes would light up with pride and I knew then that it was his great joy simply to find gold, win it from the earth and finally see it as bullion. It was an achievement for him, for he had done what so many thousands had failed to do. Not only did the search give a purpose and challenge to his life; the simple life involved in finding it gave him more than money could buy - peace of mind and a harmonious existence. He really did have everything. I realized that it is the life of goldmining that is so fulfilling, not the spending of the gold.¹³⁵

She recalled that 'he never lost hope',¹³⁶ undoubtedly the mark of the men who were prepared to spend years prospecting, and may have been successful occasionally, in a small way and for a short time.

A LONE PROSPECTOR: WILLIAM TREGOWETH

¹³³ Editorial, *Thames Star*, 20 November 1901, p. 2.

¹³⁴ Elizabeth and Harry Orsman, *The New Zealand Dictionary*, 2 ed. (Auckland, 1995), p. 120; see also Philip Ross May, *The West Coast Gold Rushes*, 2nd, rev, ed. (Christchurch, 1967), p. 527; G.A. Wilkes, *A Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms* 4 ed. (Melbourne, 1996), p. 191.

¹³⁵ Ann Bale, *Maratoto Gold* (Auckland, 1971), pp. 155-156.

¹³⁶ Bale, p. 138.

When William Tregoweth,¹³⁷ a prospector and miner who participated in the Te Aroha rush,¹³⁸ was found dead in his hut at Karangahake in 1908, an obituary noted that

Mining promoters are proverbially sanguine, but “Billy,” as everybody called him, was one of the most optimistic members of the fraternity who ever operated on the Hauraki Peninsula. Had he been less sanguine and more speculative he might have died a rich man.... But “Billy’s” geese were always swans to his eyes, and by his over-estimates of the value of mining propositions he lost several opportunities of making profitable deals.

When Tregoweth was the principal owner of the Sylvia, at Tararu, Thames, a big syndicate offered several £1,000s for it. As ‘“Billy” could only think in millions, so persuaded was he of the richness of the ores and the wonderful results that they would yield under the new process’, there was no sale; but this process did not achieve the results he expected. Later, he could have sold the Waverley (which he later renamed the Comstock) at Karangahake for a high price. However, when some company promoters attempted to float it, the Auckland Stock Exchange refused to quote the share prices because it considered the promoters were getting too high a consideration. As a result, it was not Tregoweth but ‘the knowing people who came into the venture who eventually profited, and it was “Billy’s” share of the proceeds that had to be reduced to satisfy the requirements of the brokers’.¹³⁹ In the initial arrangement, he had sold the ground to the Comstock United Company for £2,500 cash plus 30,000 paid up shares (out of 100,000), a total of £7,000.¹⁴⁰ As a consequence of stock exchange requirements, before the shares were listed Tregoweth (and ‘his friends’, in one account)¹⁴¹ had to give up £1,000 of the cash and sign a deed binding himself not to sell any of his paid-up shares ‘during a given period, until the

¹³⁷ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 7 (Wellington, 1898), p. 58.

¹³⁸ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 170, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; Te Aroha Warden’s Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 23 December 1880, p. 3.

¹³⁹ *Observer*, 24 October 1908, p. 21.

¹⁴⁰ Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 203 no. 1219, ANZ-A; letter from William Tregoweth, *Auckland Weekly News*, 24 October 1907, p. 25.

¹⁴¹ *Observer*, 2 June 1906, p. 7.

contributing shares were of the market value of 3s'.¹⁴² As the shares had by then sunk from their value on flotation of 3s to 2d,¹⁴³ they were unsaleable.

When the stock exchange first refused to quote the shares, Tregoweth retorted that he had worked the property for 12 years 'and against adverse circumstances held on to it, expending in labor, material, and cash a sum of about £11,000'.¹⁴⁴ After continued criticism that he was receiving too much from the flotation, he wrote to the press:

I took this ground up some 14 years ago. I have, with some outside help, spent about £1000 per annum on the said property during that term. Before the existing company took it over, I had driven (low level) between 1900ft and 2000ft, besides a level of 800ft in the top workings; also other valuable works. Several good reefs were unearthed during this prospecting process. Before I placed the property on the market I proved to myself and other real experts the existence of a payable lode.... The [Talisman] ore is now being worked towards the Comstock fully 1200ft from where the payable ore was first worked, and if it continues its present dip must pass into the Comstock mine. Is it fair that the last word of these unpractical men should be thrust on the investing public as showing the Comstock to be "a wild cat?" This is what they want the public to believe. Not one of them has ever visited the mine. Why, one of our lodes, carrying gold, is 67ft wide. I have never offered or given bribe to any person or party in connection with the Comstock. My name is unsullied and unstained in mining matters during a period of 40 years' experience on this field, and I think it cruel and uncalled for that a slur should be thus attempted to be placed on me and my mine.¹⁴⁵

He had the sympathy of the *Thames Star*, which uncritically cited his claim that his property contained an immense lode 'as good as the reefs in the Waihi mine'.¹⁴⁶ He deserved success, 'for if ever a man has stuck to his work it is Mr Tregoweth'.¹⁴⁷ When the company that caused all the fuss was floated, it wrote that, 'if pluck and determination carried out under considerable difficulty merit success, Mr Tregoweth may justly claim his

¹⁴² *Auckland Weekly News*, 7 November 1907, p. 23.

¹⁴³ *Auckland Weekly News*, 24 October 1907, p. 25.

¹⁴⁴ *Thames Star*, 22 August 1906, p. 2.

¹⁴⁵ Letter from William Tregoweth, *Auckland Weekly News*, 24 October 1907, p. 25.

¹⁴⁶ *Thames Star*, 29 July 1903, p. 4.

¹⁴⁷ *Thames Star*, 15 September 1904, p. 2.

reward'.¹⁴⁸ Although the *Observer*, which both admired his persistence and was amused by his personality, published a cartoon of him as 'the coming multi-millionaire',¹⁴⁹ his living conditions revealed that he died in straightened circumstances.¹⁵⁰ An acquaintance recalled him predicting that a local carter would be 'carting his gold into Paeroa instead of coal to Waikino, but poor Bill died without getting his gold'.¹⁵¹ (And as for Tregoweth's claims of having found a reef to rival Waihi, when McCombie investigated in 1923 he discovered the drive had not reached the lode.)¹⁵²

OBSTACLES TO PROSPECTING

Amongst the difficulties of early Hauraki mining was the refusal by some Maori to permit Pakeha exploration of their lands. Consequently, this had to be done illegally and secretly, but as finds could not be registered they could not be protected from being jumped.¹⁵³ Another difficulty was the holding of large areas of land by companies. As early as 1876, when there was a decline in mining at Thames, one miner, Clement Augustus Cornes,¹⁵⁴ told Sir George Grey that hundreds were in enforced idleness. 'When the depression set in, men went over the field prospecting, but could not put a pick in any ground which did not belong to some company'.¹⁵⁵ At Te Aroha in 1882, John Purvis,¹⁵⁶ who had participated in the Te Aroha

¹⁴⁸ *Thames Star*, 24 February 1906, p. 2.

¹⁴⁹ Cartoon, *Observer*, 28 March 1908, p. 18.

¹⁵⁰ Inquest on William Tregoweth, Justice Department, J 46, 1908/953, ANZ-W; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 21 October 1908, p. 3; he did not leave a will, and there is no record of the value of his estate.

¹⁵¹ W.M. Sorenson, 'Early Days in Mackaytown', *Ohinemuri Regional History Journal*, no. 54 (September 2010), p. 7, reprinted from *Hauraki Plains Gazette*, 27 October 1948.

¹⁵² New Talisman Gold Mining Company, Karangahake, 1923, Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 418 no. 2385, ANZ-A.

¹⁵³ See, for example, 'Ohinemuri (from an excursionist)', *Thames Advertiser*, 16 January 1875, p. 3.

¹⁵⁴ See paper on his life.

¹⁵⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 24 February 1876, p. 3.

¹⁵⁶ See *Waikato Times*, 8 January 1881, p. 3; *Thames Star*, 25 September 1882, p. 3; *Thames Advertiser*, 14 August 1894, p. 2.

rush,¹⁵⁷ stated that 18 months previously he had found good gold, ‘but he could do nothing then as the ground was in the possession of a company’.¹⁵⁸ A decade later, when many companies held unworked ground under protection, ‘An Old Thames Miner’ complained about how detrimental this was to mining:

The life and soul of a goldfield is the prospector, and what chance has he with the country locked up for miles around. How often has it occurred that men who have been out prospecting for months, and have at last come across as “show,” on what was to all intents and purposes unoccupied ground, only to find in the end that they were on protected property, and to be threatened with prosecution if they did not clear out at once? This has taken place hundreds of times, as every old Thames miner knows.¹⁵⁹

PROSPECTING TRACKS

One solution was to make prospecting tracks to provide access to more remote areas. In 1887, an Ohinemuri correspondent wrote that the only places on the peninsula where gold had been found were ‘in the immediate neighbourhood of Maori or gumpackers’ tracks which were in existence long before the advent of the digger, whilst all the intervening parts of the country are still unexplored’.¹⁶⁰ Exploration was difficult without ready access to the back country, as ‘1870’ pointed out, for prospectors needed to be able to ‘find their way in and out of the bush without the fear of perhaps being bushed for several days’ when attempting to replenish their supplies:

Miners and prospectors are not all bushmen. About the time the Coromandel range track-cutting was going on a party of men left town on a prospecting expedition, and on the eastern side of the main range discovered several reefs, which gave excellent dish prospects, and, I believe, took stone from one reef which showed gold to the naked eye; but, being winter time and the creeks continually in flood, they were obliged to abandon prospecting at that time, with the intention of returning at some future date,

¹⁵⁷ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Miner’s Right no. 502, issued 25 November 1880, Miners’ Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1d; Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 194, 229, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *Waikato Times*, 8 January 1881, p. 3.

¹⁵⁸ *Waikato Times*, 3 October 1882, p. 3.

¹⁵⁹ Letter from ‘An Old Thames Miner’, *New Zealand Herald*, 25 June 1891, p. 3.

¹⁶⁰ Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 8 October 1887, p. 2.

and in their struggle to reach the track at the top of the range they were so encumbered with their swags, picks and dish in the dense forest of scrub and supplejacks that they decided to strip themselves of all goods and tools they were carrying, and so left them, thinking it an easy matter to find them again under more favorable circumstances; but which, it is needless to say, was like looking for a needle in a haystack and that was the last they saw of them.

Seventeen years later, '1870' discovered the rusty remains by accident, proving to him that 'in comparison with the present generation of miners "there were giants in those days," men who were not afraid to plunge into trackless forest in search of the yellow gold'.¹⁶¹ There was general recognition that tracks were needed, prompting constant requests to councils and the government to provide these.¹⁶² As local and central government funds were not supplied for new areas until prospectors had proved they contained auriferous ore, the first prospectors had to make do without tracks.

PROSPECTING PARTIES

Every time a goldfield declined, there were calls to subsidise prospecting parties in the hope that new discoveries would revitalise it. For example, in 1884 the Aroha Prospecting Association was formed; it sought 40 to 50 members each subscribing £1 as the first payment and then 5s a week to pay the wages and expenses of four or five experienced prospectors.¹⁶³ However, many doubted the value of subsidised prospecting parties. As early as 1869, Frederick Wollaston Hutton, a geologist later associated with the 'Waitoa find' near Te Aroha,¹⁶⁴ wrote that 'paid men,

¹⁶¹ Letter from '1870', *Thames Star*, 11 May 1899, p. 2.

¹⁶² For examples of the Piako County Council being asked to construct tracks at Waiorongomai, see *Te Aroha News*, 15 September 1883, p. 3, 30 May 1885, p. 2, 13 March 1886, p. 2, Piako County Council, 15 May 1886, p. 2; County Clerk to Minister of Mines, 26 October 1886, Mines Department, MD 1, 87/159, ANZ-W; for examples of the Ohinemuri County Council being asked to construct the Tui track, see *Thames Advertiser*, 23 October 1885, p. 3, 14 February 1886, p. 3; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 5 February 1906, p. 2, 2 March 1906, p. 2.

¹⁶³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 29 November 1884, p. 2.

¹⁶⁴ See paper on this find.

with no one to look after them', were 'apt to get indolent, and not to prospect the ground thoroughly'.¹⁶⁵ In 1877, Adam Porter¹⁶⁶ stated that during 16 years' mining he had 'contributed much money' to such parties and 'been on many prospecting committees, which have paid prospecting parties, but as a rule the prospecting had been unsuccessful, the reason being that the men have been paid not for work done, but for time spent'.¹⁶⁷ Two years later, the Ohinemuri Prospecting Association sacked its prospectors because 'money was being claimed for services not rendered'.¹⁶⁸ In his first report, in 1880, the new warden, Harry Kenrick,¹⁶⁹ stated that the current system of subsidies to prospectors was 'not a success. There is necessarily little or no check on the work done by the prospecting party', and grants were 'very liable to abuse, even when the checks were good'.¹⁷⁰ In 1887, 'Old Thames' wrote that during his 24 years in Thames not one paid prospecting party had found gold but all asked for their pay 'with the utmost regularity'.¹⁷¹ Two years later it was commented that it was 'notorious that when some prospecting partners get out of sight, they do half a crown's worth of work for every sovereign they receive', meaning they did only an eighth of the value of the money they received. Prospecting was 'better done by men with a little capital, and whose restless energies prevent them settling down to methodical work'.¹⁷² John McCombie stated that in his 25 years of experience in almost all New Zealand's mining regions, had he known a subsidised prospecting party make a discovery 'of any consequence'. True prospectors 'will not work by "rule of thumb," nor as proteges of either local or general governing bodies, but on their own "hook"', requiring only 'packs' or 'blazed lines' through the heavily-timbered country'. There was a lot of bogus prospecting by those being subsidised.¹⁷³ L.M.J., an unknown person who was not included in the Thames electoral roll, argued on the

¹⁶⁵ F.W. Hutton, Essay No. 2, 'Essays on the Subject of the Settlement of the Gold-Mining Population in New Zealand', *AJHR*, 1869, D-6, p. 17.

¹⁶⁶ See paper on his life.

¹⁶⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 7 March 1877, p. 3.

¹⁶⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 29 January 1879, p. 3.

¹⁶⁹ See paper on his life.

¹⁷⁰ Harry Kenrick to Under-Secretary, Gold Fields, 30 April 1880, *AJHR*, 1880, H-26, p. 7.

¹⁷¹ Letter from 'Old Thames', *Thames Advertiser*, 12 October 1887, p. 3.

¹⁷² *Observer*, 17 August 1889, p. 10.

¹⁷³ 'Aboriginal', 'Gold or Bullion. Tracks as an Aid to Prospecting', *Auckland Weekly News*, 8 April 1893, p. 35.

basis of his experiences that prospecting associations had ‘proved a huge mistake and loss’ to those who formed them because of the ‘incompetent handling’ of the ‘unscrupulous skunks’ employed. Even ‘if tons of gold existed in the area they were supposed to explore, it would not be found by them, simply because they were too lazy to search for it’. And those who provided the capital made little effort to find out how it was spent:

The only report they got was that we (the party) have fossicked all along that section, or ridge, and gully, and could not even find a trace of any values or valuables. Why? Simply because they never went out to look for anything. The chances are that if the party could be hunted up, he would be found in his bunk at camp, or hanging around camp.¹⁷⁴

In the following year, the *Observer* reported ‘an old form of mining fraud’ was still being practiced in Hauraki.

Two prospectors were being kept going by a little town syndicate on half wages and an interest in whatever they might find. They didn’t find anything at all, but drew their wages regularly till the syndicators smelt a rat. Then a descent was made on the subsidised men’s quarters, and the little swindle was exposed. They had not prospected at all for a long time, but had taken to gum-digging, and were doing fairly well at that, besides pocketing the syndicate’s subsidy.... Many an Auckland tradesman could tell tales about being similarly bled in the early days of the Thames.¹⁷⁵

A legal manager for many mining companies, Joseph James Macky,¹⁷⁶ in 1911 urged the minister to end all subsidies to prospectors.

The long experience of those intimately connected with “Prospectors” has very clearly demonstrated that money so given is simply wasted, seeing we have had too many professional prospectors who love the “go as you please” life in the Bush, away

¹⁷⁴ Letter from L.M.J., *Thames Star*, 16 June 1902, p. 3.

¹⁷⁵ *Observer*, 20 June 1903, p. 16.

¹⁷⁶ See Neil Lloyd Macky, *Macky Family in New Zealand 1845-1969* (written 1939; Auckland, 1969), vol. 1, pp. 45-47.

from the haunts of men, but whose real qualifications and intentions hardly ever inspire confidence.¹⁷⁷

In a further letter he claimed that subsidized prospectors 'as a class' were 'unreliable; and when they report against any place, after probably doing nothing, by way of real prospecting, the district is condemned, and thereafter generally neglected'.¹⁷⁸ He may have been particularly soured by his experience with the Waitawheta Gold Prospecting Company, which he formed after receiving samples of apparently valuable ore from the Waitawheta Valley, across the range from Te Aroha. A large piece of sulphide ore plus quartz samples rich in gold were displayed in his Auckland office which he told the public were taken from an area 'as yet undeveloped, on which it is intended to carry out prospecting' and to form a company.¹⁷⁹ After its first year of operation, the directors had to report the truth about these samples:

The man who made the statement which led to the formation of the Company, that he had found rich Sulphide Stone well within the bounds of the area prospected, at a locality which he undertook to show to our men, utterly failed to show them any similar stone, or indeed Sulphide Ore of any kind, notwithstanding that he was working there for Three Months at the Company's expense, and ably assisted by energetic and excellent men.... Indeed our Prospectors have made it quite clear that the very nature of the country precludes the possibility of Sulphide Ore being found within the area taken up, unless it of course had first been taken there by human agency.¹⁸⁰

There were many other cases of deliberate fraud. One man recalled a 1930s case of 'roguey':

I remember a mate of mine telling me that some miner chap in Thames had a stranger there one day who had a prospecting dish and he was panning away and then he was excited and showed

¹⁷⁷ Joseph James Macky to Minister of Mines, 17 February 1911, Mines Department, MD 1, 14/1514, ANZ-W.

¹⁷⁸ Joseph James Macky to Minister of Mines, 24 April 1911, Mines Department, MD 1, 14/1514, ANZ-W.

¹⁷⁹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 7 February 1907, p. 44.

¹⁸⁰ Directors' Report for year ending 31 December 1908, Waitawheta Gold Prospecting Company, Companies Files, BADZ 5181, box 222 no. 1314, ANZ-A.

this miner the dish. The miner said “Yes, that is gold in the dish all right.” So this other bloke who was with my mate said, “Let me have a look,” and he took the dish and had a look and he swished it round and then had his finger in the dish and then he said “I can’t see anything there at all.” Then the new chum that had thought he had gold in the dish grabbed the dish, had a look and he couldn’t find any either. My mate said to the miner fellow “Are you sure there was a bit of gold there.” The miner chap said, “Of course there was.” A bit later my mate said to the second bloke “It wasn’t there when we looked later on.” The bloke said, “No, I know that. Here it is now. I have got it in my fingers.” He said “I knew that the miner had a pigeon [‘a sucker, a victim’]¹⁸¹ and was trying to get this new chum to put money into the venture so when I put my finger in the pan I pinched his specimen he had put in there in the first place.”¹⁸²

The *Thames Advertiser* in 1881 warned against placing ‘confidence in those who live by pegging out’ in untried localities,¹⁸³ but many ignored such advice.

The genuine prospector did not exploit the gullible; indeed it could be argued that he was exploited by the more experienced or the more crafty. The typical arrangement for paying a prospecting party was described by one mining agent in yet another letter seeking government assistance: ‘The party will consist of four good Miners who will be paid low wages and receive an interest in any ground in which Gold may be struck by them’.¹⁸⁴ In 1893, the Te Aroha Prospecting Association employed two men for three months for £2 each per week and a quarter share in any claim pegged out.¹⁸⁵ The highest reward for finding gold was a half-interest in any claim registered.¹⁸⁶ As these arrangements meant a prospector employed by others often obtained only a minority share in his discovery, many refused to work on this basis. In 1901, one newspaper claimed the lack of prospecting in Ohinemuri was because a successful prospector was ‘simply

¹⁸¹ Jonathon Green, *The Cassell Dictionary of Slang* (London, 1998), p. 913.

¹⁸² Percy Howe, interviewed on 12 August 1997, in *Hauraki Memories: Some treasured memories from the wider Hauraki area*, comp. Ken Clover (Ngatea, 2008), pp. 79-80.

¹⁸³ *Thames Advertiser*, 12 July 1881, p. 3.

¹⁸⁴ John P. Stodart to Warden, 10 August 1881, Thames Warden’s Court, Inward Letters 1879-1896, BACL 13388/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁸⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 25 January 1893, p. 2.

¹⁸⁶ Waitoa Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 22 July 1880, p. 2.

in the hands of the capitalist who backs him' and consequently he was 'not taking any'.¹⁸⁷

PART-TIME PROSPECTING

To meet expenses, prospectors had to take whatever work was available. For example, James Smith of Smyth, describing his prospecting with others of Ohinemuri in 1868 and 1869, said 'we prospected from time to time, a fortnight now and again. We earned money fencing' for a farmer, 'and when we had it we spent it in the ranges prospecting on our own hook'.¹⁸⁸ When 'Daldy' McWilliams and his brothers prospected there in the late 1870s, 'working capital was provided by two of his party, who tackled any job they could get. The other two fossicked in the ranges'.¹⁸⁹ Some members of a party working at Wharekirauponga, near Whangamata, in 1886, dug kauri gum as well as prospecting.¹⁹⁰

OTHERS BENEFIT FROM PROSPECTORS' DISCOVERIES

As prospectors usually were under-funded, they could not develop their finds to gain adequate rewards. One observer wrote that 'often the prospector after expending all he has in developing his lease has to abandon it, when someone else steps in and reaps a golden harvest'; in these circumstances 'a man should be paid for his improvements'.¹⁹¹ The prices prospectors obtained by selling their discoveries were usually not recorded. In many cases, they were given shares in the company formed to work their prospecting claim along with a small cash bonus, promoters not being willing to give large sums of cash for ground that might not be profitable. By receiving shares, a prospector selling a fraudulent claim would share in the loss. Any cash payment did not go far; for instance, when Thomas Henry

¹⁸⁷ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 15 April 1901, p. 2.

¹⁸⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 15 March 1875, p. 3.

¹⁸⁹ *Te Aroha and the Fortunate Valley*, p. 315.

¹⁹⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 13 February 1886, p. 3.

¹⁹¹ John Andrew Wauchope, *The Goldfields of the Hauraki District, New Zealand* (London, n.d. [1897]), p. 45.

Russell¹⁹² of the Waihi Company bought the Komata find of 1891 for £3,000, this sum had to be shared amongst a prospecting party of eight.¹⁹³

That inadequate returns for prospectors were common world wide was illustrated from an 1888 article in the *Nevada County Herald*, reprinted in the *Te Aroha News*:

Sometimes weeks, or even months, are spent upon the "prospect." At last he strikes a body of good ore. He feels sure that a fortune is near at hand. But he cannot develop it. He must enlist capital or sell his prospect. To this end he selects a quantity of specimens and goes to town. Then the hardest part of all the work begins - that of getting somebody interested in the "find."

If the rock shows a large quantity of free gold there will be no trouble in getting men who have money to go and examine the ledge [a reef]. But in many cases the inspectors declare it is too small, or not as good as represented. They have a long consultation, have assays made of the rock, decide that it is not what they supposed, and finally decline to put any money into it. Then the prospector begins again. He goes from one capitalist to another. The months drag by, and at last he finds that he must either sell his find or leave it. Somebody has offered him a low figure for his claim, and he may or may not accept it. Nobody recognizes his right to ask a fair price for it. They tell him it is only a prospect; it may pinch out, or be only a pocket-ledge, or anything but a good mine in embryo. At last he sells the property, and the new owners develop it. It becomes a good paying mine - a valuable property. The prospector, who has spent months upon it, has received a few hundred dollars, and the new owners reap a harvest of many thousands. It is this method of treatment on the part of capitalists that puts a check on the prospector's work. The man who hunts for gold is not encouraged. His reward is too small. He must do his prospecting at his own expense, and then, if he is successful, there is nobody willing to give him a fair compensation for his time and labour. On the contrary, every man would sooner take advantage of him.¹⁹⁴

When Charles Ring, who discovered the first goldfield in New Zealand at Coromandel, died, it was reported that he had not received any reward, only about £200 to meet his out-of-pocket expenses. 'Like most other holders of prospectors' claims, Mr Ring took no brilliant yield from the ground he

¹⁹² See paper on Billy Nicholl.

¹⁹³ *Thames Advertiser*, 11 September 1891, p. 2, 18 September 1891, p. 3, 5 February 1892, p. 2, 27 April 1892, p. 2.

¹⁹⁴ *Nevada County Herald*, n.d., reprinted in *Te Aroha News*, 19 September 1888, p. 2.

took up'.¹⁹⁵ When prospectors did make money, only rarely did they retain it. In 1883, William Albert Hunt, one of the four discoverers of the first bonanza at Thames, was so down on his luck that he had been forced to return to prospecting at Coromandel. Although he had shared in the nearly £250,000 return from the Shotover claim, he had filed as bankrupt recently. 'Not one of the original shareholders was able to stand the sudden access of wealth.... It was easy come, easy go'. In that year, one of the others, George Clarkson, was a pitman in an Australian colliery, while William Cobley and J. E. White were living in Auckland 'in a small way far removed from the palatial style in which they started'.¹⁹⁶ Other examples can be found¹⁹⁷ that confirm the first of two generalizations: 'The professional prospector seldom gets rich, not but that good things do now and then fall his way, but either through want of prudence or forethought, the money thus earned is often soon spent again. But he does not mind, for he knows where he can soon pick up another reef'.¹⁹⁸

Bert McAra, a miner who did both surface and underground prospecting at Tui in the late 1940s and early 1950s and later became a mining inspector, commented in 1985 that 'they say that prospecting never pays'.¹⁹⁹ One problem for the prospector was to know how to make it pay. Referring to discoveries in Canada in the early twentieth century, one historian wrote that the 'best hope' of the prospectors

had always lain in selling their claims for a quick profit rather than trying to develop mines themselves.... But how soon should they cash in and for how much? The elusive nature of the answers did not slow the process whereby amateur prospectors were squeezed out or forced to join the ranks of the professionals,²⁰⁰

who worked for companies.

IN CONCLUSION, A 'WAIL'

¹⁹⁵ *Observer*, 31 March 1906, p. 5.

¹⁹⁶ *Otago Daily Times*, quoted in *Te Aroha News*, 6 October 1883, p. 2.

¹⁹⁷ See, for example, paper on Billy Nicholl.

¹⁹⁸ W. Green, 'The Prospector's Quest', *Thames Advertiser*, 29 August 1898, p. 4.

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Bert McAra at Waihi, 4 August 1885, p. 45 of transcript.

²⁰⁰ Fetherling, p. 178,

To conclude, 'A Prospector's Wail', written by 'Hill Track' in 1898 and published first in Paeroa and then in Thames:

Sitting in a raupo whare on an old condensed-milk case, the wind guttering the last of my candle, writing with a pen - well, you can see what it's like - and ink like paste and on paper stolen from the Post Office last time I was in the township, I want to tell you something about my prospecting experience. I have been a prospector - West Coast, Thames and Ohinemuri - for over twenty years. I shall never, I am afraid, be anything else. I have helped to discover some of the best lodes on the peninsula. Yet here I sit to-night on my milk box within sound of the stamps which are crushing the quartz, some of which once belonged to me, but which I had not the cunning to keep, and which is now making money for some London Hooley [speculator of ill repute].²⁰¹

I have arrived at that stage when one looks at life, especially his own life, almost with amusement. When a man can look back to the '50s - nay a year before, the historic '49 - when he has neither house, wife, nor child - nothing but grey hair and thoughts, with clean and empty hands, is it not that he may be a fair critic of his craft and times. And in one phrase, which I demand shall be heard, I say that the downfall of the goldfield will one day be found in the non-recognition of the prospector. How many old hands, Pat Mulligan, Paddy Byrnes, Micky Te Hira,²⁰² Dan Leahy,²⁰³ Jimmy Liddle, Johnny McCombie, Jim Shaw, Wat. Davis, Bill and Fred Hollis, Jack Goonan, Hugh Butler,²⁰⁴ Mat. Kinsella, Tom Hollis, Ted [Edward Mann] Corbett,²⁰⁵ Bob Lowrie, aye, dozens of others, have spent their life in the search for that which has made others fortunes but brought us nothing - nothing! I say, sir, that Government should afford prospectors strong

²⁰¹ The original Hooley was a millionaire who went bankrupt in 1898: Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, 8 ed., edited by Paul Beale (London, 1984), p. 567.

²⁰² Not known as a prospector in Hauraki, which all the others were; could it be an extremely garbled version of Hone Werahiko?

²⁰³ See paper on his life.

²⁰⁴ For his involvement in the Te Aroha rush, see Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 416, issued 25 November 1880, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1c; Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 170, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 24 February 1881, p. 258.

²⁰⁵ For his shareholding in the New Find at Waiorongomai in 1881 and 1882, see Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 30, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 23 March 1882, p. 490.

assistance.... The very seed sower of the industry, the prospector, is perishing.... The storekeepers who "started" us years ago look on us now with a distrustful eye. We have to pay lawyers and surveyors, Court fees, rent, God knows what, and at the finish, if we *do* find anything worth talking about it and get some one in Auckland to half believe in it, where do we come in? A roomful of supercilious shopmen kindly give us about a hundredth of what we found for them; elect a legal manager (what a rotten term) and then if the thing proves good, freeze us out in calls.

I could give dozens of instances of this procedure, but they are so commonly known that they will not be new to your readers. Suffice it for me to ask, not for myself - a back number, done, and like old Gladstone "waiting," will the country do anything for the prospector?²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ 'Hill Track', A Prospector's Wail', *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 20 July 1898, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 22 July 1898, p. 3; *Thames Advertiser*, 23 July 1898, p. 4.