

AWAITING THE PROCLAMATION OF THE TE AROHA

GOLDFIELD: 1–24 NOVEMBER 1880

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Abstract: *Rumours about finds and prospects could not be proved either way until more prospecting could be done, and this had to await the official proclamation of the new goldfield. Despite optimism, no reef, or even a leader, had been discovered, and all the hopes were based on surface stone of uncertain value. Apart from the original prospectors, nobody was doing much development, most waiting to see where others made good finds so that they could peg out adjoining ground. Although increasing numbers continued to arrive, some in organized parties, most of their time was spent hanging around the hotels discussing the latest news and arguing about the value of the local ore, which even some experienced miners misunderstood.*

As officials considered that delaying the opening would create more difficulties, they were not convinced the field would be valuable. They, like some journalists, discouraged exaggerated hopes and men from rushing to Te Aroha. Two canvas settlements were formed, with storekeepers arriving in increasing numbers to service them. As opening day approached, the influx increased, and so did arguments over the new regulations to be applied. On the eve of the day of the proclamation, hundreds were ready to compete for mining claims and for residence and business sites.

EARLY NOVEMBER

‘ “Were you ever at Te Aroha?” writes a peregrinating contributor, “because if not, come at once. We have the finest whisky, the prettiest girls, the richest quartz, and the biggest liars in the world” ’.¹ Thus a jest in the *Observer*. While there was plenty of whisky, for life was centred on the Hot Springs Hotel,² at the beginning of November there were few if any girls living there, the value of the quartz was yet to be proved, and the extent of the lies was suspected but unproven. Rumours continued about the ore, the prospecting, and the details of when and how the new goldfield would open and be administered. What was certain was that all would be uncertain until a goldfield was proclaimed. There were complaints that until then there could be no security for any finds, and successful prospectors were

¹ *Observer*, 6 November 1880, p. 60.

² *Waikato Times*, 4 September 1880, p. 1, Waitoa Correspondent, 19 October 1880, p. 2, Waihou Correspondent, 26 October 1880, p. 2, 16 November 1880, p. 2.

liable to be jumped by rivals. This, it was claimed, was preventing prospecting. In response to these worries, on the first day of November the *New Zealand Herald* clarified the legalities:

If any party discovers gold, they have merely to bring the fact to the knowledge of the Government, and steps will be taken to enable them to hold the ground. The Government have power to do this, and have pledged themselves that they will exercise this power in the case of any *bona fide* discovery. Men may therefore engage at prospecting over Te Aroha without any misgivings. The sooner they do so the better; for upon the results of prospecting within the next few days will depend whether the field is proclaimed a goldfield or not. Miners who know how to do prospecting may, therefore, crowd from the Thames or from Waikato. In all probability, however, the outcry arises, not from those who mean to do prospecting, but from the numerous class who follow every new rush, and “hang around” till they hear gold has been struck, and then peg out as near as possible. For these men there certainly will be no protection at Te Aroha, till the field is proclaimed, if it ever should be. The discoveries as yet do not amount to very much. A reef or leader has been found which yielded on the test of a small quantity of the stone at the rate of somewhat over an ounce to the ton. True, loose stones have been picked up at Te Aroha which show gold, and may indeed be classed as specimens, but it would hardly be wise to proclaim a goldfield on the evidence of loose stones.³

Its Thames correspondent responded that this promise of protection would ‘scarcely satisfy prospectors’:

The men on the ground assert that it is useless for them to start prospecting for their movements would be so closely watched that it would be impossible to keep any find they might make to themselves until they had sufficient time to communicate with the Government and obtain protection, and consequently they would only be laying themselves open to be robbed. For instance, suppose a party of four men selected a likely spot and commenced working on it. In a day or two their movements would have attracted notice, and from that time they would be closely watched. To enable them to get protection for their ground they must make a discovery of some importance, and should they succeed the watchers are aware of the fact as soon as the workers, and would immediately put in a claim for the ground also. Not only so, but should the men working discover a leader carrying

³ Editorial, *New Zealand Herald*, 1 November 1880, p. 4.

rich gold-bearing stone, and apparently this is what the Government require before they will give any protection, every Dick, Tom, and Harry near the place could, and probably would, go and break away a portion of the leader, and the discoverers, having no title to the ground, could not prevent them. The question has also been asked if there are no grounds upon which to open the field, why have the first prospectors been granted protection, and why promised a prospector's claim? Apparently the best plan would be to declare a portion of the field open and give the miners protection at once, and then the first party who discover a payable lode should, if possible, receive a prospector's claim, and, if not, let them have an ample reward. Among the miners the feeling is that, so long as there is any uncertainty about getting a title to their claim, the ground had better be left alone.⁴

On 2 November, this newspaper stated that,

although few are prepared to express very sanguine views, a feeling exists that if payable gold has not been discovered it may be discovered, and some go so far as to think that it has been discovered, but that the prospectors are too prudent to expose their hands until they have a legal guarantee that they shall own their discovery. At all events there is a very general desire that the field should be opened, and that the best or worst should be known as soon as possible.

It was expected that pressure on the government would cause the district to be opened within a few days, probably under the old Goldfields Act because this would mean more effective prospecting.⁵

On 1 November, the *Thames Star* correspondent at Te Aroha reported an 'impression' held there that the warden would not open the field until satisfied there was a payable goldfield, 'which of course he cannot be yet'. Regarding the resolution at the miners' meeting not to interfere with the prospectors for a limited period, he believed this was 'all the so-called protection'. He had 'heard from several parties' that there was 'likely to be some fun' when the fortnight expired, 'as there will be a general pegging out, and perhaps some heads broken'. Hone Werahiko⁶ had shown him more good stone from the Prospectors' Claim, and another party had discovered a

⁴ Thames Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 3 November 1880, p. 6.

⁵ *New Zealand Herald*, 2 November 1880, p. 5.

⁶ See paper on his life.

seven-foot reef three miles from the latter (at Waiorongomai?), but with no gold showing so far. 'A great many seem to be playing a waiting game'.⁷ In the next issue, he expanded on some of these points:

On the whole I do not consider that the present state of things on the field is at all satisfactory. With the exception of the prospectors – Hone [Werahiko], Davy Morgan [Rewi Mokena],⁸ and [John Mc]Sweeney⁹ - scarcely any of the other miners are doing anything. Nor are they to be blamed, because as the field stands at present there is no guarantee that the fact of the making of a discovery will give the finder priority. They consequently prefer the Micawber-like policy of waiting for something to turn up, in the meantime keeping themselves thoroughly acquainted with every move.

He wanted the district proclaimed immediately so that 'men would have heart and confidence to go in for giving the mountain a thorough overhaul, and have security in the event of success'. He reported on some prospecting and the exceptionally good surface specimens he was shown at Mokena Hou's house. It was 'a wonderful thing that this loose stone should be so plentiful, while its source yet remains undiscovered': if they 'came from much higher up the mountain', current prospecting would be 'so much labor thrown away'. He then recounted 'a disappointment' experienced by a visitor from Thames who had visited the Prospectors' Claim:

While laboriously ascending the precipitous hillside, perspiration oozing from every pore, and already faint hearted with his self-appointed task he suddenly espied on the ground in front of him a piece of quartz with something bright and glistening showing in it. He prized it up with his stick. It was quartz, and, lo and behold! right across the stone ran a band of bright yellow mineral. "Gold, and no mistake," he mentally ejaculated. He hastened down to the creek, visions of the future prosperity of the place coursing through his brain, and in this frame of mind dipped his treasure in the pellucid water. Yes, there was the yellow gold glistening and shining in the streaks of sunlight that found their way through the interstices in the canopy of foliage. Then he rubbed it thinking how fortunate he was to pick up a good specimen, but horrible to relate the yellow metal grew faint and soon after disappeared. Our friend, after praying fervently for

⁷ Pigeongrams, *Thames Star*, 1 November 1880, p. 2.

⁸ See paper on his life.

⁹ See paper on his life.

about five consecutive minutes, devoted his energies to discovering the cause of the phenomena. He soon realised that the rubbing of the brass ferrule of his stick had produced the auriferous appearance.¹⁰

It had been reported, incorrectly, that the government had permitted the granting of protection to other discoveries, and, correctly, that some men were hanging around awaiting to hear of gold being found so they could peg out as close to the new discovery as possible.¹¹ Two men from the West Coast of the South Island had commenced prospecting, and a party of ten or 12 experienced miners were coming from Coromandel.¹² Whether they would find anything payable was still regarded by many as questionable, as shown by the careful investigations of a *Thames Advertiser* reporter. Having hurried to Te Aroha upon reading Charles Featherstone Mitchell's claim to have found a large reef that would produce up to 200 ounces to the ton,¹³ he

met with several "old hands," who have been prospecting around in this locality for the last two months. They assured me that they had not seen anything approaching a gold-bearing reef, and, with the exception of the specimen stones picked up on the surface by the prospectors, they had not seen any indications to warrant the theory that a gold-bearing reef exists in this neighbourhood.

His own examination of the Prospectors' Claim confirmed this, and he described the geology of the area:

Within easy distance of the prospectors' workings is plainly to be seen the outcrop of a conglomerate mass of basalt and sandstone, intermixed with quartz stringers. This immense body has a general north and south course, with a westerly underlie, and runs right through the prospectors' ground. After making a careful examination of this outcrop, and not finding the slightest traces of gold, we made tracks for the outcrop of a reef which is situated about 200 yards further up the gully. This lode will average 2 feet in thickness, with a general north and south course, and a westerly underlie. We gave this lode a thorough

¹⁰ Special Reporter, 'Te Aroha', *Thames Star*, 2 November 1880, p. 2.

¹¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 2 November 1880, p. 2.

¹² *Thames Advertiser*, 3 November 1880, p. 2.

¹³ See paper on the discovery of gold at Te Aroha and its consequences.

prospecting but failed to raise a colour of the precious metal. It presents, however, all the characteristics of a gold-bearing lode, and miners are so convinced of the truth of this that they have pegged off claims on its line for some considerable distance. These are the only reefs out-cropping in the immediate neighbourhood of the prospectors' ground, but there are many others further afield.¹⁴

On the following day, the same newspaper noted that, so far, all that had been found were 'mere boulders, apparently released from some undiscovered reef'. The richness of the stone was 'unquestioned', but a successful field required the 'element of permanence'.¹⁵ A *Waikato Times* reporter confirmed how little was happening and that reefs were yet to be found:

I was much surprised on coming within view of the mountain ... a couple of days ago, to see it in exactly the same place and condition as when last I saw its regal grandeur. The tents of the numerous prospectors and expectant diggers I sought in vain. They were not; although I am positive I saw it stated in print that such things were dotted all around the Hot Springs. On arriving at the hotel I found everything quiet in the extreme, and evidently not the slightest excitement going on.... I found on buzzing round that there were absolutely some fifteen men on the hill, prospecting I suppose, and there were three or four at work on the prospectors claim putting a trench right up the face of the hill. That they have got several rich golden stones is a certainty, as everybody here has seen them, and they still keep finding them as they go on up, *but they are all surface stones*, nothing of the sort having been found in the small leader, which was tested at Grahamstown.... So far this work of the prospectors is all that has been done, and there is nothing here to warrant a rush of any sort. Systematic prospecting is the thing required.

He was pleased to learn that the Waitoa Prospecting Association¹⁶ was about to arrange that 'the prospecting will be done on the ranges and not around the Hot Springs Hotel'.¹⁷ In the same issue, this newspaper's Waitoa correspondent reported 'several prospecting parties' exploring, finding 'very good specimens of the highly-prized and much coveted mineral', but noted

¹⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 3 November 1880, p. 3.

¹⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 4 November 1880, p. 2.

¹⁶ See paper on the Waitoa Prospecting Association/Gold Mining Company.

¹⁷ Special Reporter, 'Te Aroha', *Waikato Times*, 4 November 1880, p. 2.

that many would be ‘inclined to doubt the authenticity of this’.¹⁸ At the beginning of November ‘about a dozen genuine miners’ arrived from Thames and elsewhere and started work. They seemed ‘to be a class of men likely to make good prospectors, and not “flat” loafers’,¹⁹ a reference to men who filled in time at the hotel waiting for others to find gold. A ‘small party’ left Hamilton on 5 November, intending to prospect for at least three months.²⁰

The *Thames Advertiser* believed that many of the unemployed would go there once they were assured any finds would be protected, and repeated an Auckland rumour that a company with a capital of £10,000 was being floated by ‘certain influential persons’, whose interests, it argued, would be helped if the *Thames Star* continued to decry the prospects of Te Aroha.²¹ In Hamilton, there was suspicion about the motives of the *Waikato Times*’ enthusiasm for the new field, based on the same rumour, as explained by a local correspondent: ‘It is in the interest of this ring that the local print continues to abuse the HERALD and Thames Advertiser for their fearless publications of the real prospects of the Te Aroha goldfield’.²²

PREPARING TO OPEN THE FIELD

On 6 November, an Auckland newspaper argued that, because no new discoveries were being made, the government should delay declaring the field open. That action would look like ‘an invitation to come to a place proved to be auriferous’, and might ‘cause serious complications’ if payable gold was not found. Frederick Whitaker, the Attorney General, and the warden, Harry Kenrick,²³ were praised for taking a ‘great deal of trouble’ over making arrangements that would avoid ‘the difficulties that occurred at the opening of Ohinemuri’.²⁴ On the following day, Whitaker told the Minister of Mines it was time to proclaim the goldfield:

¹⁸ Waitoa Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 4 November 1880, p. 2.

¹⁹ *Thames Star*, 4 November 1880, p. 2.

²⁰ *Waikato Times*, 6 November 1880, p. 2.

²¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 2 November 1880, p. 3.

²² Hamilton Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 5 November 1880, p. 3.

²³ See paper on his life.

²⁴ *Auckland Weekly News*, 6 November 1880, p. 16.

It may be that the value of the District for Gold Mining is overrated and I should have preferred to have had some more satisfactory evidence of the value before taking this step, but I feel assured that more difficulty will arise from delay and the complications which will arise from the number of men congregating on the grounds.

Because of the quality of gold found, he had ‘not a great deal of confidence as to the Goldfield becoming important’. He had arranged for the prospectors to be granted three acres which including the leader that they had found.²⁵ This reluctant move to open the field was delayed by some Ngati Rahiri demanding a bonus of £1,000.²⁶ As the *New Zealand Herald* reported, miners’ rights would be issued in advance to ensure that everyone could be

on the ground ready to peg out when the legal hour strikes. It will be remembered that at Ohinemuri there was a race, but this time that excitement will be left out of the programme. How the scramble can be conducted we cannot imagine, but we suppose it is the only method, and that things will settle themselves somehow.²⁷

One Hamilton correspondent urged an early opening:

While there are large numbers of persons on the ground, but few are engaged in active prospecting, being utterly demoralised by the action of the Government in not “proclaiming” the field. The public houses, three in number, were full to overflowing, people considering themselves fortunate to get room for a shakedown on the floor with their own blankets, and the steamer was continually coming and going between the Thames and the Waihou landing, taking many passengers both ways. Some very excellent stone was shown to our Hamilton visitors, but the utmost closeness was observed as to where it was found.

He disapproved of a ‘very discouraging, but palpably overdrawn, report of the new field’, written by a special reporter for ‘a local print’, presumably a Cambridge newspaper (copies of which no longer exist), for the Hamilton

²⁵ Frederick Whitaker (Attorney General) to Minister of Mines, 7 November 1880, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/353, ANZ-W.

²⁶ See paper on Maori and mining at Te Aroha.

²⁷ *New Zealand Herald*, 12 November 1880, p. 5.

newspaper was cautiously positive. 'As that worthy never went nearer Te Aroha than Hautapu', his statements were given 'no credence' in Hamilton. Reportedly this newspaper had 'received its brief to decry the field', and was 'certainly doing its best in that direction'. He also supported calls for the goldfield to be opened only

to men holding claims under miners' rights, and that the ground should not be leased for many months to come. It is essential that new goldfield prospecting should be encouraged to the utmost, and to issue leases is to ensure that the ground will not be prospected to one-fiftieth the extent it would be if every acre occupied were bound to be worked without twenty-four hours' intervals, except on Sunday, by so many men.²⁸

EXAGGERATED HOPES DISCOURAGED

Opinions in Tauranga were exceedingly positive. 'From the specimens picked up in the ranges several experienced miners say that the lode ... will be the richest, with the exception of the Caledonian', in Hauraki.²⁹ (As the Caledonian was the richest bonanza of the early Thames field, this was a very brave prophecy.) These specimens were stated to be 'the richest ever found in New Zealand', and the reporter who visited Te Aroha 'saw £5 offered for a small piece of stone and refused, the stone measuring 9 inches by 5 inches, and containing it was supposed more than 3oz of gold'. Although the main reef might not be found for a while,

one prospector who has examined the ranges is confident that the reef will be struck first on the Katikati side of Te Aroha.... Our reporter informs us that while there is nothing to warrant a rush, any of the prospectors can show sufficiently rich specimens that the goldfield must turn out one of the richest ever proclaimed.³⁰

The *Thames Star* condemned such newspaper reports for creating exaggerated hopes.³¹ A few days later a special correspondent from the same Tauranga newspaper wrote more cautiously under the headline 'A Word of Counsel to the Tauranga Folk', who were warned to 'beware of

²⁸ Hamilton Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 6 November 1880, p. 21.

²⁹ *Bay of Plenty Times*, 6 November 1880, p. 2.

³⁰ *Bay of Plenty Times*, 6 November 1880, p. 2.

³¹ *Thames Star*, 12 November 1880, p. 2.

being led away on a wild goose chase'. At George O'Halloran's hotel,³² where he had met the few miners in the district, 'none of them were very communicative'. Despite being shown some 'pretty rich' specimens from the Prospectors' Claim, there was

nothing to warrant a rush to the place. Many people even on the spot are dubious as to whether the stone was found there or brought from the Thames, and what appeared curious to many was that one miner spent half a day around the place where the gold was supposed to have been found and could not get even "the color." The people in the district take matters very quietly and there is far more talk the further you go from the place. Perhaps with many people "the wish is father to the thought," and my advice to all and sundry is to stay where they are, and if they do wish to go to the goldfield wait until it is proclaimed, or they may lose more money and time in a wild goose chase than they expect.³³

While this debate was taking place, several prospecting parties were in the ranges, but no finds were reported. On 10 November, the Te Aroha correspondent of the *Thames Star* once more warned people 'against leaving good wages to come up here', as nothing was 'certain as yet'.³⁴ The Hamilton newspaper agreed there was 'nothing to warrant a rush'.³⁵ Despite this discouragement, increasing numbers were leaving for Te Aroha, most with little mining experience: for example, out of a party of six men arriving from Auckland and Taupiri, 'one or two' were 'practical miners'.³⁶

MORE PROSPECTORS ARRIVE

The *Waikato Times'* correspondent could not give any more certainty about the prospects, but his reports provided an impression of how Te Aroha was becoming the place to visit:

The news from this part of the world is of small moment as regards any more signs of gold. People continue to arrive daily, many just to pay a flying visit, a few to remain and see what

³² See paper on his life.

³³ *Bay of Plenty Times*, 11 November 1880, p. 2.

³⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 10 November 1880, p. 2.

³⁵ *Waikato Times*, 11 November 1880, p. 2.

³⁶ *Waikato Times*, 11 November 1880, p. 2.

affairs will take.... That the ranges will get a good overhauling there is no doubt. There are now some 30 men out, and they all say the same thing. The country abounds in reefs and leaders, and though I know that gold has been got in some of them in very small quantities, yet I am equally sure that *nothing rich* has yet been found, though this might be altered at any moment. When I say that nothing rich has been got I allude to the reefs only, because some rich specimens have been obtained loose on the surface by the prospectors. The best of the stone is now in the hands of Mr Kenrick, the Warden, and Mokena [Hou],³⁷ the native owner of the land on which they are working has several others, one of which weighing about three lbs is extremely rich carrying good heavy gold of superior quality. This speaks well for the prospects of the place, and gives encouragement to others. Quartz of splendid appearance abounds, and Mr [James] Gribble, than whom no better authority can be found, is highly pleased with what he has seen in the short time he has been here, and he intends to remain awhile and see it out.³⁸

(Gribble, a prominent Thames mine manager who was then farming near Hamilton,³⁹ would participate in the rush and be a part owner of two claims.⁴⁰ He would manage one claim on behalf of Waikato investors.)⁴¹ This correspondent's account continued with the arrival of 'a party of Hamilton gentlemen' who

went up the range as far as the Prospectors claim, and enjoyed their walk up immensely, followed as it was by a dip in the hot springs to refresh themselves. Mind, I don't say this was the only refresher they indulged in. Perhaps they had something else to warm them; history is silent on this point. Your Hamilton and

³⁷ See paper on his life.

³⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 11 November 1880, p. 2.

³⁹ For his life in Thames, see *Thames Advertiser*, 13 September 1870, p. 2, 13 September 1873, p. 3, 17 October 1873, p. 2, 9 December 1873, p. 3, 14 July 1874, p. 3, 13 January 1875, p. 3; for his becoming a farmer, see *Thames Advertiser*, 13 November 1880, p. 3; for his life in general, see *Waikato Times*, 4 September 1886, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 301, issued 25 November 1880, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1a; Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 156, 201, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Star*, 26 November 1880, p. 2, 16 December 1880, p. 3.

⁴¹ *Thames Star*, 27 November 1880, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 25 November 1880, p. 3, 10 December 1880, p. 3, Te Aroha Correspondent, 20 January 1883, p. 3.

Waikato readers will be able to judge themselves of the quality of stone to be found here, as Mr [William Henry] Pearce, of the Commercial Hotel has within a very good specimen of golden stone found on the range, and also some samples of quartz with no gold visible therein. They are worth looking at.⁴²

(Pearce, formerly a miner but now a publican,⁴³ would participate in the rush and become an owner of one claim and a director of a company.)⁴⁴

The number of men on the ground was ‘rapidly increasing’ by 11 November, when the *Thames Advertiser’s* correspondent penned his next article. About 60 men, nearly all of them experienced prospectors, were there, ‘hailing respectively from the West Coast, Otago, Tauranga, Katikati, Waikato, Auckland and Thames, the majority being from the latter place’.⁴⁵ On the same date, the *Thames Star* estimated the population at about 100.⁴⁶ The *Thames Advertiser’s* correspondent wrote that those who had

come from a distance are not by any means highly pleased with the surface prospects obtainable here, and they speak in anything but complimentary terms of those who have from time to time written bogus reports respecting the prospects of this field, and to these latter I would say - beware! for “better had’st thou been born a dog than answer to the waxed wrath of an angry gold digger.”⁴⁷

Charles Featherstone Mitchell, who was regarded as the author of the most bogus of the bogus reports, continued to rail at the lack of successful prospecting and the stupidities of official policy. He complained that the news was

⁴² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 11 November 1880, p. 2.

⁴³ *New Zealand Herald*, 6 January 1902, p. 5.

⁴⁴ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Miner’s Right no. 925, issued 25 November 1880, Miners’ Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1b; Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 153, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *Observer*, 18 December 1880, p. 126; *Thames Star*, 5 January 1881, p. 2.

⁴⁵ Own Correspondent, ‘The Aroha Goldfield: Its Progress and Prospects’, *Thames Advertiser*, 12 November 1880, p. 3.

⁴⁶ *Thames Star*, 12 November 1880, p. 2.

⁴⁷ Own Correspondent, ‘The Aroha Goldfield: Its Progress and Prospects’, *Thames Advertiser*, 12 November 1880, p. 3.

becoming quite monotonous. We hear from day to day of rich finds, but that reef with heavy gold is not found yet. Did ever any one know of people more incapable of utilizing a stroke of luck than the unfortunate people of the Province of Auckland, or those who govern them? I wonder would it be libellous to call them imbeciles? ... Now when there is gold! gold! gold!- why, they cavil at that. They will not grant the paltry protection necessary to men who have spent time and money for sixteen years in exploring the country, nor do they know how to deal with a question that a child could have settled in half an hour. Many of the men who were out prospecting have come in. They ask if they are merely to do all this work for the first lot of jumpers who may come along.⁴⁸

As a Hamilton correspondent pointed out, the delay in opening the field meant it was hard to judge 'what has been found or what has not', for the prospectors would not 'show their hands'. There was 'a general feeling' that after the opening 'we shall hear of finds that will at once establish the permanent and paying character of Te Aroha goldfields'. He denied the *Waikato Times*' report of little or no work being done. 'Judging from appearances, it would not seem that there were more than about thirty men upon the field; but when Saturday night and Sunday comes more than a hundred show up. This would indicate that the men are away working back in the ranges'.⁴⁹ More encouraging specimens were being found, some reputedly extracted from reefs.⁵⁰

The *Thames Advertiser*'s Te Aroha correspondent, presumably George O'Halloran,⁵¹ tried to be factual; unlike Mitchell, he avoided making opinionated statements. On 11 November, he had no new discoveries to report:

All hands are looking anxiously forward to the day of the opening, whenever that may be; and but for the loose gold-bearing stones picked up on the prospectors' spur, upon which miners pin their faith, I believe a general stampede from here would set in at once. If the authorities are desirous of retaining the mining population located here at present, the sooner they open the field the better,

⁴⁸ Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 12 November 1880, p. 3.

⁴⁹ Hamilton Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 12 November 1880, p. 5.

⁵⁰ *Auckland Weekly News*, 13 November 1880, pp. 9, 17.

⁵¹ See paper on his life.

for all hands are wearying of the “taihoa”[procrastination] ⁵² policy.

In writing on the prospects of this field, I have avoided the croaker on the one hand and the enthusiast on the other. My information has been derived partly from personal observation and partly from men who are competent to judge such matters.

To those without means who intend coming here, I would say stay at home and to those with sufficient means to enable them to stand a three or six months’ siege I would say come on, for although the surface indications, generally, are not very grand, still the field is an extensive one, and there are belts of first-class gold bearing country here, such as the prospectors’ spur, over which are scattered unmistakable evidence of mineral wealth.⁵³

The day after these cautious words were published, the *Thames Star*’s correspondent announced a rich find in the Prospectors’ Claim.⁵⁴ Miners confirmed that its values were genuine.⁵⁵ As a consequence, ‘the S.S. Vivid came down from Te Aroha on Saturday with all her flags flying, in honour of her being the bearer of the official news respecting the first discovery of good gold in a reef at Te Aroha’.⁵⁶ A special reporter who rushed to Te Aroha confirmed the value of the find. He discussed its worth with Gribble, who considered it to be ‘of considerable importance’, but also warned against a rush. The ‘about 70’ men this reporter counted there were mostly not from Thames but from the West Coast, Tauranga, Coromandel, Waikato, Napier, and Wellington, plus one man from Sydney. He named 16 miners from Thames and Coromandel, one of whom ‘had come up from Coromandel to watch events on behalf of two Auckland capitalists’.⁵⁷ Of these 16, all but two would be shareholders in the first claims marked out after the opening.

⁵² Elizabeth and Harry Orsman, *The New Zealand Dictionary* (Auckland, 2 ed., 1995), p. 278.

⁵³ Own Correspondent, ‘The Aroha Goldfield: Its Progress and Prospects’, *Thames Advertiser*, 12 November 1880, p. 3.

⁵⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 13 November 1880, p. 2.

⁵⁵ See Hamilton Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 20 November 1880, p. 9; John McCombie, ‘Early Days in Te Aroha’, *Auckland Weekly News*, 8 December 1910, p. 17.

⁵⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 15 November 1880, p. 3.

⁵⁷ Special Reporter, ‘The Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 15 November 1880, p. 3.

One of these men was John McCombie,⁵⁸ who in 1910 wrote his recollections of Te Aroha before the official opening:

The general topic of conversation was the prospective value of Hone's "find," and the outlook for the field generally. It did not take many hours to realise that Hone's "find" consisted of loose quartz, rich in gold, and that the reef from which it broke away had not then been unearthed. Small steamers with punts in tow started plying regularly on the Waihou River, connecting Te Aroha with Thames, and every day added its quota to the digger element.

The days were filled up with prospecting, and the evenings devoted chiefly to swapping yarns and fighting mosquitoes, which were strongly in evidence during the autumn and summer months. One day Corbett, Ferguson, McIntyre, Marrinan,⁵⁹ and myself, when out prospecting, discovered a big reef crossing the gully north of [Denis] Murphy's claim [pegged out in 1908],⁶⁰ and about one mile distant from the township. The first pieces of ore broken out therefrom, after being reduced to a powder and panned off, yielded a prospect that knocked all hands speechless with surprise. This prospect was variously estimated to give a return ranging from £20 to £50 per ton. At that time prospectors were raking all the spurs and gullies in the neighbourhood, and the great difficulty that presented itself to us was to keep the prying eyes of other men off the "bonanza," pending the opening of the field by the Government. After discussing a variety of schemes it was resolved to cover up the outcrop by felling a lot of heavily-branched tawa trees on the top of it, and then we started for the camp in order to obtain the requisite chopping implements. We broke out and carried with us quite a lot of the ore, and, when we got clear of this heavily-timbered country and into the sunlight, we subjected some of the specimens to the crushing and panning process. Although the result was simply astonishing there was a peculiar glint about it that was not observable in the gloom of the bush, and that did not chime in with our ideas of the fitness of things. Then some doubts were expressed about its being the genuine article. "Too good to be true," said one fellow. "It's mundic [pyrite]," chipped in another one. "Give it a fire test," chipped in a third one. We lit a fire, placed the dish with its valuable contents thereon, and in less time than it takes me to tell the story, our vision of fabulous wealth vanished in smoke. Briefly the glittering contents of the dish had evaporated. It was chromate of lead, which has often

⁵⁸ See paper on Billy Nicholl.

⁵⁹ For these men, see paper on the discovery of gold at Te Aroha and its consequences.

⁶⁰ See paper on Denis Murphy.

been mistaken for gold because of its strong resemblance to the royal metal.⁶¹

If these experienced prospectors, miners, and mine managers could be so confused about what they had unearthed, the amateurs flocking from the Waikato and elsewhere would be even more easily misled, and were less competent to test their finds. Michael Marrinan (or Marriman) was the only one of these four men who would not become an owner of any claims, although he did participate in the rush.⁶²

The report published in the *Thames Advertiser* on 15 November ended with the usual, futile, caution:

There is nothing here as yet to warrant a rush, and I would advise those who are doing well elsewhere not to come here, until the lode will have been tried at a lower level, which is now being run in with that view, as fast as circumstances will permit. But I suppose it is useless to attempt anything in the shape of advice to those who are smitten with the gold fever. Gold-digging is the lottery of adventure, and few men pause to calculate the chances of success.⁶³

THE NEW SETTLEMENTS

Those who arrived by mid-November found a canvas township. Early in the month, 'Morgan's township', named after Mokena Hou, was surveyed, and storekeepers from Hamilton started up in business.⁶⁴ John Wood,⁶⁵ by 11 November erecting a butcher's shop, was expected to do 'a good business, there being at present no regular supply of meat obtainable'.⁶⁶ Until early that year he had conducted the Nottingham Castle Hotel in Morrinsville.⁶⁷

⁶¹ John McCombie, 'Early Days of Te Aroha', *Auckland Weekly News*, 8 December 1910, p. 17.

⁶² Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 373, issued 25 November 1880, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1a, ANZ-A.

⁶³ Special Reporter, 'The Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 15 November 1880, p. 3.

⁶⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 10 November 1880, p. 2.

⁶⁵ See *Te Aroha News*, 7 September 1921, p. 3.

⁶⁶ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 11 November 1880, p. 2.

⁶⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 24 February 1879, p. 3, 23 March 1880, p. 3; *Descriptive Handbook to the Waikato* (Hamilton, 1880), pp. 33, 66.

During the rush, he concentrated his efforts on obtaining business sites,⁶⁸ not acquiring an interest in a claim until January 1881; he later had shares in four at Waiorongomai.⁶⁹ John Bullock, for himself and partners, was superintending the erection of a store.⁷⁰ Earlier, he had been on the goldfields of the West Coast and then at Thames, investing in mining in both places as well as at Ohinemuri.⁷¹ Although in 1880 he sold ‘Cheap Bread, Hot Pie and Coffee, Confectionery’ and other food, he had correctly described himself three years earlier as a ‘speculator’.⁷² He did not acquire any shares in any claims during the rush, but did obtain a business site.⁷³ At Waiorongomai he would be part owner of 14 claims, a shareholder in eight companies, and a director of most of the latter.⁷⁴

On 14 November, a Te Aroha correspondent described the settlements, starting with one named Fraterville, ‘named after the Messrs Frater Bros, who pitched the first tent upon the site of where now are built the canvas homes of some five-and-twenty gold seekers’.⁷⁵ The Frater brothers,

⁶⁸ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Applications 1880-1882, folios 5, 57, 58, BBAV 11505/3a, ANZ-A.

⁶⁹ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 201, BBAV 11567/1a; Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 25, 55, 64, 84, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

⁷⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 11 November 1880, p. 2.

⁷¹ For example, see *New Zealand Gazette*, 31 August 1867, p. 339, 13 September 1869, p. 478, 21 September 1876, p. 665, 19 October 1876, p. 716, 15 February 1877, p. 2.

⁷² *Thames Star*, 30 October 1880, p. 3; District Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 9 February 1877, p. 3.

⁷³ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Applications 1880-1882, folios 27, 28, BBAV 11505/3a, ANZ-A.

⁷⁴ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 238, 244, 245, 254, BBAV 11567/1a; Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 4, 13, 24, 30, 53-55, 81, 97, 103, 118, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 23 March 1882, p. 490, 17 August 1882, p. 1131, 14 September 1882, p. 1264, 14 December 1882, p. 1885, 31 May 1883, p. 722, 6 September 1883, p. 1265, 27 September 1883, p. 1369, 22 November 1883, p. 1675; *Thames Advertiser*, 7 March 1882, p. 3, 15 September 1883, p. 3, 21 April 1887, p. 2; *Thames Directory for 1885* (Thames, 1885), p. 127.

⁷⁵ Own Correspondent, ‘The Aroha Goldfield: Its Progress and Prospects’, *Thames Advertiser*, 15 November 1880, p. 3.

James,⁷⁶ John,⁷⁷ Robert,⁷⁸ and William,⁷⁹ were sharebrokers and land agents.

The flat which lies between O'Halloran's Hotel and the landing presents, this morning, quite a lively scene. Look which way you will, buildings are to be seen in various stages of completion, comprising butchers, bakers, wholesale and retail shops and stores. In short, a week hence we shall be able to indulge in all the etceteras of civilised life.⁸⁰

A reporter from Thames described the settlements:

At present there are two canvas townships at Te Aroha - Morgantown and Fraterville, the former being on the flat between O'Halloran's Hotel and the landing, and the latter between the Springs and the prospectors' claim. In Morgantown, Mr Wood, late of the Nottingham Castle Hotel, Piako, has opened a butcher's shop, Messrs [Thomas] Veale, Bullock, and [John Leech] Allen a bakery, Mr Geo. Clotworthy (late of Tairua) a general store, and Mr T. Veale is now having erected a weather-boarded grocery establishment. Mr O[sborn Beal] Hubble, late of Gisborne, has started work as a brick-layer, and Mr Parkes, formerly of the Thames, intends to open a smithy in a few days.⁸¹

Veale, a prosperous Thames grocer, owned the store and bakery managed by Bullock and Allen.⁸² Although he would not take up any shares in claims in 1880, Veale held some in the Te Aroha battery and later

⁷⁶ See *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 September 1897, p. 30.

⁷⁷ See *New Zealand Herald*, 27 September 1927, p. 10.

⁷⁸ See *New Zealand Herald*, 7 May 1927, p. 8.

⁷⁹ See *Auckland Star*, 14 December 1934, p. 8; *New Zealand Herald*, 15 December 1934, p. 16.

⁸⁰ Own Correspondent, 'The Aroha Goldfield: Its Progress and Prospects', *Thames Advertiser*, 15 November 1880, p. 3.

⁸¹ Special Reporter, 'The Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 15 November 1880, p. 3.

⁸² *Thames Advertiser*, 8 July 1873, p. 2, 13 August 1874, p. 2, 3 January 1877, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 8 November 1880, p. 3, 11 November 1880, p. 2, 22 November 1880, p. 2; *A Return of the Freeholders of New Zealand ... 1882* (Wellington, 1884), p. V 2; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand* vol. 6 (Christchurch, 1908), p. 124.

acquired interests in three claims and two companies at Waiorongomai.⁸³ Allen had been a miner and then a baker at Thames.⁸⁴ He would not acquire any interests during the rush, but in the following year held shares in three Waiorongomai and two Te Aroha claims.⁸⁵ George Clotworthy had invested in Thames mines before becoming a storekeeper at Tairua.⁸⁶ He would not take out a miner's right until 3 December, after which he obtained interests in two Te Aroha claims.⁸⁷ Hubble had been a bricklayer at Gisborne before becoming one, briefly, at Te Aroha.⁸⁸ Parkes has not been identified, not being listed in the Thames electoral roll.

'The first batch of bread baked at Te Aroha was out of the oven early on Saturday morning and was given away, every person about the place receiving a loaf for nothing'.⁸⁹ Provided by Veale, it was pronounced 'excellent' and 'quite a treat'.⁹⁰ In 1927, he recalled baking 300 loaves.⁹¹ The prices charged for food were 'unprecedentedly low': beef was 4s per pound, and bread 4d a loaf.⁹² A couple of days later, five stores were being erected, plus another butcher's shop 'and other business places'.⁹³

⁸³ *New Zealand Gazette*, 28, April 1881, p. 476, 14 September 1882, p. 1264, 14 December 1882, p. 1885; Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 4, 53, 54, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

⁸⁴ Thames Warden's Court, Register of Deeds 1869, folio 377, BACL 14417/3a; Shortland Claims Register 1870, no. 2358, BACL 14397/5a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 24 August 1877, p. 2, 1 September 1877, p. 2, 13 November 1880, p. 3.

⁸⁵ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 13, 55, 63, BBAV 11500/9a; Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 248, 254, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

⁸⁶ Thames Warden's Court, Thames Claims Register 1868, folios 244, 276, 351, BACL 14397/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 20 September 1872, p. 2, 7 June 1873, p. 2, 8 November 1878, p. 2.

⁸⁷ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 644, issued 3 December 1880, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1e; Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 163, 191, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

⁸⁸ See *East Coast Electoral Roll, 1880*, p. 13; advertisement, *Thames Advertiser*, 20 December 1880, p. 1; advertisement, *Poverty Bay Herald*, 13 November 1884, p. 3.

⁸⁹ Special Reporter, 'The Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 15 November 1880, p. 3.

⁹⁰ *Thames Star*, 15 November 1880, p. 2.

⁹¹ *Te Aroha News*, 3 October 1927, Supplement, p. 3.

⁹² *Thames Star*, 23 November 1880, p. 2.

⁹³ Cambridge Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 20 November 1880, p. 9.

The flat lying between O'Halloran's and the river, a portion of which has been laid out for a township, is the favourite camping ground, and already the frame work of several large buildings are to be seen in course of erection. Mr Veale's new store and bake-house is a conspicuous object, and the frame work of Mr Clotworthy's building may also be easily distinguished.⁹⁴

The three hotels reportedly provided 'excellent' accommodation,⁹⁵ one correspondent noting that 'the claims giving the best returns at present' were O'Halloran's and Missen's hotels. He wondered how they managed to provide such good meals, being so far from butchers, bakers, and greengrocers. 'We had a splendid dinner at O'Halloran's' which could not have paid him at the price. Visitors were warned that, though the catering was 'first-rate', it would be wise to bring a blanket if remaining for the night, as accommodation was limited.⁹⁶ Government offices, which at this stage comprised large tents, were erected one week before the opening.⁹⁷

SPECULATION IN RESIDENCE SITES

The imminent start of the rush prompted one Thames speculator in land, Samuel Stephenson, to publish an advertisement:

THE MOUNTAIN OF GOLD
TOWNSHIP OF RUAKAKA, TE AROHA
THE PREMIER SITE of one acre, for sale, for an Hotel, right
under the Prospectors Claim; only freehold land for miles on that
side of the river.⁹⁸

Whilst correct about the freehold, it was quite wrong about the location, which was close to Omahu, and over two miles from the claim. No hotel was ever built on this site. Stephenson and his partner, James Burt

⁹⁴ Special Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 22 November 1880, p. 2.

⁹⁵ *Auckland Weekly News*, 13 November 1880, p. 9

⁹⁶ *Waikato Times*, 16 November 1880, p. 2.

⁹⁷ Harry Kenrick to Oliver Wakefield, 22 October 1880; Oliver Wakefield to Blackett, 30 October 1880, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/353, ANZ-W; Thames Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 20 November 1880, p. 9.

⁹⁸ Advertisement, *Thames Advertiser*, 16 November 1880, p. 2.

of Auckland,⁹⁹ also offered allotments for sale in early December, their advertisement promising a ‘Magnificent River Frontage, Splendid Soil, abundantly Watered by mountain streams, crystallised through quartz and gold-bearing stone.... Purchasers of Allotments in this Township may some day develop a mine of wealth’.¹⁰⁰ That neither Stephenson nor Burttt ever acquired any mining interests undermined their supposed confidence in the wealth awaiting those who bought their land. The *Thames Star* considered that buying these allotments would be a good speculation because, as the district was likely to go ahead, the land would increase in value. It thought the expectation of many that Te Aroha was ‘the site of the largest inland town in New Zealand’ would very likely become true.¹⁰¹

THE POPULATION SWELLS AND ANTICIPATION GROWS

A week before the opening, about 150 were living at Te Aroha, ‘with constant arrivals from the Thames’, and ‘several parties swagging it from Hamilton and Cambridge’,¹⁰² including ‘several of the fair sex’.¹⁰³ The large number of people from Cambridge and Hamilton who visited the Prospectors’ Claim on Sunday 14 November ‘were all astonished and delighted at the show of gold’. Gold fever was spreading in the Waikato, and miners continued to grumble that the field should be opened at once.¹⁰⁴ A party from Cambridge reported the find of gold as ‘a perfect jeweller’s shop’.¹⁰⁵ The local correspondent of the *Waikato Times* reported that

the rich find in the Prospectors’ Claim has settled the minds of many old miners, who were beginning to feel uneasy and discontented with being shown nothing but surface specimens. Very general anxiety prevails at the delay in issuing the proclamation; and in the face of having no protection very little work is being done, although no doubt the experienced men have formed a pretty correct notion where they intend to peg off.

⁹⁹ For both men, see paper on the Aroha Block from 1880 onwards.

¹⁰⁰ Advertisement, *Thames Star*, 15 November 1880, p. 3.

¹⁰¹ *Thames Star*, 15 November 1880, p. 2.

¹⁰² Hamilton Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 20 November 1880, p. 9.

¹⁰³ *Waikato Times*, 20 November 1880, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ *Thames Star*, 15 November 1880, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ Cambridge Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 20 November 1880, p. 9.

More delay entailed more difficulties, and those who had come first should be entitled to the first claims. After describing the quartz samples, ‘thickly interspersed with the precious metal’ that were being shown to visitors to the Prospectors’ Claim, he again discouraged men to leave their jobs until the date of opening was known. As Te Aroha was only 35 miles from Hamilton, men could walk there in one day.¹⁰⁶

Despite these repeated exhortations to delay arriving, parties continued to leave Hamilton to prospect ‘in readiness for the opening’. One comprising four men was ‘associated with several of the townspeople in the venture, who subscribe weekly towards defraying expenses’.¹⁰⁷ Two days later, it was reported that ‘several parties have left Waikato for the field within the last day or so’, some comprising unemployed men subsidized by Hamilton tradesmen. The *Waikato Times* hoped they would find alluvial gold because this would provide work for ‘hundreds’ until the reefs were proved.¹⁰⁸ Hamilton residents were excited at having a goldfield so close to their farms and shops, and when the first coach from there arrived at Te Aroha ‘a Union Jack was displayed on a pole from the roof of the coach in honour of the first trip’.¹⁰⁹ Commenting on the exodus from Hamilton, Cambridge, and elsewhere in the Waikato, a Hamilton correspondent wrote that it was ‘peculiarly a Waikato goldfield’ and he expected Hamilton and Cambridge would ‘get the first fruits of business enterprise there’. William Kennedy Carter,¹¹⁰ who did not become a shareholder in any claim, was about to start a regular coach service between the two places, and another carter was about to start conveying food and produce from Hamilton on American waggons that could hold two tons. While this would be a good market for farm produce, some worried about labour shortages caused by the lure of the goldfield.¹¹¹ One Thames correspondent confirmed that there was ‘considerably more excitement’ over the goldfield in the Waikato than at Thames, horsemen ‘constantly passing between Hamilton and Te Aroha’.¹¹² On one trip, the coach from Hamilton passed at least 30 men

¹⁰⁶ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 16 November 1880, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ *Waikato Times*, 16 November 1880, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ *Waikato Times*, 18 November 1880, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ *Thames Star*, 18 November 1880, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ See *Waikato Times*, advertisement, 20 April 1876, p. 1, advertisement, 18 December 1880, p. 1, 11 November 1916, p. 9, 27 October 1917, p. 6, 31 July 1918, p. 4.

¹¹¹ Hamilton Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 17 November 1880, p. 5.

¹¹² Thames Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 20 November 1880, p. 9.

‘swagging it to the field’.¹¹³ At Te Aroha, there was much interest in these newcomers, estimated by O’Halloran to have brought the population up to 200,

comprising prospectors, miners, publicans, squatters, gentlemen farmers, farmers, cockatoo strugglers and ground parrots [small farmers].¹¹⁴ It is highly amusing to witness the arrival of these latter, many of them being armed with double-ended navy picks, and other ungainly weapons with which to prosecute the work of prospecting.¹¹⁵

The *Thames Star*’s correspondent also noted inexperienced swagmen arriving from the Waikato ‘by the dozen, the appearance of the bucolic miners with long-handled shovels and navy picks being a constant theme for mirth to the old hands on the field’.¹¹⁶ This newspaper continued to remind its readers that a lot of work was needed to prove the existence of a large and payable goldfield, for work in the Prospectors’ Claim was carried out only on ‘a fossicking principle’.¹¹⁷ But in the following issue it announced that miners from Thames had found some ‘splendid’ and ‘very rich stone’ elsewhere on the mountain in the past couple of days.¹¹⁸ Until the official opening, ‘very little work’ was being done, and all those claiming to have found prospects were ‘very reticent about their information’.¹¹⁹ One newspaper estimated that from 300 to 400 were prospecting, ‘their operations extending for miles along the range, chiefly in a direction southerly from the prospectors claim’.¹²⁰

A Cambridge correspondent wrote that ‘the sensational items floating about Cambridge on the Te Aroha gold discovery are something wonderful. I was told this morning that four new chums had been offered £1000 a-piece for their claims’, but he doubted this report. He was also told that someone in Cambridge had ‘a piece of gold the size of a pigeon’s egg’, and in this town

¹¹³ *New Zealand Herald*, 22 November 1880, p. 5.

¹¹⁴ Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, 8 ed., ed. Paul Beale (London, 1984), pp. 234, 507.

¹¹⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 22 November 1880, p. 3.

¹¹⁶ Special Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 23 November 1880, p. 2.

¹¹⁷ *Thames Star*, 18 November 1880, p. 2.

¹¹⁸ *Thames Star*, 19 November 1880, p. 2.

¹¹⁹ Thames Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 20 November 1880, p. 9.

¹²⁰ *Waikato Times*, 20 November 1880, p. 2.

there was 'a strong feeling of confidence in' the goldfield and all who could go were 'preparing to be in "at the birth" '.¹²¹ In Thames, there was 'little or no excitement' about the finds

and comparatively few have left here for the district. There can be no doubt, however, that next week a good many miners and others will go up if only to have a look round. The Thames storekeepers do not appear to be quite as much on the alert as those of Hamilton and Cambridge, and, unless they bestir themselves a little more, the trade with the Te Aroha will be lost to them.¹²²

By then there was sufficient interest to require five steamers to transport people and supplies, and the county council was energetically bridging creeks and in other ways improving the road from Thames.¹²³ Reportedly a watchmaker was moving from Napier to Te Aroha to erect a 'specimen and test crushing battery'.¹²⁴ The *New Zealand Herald*, which had long doubted whether there were grounds for opening the field, was reassured by 'encouraging finds' which provided 'good reason to believe that Te Aroha will have an important history. This discovery can hardly fail to be of great importance to the colony, as it will open up the great valley through which access can be most readily obtained to the interior of the North Island'.¹²⁵

ARRANGEMENTS FOR OPENING DAY

After agreement was reached with Ngati Rahiri, it was announced that the field would open at 9 o'clock in the morning on 25 November. Miners' rights could be obtained at Thames from 20 November onwards, and at Te Aroha two days later. The maximum area that could be marked out was five acres, equal to 15 men's ground, meaning that 15 men would be required to man it. Arrangements for pegging-off were simplified, but, as Kenrick expected arguments, he would be at the Prospectors' Claim at the time of

¹²¹ Cambridge Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 20 November 1880, p. 2.

¹²² Thames Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 20 November 1880, p. 9.

¹²³ *Thames Star*, 20 November 1880, p. 2, 22 November 1880, p. 2.

¹²⁴ *Thames Star*, 20 November 1880, p. 2.

¹²⁵ *New Zealand Herald*, 24 November 1880, p. 5.

opening to 'decide all disputes at once as far as practicable'.¹²⁶ He and his assistants would take the names of those disputing the ownership of claims marked out, which would 'limit the number of claimants to those actually present on the ground'. The policeman who had been keeping order for the past month would be joined by a sergeant and three constables 'to prevent the occurrence of scenes incidental to a new goldfield'.¹²⁷

There were rumours that these policemen would be needed. O'Halloran believed that parties of miners were being organized 'by men who will undoubtedly resort to main force should moral suasion fail to enable them to hold their ground'.¹²⁸ The 'general opinion' amongst those foregathering was

that some very serious disturbances might be anticipated, for several parties of men were equally determined to secure a certain piece of ground adjoining the prospectors. It was even said that one or two of the parties had so arranged that while some of the men were to do the pegging out, the duty of the others would be to keep their rivals away from the ground. Of course there is little dependence to be placed on a great deal of what is said, but the question - how disturbances are to be avoided - has not so far been satisfactorily answered.¹²⁹

EXPECTATIONS RISE, AS DOES THE NUMBER OF THE HOPEFUL

Just before opening day, it was reported that two Auckland prospectors who had cut the Prospectors' No. 2 reef had joined forces with a Waikato syndicate and would 'advance a prior right for the discovery and workings. Five men will be stationed at each peg to resist invaders'.¹³⁰ Stories continued to circulate about new finds: one, published three days before the opening, reported that gold had

been discovered two miles each side of the Prospectors' Claim, and stone is shown said to come from several other localities besides the Prospectors' Spur. It appeared to be the universal

¹²⁶ Thames Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 20 November 1880, p. 9.

¹²⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 19 November 1880, p. 3.

¹²⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 22 November 1880, p. 3.

¹²⁹ *Thames Star*, 22 November 1880, p. 2.

¹³⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 25 November 1880, p. 3.

opinion that the country was worth a good deal of prospecting, and that there was every indication that the district was highly auriferous; in fact, one miner of experience, who had been on many goldfields, remarked that he never saw more favorable indications upon a new field.¹³¹

Good leaders and a gold-bearing reef had been found in the 'Kukaka' (presumably Ruakaka) Creek, it was reported.¹³² Bay of Plenty residents still hoped that gold would be found on their side of the range, encouraged by reports from the Tauranga newspaper's correspondent:

Rumours are rife as to finds in other directions, the latest being away on the far side of Te Aroha, while one party shifted camp on Saturday 5 miles this side, and near the main Katikati range. Many think the best eventual finds of gold will be in the main range dividing Katikati from Te Aroha, and principally on this fall of range.

He qualified this hope by warning that, beyond the Prospectors' Claim, 'everything' was 'dark', and would remain so until the field opened.¹³³ Another party had reportedly found

a show equally as good as the prospectors, but not the slightest hint is given as to the locality. Certain it is several parties have found gold, but nothing will be known till after the field is proclaimed. The fact that a licensed surveyor on the field is engaged to survey seven claims as soon as the proclamation is out, is evidence that others have found something worth working.¹³⁴

Three days later, it was 'well known' in Hamilton that 'more than one party' had found 'two claims quite as good as the prospectors, but it would be serving no useful purpose, and only injuring the lucky finders to mention names'.¹³⁵ On the Sunday before the opening, 'a number of visitors from the Waikato were over, some from Cambridge, others from Alexandra [later Pirongia] and Hamilton. A great many persons went up to the Prospectors'

¹³¹ Special Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 22 November 1880, p. 2.

¹³² *Thames Star*, 23 November 1880, p. 2.

¹³³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Bay of Plenty Times*, 25 November 1880, p. 2.

¹³⁴ Hamilton Correspondent (Friday), *Auckland Weekly News*, 27 November 1880, p. 9.

¹³⁵ Hamilton Correspondent (Monday), *Auckland Weekly News*, 27 November 1880, p. 9.

Claim, but as the face of the drives were covered up little was gained for the climb up the hill'.¹³⁶ The *Thames Star's* correspondent regretted that a big rush was likely because 'no good find' was known to exist outside the Prospectors' Claim:

I am told that letters have been sent to different parts of the colony by so-called miners here, stating that this is a fine diggings, splendid shows, and all the rest of the high falutin of needy parties who want to collar the coin. In some cases the bait has been swallowed and money forwarded, in many cases to be squandered in the hotel, the so-called diggers being no more fit to give an opinion or discover a reef than a cow.¹³⁷

This newspaper reported that at Thames 'the Te Aroha gold fever' was 'apparently a most infectious disease, as the whole male portion of our community seem to have caught the contagion', all expecting to make a profit from it. 'Johnny McSweeney and other prospectors who were on the Thames were the heroes of the hour'. On the wharf, 120 men were crowded awaiting boats, 'each one bearing the orthodox swag - frying pan, pannikin, with pick and shovel slung outside. All appeared in good spirits, and were evidently determined to give the field a thorough trial'.¹³⁸ Not all these men were experienced miners. On the day before the opening, the passengers on three 'over-flowing' steamers included, as well as miners from the South Island and Sydney, a draper, a tobacconist, a bootmaker, a builder, and two or three publicans, all seeking business sites.¹³⁹ On the Saturday before the opening, about 50 people crossed the bridge at Hamilton, and more went over on Sunday:

Amongst these was a party from Ngaruawahia and a large party from Whatawhata, the greater part of them intending to remain on the field. There will be a great demand for business sites, many business men in Waikato townships intending to open branch establishments on the new field; indeed, Waikato appears to be taking up an early position at Te Aroha.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Special Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 22 November 1880, p. 2.

¹³⁷ Special Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 23 November 1880, p. 2.

¹³⁸ *Thames Star*, 23 November 1880, p. 2.

¹³⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 25 November 1880, p. 3.

¹⁴⁰ Hamilton Correspondent (Tuesday), *Auckland Weekly News*, 27 November 1880, p. 9.

On 22 November, two coaches packed with passengers left Hamilton, 'and every available buggy and paddle horse was put into requisition'. One of the parties consisted of 'half-a-dozen prominent settlers, taking in their wagon every requisite for setting up camp on the latest and most approved principle'. Trains from Auckland deposited potential miners from there and intermediate settlements at Hamilton.¹⁴¹ About 20 men from 'the quiet little settlement of Taupiri' participated in 'the general exodus to the diggings', about a dozen leaving the coal mines because of the 'slack demand' for household coal.¹⁴² Several parties of coalminers from Huntly also left after the reports created 'considerable excitement'.¹⁴³

At Cambridge, 'one or two of our smaller storekeepers have shut up shop, sent their superfluous baggage to the auctioneers', and departed. 'Not a day passes but a party of more or less in number, with their swags and camp appurtenances leave'.¹⁴⁴ Forty left on one day alone.¹⁴⁵ A local resident, presumably over-dramatizing, wrote that Cambridge was 'nearly depopulated'.¹⁴⁶ The day prior to the opening saw a 'regular stampede' from Hamilton and all other Waikato townships:

Everybody seems to be going to the opening of the field. Two of Carter's coaches started early this morning filled with passengers, and many were disappointed. Not a private vehicle or horse will be left in the township by evening, and very few of the male sex. How they will all get on at Te Aroha to-night, where there is no accommodation for man or beast on the large scale that will be required, is hard to say. The wise virgins will fill their lamps with oil, that is, take their own and their horses' commissariat.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴¹ *Waikato Times*, 23 November 1880, p. 2.

¹⁴² *Waikato Times*, 25 November 1880, p. 2.

¹⁴³ Huntly Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 27 November 1880, p. 9.

¹⁴⁴ *Waikato Times*, 25 November 1880, p. 2.

¹⁴⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 25 November 1880, p. 3.

¹⁴⁶ W.L.C. Williams to Hamilton Newall, 27 November 1880, W.L.C. Williams Letterbook 1880-1884, in private possession. The recipient was probably either Hamilton or Robert Newall, cordial makers of Ngaruawahia: *Waipa Electoral Roll, 1880*, p. 15.

¹⁴⁷ Hamilton Correspondent (Wednesday), *Auckland Weekly News*, 27 November 1880, p. 9; see also Hamilton Correspondent, *Observer*, 27 November 1880, p. 89.

Numbers of the unwise had to sleep in the fern.¹⁴⁸ An amateur gold-hunter on the staff of the *Observer*, who arrived two days before the opening after travelling from Thames ‘penned up in a small steamer from early morn until closing eve’, spent his first night ‘on the cold, cold ground in a dry ditch, under a weeping willow’.¹⁴⁹ In 1930, Charles John Wright Barton, a farmer from the Waipa district,¹⁵⁰ wrote of his involvement in the rush:

I was deputed by a number of Hamilton residents to peg out a claim for them and they provided me with the necessary funds for a start. I was then farming on the Waipa. Some days before the opening I set out from Hamilton, riding all night. The roads were good for those times, and there was a punt somewhere about where the bridge now is. The first day I pitched my tent near the springs. Meeting an old friend, Mr Fraser, of Coromandel, “Tokatea Fraser,” we joined forces and spent the time in the ranges at the back of the township. We neither of us formed a very high opinion of the prospects as a goldfield, judging by the show at the Prospectors’ Claim.¹⁵¹

(‘Tokatea Fraser’ was John Cameron Fraser, formerly a Coromandel mine manager who had become a timber merchant.)¹⁵² Barton’s actions reflected his initial impressions, for he did not take up any interests. The *Waikato Times* deplored this exodus, for various reasons:

In consequence of the large number of men, working men principally, who have gone to the Aroha in the hope of making their fortunes, the labour market just now is very tight. Indeed, if things continue as of present it is difficult to know whether any labour will be available at all in a few weeks. As it is, a very indifferent quality has to be put up with, and that at an advanced rate. A day or two ago a gentleman was obliged to give 10s per day to a man for gardening, the operations of which the *employe* was only very slightly acquainted with; and ordinary day

¹⁴⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 25 November 1880, p. 3.

¹⁴⁹ Own Correspondent, ‘Te Aroha’, *Observer*, 18 December 1880, p. 126.

¹⁵⁰ He had changed the sequence of his first names: in 1880 he was John Charles Wright Barton, a farmer in the Newcastle District of Waipa: *Waipa Electoral Roll, 1880*, p. 2.

¹⁵¹ Extract from letter written by C.J.W. Barton, 27 October 1930, printed in *Te Aroha and the Fortunate Valley: Pioneering in the Thames Valley 1867-1930*, ed. F.W. Wild (Te Aroha, 1930), p. 349.

¹⁵² *Thames Electoral Roll, 1880*, p. 16; John Kennett, ‘Sir Colin Fraser’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 8 (Melbourne, 1981), p. 576.

labourers were asking extremely high rates. What is worse, men are every day throwing up good employment in order that they may depart to the golden mountain. We can't help thinking that such a course is unwise. Not long ago complaints about the scarcity of work were painfully frequent, and now everything is incautiously thrown aside in order to be "first on the field." But really, except in the case of practical men, who have had some experience in quartz reefing, nothing will be gained by going upon the field until it is known that gold exists there in something like quantity. In the meantime, it were much better for working men to retain that which they have, rather than squander their savings needlessly in the wrong direction. There is no reason, moreover, why they should not secure an interest in the field without throwing up a certainly such as their present employment; it is quite possible for them to band themselves together into associations, deputing to some trustworthy person the care of their interests. By this means time would be gained and an opportunity secured of discovering the probable nature of the field, before a sacrifice is made of the present means of support.¹⁵³

What this common sense evaluation of the situation left out was the sheer exhilaration of being involved in an historic occasion that might produce great personal wealth. As this newspaper's Cambridge correspondent wrote,

Te Aroha! Te Aroha! concentrates all feelings and all energies. Every little bit of gold from Te Aroha possesses a fictitious value, and is viewed with a species of Fetish worship. Men whose years have been spent on the goldfields, to whom gold in every form has been the study of life, approached the few specimens that have reached Cambridge, and contemplated them with an awe and veneration, which to the casual observer might appear ridiculous, but such is life.¹⁵⁴

By this time only one battery test had been made, almost a month previously, of the ore on which so many hopes were based.

CONCERNS OVER THE REGULATIONS

¹⁵³ *Waikato Times*, 23 November 1880, p. 2.

¹⁵⁴ Cambridge Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 25 November 1880, p. 2.

As opening day approached, ‘dissatisfaction at the method of opening the field’ intensified.¹⁵⁵ The *Thames Star* argued that all bona fide discoverers of gold, not just the original prospectors, were entitled to the protection of their claims, quoting in its support Part 13 of the Gold Mining Districts Act 1873.¹⁵⁶ One correspondent believed that arguments over allotments would be avoided if Kenrick advertised a time and place to hear claimants.¹⁵⁷ The reporter for the first Te Aroha newspaper, the *Te Aroha Miner and Thames Valley Agriculturalist*, first published on 30 November,¹⁵⁸ wrote that when Kenrick arrived on the day before the opening he was ‘deputationised by the miners, singly and collectively, regarding the mode of pegging out’. The reporter was ‘sorry’ to discover a ‘large amount of dissatisfaction’.¹⁵⁹ Accordingly, Kenrick convened a meeting in front of his office at 4 o’clock on that afternoon; one estimate gave from 500 to 600 attending.¹⁶⁰ The very full account in the *Thames Advertiser* of this and the subsequent meeting revealed the reasons for objecting to his plans:

Mr Kenrick commenced by stating that he had called them together to explain the course that would be adopted at the opening of the field on the following morning, and also to explain to those who were unacquainted with the Gold Mining Districts Act and regulations the steps necessary to secure claims or sites. He premised by stating that every effort had been made to obviate as far as possible the confusion and scramble that was inevitable at the opening of a new goldfield under such peculiar circumstances as the present. The delay in the opening was unavoidable - in fact it was a matter for congratulation that it was not prolonged, as very nice and difficult negotiations had to be undertaken with native and European owners. First, as to the opening. The field would be open at 9 o’clock on the following morning, when claims and business sites would be pegged off. As watches varied, the time would be taken from the Warden’s watch; and precisely at 9 o’clock two guns would be discharged

¹⁵⁵ Special Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 23 November 1880, p. 2.

¹⁵⁶ *Thames Star*, 23 November 1880, p. 2.

¹⁵⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Star*, 23 November 1880, p. 3.

¹⁵⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 3 December 1880, p. 2.

¹⁵⁹ *Te Aroha Miner*, 30 November 1880, reprinted from copy in possession of Thomas Veale, in *Shop in Te Aroha: Carnival Week October 17 to 24, 1927: Souvenir Programme of Events and Competitions* (Te Aroha, 1927), p. 63.

¹⁶⁰ *Waikato Times*, 27 November 1880, p. 2.

from the spur at the top of the prospectors' claim. This would be heard by all in the vicinity, and it was there only that time would be material, the ground being disputed adjoining the prospectors' only. As it was expected that there would be a rush of men to peg adjoining the prospectors' claim, he (the Warden) had arranged that a trustworthy man - constable or Government officer - would be stationed at each of the prospectors' pegs, and as many along the lines as could be spared. They would have a written authority to demand to see the mining rights of those pegging in their vicinity, as also the names of the rest of the members of each party. These names would be taken down, and the presence of all the men on the ground at once verified, for it was necessary that there should be a man holding a miner's right on the ground to represent each man's ground taken up. The Warden then explained the required size and position of pegs, &c, &c, and said - I must now refer, I am sorry to say, to some very unpleasant rumours that are disturbing the minds of the well-disposed. These are that threats have been freely used, that violence would be resorted to to prevent pegs being inserted on some of the disputed claims. He was aware that "tall talk" was not an unusual thing at a new rush, but it was necessary to point out that even threats of violence could not be permitted in a district such as this, - a district where the law of force had been but recently confronted by the law itself. He believed that these threats were, - well, bounce, and nothing more, - but he must point out that if any excitable individual should so far forget himself as to use actual violence to prevent anyone pegging, then that individual would most certainly lose both his claim and his liberty, for he (the Warden) had determined that in all disputes, other things being equal, violence or force used would turn the scale against the user. He had also determined not to inflict pecuniary penalties at first, but imprisonment, and the police had instructions promptly to arrest every offender. It was necessary to state this, but he hoped, and believed, that the opening would be disgraced by no such scenes, and that they would act so as to give him reason to be proud of being the first Warden of the Aroha goldfield. He would endeavour at once to settle the disputes that were apparently inevitable. Those that required the assistance of a surveyor would be adjourned for a day or two, but they must remember that when forty or fifty men claimed some eight or ten men's ground, many would be disappointed. He would only ask them to believe that his decision would be impartial, and given after a fair and careful consideration of their claims. He did not expect to satisfy: an archangel could not do that, but they must remember that there were as good fish in the sea as any that came out of it, and from the information given him as Warden, he fully expected to see them rushing two or three miles away from the prospectors in a few days. After some further explanation of

the necessary steps to be taken, a number of questions were asked and answered. Many questions were put as to the rule that would guide the Warden in settling claims that were all equal. This, the Warden said, they would learn when the disputes came before him. He would then give his decision, but not his reasons. The former, some of them at any rate, [they] would agree with; the latter would possibly be cavilled at by all. Questions were put as to whether the Warden would give any preference to those who had done work or reported a discovery. He said that, other things being equal, he thought this ought to weigh with him. This did not appear to be appreciated by a good number present, who thought that lots ought to be drawn by every miner who pegged in time. The Warden said if they could agree amongst themselves to this course he would be glad to give the claim to the successful party, but that he had no power to direct this course to be pursued. The Warden next pointed out the method of taking up business sites, stating that business sites were for business purposes. He should, therefore, discourage as much as possible speculation in them, by awarding - when all things were equal, and the dispute lay between a business man and one who could not prove a bona fide intention to use the section for business purposes - the section to the businessman. After stating that precautions - similar to those taken at the claims - had been taken to prevent violence being used in the township, the Warden dissolved the meeting by wishing them all golden claims.¹⁶¹

Dissatisfaction with his pronouncements resulted in the bellman, James Gerrish,¹⁶² announcing a meeting would be held at five o'clock.¹⁶³ Two hundred 'respectable' miners attended, to quote the chairman elected by the gathering, Roderick McDonald Scott, a leading legal manager and mining agent.¹⁶⁴ He claimed Kenrick's policies were 'wholly unjust' and his answers to questions were inconsistent, reflecting his lack of experience as a warden and ignorance of goldfields law. Thomas Shaw, then a miner,¹⁶⁵ who would not become an owner of any claims, moved that Kenrick's statement 're preference to men who may have been prospecting outside the prospectors' claim' was 'not satisfactory to the miners, as it may prevent them from pegging out claims somewhere else'. As Kenrick clearly intended

¹⁶¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 26 November 1880, p. 3.

¹⁶² See paper on his life.

¹⁶³ *Waikato Times*, 27 November 1880, p. 2.

¹⁶⁴ See *Thames Star*, 14 June 1905, p. 2; *Observer*, 17 June 1905, p. 17.

¹⁶⁵ See Warden's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 23 October 1876, p. 3; Warden's Court, *Thames Star*, 1 December 1881, p. 2.

to give preference to those who had already been ‘fossicking’, there was little point anyone pegging out near the Prospectors’ Claim. Augustus Clement Cornes, another leading miner,¹⁶⁶ seconded Shaw’s resolution, and strongly condemned Kenrick’s intentions, as did others. Hugh McIlhone, recently dismissed on Kenrick’s initiative as Inspector of Miners’ Rights,¹⁶⁷ seized the opportunity to abuse him. ‘The statements made by the Warden were of the most extraordinary character he had ever listened to.... He could hardly bring himself to believe that a man placed in Mr Kenrick’s position would so far expose himself to ridicule as to talk such trash’. Although Kenrick’s statements were contrary to law, McIlhone advised miners to obey his instructions ‘and allow any matters that might arise to be decided by the authorities in Wellington’. After the resolution was passed unanimously, a deputation presented it to Kenrick, who replied that ‘their business was not one requiring an answer, and therefore he would not give them one’. It was subsequently rumoured that a report of these proceedings would be sent to the Minister of Mines,¹⁶⁸ but no such report is in the departmental files.

According to another account of this meeting, when Kenrick stated that he might choose between claimants for the same piece of ground in favour of ‘those who had done work on the ground’, this was ‘met with loud expressions of disapproval, several of those present stating that the Warden might as well give the ground away at once. The Warden was then understood to withdraw his previous remark and to state that he would decide on the merit of all claims to the best of his ability’.¹⁶⁹ Yet according to another account, Kenrick’s arrangements for the opening and intended method of considering disputes ‘met with general approval’.¹⁷⁰

Although Kenrick and George Thomas Wilkinson, the Native Agent,¹⁷¹ were praised for taking ‘a great deal of trouble’ to avoid many of the difficulties of earlier openings,¹⁷² uppermost in the minds of both officials

¹⁶⁶ See paper on his life.

¹⁶⁷ Harry Kenrick to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 1 May 1884, Mines Department, MD 1, 85/497, ANZ-W; Warden’s Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 11 June 1880, p. 3; letter from ‘Critic’, *Thames Star*, 23 June 1880, p. 2.

¹⁶⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 26 November 1880, p. 3.

¹⁶⁹ *Waikato Times*, 27 November 1880, p. 2.

¹⁷⁰ *New Zealand Herald*, 26 November 1880, p. 5.

¹⁷¹ See paper on Merea Wikiriwhi and George Thomas Wilkinson.

¹⁷² *Thames Star*, 3 November 1880, p. 2.

and miners were previous disorderly opening days. In Hauraki, there been the literal rush at Karangahake in 1875, which led, in the words of 'A.C.', for a need to protect the weak 'against the strong and unruly' at Te Aroha.¹⁷³ When the Tairua field opened in 1875, there had been attempts to jump others' ground by false pegging out and other methods.¹⁷⁴ Fears were expressed that the litigation resulting from the confusion of these two rushes would be repeated.¹⁷⁵ One correspondent anticipated that because applications for both claims and business sites would be lodged at the same time, 'in all probability' there would be 'a most disgraceful scramble' to decide 'who shall squeeze first into the small shed hastily erected for a temporary Warden's office. I fancy it would have been better if the claims had been registered in the morning, and business sites say at noon'. Several small stores were being erected, with their 'owners running the risk of being first applicant'.¹⁷⁶ With 500 expected to take part in the rush, or even 900 according to one estimate of the number of miners' rights issued at Thames,¹⁷⁷ there was potential for trouble.

ON THE EVE

On the eve of the proclamation, excitement was heightened. The *Waikato Times*' reporter described a large exodus to Te Aroha,

Hamilton and Cambridge being almost deserted. The weather was fine, the roads exceptionally good, and the trip consequently proved a very enjoyable one. The majority of the visitors proceeded direct to the Aroha, some crossing the river and either taking up their quarters at O'Halloran's Hotel, or pitching camp on the site of the new township, and the rest remained on the near [western] side of the river, encamped in a grove of native trees along the banks.... A large number of miners had also arrived from the Thames by the steamers Vivid and Memsahib, and speedily swelled the number of tents in the encampment. During the early part of the day, the scene was tranquil enough, the majority of the men being away up the mountain busily

¹⁷³ Letter from 'A.C.', *Thames Advertiser*, 16 November 1880, p. 3.

¹⁷⁴ See *Thames Advertiser*, 24 May 1875, p. 3.

¹⁷⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 22 November 1880, p. 3.

¹⁷⁶ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Star*, 23 November 1880, p. 3.

¹⁷⁷ *Thames Star*, 22 November 1880, p. 2; Thames Correspondent, *Auckland Star*, 23 November 1880, p. 3.

concocting measures for the morrow. In the afternoon, however, things became more lively; groups of miners were gathered about O'Halloran's Hotel, which seemed to be doing a thriving business, engaged in discussing the all absorbing subject of gold.¹⁷⁸

In its final comments before the opening, the *New Zealand Herald* felt that it

may be well to utter a few words of caution. Ohinemuri and Tairua were opened with higher expectations than Te Aroha, and the result was great loss to many. Both those suffered who spent labour and money in the mines, and those who entered into business on the faith of a goldfield being there at which a considerable number of men would be employed. It must also be kept in mind that Te Aroha is, if a goldfield at all, a quartz field, that time must elapse before any return can be obtained, as batteries must be erected, and the mines opened. We feel it our duty to utter these words of caution, hoping at the same time that Te Aroha may surpass the highest expectations.¹⁷⁹

The *Auckland Star* believed the opening might 'mark a wholly new era' for the district. The first discoveries were 'certainly promising enough to excite the liveliest prognostications that have already drawn a population of hundreds to the scene in the course of a few weeks', and a permanent settlement would 'set the plough of the agriculturalist speedily at work across the fertile lands stretching for miles inland until the stream of colonization hems in and overflows the barriers which have been erected by the natives in the King Country'. Despite this alluring vision, the editorial writer warned that, 'so far, nothing has been proved that will warrant men in rushing recklessly to the field in great numbers'. Far too many men had rushed there from the Waikato, 'depriving farmers of necessary labour'. Its special correspondent, who had had 'very considerable experience of mining', was cited to support the view that 'existing facts' did not justify a large rush. Yet the editorial quoted as 'one very marked advantage about the "goldmining fever" that by attracting adventurous and speculative spirits, it secures an amount of prospecting and an earnestness in the search which no money investment regulated by purely prudential principles would attain'. It disapproved of Kenrick's requirement for continuous occupation of the ground. 'The effect of this will be to place a

¹⁷⁸ *Waikato Times*, 27 November 1880, p. 2.

¹⁷⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, 25 November 1880, p. 5.

bona fide prospector, whether on his own account or employed on wages, absolutely at the mercy of loafers who may be watching his movements, ready to jump any “find,” which his skill, experience, and industry may discover’. A number of mining investors were soon to point out to the Attorney General ‘the pernicious effect this rule will have upon legitimate prospecting, and no doubt it will be at once altered so far as to afford a prospector some reasonable protection after pegging out his ground’. The editorial concluded with the assurance that the prospectors had ‘the good wishes of the whole community’; the ‘general wish’ was that ‘their venture may prove to be as valuable as they hope and believe’.¹⁸⁰

CONCLUSION

All was in readiness for the opening, but the prospects of the field were dubious. Little prospecting had been done except in the Prospectors’ Claim, and loose surface boulders rather than a reef or even leaders were all that had been found, and the value of what ore had been found was uncertain. Waikato residents in particular hoped for a new market, and adjoining districts, notably Katikati, hoped that gold would be found in their areas. Only after the official opening permitted intensive prospecting and serious efforts to open up promising ground would it be proved whether Te Aroha would prove to be a duffer or a goldfield of lasting importance.

Appendix

Figure 1: ‘Aroha Gold Field’, 1 November 1880, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/353, ANZ-W [Archives New Zealand The Department of Internal Affairs Te Tari Taiwhenua]; used with permission.

Figure 2: Map of Te Aroha, n.d. [November 1880?], appended to G.E. Barton to Governor, 6 August 1886, Maori Affairs Department, MA 1, 13/27a, ANZ-W [Archives New Zealand The Department of Internal Affairs Te Tari Taiwhenua]; used with permission.

¹⁸⁰ Editorial, *Auckland Star*, 25 November 1880, p. 2.



Figure 2: Map of Te Aroha, n.d. [November 1880?], appended to G.E. Barton to Governor, 6 August 1886, Maori Affairs Department, MA 1, 13/27a, ANZ-W [Archives New Zealand The Department of Internal Affairs Te Tari Taiwhenua]; used with permission.