

THE TE AROHA GOLDFIELD FROM ITS OPENING UNTIL
CHRISTMAS 1880

Philip Hart

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Historical Research Unit
Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

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Contact: prhart1940@gmail.com



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Abstract: *To explore the new field, men were attracted by the excitement and the great hopes expressed, although others deprecated rushing to Te Aroha before payable gold was found. In the immediate aftermath of the opening, disputes over ownership of township allotments and mining claims were resolved quickly and peaceably, mostly without the need to involve the warden, Harry Kenrick, who was praised for his handling of issues brought before him. He declined requests for protection, requiring claims to be manned for the first month to encourage working rather than speculation; unworked ground could be forfeited and granted to others.*

Kenrick expected the goldfield to be a permanent one, and preliminary work was encouraging, though the hopes were exaggerated, and much ground was abandoned after initial examination. As most prospectors did not understand geology, tests were made in Thames to discover the nature of the stone they uncovered. During December new finds were made, notably in the Tui district, but as all the ore was low grade, some decried the field whereas others were more optimistic, with little evidence either way. An examination of the occupations of those who became owners of claims revealed that most knew nothing of mining. As capital was required for development, some small, undercapitalized, companies were formed.

By the time mining ceased for the Christmas holidays, preliminary development had taken place in several claims, but the amount done was not sufficient to prove whether the field would be a success.

HOPES

Hopes for the new field were high, as illustrated at Thames on the night of the opening. ‘Some larrikins amused themselves at the expense of those out in the street on the look out for news from Te Aroha. They ran up and down calling out “extra,” and disposed of a number of blank pieces of paper to the intense disgust of the news seekers’.¹ After the opening, miners at Te Aroha ‘sent to the Thames, West Coast, and other goldfields’ for their mates because of ‘the general impression’ that ‘there has never been a better show for a good and extensive quartz field yet found in the colony’.

¹ *Thames Star*, 26 November 1880, p. 2.

With daily reports of ‘good prospects’, confidence in its future was growing.² On 4 December, the Anglican clergyman at Thames noted that people were ‘going crazy’ about the field.³ Five days later, a politician-turned-Piako-landowner, William Archibald Murray,⁴ informed the Premier of ‘great excitement’ about the discoveries.⁵ For a time, a stream of men headed there: for example, ‘a large number’ left Auckland bearing swags shortly after the opening.⁶ ‘The people of Hamilton and Cambridge have gone clean mad’,⁷ and a steady stream came from the Waikato, some on foot.⁸ A ‘large number’ arrived from Tauranga and Katikati, many probably because they were unemployed.⁹ Two of them were mocked by the Tauranga newspaper:

A couple of enthusiastic young men who held good situations in town, whose minds were fired by the reports they heard about the fortunes to be made by gold-digging at Te Aroha, threw up their posts the other day and started for this East Coast El Dorado. On reaching Clarke’s Hotel [at Katikati] they felt considerably knocked up, and after taking a survey of the formidable Katikati ranges which had to be crossed, they thought better of it, and, reflecting that “a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,” came to the conclusion that, there are worse places in the world than Tauranga. The young men returned to town yesterday thoroughly disgusted with the difficulties of commencing gold-digging, and resumed their plodding life again to-day. Our young friends will hardly try their hands at gold-digging for some time to come.¹⁰

Exaggerated claims were made. One newspaper over-estimated by possibly 1,000 when it reported on 9 December that 1,700 men were

² *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 December 1880, p. 9.

³ *The Thames Journals of Vicesimus Lush 1868-82*, ed. Alison Drummond (Christchurch, 1975), p. 230.

⁴ See paper on his life.

⁵ William Archibald Murray to John Hall, 9 December 1880, Sir John Hall Papers, Political Letters received by John Hall in 1880, Sir John Hall Papers, MS 1784, MSy 1100, 192, Alexander Turnbull Library.

⁶ *Thames Star*, 30 November 1880, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 1 December 1880, p. 3.

⁷ *Observer*, 4 December 1880, p. 99.

⁸ *Waikato Times*, 4 December 1880, p. 2, 11 December 1880, p. 2, 21 December 1880, p. 2.

⁹ *Observer*, 11 December 1880, p. 112.

¹⁰ *Bay of Plenty Times*, 2 December 1880, p. 2.

working in the hills or the settlement.¹¹ It was rumoured, prematurely, that ‘a large number of West Coast diggers’ were on their way.¹² One reporter was later ‘shown letters from the West Coast that state a very large rush will set in’ once ‘the richness of the ground’ was established.¹³ Amongst seven men travelling from Hamilton on 1 December were ‘some’ Australian miners.¹⁴ Men were even attracted by the absence of good news, as a ‘Waikato Whisper’ indicated: ‘News from Te Aroha is not very interesting, but as people have relapsed into a mysterious state again it is probable that great discoveries have been made. The village bachelor of Hamilton has got the fever so badly that nothing but 300 or 400 miles per week on horse-back can satisfy him’.¹⁵

In response to such enthusiasm, a Cambridge resident using the appropriate pseudonym ‘Caution’ wrote that

numbers of well-to-do business people continue to throw up certainties for uncertainties in order to proceed to the rush. No sooner have one or two claims struck gold than a stampede ensues, and numbers of people, without waiting for a reliable news as regards the value of the stone unearthed, at once pack up and are off, sacrificing everything.

He recommended waiting for the discovery of a payable lode.¹⁶ Many hoped for alluvial gold, as illustrated by an unsuccessful bid to lease three-quarters of the water in the Waiorongomai Stream ‘to a sluicing company’.¹⁷

CREATING A TOWNSHIP

The first task facing Kenrick was to sort out the confusion over residence and business sites created on opening day. Many sections were ‘pegged off by several claimants, giving rise to some troublesome disputes’.¹⁸

¹¹ *Freeman’s Journal*, 10 December 1880, p. 6.

¹² *Thames Star*, 4 December 1880, p. 2; *Waikato Times*, 11 December 1880, p. 2.

¹³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 18 December 1880, p. 2.

¹⁴ *Waikato Times*, 2 December 1880, p. 2.

¹⁵ ‘Waikato Whisperings’, *Observer*, 11 December 1880, p. 114.

¹⁶ Letter from ‘Caution’, *Waikato Times*, 2 December 1880, p. 3.

¹⁷ Thames High School Board of Governors, Minutes of Meeting of 17 December 1880, High School Archives, Thames.

¹⁸ Harry Kenrick to Under-Secretary, Gold Fields, 2 May 1881, *AJHR*, 1881, H-17, p. 12.

There was at least one complaint that competitors for a section were not true businessmen but ‘employed by outside speculators to peg out’ allotments.¹⁹ Most disputes were easily solved, almost all without resort to the court. According to one report, on the day after the opening ‘the question of applicants for business sites was settled, by drawing lots in a hat’.²⁰ Other methods were revealed in pigeongrams dispatched on 27 November:

The excitement over allotments still continues, but there is every prospect that all disputes will end well. A few well disposed and good natured individuals suggested that “Yankee grab” should be resorted to in determining the ownership of the sections. This course was adopted by some, while others suggested that the game of drawing straws, such a favorite one with boys, in determining the wish of Fortuna, should be resorted to, and accordingly straws were drawn, and he who pulled the longest straw got the coveted piece of ground. In other cases the piece was put up by auction by the claimants, and the highest bidder was declared the owner, the purchase money being divided among the others; while others demanded from the purchaser the refund of the license fee. By such means many of the differences were settled, and appeals to the Courts of Law have been avoided.

LATER, 1.30.

Messrs O’Halloran and Lipsey, the owners of small sections of land, seeing the great demand for business sections have laid off their plots in business sites, and already all have been taken up.²¹

Another account agreed that applicants for business sites had ‘been induced to settle their disputed titles by drawing lots, or in other ways arranging the points in dispute’. Others had ‘withdrawn from the contest, under the impression that’ an extension of the settlement would be surveyed.²² By 29 November, every site was applied for and 80 business licenses had been issued. The survey of another block on the northern side of the settlement had been ordered, which it was expected would provide sufficient sections.²³ ‘Businessmen on the order of their applications will

¹⁹ Theodore Wood to Warden, 29 November 1880, Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Applications 1880, BBAV 11591/1a, ANZ-A.

²⁰ *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 December 1880, p. 9.

²¹ Pigeongrams, *Thames Star*, 27 November 1880, p. 2.

²² Own Correspondent, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 27 November 1880, p. 3.

²³ Special Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 30 November 1880, p. 3.

receive sections in the new piece'.²⁴ At this stage no one could 'predict to a certainty which would be the best business part of the future town',²⁵ which must have caused some speculators to obtain additional sites.

As a matter of course, some of the claimants to township allotments are not pleased with the result of the ballot held to decide who should get the coveted pieces. Mr [William] Burton, of the Junction Hotel, and who was one of the first in the Warden's Office on the day of opening,²⁶ has lost his section, and the other two claimants to the same allotment divided the piece between them.²⁷

One correspondent wrote that the drawing for lots 'was confined merely to those instances in which all the applicants were agreeable to this mode of procedure'.²⁸ Another reported that rival claims had been resolved 'either by drawing lots for choice, or putting up the site to auction, the purchase money being divided amongst the other claimants'.²⁹

A couple of disputes not settled privately came before Kenrick in late December. Joseph Moses, a Hamilton draper,³⁰ who did not take up any interests in any claims, and John Leydon, a prominent Thames auctioneer,³¹ who was part owner of only one claim,³² competed for a business site opposite the warden's office. Leydon intended to erect 'a spacious auction mart' as soon as it was allotted to him; one newspaper wrote that, to determine who pegged out first, 'a number of respectable witnesses' were willing to support him by testifying 'to the great agility he displayed on the occasion of the rush'.³³ At the hearing, these people seem not to have testified, for Kenrick

²⁴ Pigeongram, *Thames Star*, 27 November 1880, p. 2.

²⁵ Te Aroha Reporter, *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 December 1880, p. 11.

²⁶ See paper on the opening day of the Te Aroha goldfield.

²⁷ Pigeongrams, *Thames Star*, 18 December 1880, p. 2.

²⁸ Te Aroha Reporter, *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 December 1880, p. 11.

²⁹ Thames Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 29 November 1880, p. 6.

³⁰ See *Waipa Electoral Roll, 1880*, p. 13; advertisements, *Waikato Times*, 6 August 1881, p. 3, 30 June 1887, p. 4.

³¹ See *New Zealand Herald*, 22 February 1923, p. 4, 8 April 1927, p. 12.

³² Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 176, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

³³ Own Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 11 December 1880, p. 3.

said that both parties had an equal claim, and he should order the allotment to be divided between them, or that they draw for it - Mr Leydon said he considered he had the best right to the section, and he should decline to either divide or draw - The Warden divided the allotment, Mr Leydon to have first choice.³⁴

At the hearing, Moses did not produce the evidence he had foreshadowed in a letter to Kenrick that James McGuire, a miner,³⁵ ‘tore off my application which I had posted on the front peg’.³⁶

An old Thames draper, who is established at Hamilton, claims one of the business sites, and a Thames tradesman is his rival claimant. In the meantime a friend of the former has lodged a technical objection with the Warden, and consequently fourteen days must elapse before the dispute can be settled. The Thames “joker,” Mr H.R. Jones, who was besieged with rival claimants to his favourite section, bids defiance to the lot. He says he is in possession, by occupation, and means to stick there for the next twenty-one years.³⁷

Hugh Robert Jones, the ‘joker’, commonly known as ‘Manukau’ Jones because of the wealth he had obtained from that Thames mine,³⁸ was regarded as ‘a great character’.³⁹ At Te Aroha he was an owner of one claim.⁴⁰ In late December Kenrick split the business site he had applied for,

³⁴ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 23 December 1880, p. 3.

³⁵ For his involvement in this rush, see Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 192, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 6 December 1880, p. 2; *New Zealand Gazette*, 24 February 1881, p. 258.

³⁶ Joseph Moses to Warden, 25 November 1880, Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Applications 1880, BBAV 11591/1a, ANZ-A.

³⁷ Own Correspondent, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 27 November 1880, p. 3.

³⁸ See *Thames Advertiser*, 28 December 1874, p. 3, 15 February 1876, p. 3; *New Zealand Herald*, 26 August 1922, p. 1.

³⁹ *Observer*, 21 May 1904, p. 7.

⁴⁰ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1881, folio 170, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

Jones' rival having first choice and selecting the better half, on the corner.⁴¹ Jones did not 'stick' for 21 years, abandoning the site within months.⁴²

CREATING AN ORDERLY GOLDFIELD

More complicated and less amicable were some disputes over mining claims. Kenrick's first report, written on 6 December, summarized how most were resolved:

As was anticipated, immediately the district was opened for mining a large number of men pegged off the ground adjoining the Prospectors' giving rise to a somewhat complicated series of disputes. The arrangements previously made and ably carried out by the officers to whom the work was entrusted, enabled me to decide at once upon the ground the questions as to priority of pegging and manning the ground, and possession of miner's rights. These questions being settled, it was found that about sixty (60) men's ground was disputed by some 300 men, all of whom had an equal right to the same. A little time and patience, together with the good sense and patience of the disputants themselves, have settled these disputes out of Court, I having been called upon to act as arbitrator only in a few cases. I am gratified at being able to say that the excitement inevitable at a new rush was kept within bounds, the utmost good temper being displayed by all present.⁴³

After the rush, the names of all the claims and their owners were lodged, and immediately Kenrick started to settle disputes, succeeding quickly in minor ones, but in some cases it was expected that a hearing would be required.⁴⁴ Before disputes could be resolved, it was necessary to have more than a rough sketch of each claim. Because of the number of applicants, Kenrick insisted that 'each party must have their claim surveyed, and when it is ascertained how much ground has been pegged off, and where the claims overlap one another, an attempt will be made to

⁴¹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 23 December 1880, p. 3.

⁴² Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Applications 1880-1882, folios 9-10, 21/1880, BBAV 11505/3a, ANZ-A.

⁴³ Harry Kenrick to Minister of Justice, 6 December 1880, printed in *Thames Star*, 15 December 1880, p. 2.

⁴⁴ Special Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 30 November 1880, p. 3.

arrive at an amicable settlement of all difficulties'.⁴⁵ On the day after the opening, 'great activity was shown in the manning of ground, and parties of men could be seen in all directions at work about the spur'.⁴⁶ Several parties were out 'taping off, to discover the boundaries of their claims'.⁴⁷ The two surveyors, Lindsay Jackson⁴⁸ and Daniel Henry Bayldon,⁴⁹ had 'as much work in the surveying line before them as will take them weeks to complete'.⁵⁰ In December, Jackson bought interests in two claims;⁵¹ Bayldon did not acquire any.

PROTECTION DECLINED

Immediately after the opening,

a few old hands visited the Warden's office to ask for protection, on the ground that they had not sufficient funds to continue in possession. This is, of course, contrary to the regulations, which provide that claims must be continuously manned for the next ten days, but the Warden listened sympathisingly to their appeal.⁵²

This impression was wrong, for he did not grant it. In his first report, Kenrick wrote that he had

taken advantage of the new regulations to refuse the numerous applications made to me for protection - thus compelling the claims to be fully manned and worked. Though some dissatisfaction existed at first, when this rule was enforced, I believe that the good sense of the miners has convinced them of its necessity. I need scarcely point out the advantages to the field of having the claims *proved* before calling on the outside public to

⁴⁵ Own Correspondent, 'The Te Aroha District', *New Zealand Herald*, 29 November 1880, p. 6.

⁴⁶ *Auckland Star*, 27 November 1880, p. 2.

⁴⁷ Own Correspondent, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 27 November 1880, p. 3.

⁴⁸ See *Thames Advertiser*, 10 December 1887, p. 2, 11 February 1895, p. 2; *Waikato Times*, 10 April 1888, p. 2; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 12 November 1892, p. 7.

⁴⁹ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 7, p. 49.

⁵⁰ Own Correspondent, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 27 November 1880, p. 3.

⁵¹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 173, 181, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

⁵² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 27 November 1880, p. 3.

invest their money. The difference between the old and new rules is simply the difference between speculation and *bona fide* work.⁵³

On behalf of Auckland sharebrokers, the chairman of the Brokers' Association, Joseph Newman,⁵⁴ whose only interest would be shares in one company,⁵⁵ no doubt purchased to be sold, complained that the new rule, 5A, would

deter men with sufficient capital to work a Quartz reef from prospecting – A large proportion of the Miners now at work on the Field are employed by others, and receiving wages, with the promise of a share in any discovery they make.... While promoters may be willing to pay one man wages to prospect the Field, they are not able to pay nine.

The result would be to 'withdraw Capital from the field'.⁵⁶ Kenrick responded that Newman ignored the fact that rule 5A applied only for the first month after the proclamation. By requiring one man to be employed for every 15,000 square feet pegged out, who had to be on the ground for ten days after the claim was marked out, it would attract capital:

For example under the old rules one man could peg out five acres in a new district and thirty acres in an old one. For ten days the ground could be left unmanned, if during that ten days application is made for a Licensed Holding then protection for a further period of from thirty to sixty days is given. Thus had the old rule been in force at the opening of the Aroha half a dozen men could have taken up the whole of the known auriferous ground adjacent to the prospector's without the necessity of placing a man on the ground for some six or eight weeks.

Manning from the date of pegging out meant working instead of speculation:

⁵³ Harry Kenrick to Minister of Justice, 6 December 1880, printed in *Thames Star*, 15 December 1880, p. 2.

⁵⁴ See *New Zealand Herald*, 5 January 1892, p. 5.

⁵⁵ *New Zealand Gazette*, 30 December 1880, p. 1796.

⁵⁶ Joseph Newman to Frederick Whitaker, 25 November 1880, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/353, ANZ-W.

Large areas mean floating large companies – legitimate enough after the existence of payable stone is proved, but conducive to speculation only when the claim has been marked off on the strength of discovering a few loose pieces of stone with gold in them.

Mr Newman's experience as a broker must have shown him that if men can take up claims without working them then they are tempted to look for their gold in the pockets of unwary investors as an easier method than searching for it in their claim.⁵⁷

Whitaker agreed, telling brokers that the government wanted the ground prospected as quickly as possible, which would not happen if protection was permitted. 'When the field had been in existence for some period the old regulation of a fortnight's protection for new claims could doubtless be introduced, and also security of leases'.⁵⁸ The under-secretary also 'fully' agreed with Kenrick, telling his minister that '*bona fide* running and prospecting should be encouraged upon opening a new goldfield, and not speculating in shares'.⁵⁹

George Wilson, who was assisting to open the field and would become its mining inspector,⁶⁰ supported his stance, as when writing about the opening of another goldfield in 1887:

The large areas of land applied for as licensed holdings will be detrimental to vigorous prospecting. The small area of 5 acres which was the full extent allowed in each claim at the opening of the Te Aroha Goldfield caused prospecting to be prosecuted by small parties of men over an extensive area of ground and the value was determined in a comparatively short time.⁶¹

RESOLVING DISPUTES OVER CLAIMS

On 27 November, the 15 men's ground on the northeastern corner of the Prospectors, claimed by five parties, was awaiting adjudication. That

⁵⁷ Harry Kenrick to Minister of Mines, 29 November 1880, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/353, ANZ-W.

⁵⁸ *Thames Star*, 27 November 1880, p. 2.

⁵⁹ Oliver Wakefield to Minister of Mines, 7 December 1880, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/353, ANZ-W.

⁶⁰ See paper on his life.

⁶¹ George Wilson to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 1 September 1887 [draft], Te Aroha Warden's Court, General Correspondence 1887, BBAV 11584/3b, ANZ-A.

gold had been found 'was only known to a few, but the knowledge of the large lode being there, and the presence of large quantities of loose quartz lying about, no doubt attracted some of those who pegged out to this spot'.⁶² With so many claimants, all would

have to amalgamate, for there can be no question but all have an equal right to it, the pegging out being done at the same time. This course, if adopted, will however, materially diminish the interest of the individual claimants, for there are no less than 55 men included in the several parties. At the present time there seems to be no other mode of settling the question, the fact that the Warden made a remark something to the effect that men who had done some prospecting would get a preference is buoying some up who claim that distinction.⁶³

Two days later, the number of claimants had fallen to 51, who were 'called facetiously "The blind half hundred." It is probable the number will be reduced to 46 or 47, as it is proposed to strike out Austin and party of the Belmont claim, who encroach about one man's ground into the disputed piece'.⁶⁴ (Peter Austin, a farmer, worked on the Thorp family's Belmont farm near Paeroa.)⁶⁵ There had been 'considerable delay' in surveying the claim, but the plan would be lodged in two days' time.

I believe all parties are now agreeable to amalgamate, in fact, it is generally admitted to be the only way out of the difficulties. It is proposed to be put to the shareholders whether McIntyre, Ferguson, Marriman, and Corbett⁶⁶ should not be allowed a larger proportion, because of their earlier prospecting the ground than some of the others. Some of the half hundred are in favour of the proposal, but others are opposed.⁶⁷

⁶² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 December 1880, p. 11.

⁶³ Pigeongrams, *Thames Star*, 27 November 1880, p. 2.

⁶⁴ Pigeongrams, *Thames Star*, 29 November 1880, p. 2.

⁶⁵ See *Thames Electoral Roll, 1880*, p. 3; *Thames Advertiser*, advertisement, 1 April 1874, p. 4, Police Court, 3 June 1876, p. 3, 15 May 1882, p. 2, advertisement, 1 April 1884, p. 2; 'Orphan', 'The Good Old Days of Yore', *Waihi Miner*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 14 April 1899, p. 3.

⁶⁶ For these four men, see paper on awaiting the proclamation of the Te Aroha goldfield.

⁶⁷ Pigeongrams, *Thames Star*, 29 November 1880, p. 2.

This proposal to remove the Belmont owners turned out to be a false rumour.⁶⁸ At the end of November, 37 of the ‘disputers’ had agreed to amalgamate, but those who had prospected before the opening still refused.⁶⁹ They had shown the boundaries to the surveyors, and were ‘naturally sore at having to work thus for parties whom they consider interlopers’.⁷⁰ On the evening of 30 November the dispute was resolved, ‘much to the satisfaction’ of all:

After several meetings each party appointed a delegate to come to some arrangement. The delegates, five or six in number ... agreed to amalgamate the various interests in the ground, each man to have an equal share. An agreement to that effect has been drawn up and signed by all the shareholders resident in and about the township, but it will take a few days before all have appended their signatures to the document, as many are now at Waitoa, Piako, Thames, Auckland, and Waikato, having left for their homes after pegging out, and put on men to represent them.

The six parties who had amalgamated decided to form the Bonanza Company.⁷¹ An Auckland journalist, whose party’s pegging out had overlapped with Ferguson and party, wrote that ‘it was afterwards arranged that we were all to be shareholders, my whack I sold the other day for £30’.⁷² A new dispute arose when a party of Waikato men who had pegged off a portion applied to be included as shareholders.⁷³ By 4 December, this was the only dispute yet to be settled. The Bonanza owners were ‘ready to swear that the Waikato party pegged out four or five minutes after the guns were fired, whilst the latter are as equally willing to testify on oath that they marked off exactly at 9 o’clock’.⁷⁴ This dispute was ‘squared by the amalgamation of the Victoria claim, owned by the claimants, with the Rangiriri’, the adjoining ground.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ Special Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 December 1880, p. 3; *Thames Star*, 2 December 1880, p. 2.

⁶⁹ Special Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 30 November 1880, p. 3.

⁷⁰ Special Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 December 1880, p. 3.

⁷¹ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 2 December 1880, p. 3, 3 December 1880, p. 3; details of shares in *Thames Star*, 2 December 1880, p. 2.

⁷² Own Correspondent, ‘Te Aroha’, *Observer*, 18 December 1880, p. 126.

⁷³ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 3 December 1880, p. 3.

⁷⁴ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 6 December 1880, p. 3.

⁷⁵ *Auckland Weekly News*, 11 December 1880, p. 9.

In the only other claim where difficulties were anticipated, by 27 November the rival parties 'arranged their disputes, all joining in' on an agreed allocation of shares in what they called the Consolidated.⁷⁶ According to a 1930 recollection by a man who had represented a Hamilton syndicate, he and his mate spent the day after they had pegged out endeavouring to find out whether they would be granted their claim. 'In the meantime, of course, we were idle. So much confusion existed and so many overlapping interests had to be adjusted that we came to the conclusion that the game was not worth the candle'. After one of the party 'cleared out', he returned to his farm, 'taking back to my syndicate the unspent funds, with the advice to have nothing to do with the field as a working proposition, which, of course, was not acted on, they putting more money into claims when things had settled down and losing it'.⁷⁷

By the end of November, through Kenrick's 'intervention' nearly all disputes had been 'amicably settled' by amalgamating interests.⁷⁸ One correspondent considered that the settlement of so many conflicting claims, in both goldfield and settlement, had been 'settled amicably' spoke 'volumes for the good character and love of order that must exist amongst those who are now on the ground'.⁷⁹ This alleged 'love of order' did not prevent new squabbles arising, as for instance when one party 'found that half a dozen parties have pegged upon their ground, and they are now arranging to fight some and to amalgamate with others'.⁸⁰ An arrangement resulted in the claim being named the United.⁸¹ Not all claimants were included: 'the members of No. 2 Hamilton Association, who pegged out nearly the same ground, were thrown out of Court by non-observance of regulations'.⁸² Nearly all disputes were resolved privately, only two cases being brought before the warden, the first one concerning the overlapping of a claim near the Prospectors. 'Both parties agreed to leave the matter to' Kenrick, who

⁷⁶ Pigeongrams, *Thames Star*, 27 November 1880, p. 2.

⁷⁷ C.J.W. Barton, letter of 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), pp. 349, 351.

⁷⁸ Special Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 1 December 1880, p. 3.

⁷⁹ Thames Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 29 November 1880, p. 6.

⁸⁰ *Thames Star*, 1 December 1880, p. 2.

⁸¹ Special Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 1 December 1880, p. 3.

⁸² *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 December 1880, p. 9.

‘divided the claim into 35 shares, and gave the defendants three of them, which satisfied all concerned’.⁸³

On 2 December, Kenrick was able to return to Thames because nearly all disputes had been settled without his involvement. He considered that quick resolutions were because he required the immediate manning of claims.⁸⁴ Apart from some ‘interested parties’, there were few squabbles over his rulings.⁸⁵ According to one reporter, he was ‘gaining popularity every day, from the business-like and gentlemanly manner in which all persons having dealings with him are treated’.⁸⁶

Some conflicts continued over ownership continued. For instance, one man, employed to peg out a claim by its intended owners while they attended the warden’s court, refused to recognise their ownership once he had pegged it out.⁸⁷ As Kenrick was not called upon to adjudicate, a private settlement must have been reached. At the first hearing of the warden’s court, on 17 December, there was a plaint to obtain possession of part of the Omahu on the grounds of illegal pegging and non-working. The plaintiff, Allen Christey,⁸⁸ a provisional director of the adjoining claim, Te Aroha No. 1 South, stated that he had taken the surplus ground now known as the Omahu because its owners were not going to work it. The defense was that the directors of Te Aroha No. 1 South, at a meeting attended by Christey, had decided to work it, counsel emphasizing that Christey, while acting as a provisional director, had

obtained all possible information respecting the ground in question, and then abused the confidence reposed in him by the shareholders by pegging out the claim and laying a plaint against those who had taken up the ground on behalf of the company. - His Worship summed up the evidence, and after commenting somewhat strongly on the system of pegging out ground for speculative purposes, awarded the claim to the plaintiff,

⁸³ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 2 December 1880, p. 3.

⁸⁴ *Waikato Times*, 4 December 1880, p. 2.

⁸⁵ Own Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 27 November 1880, p. 2.

⁸⁶ Pigeongrams, *Thames Star*, 1 December 1880, p. 2; his popularity was described in identical words in *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 December 1880, p. 9.

⁸⁷ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 14 December 1880, p. 3.

⁸⁸ See *Thames Directory for 1881* (Thames, 1881), p. 103; District Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 9 June 1880, p. 3.

presumably because the mine manager gave evidence that he had ‘found it would be useless to do any work on the Omahu, as it overlapped several other claims’.⁸⁹ This use of insider information for personal benefit was common, but despite any moral disapproval of this behaviour and of speculative pegging, Kenrick’s decision was based on his insistence that ground must be manned and worked.⁹⁰ Although his insistence caused ‘some dissatisfaction’, most miners approved because some parties were ‘holding large areas of land and only keeping one or two men at work, thus retarding the development of the field’.⁹¹ On 20 December, Kenrick awarded half-a-man’s ground to another miner who could prove that it had not been properly worked.⁹² Later, the Morning Light was awarded to a plaintiff who proved that it had not been worked: two sleeping partners had not been represented, one of its owners had never worked on it, another had gone to Thames two weeks before, and a third had gone to Auckland in the past few days. Inadvertent encroachment on another claim led to those at fault being ordered to desist. In another case, a miner sued for wages owed by a sleeping partner; the plaintiff was granted most of what he sought.⁹³ These cases were typical of those that would be before the court in future years.

THE WARDEN’S VIEW OF THE PROSPECTS

In his May 1881 assessment, Kenrick wrote that ‘the loss of time incurred before all the disputes were settled’ meant that little work was done before the Christmas holidays.⁹⁴ In contrast, contemporary reports indicated a considerable amount of prospecting of claims and many more claims being pegged. Of course, while disputes continued over ownership, no work could be done even though claims were fully manned.⁹⁵ What everyone wanted to know was whether the field would be payable. In his first report, after inspecting 30 claims with George Wilson, Kenrick was optimistic

⁸⁹ Warden’s Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 18 December 1880, p. 3.

⁹⁰ See *Thames Star*, 18 December 1880, p. 2.

⁹¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 23 December 1880, p. 2.

⁹² Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 21 December 1880, p. 3.

⁹³ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 23 December 1880, p. 3.

⁹⁴ Harry Kenrick to Under-Secretary, Gold Fields, 2 May 1881, *AJHR*, 1881, H-17, p. 12.

⁹⁵ Pigeongrams, *Thames Star*, 1 December 1880, p. 2.

that a permanent goldfield has been opened, that will prove to be of very large extent, and will not be confined ... within the present proclaimed boundaries. I have spoken with more than 80 miners who have either taken up claims or are scattered over the field prospecting. In every instance they concur with me in thinking the indications most promising. Not only have loose pieces of stone showing gold been picked up over a large area, but several well-defined lines of reef have been traced, in each instance of very promising looking stone with all the minerals indicating gold. One reef, Catran and party, is situated some 2 1/2 miles North of Prospectors' (down the river), another, Dickson and party, about the same distance South (up the river).

The former was the future Tui field, the latter the future Waiorongomai one. The Catran brothers did find ore, as later described, unlike John Dickson (or Dixon). Both parties believed they had payable reefs, which 'time alone' would prove, but it tended 'to show the extent of ground over which gold bearing stone is supposed to exist'. By 2 December, as Kenrick reported, about 60 claims were taken up between these two discoveries.

In the majority of these, work or preparations for work have already commenced. It is satisfactory to be able to report that the miners - many being experienced miners - speak hopefully of their prospects. The amount of real, hard, practical work they have commenced is the best guarantee they can give of their faith in the value of the field... I would point out the necessity of warning men thinking of coming to this district, that there is but little demand at present for labour, and that it requires both time and money to develop even known discoveries, and at present there appears no prospect of an alluvial field being found.⁹⁶

'Spectator', one of Kenrick's critics, condemned this optimistic account, claiming that Wilson would not confirm that he had inspected 30 claims, and challenging his opinion about the unproved district. 'Statements like this have had (already) a very prejudicial effect, both at the Thames and Auckland', where the goldfield was 'looked upon with doubt'. Kenrick's description of 'most promising' loose stones and reefs being found read like 'the production of a new chum; as I am prepared to prove that some of the loose stones he speaks of were picked up by him at the suggestion of one of

⁹⁶ Harry Kenrick to Minister of Justice, 6 December 1880, printed in *Thames Star*, 15 December 1880, p. 2.

the parties accompanying him, he well knowing that it had been placed there'.⁹⁷ This charge of deliberate fraud was an example of how great the ill feeling was between supporters of the former warden, William Fraser, and Kenrick, his replacement.⁹⁸

More pertinently, 'Spectator' pointed out that when parties stated that they had found payable reefs, how did Kenrick 'know what is their real belief; may they not have made statements to him while their belief was very different?'⁹⁹ (Knowing what claimholders really believed was a skill nobody possessed, though frequent comments about the grain of salt needed when listening to their songs of praise indicated there was much scepticism.)

WORK COMMENCES

A mining correspondent, John McCombie,¹⁰⁰ considered that miners would benefit from the location of the new field:

The claims which have been pegged off are well situated so far as crushing the quartz is concerned. The sides of the hills are so steep that there will be no difficulty in getting the quartz to the base by means of shoots, and the river banks, where undoubtedly most of the mills will be erected, are so near that there will be very little difficulty in getting the stuff conveyed to them.

Water races from streams near Waiorongomai 'could be constructed without much difficulty at a sufficient height to give an excellent fall to the level of the flat ground'.¹⁰¹

'Most' of those who pegged out immediately 'commenced work in earnest, and in several claims good prospects of loose gold have been found, while in one or two instances reefs have been discovered from which stone showing gold has been broken out'. Allegedly there was 'no attempt to exaggerate these discoveries', for each party was 'anxious to develop

⁹⁷ Letter from 'Spectator', *Thames Advertiser*, 21 December 1880, p. 3.

⁹⁸ See *Observer*, 19 December 1903, p. 5, and paper on Harry Kenrick.

⁹⁹ Letter from 'Spectator', *Thames Advertiser*, 21 December 1880, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ See paper on Billy Nicholl.

¹⁰¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, 'The Te Aroha District', *New Zealand Herald*, 29 November 1880, p. 6.

something more certain before saying anything about their finds'.¹⁰² Because of thirst for the latest news, reporters usually passed on all information received unchecked, though occasionally with cautionary warnings, especially when they were able to investigate. For example, one correspondent warned that reports of finds

should be received with due caution, as in many cases they can be traced to a common source. We heard yesterday, for instance, that gold had been found in a certain reef in payable quantities, and about the same time another report reached us to the effect that stone had been found with a band of gold 2 1/2 inches thick running through it. Upon enquiry we found that both stories related to one claim, and that the latter of the two was without the slightest foundation.¹⁰³

Following is an outline, with examples, of the first workings. A more detailed account of developments in the Prospectors' Claim, whose success or failure was expected to determine the future of the field, is given in the paper about it.

Two days after the opening, the settlement was 'comparatively deserted', most miners being out prospecting:

The general feeling seems to be that there is a good field for prospecting, and the miners present are determined to give the whole district a fair trial before expressing any opinion upon it. Every now and then one hears of claims being taken up, and many of the rumors say that good stone has been taken out. Of course it is nothing unusual to see good specimens in the possession of men, but little dependence is to be placed upon all that is said as to where they were obtained.

Claims were being pegged out on all the mountain's spurs, quartz being found in 'almost' all of these.¹⁰⁴

A large number of tents have been removed to the ranges, in order that their occupants may be near the scene of their labours. There is no doubt that after work has been commenced in all the claims that more of the diggers will shift their quarters nearer

¹⁰² Thames Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 29 November 1880, p. 6.

¹⁰³ Te Aroha Correspondence, *Waikato Times*, 30 November 1880, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ Pigeongrams, *Thames Star*, 27 November 1880, p. 2.

their claims, as it is no joke having to climb up the hills before starting work.¹⁰⁵

The field extended as far as the Thames High School Endowment, at Waiorongomai,¹⁰⁶ and by the end of November ‘the ground in that direction’ was ‘rapidly being taken up. At present only two claims have been registered, but notice of pegging off has been given of no less than forty different claims’.¹⁰⁷ Although ‘the chief amount of attention’ had been devoted to the Prospectors’ Spur, experienced quartz miners believed that ‘ultimately the best portion of the field’ would be behind this endowment,¹⁰⁸ as indeed proved to be the case.

The impact on the environment was immediate. On the spur behind O’Halloran’s hotel, earth removed from tunnels was ‘thrown down the hill’, to be ‘conspicuous against the burnt fern’.¹⁰⁹ Portals could be seen from the flat. Parties were ‘high up the mountain’, and fires to clear the bush were ‘seen in all directions’.¹¹⁰ There was talk of forming companies because few claims could be worked without capital, and ‘in most cases’ prospectors were ‘men of little or no means’.¹¹¹ Before companies could be floated, good gold had to be found, and on every day in late November and early December newspapers reported leaders driven on, loose gold found on the surface, reefs cut, trenches dug, and promising stone being pounded to detect any colours indicating gold. ‘Those who have had some experience of new fields, and of this district, tell us in all earnestness that active prospecting must disclose finds of rich gold, from the indications everywhere to be met with’.¹¹² ‘All parties here appear sanguine about the field’, although ‘little work’ was expected before Christmas.¹¹³

¹⁰⁵ Special Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 30 November 1880, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ See paper on this endowment.

¹⁰⁷ Thames Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 30 November 1880, p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ Own Correspondent, ‘The Te Aroha District’, *New Zealand Herald*, 29 November 1880, p. 6.

¹⁰⁹ Special Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 30 November 1880, p. 3.

¹¹⁰ Pigeongrams, *Thames Star*, 1 December 1880, p. 2.

¹¹¹ *Waikato Times*, 30 November 1880, p. 2.

¹¹² *Te Aroha Mail*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Advertiser*, 4 December 1880, p. 2.

¹¹³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 7 December 1880, p. 2.

Regulations required that, within ten days of marking out, a claim had to be registered,¹¹⁴ which meant that if initial prospecting was discouraging, claims were abandoned to avoid expenses. Many who pegged out would not become owners of registered claims nor hold scrip shares in companies. Within days of the opening, small claims were starting to amalgamate,¹¹⁵ sometimes as a prelude to taking out a license and in a few cases to floating a company. At the end of November, discoveries by prospectors ‘on whose words reliance can be placed’ were made two miles on each side of the settlement. ‘Fine gold’ was reported near the Mangaiti, Waitoki and Wairakau streams.¹¹⁶ Because of a shortage of miners, ‘most of the Thames unemployed were quickly picked up’.¹¹⁷ These men would either be wagesmen or would be working the interests of sleeping partners. It was seen as worthy of note that in the Early Dawn the ten Ngaruawahia shareholders were all ‘working their own interests’.¹¹⁸

On 15 December, there were the usual assurances of good prospects, of encouraging finds either on the surface or in the solid stone, and of ore being readied for testing at Thames. A parcel from the Golden Anchor had already been tested for ‘a return highly satisfactory to the shareholders’, who received ‘the first dividend on the field’ 2s 6d for each full shareholder. Several drives had been commenced, the longest, in the Rose of Denmark, being ‘in 50 feet through good country’, without striking any quartz. At least one winze had been started, and at least one joint low level tunnel was contemplated.¹¹⁹ One reporter, who wished the field well, knew that finding good gold would establish its permanence ‘and leave no room for the croakers’ (meaning ‘pronounced and persistent pessimists’).¹²⁰ There was still ‘little beyond hope to rely upon’, but this was ‘of a substantial

¹¹⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 13 October 1883, p. 2.

¹¹⁵ For example, *Te Aroha Correspondent*, *Thames Advertiser*, 27 November 1880, p. 3; *Te Aroha Miner*, 4 December 1880, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 6 December 1880, p. 3.

¹¹⁶ Special Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 30 November 1880, p. 3; *Te Aroha Mail*, n.d., reprinted in *Waikato Times*, 4 December 1880, p. 2.

¹¹⁷ *Te Aroha Miner*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 9 December 1880, p. 3.

¹¹⁸ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 10 December 1880, p. 3.

¹¹⁹ *Thames Star*, 15 December 1880, p. 2.

¹²⁰ Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*. 8 ed., ed. Paul Beale (London, 1984), p.270.

character'.¹²¹ Final proof of the value of the field was expected within a month or so, and a correspondent wrote confidently in mid-December:

The many favourable indications that have been found during the last few days in various parts of the field have done much to establish confidence in the payable nature of the ground, and inspired the miners to more active work in opening out and thoroughly prospecting their claims. Nearly every party who have hitherto been shepherding their ground have started to work this week, and during the day the Township is deserted by all but business people. Prospecting is also going on for a considerable distance in the ranges, and from the gentlemen who came over from Katikati yesterday, I heard that parties of men were out ten miles away.

Although prospects were 'very encouraging', he warned those 'without some money' that it was 'useless' going to the field at present because 'very little labour' was being employed and a number of men had been 'forced to leave through want of means to hold out' until gold was found.¹²²

WORKING OR SHEPHERDING?

'Spectator' claimed that many claims were not being fully manned and that in most no work was being done.¹²³ The latter can rarely be determined, because owners did not advertise their failure to work and occasional visits by reporters did not always detect it. No work at all was unlikely in most cases, for it was a waste of claimholders' time and money if they did not at least test their ground. As well, if claims were not fully manned or worked, they could be forfeited. On the day after the opening, a Thames reporter wrote that the 'great jumper, who was interested in the pegging-out, had taken his departure, but has deputed ex-Warden Fraser and Mr [Hugh] McIlhone¹²⁴ to look after his speciality in his absence'.¹²⁵ However, there is no evidence that William Fraser jumped others' claims, and McIlhone did not acquire any interests, although dummyming may explain why their names were not recorded. Reporters believed most claims

¹²¹ Own Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 14 December 1880, p. 3.

¹²² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 16 December 1880, p. 2.

¹²³ Letter from 'Spectator', *Thames Advertiser*, 21 December 1880, p. 3.

¹²⁴ See paper on Harry Kenrick.

¹²⁵ Own Correspondent, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 27 November 1880, p. 3.

were being worked. On 2 December, for instance, one stated that work had ‘commenced in almost every claim ... and already some very good bodies of quartz have been discovered in several’.¹²⁶ On 9 December, he ‘visited the claims to the south of the Prospectors’ spur ... and found that sections have been pegged out, and are being legitimately worked, for at least a mile from that point’.¹²⁷

There were occasional reports of that common goldmining practice, shepherding. One party, after pegging out most of Bald Spur on opening day, had shifted their pegs ‘from day to day, in order to enable them to hold’ their unworked ground.¹²⁸ A reporter learnt from ‘private sources’ that ‘many parties were only waiting to see whether the gold does go down’ on the Prospectors’ leader. ‘Should the result be favourable, they will commence working vigorously, while if it is otherwise, they will probably leave the district’.¹²⁹

‘Spectator’s’ malicious criticisms of Kenrick were very much a minority view. The newspaper that published his letter had earlier warned miners against being misled by the ‘plausible utterances of individuals known for their hostility’ to Kenrick, who was trying to be fair to genuine businessmen and prospectors.¹³⁰

HANDICAPS

Correspondents, like prospectors, appeared to have had little technical knowledge of geology, unless reporters chose to describe the ore in laymen’s terms. The public was told about a reef of ‘light colored crystalised quartz’;¹³¹ stone that was ‘nicely mineralised, ruby silver showing well, and the proprietors believe with these promising indications gold is not far off’;¹³² ‘nice looking stringers’;¹³³ ‘an auriferous leader ... the quartz in which is of a character unlike any yet seen in this locality, the color being almost

¹²⁶ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 3 December 1880, p. 3.

¹²⁷ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 10 December 1880, p. 3.

¹²⁸ *Auckland Weekly News*, 11 December 1880, p. 9.

¹²⁹ Own Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 18 December 1880, p. 9.

¹³⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 27 November 1880, p. 2.

¹³¹ Pigeongrams, *Thames Star*, 29 November 1880, p. 2.

¹³² Special Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 December 1880, p. 3.

¹³³ *Thames Star*, 15 December 1880, p. 2.

white’;¹³⁴ ‘a likely-looking leader’;¹³⁵ ‘blue stone full of mineral’;¹³⁶ ‘a very nice-looking leader of whitey-brown quartz’ and another ‘of a bluish white colour’;¹³⁷ and stone ‘of a composite character, containing crystallised quartz, sandstone and other hard mineral substances, besides excellent shows of gold-indicating mineral’.¹³⁸ Lack of geological skills combined with an inability to treat ore locally could mean much wasted effort. For example, when three bags from the Bright Smile were sent for testing, shareholders had ‘no idea how it will shape’.¹³⁹ Even experienced miners were puzzled, as indicated by a ‘special reporter’ who had visited at the end of October:

The stone in which gold is obtained differs most materially from that known as promising at the Thames. It is the most hungry and unpromising-looking you would find in a day’s march, and yet there is the gold in unmistakable quantities, and of superior value to Thames auriferous stone. During your correspondent’s visit he was shown some remarkable stone. An old Thames miner would not look at it, and would as soon expect to find gold in pavingstones as in such a conglomerate of shale and rotten brown quartz.¹⁴⁰

By December, some believed that they understood the geology:

Many old Thames miners entertain an opinion concerning the field - that the gold-bearing country runs on a belt, nearly parallel with the river, and about half a mile distant from it. This theory has been demonstrated by creek prospectors, who have discovered that boulders in the lower portion of the creeks are almost without exception, of dark colored flint, and when the supposed auriferous belt is reached, the creek rocks are found to be of sandstone.¹⁴¹

¹³⁴ *Thames Star*, 15 December 1880, p. 2.

¹³⁵ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 3 December 1880, p. 3.

¹³⁶ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 17 December 1880, p. 3.

¹³⁷ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 28 December 1880, p. 3.

¹³⁸ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 10 December 1880, p. 3.

¹³⁹ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 6 December 1880, p. 3.

¹⁴⁰ Special Reporter, ‘A Visit to the Prospectors’ Ground at Te Aroha’, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 November 1880, p. 3.

¹⁴¹ *Te Aroha Miner*, 4 December 1880, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 6 December 1880, p. 3.

Prospectors were both excited and confused by often-baseless rumours. For instance, the *Te Aroha Miner* reported in early December that a 'rumour was current yesterday that hard country had been met with in the Te Aroha No. 1 South, but on making enquiries we find that such is not the case'.¹⁴²

Many prospectors were wasting their time. At the beginning of December, a Cambridge resident warned that it was easy to peg out a claim but hard to find payable ore. 'Scores of people' were 'literally doing nothing on the field, beyond walking hither and thither prospecting'. Out of 800 or 900 present, perhaps only one or two hundred were 'experienced miners, who have paid dearly for their wanderings. The remainder have never taken a pick in hand'.¹⁴³ As an example of inexperienced miners, in the Don, owned by Cambridge men,¹⁴⁴ and worked mainly by men from that non-mining district, a drive 'almost big enough for a railway tunnel' was being put in through the spur to the north of the Prospectors,¹⁴⁵ a wasteful expenditure of time and labour.

Miners faced significant difficulties, notably the lack of a battery, although by the end of November Allen Christey, who by late December would be an owner of four claims,¹⁴⁶ had erected 'a small hand berdan near the prospectors' spur' to test stone 'at reasonable rates'.¹⁴⁷ Blacksmith's shops erected near some claims saved 'both time and money'.¹⁴⁸ In the United, driving was slowed 'owing to the scarcity of trucks and barrows and material for timbering up'.¹⁴⁹ Shortage of blasting powder stopped work in claims with very hard rock.¹⁵⁰ Steep topography combined with lack of roads was a particular difficulty; for instance, taking samples down from the Bright Smile required quartz being 'bagged to the flat - a very arduous job'.¹⁵¹ By mid-December, 'a good barrow road' had been made from the

¹⁴² *Te Aroha Miner*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 9 December 1880, p. 3.

¹⁴³ Letter from 'Caution', *Waikato Times*, 2 December 1880, p. 3.

¹⁴⁴ *Waikato Times*, 16 December 1880, p.2.

¹⁴⁵ Pigeongrams, *Thames Star*, 1 December 1880, p. 2.

¹⁴⁶ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 154, 181, 185, 200, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁴⁷ Special Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 1 December 1880, p. 3.

¹⁴⁸ *Te Aroha Miner*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 17 December 1880, p. 2.

¹⁴⁹ Own Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 6 December 1880, p. 3.

¹⁵⁰ Own Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 16 December 1880, p. 3.

¹⁵¹ *Te Aroha Miner*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 17 December 1880, p. 2.

drive in the Bonanza to the blacksmith's shop erected on the adjoining Prospectors, where there was suitable ground for stacking quartz.¹⁵² One carter assisted one claim by 'conveying the quartz to the landing free of charge'.¹⁵³

To ship quartz to Thames cost four shillings per load, although a steamer provided free transport at least twice.¹⁵⁴ The proprietors of the river steamers, 'with a view to encouraging large trials', offered to convey 10 tons at 2s 6d per ton, and the Golden Anchor shareholders 'decided to avail themselves of the offer before the holidays. This will give a thorough good test, and if successful should materially increase the confidence in the stability of the field'.¹⁵⁵ By the Christmas holidays, about 16 claims had sent parcels for testing.¹⁵⁶

NEW FINDS

On the evening of 6 December, there was 'considerable excitement' about two reported finds, one at Tui, of which more below, and the other 'on the bald spur upon which Fraterville is built', below Werahiko's original find. A reporter visited the latter on the following morning,

and found in a tunnel, some 10 feet in length, a rubbly leader about 10 inches thick. Several dishes of the stuff broken out from the lead were panned off in my presence, all of which yielded more or less gold. The prospectors of the spur are [Allen] Christey and party, who have been working with a view to intersect this lead since the opening of the field. All the available ground in the immediate neighbourhood was pegged off before 6 o'clock this morning. Amongst others engaged marking off, I noticed several of the Fraterville residents, who, regardless of punishment for indecent exposure, were pegging out for "life or death" in their shirts, so eager were they to obtain a good piece of ground. Several experienced miners who have visited this locality, and to whom I spoke on the subject, inform me that it is their opinion the "find" is a valuable one, the spur on which it is situated being composed of first class gold bearing country.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² Own Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 16 December 1880, p. 3.

¹⁵³ *Te Aroha Miner*, 23 December 1880, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 24 December 1880, p. 2.

¹⁵⁴ *Thames Star*, 18 December 1880, p. 2, 24 December 1880, p. 2.

¹⁵⁵ *Thames Star*, 15 December 1880, p. 2.

¹⁵⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 23 December 1880, p. 3.

¹⁵⁷ Own Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 8 December 1880, p. 3.

Despite such confident predictions, this area would never produce gold. Throughout December, there continued to be regular reports of good stone in the Bonanza, adjoining the Prospectors'.¹⁵⁸ For example, 'some excitement was created' when 'several pounds of excellent specimen stone' were broken out from the leader in the Bonanza. This 'picked and specimen stone has been lodged for safe keeping in the post-office, but before it was locked up it was examined by nearly every one in the township, and those who were competent to judge pronounced it equal to any obtained from the Prospectors'.¹⁵⁹ Prospectors' Spur was 'literally filled with small leaders, many of which have already been intersected, and found to contain more or less gold'.¹⁶⁰ The other major 'excitement' before Christmas was on 11 December, when shareholders in the Morning Star, near Stoney Creek, between Te Aroha and Waoiorongomai, brought into the settlement

a small specimen and a large flake of gold, which were obtained from the lode in the main drive shortly before noon to-day. The gold appears to be of splendid quality, and it is worth, it is estimated, over £3 per ounce. The reef in question is over two feet thick, and the drive is now in a distance of 20 feet. The shareholders have from the first of the week been expecting a change for the better in that part of the mine, and their anticipations have just proved correct. The "find" has caused some excitement, as it is undoubtedly the best unearthed outside the Prospectors, and £80 has just been offered, and refused, for a share in the claim.¹⁶¹

THE TUI DISTRICT DISCOVERED

The first finds in the Tui district, then more commonly called Omahu or Ruakaka, were the first significant discoveries at a distance from the original find, and in later years this district became important when gold was found higher up the mountainside. The first report simply stated that, on the evening of 6 December, gold was found 'some four miles north-east of the township'. Early the following morning, there was 'quite a small rush'

¹⁵⁸ For example, Own Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 16 December 1880, p. 3.

¹⁵⁹ Own Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 16 December 1880, p. 3.

¹⁶⁰ Own Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 21 December 1880, p. 3.

¹⁶¹ Own Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 13 December 1880, p. 3.

when ‘numbers of men’ made their way to the find. The first discovery had been made by several Maori, who pegged out the Te Aroha Atai on 6 December after finding a large reef closely resembling that in the Prospectors’ Claim. The following day, it was reported that ‘a leader, four to six inches in thickness’, showed ‘strong colours of gold’. Most of the 15 prospectors were Maori.¹⁶² One reporter gave a detailed description:

The locality is situated fully four miles from the township, and about half that distance from the Maori pah [at Omahu]. The claim is reached by a track along the side of the range, which the claimholders have just cut. The grade is a gentle one, and if the track were made a little wider saddle horses would be able to go up it. Even as it is, goods could be packed to the claim, which is situated on the side of the hill, about forty or fifty feet above the Omahu or Ruakaka creek.... Very little work has been done on the claim as yet, but on Monday active operations will be started on it. A hole has been sunk on the lode, which is between three and four feet thick, and already more than half a-ton of quartz has been broken out. The stone is different in character from that obtained in the immediate vicinity of Morgantown, being composed of blue and brown quartz, and has a kindly appearance. About twenty feet further down the hill the proprietors of the claim have made a start to put in two tunnels on the reef, which is cropping out at those points, and on Monday another will be started. The lode is expected to be cut in about 10 or 15 feet of driving. In the first working it is the intention of the shareholders to sink upon the lode, which they believe will improve in quality as it goes downwards. It is also their intention to take out a crushing of a ton from the reef, and forward it to the Thames. The quartz broken out contains splendid minerals, and gold must be about somewhere. The reef runs due north and south - that is, up and down the river, and 600 feet of it are included in the claim, which has been named the Omahu. Five claims have been pegged out contiguous to Catran’s, representing an area of fifty men’s ground.... Should the locality prove auriferous, the claimholders will experience little difficulty in having their quartz crushed, as a splendid stream of water runs through it, and some enterprising men would not think twice about erecting a battery somewhere in the gully.¹⁶³

¹⁶² *Te Aroha Miner*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 9 December 1880, p. 3; Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 8 December 1880, p. 3.

¹⁶³ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 13 December 1880, p. 3.

The name of the claim was taken from the Omaha pa. The Catran brothers, Martin, Stephen, Thomas and William, all experienced miners,¹⁶⁴ with others owned several claims there in December: William had shares in four, Martin in three, and Stephen and Thomas in two.¹⁶⁵ They established a camp close to their find.¹⁶⁶ On 16 December, there was another rush on the Te Aroha side of the Omaha claim:

The new locality is about three miles from the township, by a good track, and the first persons to take up a claim in it were the Catrans, who inform me that they discovered good prospects there some time ago, but did not pay much attention to the discovery, until within the past week. The reef on the line of which they have pegged out had been driven through for a distance of three feet, and yet the footwall has not been reached, and the proprietors believe, from this fact, that the lode is of a large size. A colour or two of gold is occasionally seen in the solid stone; but after the quartz has been pounded and panned off first-class prospects are obtained. The claim has been named the Tui, and is five acres in extent.... As soon as it was known that Catrans had taken up a claim there was a rush on a small scale for adjoining sections, and very soon nine or ten claims were pegged out. The Catrans do not intend to throw up their first claim before giving it a trial, which they will do by taking out a parcel from three different portions of the lode, and getting it crushed at the Thames. They also intend to test the reef in the Tui in a similar manner, and they are now busily engaged in both claims taking out crushings.¹⁶⁷

Shortly afterwards, they pegged out another claim containing ‘a large auriferous reef’, about a mile from the Omaha. Upon driving on it for about six feet, they found ‘some of the nicest looking’ quartz to be discovered there, showing ‘a little gold’. A small trial parcel was sent for testing, and

¹⁶⁴ For example, Thames Warden’s Court, Register of Grahamstown Claims 1878-1880, claim 787, BACL 14397/12a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 20 September 1872, p. 3, 20 February 1875, p. 2, 30 March 1875, p. 3, 9 April 1875, p. 3, 18 June 1875, p. 3, 22 August 1876, p. 3; *New Zealand Mining Standard*, 17 July 1896, p. 4; Recollections of A.F. Sawyer, n.d. [1940s]. W.G. Hammond Papers, MS 134, folder 34a, Library of the Auckland Institute and Museum.

¹⁶⁵ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 177, 178, 189, 201, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁶⁶ *Thames Star*, 11 December 1880, p. 2.

¹⁶⁷ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 17 December 1880, p. 3.

Kenrick took some stone from the Tui claim 'which on being crushed and panned was found to be auriferous'.¹⁶⁸ The owners hoped for 1 1/2 to 2oz to the ton.¹⁶⁹ This claim, about 300 yards in the bush above Ruakaka Creek, was visited on 23 December:

Three small drives are being put in. In one of them, which is nicely timbered up, the lode, eight feet thick, is showing, and it looks first class. It is composed of dark brown rubbly quartz, and so easy to break out that two men ought to be able to knock down sufficient to keep a couple of carts employed in taking it away.

There were plans to thoroughly test the lode in several places, and when the reporter 'broke down three or four pounds of rubble', on 'panning off' he

distinctly saw thirty or forty colors of gold in the bottom of the dish. After I had finished a friend of mine panned off another lot and obtained an equally good prospect, and I am satisfied from what I have seen that this part of the field has a bright future before it. Running past the claim is a very good creek, sufficient to drive a large battery, and, should the prospects of the place warrant it, Colonel [William] Fraser [the former warden] intends erecting a suitable crushing mill. Water being the motive power, crushing can be done cheaply, and as the reef is a very large one, less than half-an-ounce to the ton would pay handsomely. The result of the trial crushing of a ton and a-half forwarded to Grahamstown in the early part of the week is anxiously expected. Between one and two ounces to the ton is expected. Mr Stephen Catran is superintending the crushing. Fourteen claims have been pegged out in the vicinity of the Tui.... In all of them work has been started, and each party is confident of success.¹⁷⁰

TESTING TO DETERMINE IF THE FIELD WAS PAYABLE

Before Christmas, a month of prospecting had not found one large, payable, reef. As trial crushings were designed to be a fair test of its value, quartz was not selected but taken 'as it comes'. The opinion was 'gaining ground amongst practical men that it will not be what is called a rich field' compared with the best parts of Thames. As 'the quartz will be of a lower

¹⁶⁸ *Te Aroha Miner*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 22 December 1880, p. 2.

¹⁶⁹ *Te Aroha Miner*, 23 December 1880, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 24 December 1880, p. 2.

¹⁷⁰ Own Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 24 December 1880, p. 3.

grade and more uniform in its nature and spread over such a large area of country', it would 'afford permanent employment for capital and labour for many years to come'.¹⁷¹ Despite such optimism, the cautious were not convinced that the field would be either payable or permanent. This was illustrated when an unnamed Te Aroha resident received a letter from a friend in New South Wales

asking his opinion as to the advisability of proceeding to Te Aroha, and stating that if it was favourable nearly a thousand diggers would come over at once. The writer enclosed a post office order for £2, with which to bear the cost of a reply by cable. The receiver has wired to his friend not to come until further development takes place.¹⁷²

Many early visitors expressed doubts because no rich finds had been made.¹⁷³ Some men soon abandoned the field: for instance, on 10 December 'a number of miners' returned to Thames 'alleging that they were full up with the new field, and intended to stick to their old love'.¹⁷⁴ The *Thames Advertiser* was told by some 'that the indications never warranted the glowing descriptions' published.¹⁷⁵ However, its Te Aroha reporter felt that it was too early for the 'croakers' to be able to prove the field was a failure. 'Hitherto literally nothing has been done in the way of bona-fide prospecting except by a small hand-full of the right stamp', and it was 'unjust to these men that the field should be condemned ere they have had time to satisfy themselves'.¹⁷⁶

The basis for caution or condemnation often was no firmer than that for optimism. A Waitekauri correspondent reported that a 'would-be' local expert pronounced it a duffer after getting 'as far as Fraterville', below Prospectors' Spur, on opening day. This correspondent also 'heard a would-be geologist, who just came from Reefton, say the field was no good. I made it my business to find out how this fellow knew it was no good. It was drinking beer at O'Halloran's Hotel, from which he never left for a whole

¹⁷¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 21 December 1880, p. 2.

¹⁷² Own Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 20 December 1880, p. 3.

¹⁷³ Pigeongrams, *Thames Star*, 1 December 1880, p. 2.

¹⁷⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 11 December 1880, p. 3.

¹⁷⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 22 December 1880, p.2.

¹⁷⁶ Own Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 22 December 1880, p. 3.

week'.¹⁷⁷ Others made closer inspections: 'one shrewd old digger informed me that Te Aroha was the hungriest ___ country he had ever seen'.¹⁷⁸

WHO WERE THE MINERS?

As an example of the type of men who went mining, a report from Cambridge shortly after the field opened stated that this township was 'being cleared out almost' by it, 'and great numbers, in proportion to the population, have already gone there to try their fortune. They are of all kinds, the storekeeper, the artisan, and the "general result" class'.¹⁷⁹ From Hamilton, there was 'a steady movement' to Te Aroha, 'working men and others who have little business to keep them at home, clearing out as quickly as they can arrange their affairs, in spite of the cold water' from the local newspaper. As every day 'one or more' men returned from Te Aroha 'to visit their families or see to business matters, people here are kept pretty well posted in goldfield news and prospects, and as most such persons return to the field, very little doubt of their good faith is felt'.¹⁸⁰ They were 'exceedingly sanguine',¹⁸¹ but few had the skills needed to succeed.

Of all those who arrived in November or December, 416 Pakeha were to become partners in registered claims. Maori also became owners: see the chapter on Maori and mining at Te Aroha. More men had participated in the rush, 529 miner's rights being issued by 9 December.¹⁸² By mid-December, there was estimated to be 'fully 600 men on the field, and these are constantly being added to', many 'quite unused to mining work' and with 'no knowledge whatever of how to trace gold'.¹⁸³ Some pegged out claims that were not registered, some only wanted business sites, and some quickly left once it was clear that obtaining gold would take considerable time, effort, and capital. Of these 416, 130 were miners; 52 came from Thames, 20 from Ohinemuri, seven from Coromandel, two from Hamilton, and one each from Tapu, Waitoa, Te Awamutu, Huntly, Cambridge, and Te

¹⁷⁷ Waitekauri Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 24 December 1880, p. 3.

¹⁷⁸ *Observer*, 4 December 1880, p. 99.

¹⁷⁹ Cambridge Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 December 1880, p. 9.

¹⁸⁰ Hamilton Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 11 December 1880, p. 9.

¹⁸¹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 December 1880, p. 9.

¹⁸² *Thames Star*, 9 December 1880, p. 3.

¹⁸³ Own Correspondent, 'A Review of the Position', *New Zealand Herald*, 13 December 1880, p. 5.

Aroha (John McSweeney).¹⁸⁴ The normal place of residence of some was unrecorded or is uncertain because they moved around during that 1880. The ages of some is unknown, and in some cases different sources gives different ages; three were teenagers, 28 were in their twenties, 41 were in their thirties, 32 in their forties, nine in their fifties, and three in their sixties. The youngest was William John Cornes, aged 16,¹⁸⁵ and the oldest (if the identification is correct) was John Hanson, aged 65.¹⁸⁶ Many who became miners during the rush normally did quite different work. The occupations of many can be traced, though sometimes it is unclear which was the predominant one, some having multiple jobs during their lives and even at the same time (labourer/contractor/carpenter was a typical combination). Some were involved in the township rather than the mines, taking out business sites and setting up small shops, or assisting to erect buildings. Others were speculators with little or no personal involvement in either township or mines.

The occupations of these non-miners did not prepare them to be successful miners. The largest category was 43 farmers; then came 23 storekeepers, 13 labourers, 13 carpenters and builders, 13 hotelkeepers, ten sharebrokers, eight contractors, seven commission agents, seven butchers, seven surveyors, four bakers, four blacksmiths, four bootmakers, four gentlemen (in other words, men in comfortable circumstances, not needing to be in paid employment), three engineers, three mariners, three auctioneers, two solicitors, two bushmen, two newspaper proprietors, two sawyers, two cabinetmakers, two clerks, two carters, two painters, and two timber merchants, and one of each of the following: livery stable owner, artist, battery manager, barman, policeman, chemist, cook, plumber, gardener, shipping agent, painter, bank manager, jeweller, miller, ploughman, interpreter, merchant, and former magistrate.¹⁸⁷

INVESTING

¹⁸⁴ See paper on his life.

¹⁸⁵ Death Certificate of William John Cornes, 15 October 1929, 1929/8058, BDM.

¹⁸⁶ Death Certificate of John Hanson, 17 October 1887, 1887/4706, BDM.

¹⁸⁷ This list is based on warden's court records, lists of shareholders published in the *New Zealand Gazette*, electoral rolls, certificates of births, deaths, and marriages, and newspapers.

Throughout the Auckland region, it was hoped that the goldfield would succeed, and positive news strengthened these hopes. In early December, for example, one Auckland newspaper wrote that it was ‘satisfactory’ that ‘the payable character of Te Aroha’ was ‘no fleeting illusion’ but firmly assured.

Gold-bearing reefs have been uncovered in many places over a wide area of ground, and the general trustfulness in the results of the mining ventures is manifested by a disinclination to part with shares. In the majority of cases the men most deeply concerned in the prosperity of the place are jealously protecting their interest in their original claims.¹⁸⁸

Some shareholders did indeed refuse generous offers; for instance, just before Christmas £100 was declined for a share in the Prosperity.¹⁸⁹ In addition to well-established Auckland and Thames sharebrokers, brokers elsewhere sought business. For example, in mid-December commission agents and sharebrokers Pascoe and Field advertised themselves as being of Hamilton and Te Aroha.¹⁹⁰ Samuel Pascoe’s attempt to be a broker soon failed, and he became a barman in Hamilton before again trying, a decade later, to be a commission agent.¹⁹¹ His personal as opposed to his professional enthusiasm for Te Aroha was muted, for he invested in only one claim and one company.¹⁹² His partner has not been identified, for he did not invest; he may have been John Field, shortly afterwards a hotelkeeper at Kihikihi.¹⁹³ Henry Edward Welby Cotton, normally a Cambridge auctioneer,¹⁹⁴ set himself up as a sharebroker and advertised that he was ‘Posted with the latest information from the Goldfields’,¹⁹⁵ but did not acquire shares himself. A Cambridge correspondent reported much local interest:

¹⁸⁸ *Freeman’s Journal*, 10 December 1880, p. 6.

¹⁸⁹ *Te Aroha Miner*, 23 December 1880, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 24 December 1880, p. 2.

¹⁹⁰ Advertisement, *Waikato Times*, 16 December 1880, p. 3.

¹⁹¹ See *Waikato Electoral Roll, 1880*, p. 10; *Waikato Times*, Magistrate’s Court, 13 July 1882, p. 2, 22 January 1891, p. 2.

¹⁹² Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 175, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 30 December 1880, p. 1797.

¹⁹³ See *Waipa Electoral Roll, 1882*, p. 9; advertisement, *Waikato Times*, 18 November 1886, p. 3.

¹⁹⁴ See *Waikato Electoral Roll, 1882*, p. 5.

¹⁹⁵ *Waikato Times*, 16 December 1880, p. 3.

Likely specimens are being exhibited all over the township, and it is ascertained that a considerable amount of speculation in mining shares has been, or rather is, going on. The ground itself has been visited by a large number of residents, and the reports brought back are certainly of an encouraging character.¹⁹⁶

‘Many experienced mining men’ declared that ‘the one thing necessary to unlock the vaults that contain the treasure is the sinews of war - capital’.¹⁹⁷ However, as John McCombie wrote, in uniting the efforts of capital and labour

the greatest care should be taken to avoid, as far as possible, giving the slightest countenance to anything in the shape of bubble companies. Nothing is more detrimental to a goldfield, and tends more to hamper legitimate mining, than the creation of companies merely for the sake of trafficking in scrip. Much can be said of the good that results from the formation of strong companies, especially when a large percentage of the money received from the general public goes towards working the mine, but the evil done by one bubble company frequently counteracts all the good results thus derived, and prevents numbers who would otherwise invest a little of their saving in mining enterprise from doing so. It would be a great pity if the Te Aroha were to suffer from this cause.¹⁹⁸

Certainly there was interest from investors. Shortly after the opening, one report of a rich find prompted ‘some Auckland speculators’ to leave for Te Aroha ‘to try to get a finger in the pie’.¹⁹⁹ Apart from the Aroha and Waitoa Companies,²⁰⁰ shareholders in the following claims decided to form companies: Bonanza, Waikato, Te Aroha No. 1 South, Te Aroha No. 2 South, Morning Star, Who’d Have Thought It, and Duke of Cambridge.²⁰¹ Of these, only four would be successfully floated: Waikato and Bonanza in

¹⁹⁶ Cambridge Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 9 December 1880, p. 2.

¹⁹⁷ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 21 December 1880, p. 3.

¹⁹⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 11 December 1880, p. 9.

¹⁹⁹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 December 1880, p. 17.

²⁰⁰ See papers on these companies.

²⁰¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 3 December 1880, p. 3, 10 December 1880, p. 3, 13 December 1880, p. 3, 16 December 1880, p. 3, 20 December 1880, p. 3.

December, Morning Star in the following January, and Te Aroha No. 1 South in February.²⁰²

In some cases, owners of claims allotted most shares in the companies to themselves, using money raised by selling interests to the public to work the ground.²⁰³ Even when, as in the case of the Morning Star, the shareholders took only half the scrip shares, the £450 to be raised by selling the other half, at three shillings per share,²⁰⁴ meant that the company was undercapitalized and would soon have to make calls. In two cases the owners not only allotted themselves half the shares but from sales to the public each full shareholder in the claim received £20.²⁰⁵ In the case of the Waikato Company, shares were allotted immediately, the company applying for registration on 9 December. Appropriately, 21 shareholders lived in Hamilton and provided most of the capital, while eight lived in Te Aroha; the two women shareholders, one the wife of the legal manager, lived in Thames.²⁰⁶ The directors were William Steele, a Hamilton land agent,²⁰⁷ who would have interests in another company along with four Waiorongomai claims and three Waiorongomai companies;²⁰⁸ Nigel Cox, a Hamilton storekeeper; Robert Williamson, a Hamilton blacksmith who later became a publican;²⁰⁹ John Ridler, a Hamilton farmer;²¹⁰ and Edward Quinn, a miner and contractor,²¹¹ then living at Te Aroha.²¹² The Bonanza

²⁰² *New Zealand Gazette*, 31 December 1880, p. 1797, 20 January 1881, pp. 110-111, 24 February 1881, p. 258.

²⁰³ For instance, the Bonanza: *Thames Advertiser*, 3 December 1880, p. 3.

²⁰⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 16 December 1880, p. 3.

²⁰⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 20 December 1880, p. 3.

²⁰⁶ *New Zealand Gazette*, 31 December 1880, p. 1797.

²⁰⁷ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 752; *Observer*, 5 February 1881, p. 210; *Waikato Argus*, 22 September 1898, p. 2, 24 September 1898, p. 2, 27 September 1898, p. 2.

²⁰⁸ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 6, 55, 64, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A; *AJHR*, 1897, C-3, p. 98; *New Zealand Gazette*, 28 April 1881, p. 476, 13 July 1882, p. 961, 17 August 1882, p. 1131, 31 May 1883, p. 722.

²⁰⁹ See *Waikato Times*, advertisement, 15 July 1879, p. 3, advertisement, 6 May 1884, p. 3, advertisement, 13 Jun 1885, p. 3, 23 July 1885, p. 2, 26 September 1885, p. 2.

²¹⁰ See *Waikato Times*, advertisement, 17 February 1881, p. 3, 22 October 1881, p. 2.

²¹¹ See paper on his life.

²¹² *Waikato Times*, 11 December 1880, p.3; for the Hamilton directors, see Waikato and Waipa electoral rolls for 1880.

Company applied for registration on 24 December, having allotted all but 1,689 of its shares, this number being held in trust for the company. There were 71 shareholders, the largest holding being 261 and the smallest ten. In this case, Thames provided the largest number of shareholders; Auckland and Hamilton both provided 19, Ohinemuri seven, and Waitoa and Coromandel one each. Auckland investors bought smaller parcels, most within the range of ten to 70. 'Miner' was the occupation of 33, but for many, such as the six Maori, this was only a temporary occupation.²¹³ The names of the directors of this company were not reported.

THE STATE OF THE GOLDFIELD BY CHRISTMAS

Kenrick granted protection to all claims from Friday 24 December to Monday 3 January. Miners and others left to spend Christmas with family and friends, scarcely 200 remaining. Only a few claims kept working over the holidays.²¹⁴ Assessing what mining had taken place and the prospects of the field, in late December a businessman from Reefton who had acquired a business site on opening day wrote to a friend:

I may say that from the first day I came here I have felt doubtful of the payableness of the reefs of this field, and I still feel so, though in a modified degree, as during the last few days rather better prospects have been obtained, and reefs of larger size and apparent permanency discovered, but withal they are not such as would be thought much of on the West Coast. We have a large number of reefs of different sizes, averaging from 3 inches to 7 or 8 feet or more in thickness, and running in various directions, but the great majority of them show very little gold, and it would be extremely hazardous to pronounce them payable. There are however three or four, which I think may be classed as payable, first amongst which is the Prospectors, and as this place is very young yet, the chances are that more will be discovered and found to be payable in course of time. A parcel from the Prospectors of 35cwt was sent to the Thames a fortnight ago to be crushed, and yielded at the rate of 10 1/2oz to the ton, which is of course highly payable, though the reef is only about 6 inches thick, and the gold is only worth £2 15s per ounce. The United Company also sent down a sample for trial which yielded 12dwt to the ton from a reef about 7 feet in thickness. Another company the Golden Anchor

²¹³ *New Zealand Gazette*, 20 January 1881, pp. 110-111.

²¹⁴ *Waikato Times*, 23 December 1880, p. 2, 25 December 1880, p. 2; Own Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 28 December 1880, p. 3.

obtained 8dwt 12 grains from 2cwt of stuff, or at the rate of about 4oz to the ton from an 8-inch reef. The Bright Smile send down last night 5 tons, from which they expect 1oz per ton, and the Golden Eagle forwarded 1 ton as a sample to be tested. The river steam boats running between the Thames and Te Aroha are taking the quartz down at the low rate of 2s 6d per ton, but a ten head crushing plant is about to be erected on the field....

I am not able at present to state the aspects of Te Aroha as a field, what its future may be, I shall not pretend to predict. If you were to ask my advice as to coming here, I should say that I would not give any direct advice neither to you or any one else to come here, but on the other hand neither would I advise you or anybody else not to come, if you are doing nothing where you are, and have no prospects of doing anything. I would say, come, and take your chance, or independent of the goldfield, I venture to say there is a future in store for this place. With the vast plains and beautiful and fertile valleys of the Waihou, the Piako, and the Waitoa stretching away in the far distance...[and] with the magnificent rivers traversing the plains, navigable for more than a hundred miles for suitable river steamers. With such natural advantages of these, this part of the country must prosper, even should it fail as a gold field.²¹⁵

This consequence of this caution about the prospects of mining meant that neither the letter writer nor the recipient acquired interests in any claims. According to one Thames correspondent, the results from one month's working were 'somewhat disappointing'. Although every week more people had obtained miner's rights, it was

somewhat surprising that so little real work has been done. Of course on a new field, and especially a quartz field, it is not always well to commence work in a systematic manner from the very first. To do so would very probably lead to doing a large amount of unnecessary work, and much loss of valuable time owing to the character and lay of the country not being sufficiently well known. It is therefore almost necessary that before real mining is started a large amount of fossicking should be done, in order to test the character of the country, prove the course of the lodes and leaders, and as far as possible ascertain the best points at which to commence work. Apparently, however, at the Aroha very little of any kind of work is being done. Too many parties have gone on to the field merely with the object of pegging off ground and disposing of it to others less wise than

²¹⁵ Charles Brunn to James Grieve, n.d. [late December 1880], printed in *Inangahua Times*, 7 January 1881, p. 2.

themselves, and comparatively few have gone in for honestly working the ground, and ascertaining what there is in it. At the present time it is really astonishing the quantity of ground which is being held simply for what cannot be called other than speculative purposes. If a party of men succeed in obtaining even a small prospect of gold, the ground around them for a long distance is immediately pegged off, and this too by parties who hold ground elsewhere – not for the purpose of working, but merely to await the result of the first party's operations. Another evil, which is the result of holding the ground for speculative purposes, is the circulation of exaggerated reports with regard to the prospects obtained. Apparently this is done for the purpose of giving a fictitious value to the ground, and creating undue excitement. This kind of thing, if continued, will bring the field into disfavour, and do incalculable harm, and seriously hinder its progress.

It would have been better if the field had been worked under miner's rights for three or six months before licensed holdings were granted. Although the former system made it 'somewhat difficult to combine labour and capital, and probably less ground would have been taken up', a 'larger amount of real honest work would have been done, and the results obtained would have been much more satisfactory'. Present indications were that more hard work had to be done than was needed at Thames to prove that field payable and permanent. He wondered whether the prospects were

sufficient to warrant anyone going to the expense of putting up even a small crushing plant. That some of the trial crushings sent to the Thames have given satisfactory results is true enough, and were cheap crushing power available probably the lodes from which these parcels were taken could be worked profitably.

The best claims were the Prospectors' and the Bonanza, but the market value of the companies working these was such that it seemed 'very doubtful' that they had been proved payable.²¹⁶

'Native', possibly the pseudonym of John McCombie, who disguised himself as 'Aboriginal' in his role as a mining reporter,²¹⁷ gave a detailed response to the charge that little work had been done. A few days before the holidays he had visited 'some 18 or 20 claims, and was agreeably surprised

²¹⁶ Grahamstown Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 27 December 1880, p. 6.

²¹⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 26 May 1881, p. 3; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 471.

at the amount of work that had been done in the short space of three weeks', and provided examples:

The All Nations claim heads the list, with a tunnel 70 feet in length, besides surface workings, the Te Aroha No. 1 South, two tunnels of 32 and 20 feet in length respectively. In the Who'd Have Thought It, two tunnels have been driven an aggregate distance of 45 feet. In the Golden Gate, two tunnels have been driven a similar distance. In the United, four tunnels have been started, and the driving done in all would, if put together, amount to considerably over 100 feet. In the Early Dawn, 50 feet of driving has been done, 20 feet of which is through a solid body of quartz. In the adjoining claim, which, I believe, is named the Eureka, a large amount of prospecting has been done, and innumerable trenches are to be seen in every conceivable direction, and this party has also driven a tunnel a distance of 18 or 20 feet. In the Bright Smile, Morning Star, and other claims adjacent, more legitimate prospecting has been done than in any of those already enumerated. In the Waikato, Prince of Wales, Bonanza, Golden Anchor, Golden Eagle, and Auckland, men are employed breaking out quartz from well-defined lodes, all of which have been proved to contain the precious metal in payable quantities. At the same time, it must be borne in mind that the disputed ownership to many of these claims prevented their being operated upon for some considerable time after the opening of the field.²¹⁸

One doubter who refused to invest, James Nelson, of Auckland, advertised in the *New Zealand Herald* that 'The least that any speculators have got to do with Te Aroha the better', offering to provide 'further explanation'.²¹⁹ According to a Hamilton correspondent, his advertisement provoked 'a very widespread sensation' because Waikato residents were 'largely interested' in its future, and Waikato men formed 'the largest proportion of its enterprising developers'. The mayor of Hamilton, auctioneer John Knox,²²⁰ who participated in the rush and invested in one claim,²²¹ asked for the further explanation, promising to meet the cost of a

²¹⁸ Letter from 'Native', *Thames Advertiser*, 4 January 1881, p. 3.

²¹⁹ Advertisements, *New Zealand Herald*, 27 December 1880, p. 1, 28 December 1880. p. 1.

²²⁰ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 740.

²²¹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 918, issued 25 November 1880, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1b; Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 194, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

telegraphed reply. 'After so open and unqualified an attack some tangible reasons were looked for, but the following was the only reply vouchsafed': 'From best authorities connected with Te Aroha goldfield'. The correspondent considered that if this was what Nelson considered a further explanation

and if he can bring no more specific charges to support his sweeping condemnation of the field than this, then, like Balaam, he will have blessed instead of cursed – for the unsatisfactory explanation he vouchsafes, when no restriction was laid on the length of his reply, is of itself the best refutation of his warning. He has no reasons to give.²²²

A statement in the Auckland press that 'little or no work' had been done was condemned by a Te Aroha correspondent as 'calculated to damage the field in the eyes of outsiders'. Its credibility was challenged on the ground that the critic had not visited 'since the opening of the field'.²²³ An Auckland correspondent received 'conflicting reports':

Many of the writers, who are no doubt new chums, and with but little mining experience, may soon have to alter their opinions. The field, of course, has only been declared open for a few weeks, and until there is more permanent undertakings carried on by means of drives, levels, winzes, and extended prospecting, it would be unwise to pay much attention to the statements of croakers. My own private letters go to show that, on the whole, the competent miners are well satisfied with the show, and have every confidence that at no distant date the field will be well worth sticking to.²²⁴

'An old Australian reefer of 22 years experience' considered the indications to be 'better than he ever saw in a new field'.²²⁵ In the words of a Thames correspondent, it was hoped 'that with the new year all will go heartily to work with the one object of thoroughly prospecting the ground, and proving whether gold does exist in it in payable quantities'.²²⁶

McCombie knew that the future of the field required

²²² Hamilton Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 30 December 1880, p. 5.

²²³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 6 January 1881, p. 3.

²²⁴ Own Correspondent, 'Our Auckland Letter', *Thames Star*, 22 December 1880, p. 2.

²²⁵ Pigeongrams, *Thames Star*, 18 December 1880, p. 2.

²²⁶ Grahamstown Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 27 December 1880, p. 6.

the discovery of richer goldbearing stone than has yet been found excepting in the prospectors' claim, and perhaps one or two others. The experience of those who were first on the field, and spent some weeks there prior to the opening day, goes to prove that surface specimens are very scarce and difficult to find, and consequently if gold is to be discovered in any quantity, it will be necessary to pierce the spurs of the mountain as much as possible, and not waste time scouring over the surface. Abundant evidences of the existence of gold have been found in the district, and what is now most required is that the lodes which have been discovered should receive a thorough testing. The fact that a few colours of the precious metal can be seen in the stone when broken, or that a good prospect can be washed out of the loose dirt, is not sufficient grounds upon which to declare a lode payable, and it necessary that something better than this should be brought to light.... Excepting in the one instance of the Aroha [Prospectors'] claim, nothing very rich has yet been discovered, and that the rumours of good gold having been found at points several miles apart previous to the day of opening, were unfounded. It consequently follows that the indiscriminate rush to the district which is now going on should be deprecated. At present the field ought to be left in the hands of the miner only, and the flocking of any unacquainted with the real business of a miner to the district will only lead to bitter disappointment, and hinder the progress of the goldfield.... That the field will eventually prove a good one there can be very little doubt, but at present it is no place for anyone but a miner to go to.²²⁷

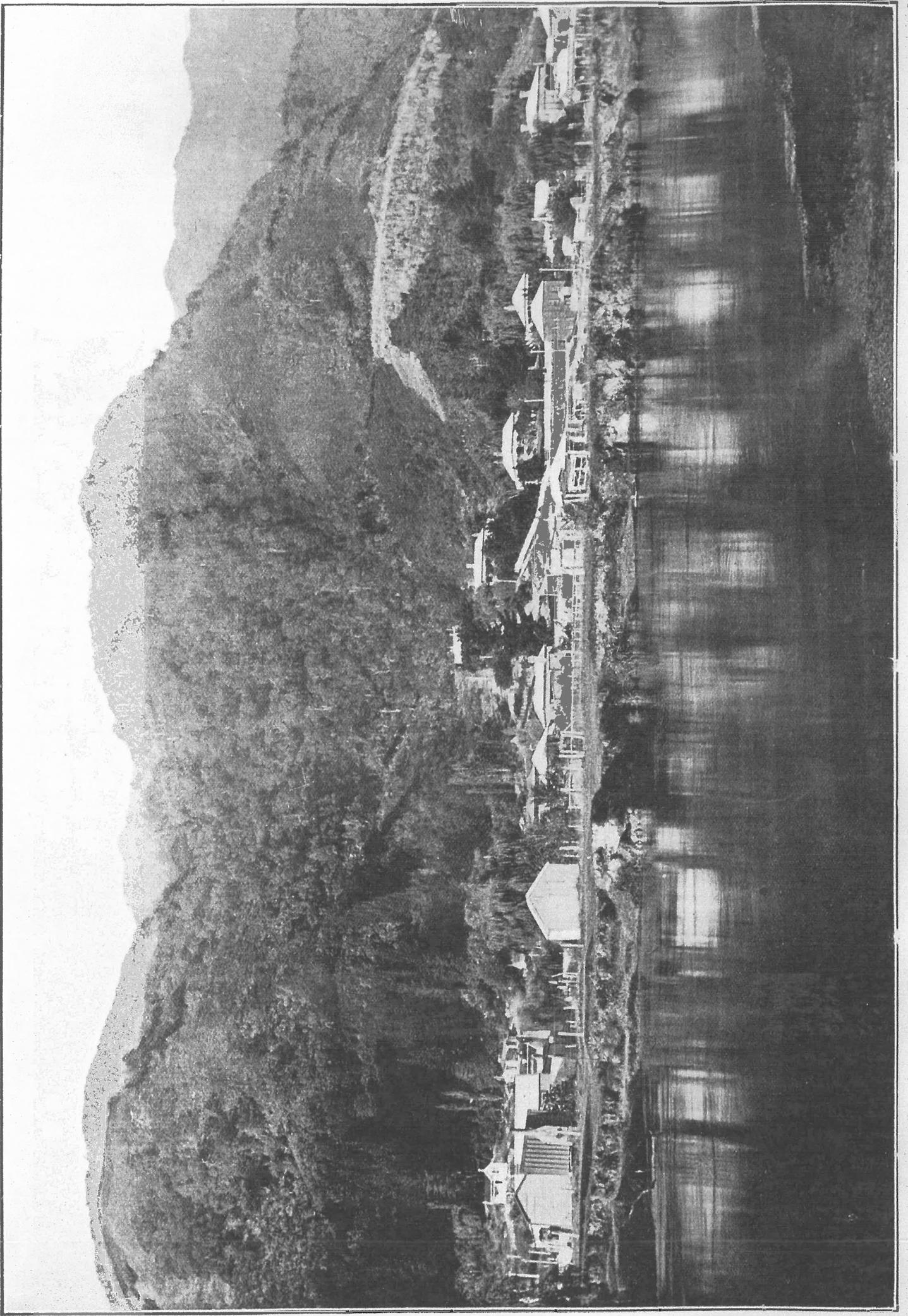
CONCLUSION

Although accounts varied about how much work had been done, by the Christmas holidays considerable preliminary development had been done to open up the ground and prospecting had spread far from the initial find. But as little testing had been done no payable lode had been found the questions of whether the field would prove payable and permanent remained unanswered, and only much more work and much more capital would answer these.

Appendix

²²⁷ Own Correspondent, 'A Review of the Position', *New Zealand Herald*, 13 December 1880, p. 5.

Figure 1: A.N. Breckon, 'View of Te Aroha, Waikato, Auckland, From the River', *Auckland Weekly News*, 16 April 1908, Supplement, p. 3, AWNS-19080416-3-3, Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries; used with permission: showing aftermath of mining on Prospectors' Spur (on the right), with Bald Spur on the left of the photograph.



VIEW OF TE AROHA, WAIKATO, AUCKLAND, FROM THE RIVER.—LANDSCAPE CLASS

A. N. Breckon, Photo.