

THE TE AROHA GOLDFIELD IS REVEALED TO BE A DUFFER

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Te Aroha Mining District Working Papers

No. 69

2016

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ISSN: 2463-6266

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

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Abstract: *The consequence of the murder of a Maori miner was the immediate abandonment of the Tui mines, but as the year progressed fields elsewhere came to the fore and Te Aroha was disparaged as a disappointment. As previously, unskilled miners combined with a lack of capital handicapped the field, and as attempts to find a payable main reef failed, mining declined and miners departed for better prospects. No discoveries of any significance were made in any claim, and once the battery commenced work it quickly proved the poverty of the ore. And all hopes of finding alluvial ore were illusory.*

Some claimholders remained hopeful, even spending their own money to make a road to get ore from the mountainside to the flat because the county council had not made one, and the Waikato Times correspondent's optimism remained boundless. Overall, insufficient development was done to prove the value of the field, and as prospecting faded and capital was not attracted mining had to cease, with companies collapsing and unworked ground being forfeited. By late 1881, the field was dismissed as being a duffer.

IMPACT OF THE MURDER

The immediate impact of the murder of Himiona Haira¹ was that threats of utu meant miners deserted claims ‘in exposed places’,² meaning the Tui district. Because of ‘an uneasy feeling’ amongst Te Aroha residents, no Pakeha were working there, ‘nor will they till the murder has blown over’.³ In May, Kenrick reported that Maori ‘at once deserted their claims, a number of European miners doing the same; work in consequence was almost at a stand-still for nearly a month in many claims’.⁴ He granted protection while the threat lasted, but it was lamented that many who left were ‘sure not to return, and consequently the Omaha district will not be so thoroughly prospected as it would have been’.⁵ By 12 March, Tui was

¹ See paper on ‘Revolting Murder at Te Aroha’.

² *Thames Star*, 26 February 1881, p. 2.

³ *Thames Star*, 15 February 1881, p. 2.

⁴ Harry Kenrick to Under-Secretary, Gold Fields, 2 May 1881, *AJHR*, 1881, H-17, p. 13.

⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 16 February 1881, p. 3.

'completely deserted, partly on account of the scare, but principally for the want of funds'.⁶

RIVAL GOLDFIELDS

Precise numbers of those leaving Tui were not recorded, but the *Waikato Times* accused the Thames press of exaggeration, another example of one of the principal difficulties facing Te Aroha, namely 'the steady opposition shown to it by the Thames papers, who lose no opportunity of speaking contemptuously and disparagingly of it'. Its Te Aroha correspondent estimated that 'fully 400 people' remained, 'a good many of whom could be spared, but we have still a large number of intelligent miners' who were 'determined to thoroughly test the field' and were showing their confidence by bringing their families to settle.⁷ In fact, the Thames newspapers were not as contemptuous as claimed, but they did support their own mines against enticing rivals, as illustrated by a March editorial:

For many months the Thames residents have been kept on the alert expectant of the auriferous nature of the new goldfields just opened up developing something that would eclipse the present character of the Thames as a gold producing district, and the consequence has been an exodus of our miners and trading people to the new fields of operation. But experience has so far taught us that with all the golden prospects dangled before the eyes of the inhabitants of this place, and more especially those who have wended their way to "fresh fields and pastures green" the promised el dorados have in every respect failed to yield such results as the Thames proper. When Te Aroha came to the front, miners, without for one moment counting the costs, relinquished their positions here and applied their efforts to the development of the new field, many doubtless believing that the "good old times" of this district would never again be experienced, and abandoning hope put their faith in the untried, and accepted the probable for the certainty. With what results? Hitherto the history of the new fields has divulged nothing of a character sufficient to warrant the belief that fortunes were to be made in a day; but on the contrary, the miners have worked on without even earning a mere pittance, and the result is that being unable to withstand the continual disappointment that met them on every

⁶ *Thames Star*, 12 March 1881, p. 2; see also Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 19 March 1881, p. 9.

⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 26 February 1881, p. 2.

hand, they have abandoned the district and returned to their old love.⁸

Some miners went to the new Tiki find at Coromandel.⁹ That a Te Aroha resident described this as the ‘much-vaunted Tiki Goldfield’ prompted a firm response from the *Coromandel Mail*:

It would be well for the miners of that district if they could break out as good stuff from their reefs as the stone from which Sheehan’s, Blackmore’s, or Tiernan’s throw on their general heap, as unworthy the name of specimen or even picked stone. It would be very pleasing to hear of Te Aroha turning out well, but when its barren-looking quartz is compared with the blocks of gold-studded Tiki stone, it shows the Te Aroha writer to be ignorant of the comparative value of the two fields.¹⁰

A week after this reproof, an advertisement for allotments at the new township at Tiki included the phrase ‘No Te Aroha Humbug’!¹¹ To Coromandel residents, Te Aroha was a ‘mirage’.¹²

UNSKILLED MINING

In late February, Daniel James Frazer, a Te Aroha ironmonger,¹³ wrote about men deserting the field:

The outside public will look upon Te Aroha as a place which soon rose into repute, and will as quickly fall again. There have been reports circulated by those who do not wish to see the old Thames cleared of its working men, and they deem it to be their policy to retard the prosperity of Te Aroha, in order that they may live a little longer. Again, Te Aroha owes its bad name - to a great extent, at least - to the class of men that first came here and left again. The majority of them were worthless, both in regard to morality and money. They pegged-out a great many claims, but what little work they did is a disgrace to any man, much less to

⁸ Editorial, *Thames Advertiser*, 24 March 1881, p. 2.

⁹ *Coromandel Mail*, 12 March 1881, p. 5.

¹⁰ *Coromandel Mail*, 2 April 1881, p. 4.

¹¹ Advertisement, *Coromandel Mail*, 9 April 1881, p. 1.

¹² Coromandel Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 10 March 1881, p. 3.

¹³ See *Te Aroha News*, 7 July 1883, p. 3, 13 September 1884, p. 2; Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 26 February 1889, p. 2.

the so-called practical miner. They did the publicans a good turn, but their life was merry and short. When their money was done their credit soon followed suit. They rolled up their "arums," and paid their grocery bills at the rate of three miles an hour. It is not an unsolvable problem that such men would give the place a bad name; but it is a strange thing that speculative men should be deterred from supporting Te Aroha by the report of a few who spent more time in debauching than they did prospecting for gold. However, there has been but little prospecting done here, yet sufficient to make some claims payable. I do not say it inadvisedly, for I consider it evidence enough when gold can be seen freely in a reef three feet thick, and there are more than one such claims in Te Aroha. What we would wish to see is a little more interest manifested in the rise of Te Aroha by the monied men of Waikato and Auckland, and I believe they will get the value of their money in time to come. If they will only trust us with a little more in future than they have in the past; if they do, you may depend upon us.¹⁴

Although Frazer was yet to invest, he would later hold shares in 11 claims at Te Aroha, Waiorongomai, and Tui.¹⁵ 'Practical Miner' of Te Aroha noted as 'a well-known fact that diggers, as a whole, like far-off fields, which are always supposed to be greener than their own'; 'the "old love is better than the new," and they return sadder but wiser men'. Te Aroha was not 'duffered-up', but it required 'working with powder and gads', and sometimes 'careful timbering', which 'very few Waikato people know anything about. Miners will not risk their lives with paper-collar gentlemen', which was 'the real reason of a good many miners clearing out'. Men of 'practical experience and long standing' from Thames, Coromandel, Tapu, Hikutaia, and Ohinemuri were 'guiding the apprentice-hands of the "anythingarians" of Waikato'.¹⁶ The *Thames Advertiser* correspondent, who had always expected such men to leave, considered that 'the class of men who flocked to the place were not, generally speaking, the proper sort for a goldfield, not being possessed of either much experience or money', and was not surprised that most of them had abandoned their claims.¹⁷

¹⁴ Letter from D.J.F. [Daniel James Frazer], *Waikato Times*, 24 February 1881, p. 3.

¹⁵ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 232, 253, 267, 286, 287, BBAV 11567/1a; Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 6, 8, 152, 155, 191, 193, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

¹⁶ Letter from 'Practical Miner', *Waikato Times*, 8 March 1881, p. 2.

¹⁷ Own Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 16 March 1881, p. 3.

STEADY DECLINE

In his annual report, written on 2 May, the warden, Harry Kenrick,¹⁸ stated that on Prospectors' Spur and adjacent ones the country had 'proved to be very hard and difficult to work', but areas to the north and south were 'much more favourable'. Considering that 'actual work' has been done for only 'about three months', he believed that much had been done, 'though not always to advantage. The inexperience of many, who were miners for the first time, caused much work to be wasted'. He blamed the field's decline on lack of capital and failure to find the lode in the Prospectors' Claim, which had 'thrown a considerable damper' over it. 'The usual reaction invariably occurring after a rush' to a new field, coupled with these special causes, largely accounted for the 'depressed state of things'.

At present there are about one hundred and fifty miners on the ground, with a total population of about three hundred, excluding, in both estimates, Maoris. To summarize the present and future prospects of this gold field, I may state that I still hold the opinion expressed in my previous and first report - namely, that a permanent gold field has been opened; but it is one that will take both time and money to develop. Several lines of gold-bearing reefs have been discovered; four, at least, of these will require to be proved at the lower levels before they can be said to be payable or not. If the crushing from the stone taken out at the upper levels should prove payable, money will no doubt be found to prove the claims further; if otherwise, further temporary depression may be anticipated, but the eventual result will still be that the discoveries already made will be further tested. It must not be forgotten that over 150lb weight of loose rich stone has been picked up on the surface, and as yet has not been traced to any leader or reef. A shaft has been sunk at the foot of the hills for some 50 feet, through broken quartz mullock; the shaft was abandoned without having reached solid formation. The main range rising abruptly from the plains, with this debris at the foot to a depth as yet unknown, would indicate that the reefs will have to be sought for, or followed down to a considerable depth before reaching the sandstone formation, which has been apparently broken up by an upheaval of the hard rock above referred to. In the Prospectors' Claim the leaders appear to pinch out when running into this hard country, whilst to the north and south of the Aroha Mountain, where the sandstone formation appears

¹⁸ See paper on his life.

undisturbed, on or close to the surface gold-bearing veins of quartz have been traced to a considerable distance through more than one claim.

The importance of ‘a gold field in the centre of an agricultural district’ justified further exploration of reefs that had ‘already been proved gold-bearing’ and which he believes would ‘eventually prove payable’.¹⁹ To show the extent of the rush, he calculated that 762 miners’ rights had been issued, 179 notices of pegging out had been received, 78 claims had been registered (covering 780 men’s ground), and ten licensed holdings had been granted over 115 men’s ground.²⁰

James Monteith McLaren, the mining inspector,²¹ was much less positive:

This field was opened ... with a grand flourish of trumpets, and as much noise made about it as if it was beyond doubt a rich gold field, which opinion was kept up by interested individuals and by others who were ignorant of quartz gold-mining; but the general opinion of the Thames gold-miners who had experience soon came to be that there was nothing to warrant an extensive rush.

In the Prospectors’ Claim the gold found on the surface and in the leader ‘did not continue down to any great depth, as the rock became very hard and pinched out’, and in neighbouring claims ‘no discovery of any moment was made’, with only the Prince of Wales having ‘a slight show’. He had been told that the Morning Star had found ‘good gold’, but not having seen it would not give an opinion; he considered the Tui district ‘much more kindly-looking’.

Rushes of this unfortunate nature are to be deplored, sweeping away, as they do, years’ savings of many poor men; not but there may be good gold in the district, but the nature of the prospecting work, the hard rock to be driven through, and the consequent slow progress that can be made, necessitate the expenditure of much time and money before any adequate returns can be had.²²

¹⁹ Harry Kenrick to Under-Secretary, Gold Fields, 2 May 1881, *AJHR*, 1881, H-17, p. 13.

²⁰ Harry Kenrick to Under-Secretary, Gold Fields, 2 May 1881, *AJHR*, 1881, H-17, p. 14.

²¹ See paper on Harry Kenrick.

²² James McLaren to Under-Secretary, Gold Fields, 19 May 1881, *AJHR*, 1881, H-17, pp. 17-18.

By mid-February ‘quite a number of claims’ had applied for protection or contemplated doing so ‘till after the erection of the battery’.²³ Miners impatiently awaited its completion, for when it started ‘the uncertainty that has been hanging over the field for months will be cleared away’.²⁴ Its opening would restore ‘somewhat the declining fortunes of this field’, for the first crushings would give it ‘a reasonable trial’.²⁵ Miners whose claims were protected left to earn money, but most intended to return once the battery started.²⁶

In March some claims were still fully manned.²⁷ Despite the alarm created by the murder, on 15 February the *Te Aroha Miner* reported on five claims with its usual optimism. ‘Nice specimen stone’ was found in one, a new lode was cut in another, a low level to ‘efficiently prospect the ground’ was started in the third, a sample was to be sent to Thames from the fourth, and ‘vigorous work’ continued in the fifth, whose prospects promised ‘success’.²⁸ By early March, there was little change, although the *Waikato Times* correspondent detected ‘a slight improvement’. He argued that Hamilton and Cambridge businessmen should provide capital because a successful field would ‘materially advance the prospects of the whole of Waikato’.²⁹ But, as Kenrick commented privately, ‘the large amount of “shepherding” frightened capitalists away’.³⁰ Although mining had become ‘very quiet’, shareholders of mines on Prospectors’ Spur revealed ‘faith in their property’ by offering to meet half the cost of the council making a road to the battery.³¹ The Prince of Wales took out 140 tons for a trial crushing, and should the ore be payable, they had ‘any amount of it; but the general opinion’ was that ‘very little care’ had been taken, ‘the owners trying to get out as large a lot as possible, without regard to value’.³²

²³ *Thames Star*, 19 February 1881, p. 2.

²⁴ *Thames Star*, 26 March 1881, p. 2.

²⁵ *Waikato Times*, 26 February 1881, p. 2.

²⁶ *Thames Star*, 12 March 1881, p. 2.

²⁷ *Thames Star*, 29 March 1881, p. 2.

²⁸ *Te Aroha Miner*, 15 February 1881, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 15 February 1881, p. 2.

²⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 8 March 1881, p. 2.

³⁰ Note by Harry Kenrick, n.d., on J.M. McLaren to Harry Kenrick, 27 May 1881, Mines Department, MD 1, 85/990, ANZ-W.

³¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 12 March 1881, p. 2.

³² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 12 April 1881, p. 2.

Trial crushings, some made in secret, reportedly gave encouraging results.³³ But mining continued to decline, and in mid-March a reporter observed ‘a great change’ since he had visited two or three weeks previously. The township looked ‘almost deserted, a great number of people having taken their departure lately, and very little’ mining was being done. A ‘great many’ claims had obtained protection until the battery started, and ‘a number’ had ‘been thrown up, the proprietors either having lost confidence in them or been unable to hold on to them any longer’. The ‘general opinion’ at Te Aroha was that the field would ‘never prove to be worth a great deal, although several of the mines may prove steady gold producers’.³⁴

John McCombie³⁵ noted the decline in early March:

Things here, generally, are flat, stale, and unprofitable. There is no denying the fact that the outlook for the coming season presents anything but a promising aspect. Our population is growing beautifully less, the exodus of miners being positively alarming - some leaving for good, others again promising to return as soon as the battery starts working. This state of affairs may be attributed partly to the ill-feeling which, since the late murder, has arisen between the two races, and partly to the fact that since the opening of the field - notwithstanding the amount of prospecting work done - no finds of any importance have been unearthed.

He was not implying there were no payable reefs, because in addition to the Prospectors’ Claim there were ‘several reefs already opened up’ which would ‘pay handsomely’. He noted ‘several attempts’ to prospect between Te Aroha and Ohinemuri, ‘but owing to the want of blazed lines or tracks as guides to prospecting in the almost impenetrable forest that clothes the hills and flats in that region, none of these attempts’ had succeeded.³⁶ Later that month, he reported that more men had departed and the Tui claims were still deserted. Of the claims still being worked, the Morning Star, on a spur about three-quarters of a mile southeast of the Prospectors’ Spur, appeared to be ‘the favourite’, for its reef had ‘been driven upon for a considerable distance, and very fair prospects met with. The quartz

³³ For example, *Thames Star*, 21 March 1881, p. 3, 23 March 1881, p. 2.

³⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 16 March 1881, p. 3.

³⁵ See earlier papers on the Te Aroha rush.

³⁶ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 5 March 1881, p. 9.

obtained from the drive has been paddocked and will be some of the first put through the battery'.³⁷

The Morning Star had always had 'a good "show"', and in early March 'several large parcels of scrip changed hands at from 1s 6d to 2s, whilst no transactions of any kind took place' in other claims.³⁸ By late March, it was stated that if any of the claims proved payable it would be on this spur, which contained the Morning Star, Smile of Fortune, Sunbeam, and Shotover claims. More 'reef gold' had been seen in them than anywhere else.³⁹ Three days later the same reporter regretted that 'claim-holders on the Morning Star line of reef' did 'not show more energy', for as the stone encasing the reef was not as hard as elsewhere 'the difficulties and expense in prospecting' were less. There was 'no great quantity of quartz ready for the mill, and no appearance of any united endeavours to make a sledge road to enable them to get it there'. The Shotover was driving, but being a long way from the flat it would be expensive taking the ore down.⁴⁰

In late March, 'a gentleman who arrived from Te Aroha' told the *Thames Advertiser* about his visit to the Shotover to examine the new find which had caused 'so much excitement'. The ore was 'excellent', but as the leader was about four inches thick, in hard country, it required blasting. 'A color or two of gold' could be seen 'in the solid stone' and the 'dish prospects' were 'really splendid - in fact, the best he has ever seen at Te Aroha'. He anticipated a yield of two ounces to the ton.⁴¹ As this would be the highest value yet found, optimism revived and several parties pegged out nearby.⁴² For a time, there were encouraging reports from the Shotover, although it was admitted that the reef was small 'and the country very hard'.⁴³

As another indication of the general decline, from the beginning of March the warden's office only opened from Tuesday to Friday every alternate week; at other times applications had to be sent to Thames.⁴⁴ By

³⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 19 March 1881, p. 9; *Thames Advertiser*, 16 March 1881, p. 3.

³⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 16 March 1881, p. 3.

³⁹ *Thames Star*, 26 March 1881, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 29 March 1881, p. 2.

⁴¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 26 March 1881, p. 2.

⁴² *Waikato Times*, 29 March 1881, p. 2.

⁴³ *Thames Star*, 7 April 1881, p. 2.

⁴⁴ *Waikato Times*, 24 February 1881, p. 2.

that month only one steamer serviced the settlement, twice a week.⁴⁵ Kenrick spelled out the consequences of lack of capital:

From the first but little capital was put into the mines from abroad, and that little came chiefly from the Waikato - the miners who took up claims at the first rush were not a moneyed class; the work was found to be heavier than was at first anticipated, a very hard bar or belt of rock being met with in many of the claims. As their means or credit became exhausted, many miners began to drop off, leaving the field, seeing no prospect of an immediate return for their labour in the absence of funds sufficient to enable them to carry on expensive underground work, where powder and the gad would be required. I have protected many claims until the battery starts, on the above plea alone, in the expectation that the majority will return, and give the ground a fair trial.⁴⁶

In early April, one correspondent campaigned against too much protection:

The names of some of the owners of so-called abandoned claims placarded on the wall of the Warden's office have excited some remarks about the fairness of granting protection to some from the usual goldminers' law that if a grant is not worked it shall be forfeited. Speculators can take advantage of this protection obtainable by payment of a certain sum, and without any expenditure of labour or capital can merely told their claim till it has been made valuable by the work of some poorer neighbour, who, after waiting for months and turning out perhaps a hundred tons of material finds that he cannot wait any longer for the completion of the battery, but must go to work elsewhere to obtain a further supply of cash, or something for a living, and who may then forfeit his claim. The moment that the battery goes to work the hundred tons of material from the forfeited claim may turn out to be of value, and the protected claim, which has done no work, immediately reaps the benefit by a rise in the price of their shares while the poor fellow who has suffered all the heat and burden of the day, has to look out for another corner in which to earn his crust, or work for somebody else's benefit all over again. There is a little complaining, naturally, to be heard on this subject, and it is said by some that the sooner the protective system is done away with the better for the field. A most promising looking claim if protected from the necessity of being worked, turns out nothing and does nothing for the advancement

⁴⁵ *Thames Star*, 23 March 1881, p. 2.

⁴⁶ Harry Kenrick to Under-Secretary, Gold Fields, 2 May 1881, *AJHR*, 1881, H-17, p. 13.

of the field, but if compelled to develop its resources might be made of use to the community generally, as well as to its owners.⁴⁷

Three days later he argued that having only a comparatively ‘poor supply of quartz’ ready for crushing was ‘one of the effects of the protective system’.⁴⁸ Granting protection to absentees while a few determined miners by ‘hard work and great expense’ proved the value of the field was unjust.⁴⁹

SELF-HELP

Mutual self-help by owners was needed, as in March when the Morning Star was permitted to use the Smile of Fortune’s tunnel, on its boundary, for £100.⁵⁰ To drive it, both companies made 3d calls.⁵¹ To get 50 tons from the Smile of Fortune and 40 from the Morning Star to the battery, the claimholders offered to meet half the cost of a road from their spur to the main road, but by April the council had not responded.⁵² Accordingly, the two parties agreed to share the cost of building six chains of tramway plus a 350-foot chute and jointly ‘put on six men to make the road to the battery’.⁵³ Should their ore be payable, they planned to ‘at once lay a self-acting tramway from this level down to the foot of the gully, by which they will save considerably, doing away with a necessity for sledging’. The ever hopeful *Waikato Times* correspondent expected the ore would probably fulfil expectations of containing one ounce to the ton, ‘a return that, considering the favourable position of the claims, will be of more value than a larger yield from others’.⁵⁴ In April and May, the claimholders built the road to the mine and with the aid of the Early Dawn owners continued it across the swamp.⁵⁵ In May, ‘all hands, including the manager’, made this road along

⁴⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 2 April 1881, p. 2.

⁴⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 5 April 1881, p. 2; Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 12 April 1881, p. 2.

⁴⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 16 April 1881, p. 2.

⁵⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 16 March 1881, p. 3.

⁵¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 16 March 1881, p. 3.

⁵² *Thames Star*, 1 April 1881, p. 2.

⁵³ *Thames Star*, 5 April 1881, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 14 April 1881, p. 2.

⁵⁵ *Thames Star*, 30 April 1881, p. 2, 9 May 1881, p. 2.

what was ‘supposed to be the main road line. They have made and laid down four culverts and two bridges’, without any assistance from the council.⁵⁶ Its total length of a mile cost ‘close on £100’, and a correspondent wondered ‘how many of the Thames miners would have shown such enterprise’.⁵⁷

STRUGGLING AGAINST THE ODDS AND HOPING FOR THE BEST

In early April, the *Thames Star* considered that Te Aroha residents had ‘shown great pluck and enterprise in pushing on the battery in the manner they have. Everything was against them, it being problematical at one time whether there would be a battery at all’. As it was ‘freely asserted at all the Thames street corners that the Aroha was a duffer’, the newspaper hailed ‘it as a harbinger of better days when the stock of a Te Aroha mine is saleable in the Thames market again’.⁵⁸ The sale was of Morning Star shares, ‘at about 1s 3d to 1s 6d’, a decline, as one month earlier there had been several sales at 1s 6d, and 2s had been paid for small parcels.⁵⁹ Test crushings continued,⁶⁰ and as protection expired work recommenced in some claims. By 11 April, a considerable amount of tunnelling had been done in several: the longest drive appears to have been the main one in the All Nations, driven 340 feet, with a crosscut of over 90 feet. Lack of skills continued to be a problem, for instance in the Waiheke, where ‘a large amount of work’ was being done but the miners were ‘badly in want of an experienced manager, as the shareholders are mostly strangers to the work’. The latter phrase was also used to describe those working the Comet. As for the Bee Hive claimholders, they seemed ‘to be all drones’ and ‘doing very little work’.⁶¹

The most encouraging developments were on the Morning Star spur, a winze in the Smile of Fortune being about to hole through and provide adequate ventilation. ‘The general opinion’ was that the stone would be

⁵⁶ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 17 May 1881, p. 2; see also Own Correspondent, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 June 1881, p. 3.

⁵⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 23 May 1881, p. 2.

⁵⁸ *Thames Star*, 9 April 1881, p. 2.

⁵⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 8 March 1881, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 14 April 1881, p. 3.

⁶⁰ For example, *Thames Star*, 12 April 1881, p. 2.

⁶¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 12 April 1881, p. 2.

payable. Several claims were taken up on this spur, 'and some of the knowing ones went and pegged off the Morning Star on the morning of the 8th, but they only had their work for their trouble, the claim being a licensed holding was not to be had for the pegging'.⁶²

On 13 April, the *Thames Advertiser* published an editorial on Te Aroha and its goldfield:

That the upper country should become settled with an industrious population has always been one of the chief desires of the Thames residents, and every effort made in the direction of that object has always been hailed with a general degree of satisfaction. When Te Aroha was proclaimed a goldfield there appeared to be a certainty of a speedy influx of population in that district, which would tend to give great impetus to the trade and commerce of the Borough of Thames, and our residents became jubilant at the anticipation of increased prosperity after a long season of depression. Those who held large slices of land adjacent and in contiguity to the new goldfield, who had despaired of realizing high prices for the same, suddenly became ecstatic, and imagined by putting their lands into the market that the promising character of Te Aroha goldfield would induce speculators to invest largely, and at fabulous prices, and so bring them a rich harvest. But to a great extent there was disappointment in store for them, for scarcely had the Aroha seen the sudden influx of population, than many miners retraced their footsteps, leaving the new el dorado to its fate. Businessmen who had likewise taken time by the forelock, secured business sites, and erected stores in many instances, regretted the infatuation that seized them to anticipate their neighbours, and the unexpected dullness of trade on the new goldfield has been to them a source of regret that they did not let others first have the experience whilst they waited and watched. For months there has been no revival in the trade of Te Aroha; few men have manned the claims, and the unearthing of quartz has been very limited. There are still those who have continued to patiently plod on, confident that "in due time they will reap if they faint not".... By those best able to judge there has been a universal feeling that Te Aroha is destined to speedy prosperity, and they have not regarded the diminution in population in the light of an ill omen of its future.... We have it on very good authority that some private tests have demonstrated the payable nature of much of the ground that has been steadily worked of late, and there are undoubted indications of the Aroha beginning to attract the attention of persons whose advent to the locality means its

⁶² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 12 April 1881, p. 2.

consolidation.... We predict that it will be only a question of a little time ere the mines of Te Aroha will be in full and active operation, and the entire district enjoying a gratifying revival of trade.⁶³

On the following day, a reporter from the same newspaper undermined these sentiments. 'Very little change has taken place in either the township or mines since my last visit. The former looks quite as deserted as it did then, notwithstanding that I was told an accession to the population has recently taken place', and no more mines were being worked. 'I do not think there are more than 100 people in the township'. There was little mining, and claims were under-manned. For example, only the mine manager and one wages man were working in the Te Aroha No. 1 South. Only the All Nations had been fully manned since opening day. Some mining was still being done badly, as for instance in the Prince of Wales, one of the few claims worked continuously since the opening. When the leader of the party became ill, 'owing to a mistake of the man left in charge' the crosscut driven had 'done very little good'.⁶⁴ Two days later, it was reported that 'only half-a-dozen claims' were working, but once the battery started operations would resume 'in 10 or 20 others'.⁶⁵ This expected total was in contrast to the 78 claims and ten licensed holdings registered.⁶⁶

The optimistic continued to expect great results from the first crushings and described the workings in enthusiastic terms. The *Waikato Times*' correspondent described how 'up the spurs and gullies of the range may be seen small holes of some six or seven feet in height, here and there, with men busily wheeling out barrel-loads of earth and shooting it over the platform of level earth in front of their drives', but did admit that they were only prospecting. The miners had a 'tremendous allowance of jollity', presumably because they, like he, had heard that 'many old diggers' called it 'one of the widest and richest goldfield ever worked in New Zealand'.⁶⁷

Two days later, the same correspondent sent another message of mostly unqualified enthusiasm. There were 'reports flying about of the finds that far surpass all hitherto reported in richness', and there was 'the fullest

⁶³ Editorial, *Thames Advertiser*, 13 April 1881, pp. 2-3.

⁶⁴ Own Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 14 April 1881, p. 3.

⁶⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 16 April 1881, p. 3.

⁶⁶ *AJHR*, 1881, H-17, p. 14.

⁶⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 5 April 1881, p. 2.

confidence in the highest expectations of the immediate advance of Te Aroha'. Some claims were credited with two and a half ounces of gold to the ton, which was 'all pure guess work'; it did 'no good to the place to state every vague rumour for the truth, and after exciting expectations to be obliged to say perhaps they were not well founded'. The amount of ore taken to the battery was 'exceedingly limited so far, owing to the bad state of the roads', only prospecting had been done, and 'absolutely nothing at all' had been done 'towards really working'. There could be 'little doubt' that it would be 'one of the richest' fields, but which claims would 'be the prize-winners in the lottery' was 'a mystery'.⁶⁸

Shortly before the battery commenced, this incurably optimistic correspondent reported that a considerable amount had been done in the claims still being worked. The All Nations was particularly well opened up, a drive of 300 feet having reached the main reef, which was still being cut through, and a side tunnel followed a leader for 100 feet. As well, a shaft had been sunk for 40 feet and an air drive of 70 feet made. A tramway had been laid and 50 to 60 tons were ready for treatment. The reef was 'first-rate', a leader carried 'splendid stone', the country was 'easily worked', and expenses would 'not be much over £1 per foot'. The Prince of Wales also revealed good indications, although 'it would not be safe to hazard any rough guess at the probable average yield'. He then ignored this caution and earlier criticisms of stone being broken out unselectively by having 'very little doubt' that it would be 'sufficient to give a handsome dividend over the expenses and an endless supply'.⁶⁹ In his last report before the battery started, this correspondent observed 'a large amount of the finest gold' in the Shotover, whose shareholders were waiting for the battery to reveal 'far better results than even they have been led hitherto to expect'.⁷⁰ In all these reports, claims on the Prospectors' Spur were ignored because others were considered more promising. Although the Prospectors' Claim was still expected to produce good ore, by April the Bonanza, 'of which high expectations were at one time entertained', was not being worked.⁷¹

In the Tui district, by mid-March only one prospector was at work and all claims 'were protected for a certain period' because of 'the threatening attitude' of some Maori at the time of the murder. Richard White and party

⁶⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 7 April 1881, p. 2.

⁶⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 16 April 1881, p. 2.

⁷⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 21 April 1881, p. 2.

⁷¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 14 April 1881, p. 2.

intended to seek forfeiture of the Tui and Homeward Bound, which would be 'strongly opposed by most of the defendants'.⁷² Both were forfeited to White's party;⁷³ it was claimed that they had been undermanned even before the murder.⁷⁴ White had formerly been at Thames, where he was associated with the Catran brothers,⁷⁵ who were amongst the first prospectors at Tui. White's party commenced work in late March, and by April 'several parties' were working ground forfeited for non-working. As usual, the prospects were 'very encouraging'.⁷⁶

John McCombie continued to give more sober assessments.⁷⁷ At the beginning of April, mining 'on the whole' was 'very quiet, and unless something very much better' was discovered there was 'little prospect of a speedy revival. A number of claims have been temporarily protected, and probably will not resume work until after the first two or three parcels of quartz have been treated at the battery'. The outcome of these crushings would determine the future of the field. 'Very little' was being done to make tracks to sledge quartz to the battery. He raised the possibility of alluvial gold:

In cutting the foundations for the battery, a deposit similar to that obtained near some alluvial beds was met with. It is believed by some that a system of prospecting by boring about the likely spots on the low-lying ground might ultimately lead to the discovery of traces of alluvial gold, which would warrant the undertaking of more extended prospecting operations by means of deep shafts.

The cost would require 'special inducements', presumably meaning government subsidies. 'The good that the discovery of an alluvial lead would do' was advancement 'incalculable'.⁷⁸ Thomas Goodman Sandes, a

⁷² *Thames Advertiser*, 16 March 1881, p. 3.

⁷³ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Plaintiff Book 1880-1898, 19/1881, BBAV 11547/1a; Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 189, 201, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

⁷⁴ Te Aroha Warden's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 24 March 1881, p. 3.

⁷⁵ Police Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 6 October 1874, p. 3.

⁷⁶ *Thames Star*, 23 March 1881, p. 2, 1 April 1881, p. 2.

⁷⁷ See previous papers on the Te Aroha rush.

⁷⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 2 April 1881, p. 9.

surveyor,⁷⁹ responded that ‘several’ miners believed there were ‘very good’ chances of finding alluvial gold. ‘A great deal’ of work was required to test the field adequately. ‘Lack of experience’ meant most opening up was pointless; in the words of a friend, there had been ‘a great deal of “agricultural mining” carried on by the Waikato miners, and a large amount of energy wasted’.⁸⁰

ASSISTANCE BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT NEEDED

A major handicap was lack of assistance from the county council. When the field was opened, it had promised ‘to be a model body’ and to assist the miners, but in practice had ‘done nothing except a bit of work on the main road’. No mine was ‘connected by any sort of a road, although offers have been made to do half the work’ and the council had received ‘about £350’ in goldfield revenue. To date, not half that amount had been spent, and it had not sought any of the government money allocated for mining tracks. ‘The excuse is they are new to the work; I don’t think they will ever be anything else’. Many miners complained and thought ‘that they would be much better off if they were a portion of the Thames County, as then some attempt would be made to open up roads to the mines’.⁸¹

AFTER THE BATTERY STARTED

Residents expected ‘great things’ when the battery in Te Aroha started, believing it would prove many mines were ‘rich in the precious metal’; certainly it would ‘either make or kill the field’.⁸² After a far longer delay than anticipated, it was opened with due ceremony on 23 April.⁸³ A week later, the same reporter was ‘happy to state’ that the field was ‘looking up again, and showing signs of improvement. Several claims had resumed work and were ‘taking out quantities of crushing stuff’.⁸⁴ On the same day, another newspaper confirmed that residents were ‘far more hopeful’, even

⁷⁹ See *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 12 May 1897, p. 2; C.A. Lawn, *The Pioneer Land Surveyors of New Zealand* (Auckland, 1979), p. 231.

⁸⁰ Letter from T.G. Sandes, *Auckland Weekly News*, 16 April 1881, p. 21.

⁸¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 12 April 1881, p. 2.

⁸² Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 16 March 1881, p. 3.

⁸³ See paper on the Te Aroha battery.

⁸⁴ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 30 April 1881, p. 3.

though there were no results from the crushings.⁸⁵ Whilst awaiting the outcome, reports continued about promising claims that would keep the plant going on their ore alone. The only return by the end of April was five tons from the Tui claim producing 15dwt, a poor result excused because ‘it was only sent in as a start for the machinery, and was hardly expected to make any profit at all’.⁸⁶

One week later, there was a change of tone in Thames newspapers. ‘News from Te Aroha has been scant, and not particularly encouraging’.⁸⁷ ‘It would seem that some of the claims have sent very inferior stone to the mill, and necessarily but a poor return has been obtained’. Five tons from the All Nations was not payable. Twenty tons being treated for the Prince of Wales might be, but more care was needed in selecting the stone. ‘It does seem strange that men who have been years on the goldfields should know so little of the business they profess to know all about. Some of the stone sent to the mill ought still to be in the hills’.⁸⁸ ‘The crushing from the Marvel was indeed a marvellous one - little or no gold having been obtained from it! The stuff was exceedingly poor, and not worth breaking out’.⁸⁹ In mid-May, the *Thames Star* was informed by ‘a gentleman from Te Aroha’ that matters were ‘looking pretty blue up there. The first few tons from the Prince of Wales, from which great things were expected, gave half an ounce per ton, but the remainder was miserably poor’.⁹⁰ A week later, it was ‘sorry to hear such bad accounts’, and reported that ‘the few people who held on for the battery’ were ‘beginning to clear out, and the claims have, almost without exception, proved rank duffers’. Nevertheless, as there was ‘undoubtedly gold there’, it did not ‘despair of the future’.⁹¹

Nor did others despair. Another ‘gentleman’ from Te Aroha told the *Thames Advertiser* that although the crushings had ‘not been up to expectations the majority of the claimholders’ had not lost faith, and those with unpayable quartz intended ‘to give their claims another trial before abandoning them’.⁹² Thereafter the Thames newspapers fell silent about Te

⁸⁵ ‘Mining Review of the Week’, *Thames Star*, 30 April 1881, p. 2.

⁸⁶ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 30 April 1881, p. 2.

⁸⁷ *Thames Star*, 7 May 1881, p. 2.

⁸⁸ *Thames Star*, 9 May 1881, p. 2.

⁸⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 10 May 1881, p. 3.

⁹⁰ *Thames Star*, 14 May 1881, p. 2.

⁹¹ *Thames Star*, 21 May 1881, p. 2.

⁹² *Thames Advertiser*, 23 May 1881, p. 3.

Aroha, reporting instead on the more promising rushes at Tiki and Waihi. Many working partners lost hope and abandoned their claims. For instance, in the Sunbeam some wished to continue and took action against their non-working partners. Three brothers ‘stated that they had been working the ground, but were not now able to do so owing to the other shareholders declining to work’. Being ‘anxious to represent their interests’, Kenrick included them in the new partnership.⁹³

The *Waikato Times*’ correspondent was for long immune to bad tidings, early in May writing that the field had gone from ‘favourable prospecting and rather wild speculating’ to steady work that proved gold existed ‘in remunerative quantities’. A new claim had ‘very good prospects’, and one stream seemed ‘the most likely place to look for alluvial finds from the rich reefs now known to abound’. All those still working were anxious to have their ore tested, the Shotover shareholders carrying four tons ‘on their shoulders ... down the steepest hillside in the whole range’ to the battery. A ‘well-known settler from Te Awamutu’, a shareholder in this claim and ‘perfectly reliable’, when visiting to test the quartz that had ‘been exciting much remark in all directions’ took ‘a dishful at hazard from the reef, and washed it himself’, obtaining ‘one dwt of coarse gold’.⁹⁴ Five days later, another of this correspondent’s eulogies was published:

A gentleman staying at Hamilton who has had considerable experience of mining in Queensland and New Guinea, and came without any great idea of being impressed, to look at the Napier claim ... and washed out a prospect from the leader on the lower level; the results showed in diggers’ parlance “over a hundred colours,” or to speak more plainly, as much as a grain of coarse gold to every ounce. He also crushed some of the stuff from the upper level ... and obtained a remarkably fine prospect. This more than confirms my good opinion of the claim, and he thinks of Te Aroha that if only one or two of these many promising claims should be worked there would be enough return to fulfil all the original anticipations, and that there is enough in this range to make Te Aroha the richest goldfield in New Zealand, to say no more.

The All Nations and the Marvel claims have not obtained any result worth mentioning from their samples sent in; but there is no need for discouragement to them even in that fact, and certainly none for other claims. First attempts in all things, and more especially in goldmining, are proverbially likely to be

⁹³ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, *Thames Star*, 14 May 1881, p. 2.

⁹⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 5 May 1881, p. 2.

failures, from the fact that the reef generally becomes richer the further in it goes.⁹⁵

In fact, the All Nations and Marvel had obtained no return at all, while the Prince of Wales had got about half an ounce from five tons and about 7dwt from several other parcels.⁹⁶ This particularly disappointed the All Nations shareholders, who had done more work than any other party and had the longest tunnel on the field, 305 feet.⁹⁷ Two days later, the same correspondent expressed his ‘happy conviction’ of great prospects. Now ‘actual results’ could provide ‘proofs of the correctness of the favourable opinions entertained by many’. It was ‘quite certain now that good fortune for some’ was ‘positively to be found here. That others would have ‘bad fortune’ was just, for success depended ‘in great measure’ upon the’ amount of perseverance, practical skill, and intelligence’ miners had ‘in dealing with other men, as it has done from the days when men first parted with his tail’. His only evidence to justify his optimism was that work had restarted in the Waikato, that the All Nations was to send a trial from ‘a much more promising leader’ expected to give a much better return than the first, unprofitable, one, and ‘a vague rumour’ of a new find near the field.⁹⁸ By 17 May, he implied that the battery results were disappointing, and stated that some miners had mistakenly rushed off ‘on a wrong track’ instead of making ‘a careful start’. It was ‘generally admitted now that a great fault in the working of some claims’ had been employing mine managers with ‘insufficient experience, who have wasted time and money in wrong starts and unnecessary labour’. It would ‘pay better for two or three claims to combine to secure the services of a thoroughly skilled manager, with a high salary, to see what work ought to be done and that it is efficiently done at the lowest prices, than for each to pay an inferior workman, who has less knowledge of mining or the proper prices of labour’. It is becoming understood that ‘contract work, when carefully defined and precisely measured’, was better than employing miners at weekly wages. He provided details of the universally poor battery results; for instance, Our Boys, one of the best-worked claims, had obtained about 1dwt to the ton.⁹⁹ On 21 May,

⁹⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 10 May 1881, p. 3.

⁹⁶ *Waikato Times*, 10 May 1880, p. 3.

⁹⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 2 June 1881, p. 3.

⁹⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 12 May 1881, p. 2.

⁹⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 17 May 1881, p. 2.

when the battery ceased work while its boiler was inspected, he hoped that the 40 tons being carted down from the Smile of Fortune and Morning Star would be more profitable, and commented on miners and gold rushes:

It is curious what sensational fellows these great rough diggers are, ready one moment to indulge in a week's "bust" merely upon the strength of their good expectations of their claim, and ready the next moment to "chuck the whole ---- thing up" because the first throw has not been quite such a brilliant affair as they wanted it to be. Here for instance, there is no doubt that one or two of the principal claims have returned less gold per ton than was originally bargained for by the excitable ones who went in for a rush on Te Aroha, but still there is undoubtedly the gold there in any quantity in the range, and it is only to be skillfully and industriously worked, and will pay some one though not the rushing or excitable first comers who expect to make silk purses out of sow's ears. The rush here did its work, it opened up the place and now must come the systematic working. It has been rather a duller time than the first brilliant rush, and it will not be brilliant perhaps again, but there will be work here and increase of population, and increase of the value of land, so it is useless to cry out that the place is a failure as some have done for months past. The Thames and the Waihi had rather dull periods after the rush, but the one is now a solidly established place and the other is rising upon the very reefs that were pronounced valueless.¹⁰⁰

His next report tried to be optimistic, describing the renewed sound of the battery as 'highly suggestive of prosperous results'. He did not have any such results to report, but hoped that with larger parcels now being crushed there would be time for the 'promising claims' to get their ore down despite the absence of roads, which was 'a great hindrance to some of them'. The Shotover, which produced less than 7dwt to the ton, had 'been rather over-rated by some perhaps who have made the common mistake even with old and experienced diggers' of mistaking 'some deceiving grains of sulphide of iron' for gold.¹⁰¹

By the end of May, some parcels were still being tested, but, in the view of the local correspondent of the *Thames Star*, 'owing to the want of roads and the expense of forwarding to the mill', there was 'not much inducement for prospecting'. He doubted that much would be done before

¹⁰⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 21 May 1881, p. 3.

¹⁰¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 26 May 1881, p. 2.

summer.¹⁰² His *Waikato Times* colleague continued to disagree, even after detailing yet more results that were ‘somewhat less than anticipated’:

They are sufficient to prove that there is gold here, and all experienced miners know that where gold is found, even in the smallest quantities, perseverance may be rewarded at any moment by success. The most successful claims at the present moment at the Thames prove this, and the rising value of the Waihi field, so long looked upon as valueless, is another instance. No one can judge a goldfield by the small return of a first or second trial. Tales are told every day of claims worked for months unsuccessfully and abandoned in despair or for want of capital, being taken up by a fresh company, and turning out immediately an enormous yield, either through a little more skill or care in the working, or the chances that is always the main feature of gold digging. If the Morning Star or the Prospectors, or the Shotover have turned out 7 or 10 dwt on a first trial, there is no reason why they should not be steadily worked, or why they should not turn out far larger yields at one time or another. There has been really nothing done here to judge by, so far, but what an old digger calls “mere scratching;” but it is proved that the gold is there, and it must be worked by capitalists and managers of practical experience, who will not throw away a chance or waste money in mistakes. No tradesman ever judges of his business by one day’s returns, or throws it up in disgust if he is still out of pocket at the end of the first six months. The first comers are most frequently the losers in all goldfields, and those who learn by experience profit by the mistakes of the unfortunate pioneers are those who come afterwards and reap the benefits. Gold-digging ... must be worked with perseverance above all, and with system and hard labour, and like everything else will pay the best man and leave the worst out in the cold. If the capital is found to carry on the claims which have proved productive here, they will undoubtedly pay, but it is equally certain they will not pay without working. The Morning Star for instance having made roads and carried on perhaps the most work in the best style of any of the claims here, will not think any the worse of the prospects of success because it has not turned out ounces to the ton at first venture, the working manager as a sensible man will know too well the changes of fortune, and as he very truly says, the stuff first sent down has been lying on the ground since the first opening of the work, and has not been picked, and therefore includes some of the worst that is ever likely to come out of it.

¹⁰² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 30 May 1881, p. 2.

He continued to hope for better results from claims yet to be tested.¹⁰³ A more common view was that of the *Thames Star*, in early June: ‘What a sell Te Aroha has been. Crushings have come out, one after the other proving unpayable - even the favorite mine, the Morning Star, going to the dogs in an unaccountable manner. Let us hope that Waihi will not prove another Te Aroha’.¹⁰⁴ The mining reporter of its rival was ‘sorry to say’ that since his last visit things had ‘not improved, but, on the contrary, have not such a bright aspect’. To everybody’s ‘great disappointment’, the battery had ‘shown that very few of the lodes opened up contained gold’, and only one was ‘rich in the precious metal. Such bad results have of course damaged the field somewhat, but as a rule the claim holders are not disheartened, and intend to give their properties a further trial, believing that subsequent battery tests will prove their claims contain gold’.¹⁰⁵ He vividly described the mood over four days during the treating of ore from the Morning Star, ‘considered to be the best piece of ground’. Because a good return was expected, ‘considerable interest was evinced’,

and the battery was visited by large numbers each day the quartz was being put through, who were desirous of ascertaining how the stuff was shaping. As the retorting proceeded, a considerable crowd collected in the building, and bets were freely made as to the quantity of gold which would be taken out of the pot, the general opinion being that a payable return would be obtained. Unfortunately, the result proved disappointing, and dashed the hopes of the shareholders to the ground, the return being only 4oz 11dwt. For this yield fifteen loads were crushed, so that the return was at the rate of about 7dwt to the load. The general impression was that at least 10 or 15dwt to the ton would be obtained, the manager of the battery being amongst the number; but the manager of the claim on seeing how the stuff was shaping did not believe that there would be more than 7 or 8dwt, although he was convinced before a start was made to crush that the result would prove payable.

As ‘very little water was available for the tables’, some shareholders believed ‘that if a copious supply had been obtainable a better return would have been got.¹⁰⁶ A Hamilton correspondent confirmed that this ‘not very

¹⁰³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 31 May 1881, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ *Thames Star*, 4 June 1881, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 June 1881, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 June 1881, p. 3.

'encouraging' return created a 'very general opinion' that 'further crushing when possible should be delayed until there is a full head of water. Stone that will pan out a fair show of free gold will not, when subjected to the battery trial, give 3dwt to the ton, and the want of water is blamed by everyone as the cause'. Despite the result, some remained so satisfied that the Morning Star reef was a good one that the line of reef was 'pegged off during the past week'.¹⁰⁷

At the beginning of June, McCombie's final, brief, report judged prospects to be 'anything but bright', all trial crushings having been unsatisfactory. The parcel from the surface level of the Morning Star, anticipated to prove 'almost payable', instead produced a 'very poor return. The gold was all taken off the plates while the berdans, which were expected to yield almost as much as the plates, scarcely produced a single pennyweight'. This result might have been because 'the parcel was scarcely selected carefully enough'.¹⁰⁸ 'Argus' opined that 'if Te Aroha had taken advantage of free conveyance of several parcels of quartz to the Thames instead of inciting speculation or mere newspaper reports by interested persons, the field would have assumed a permanent rather than a mushroom growth'.¹⁰⁹ The Te Aroha correspondent of the *Thames Advertiser* wrote in mid-June that 'the great Te Aroha rush' had 'subsided into a sparse population and abandoned claims. The great machine that was to be clogged by the density of gold clinging to the stampers' was silent.

Those who prophesied that we were to witness golden days, and the making of large fortunes in a very few months, now hang down their heads, and wander to and fro clothed in sackcloth. That worn-out horse, "Tick," which so many of our diggers rode successfully for a time, is dead, and great is the mourning of those who placed so much confidence in his riders. In short, we are now experiencing a season of depression, which is not uncommon to most gold-mining districts, and, consequently, those residents who looked forward to the field being a most prosperous one are very despondent. There is no doubt that many rushed here at first labouring under the hallucination that it was only to peg out a piece of ground anywhere, and their fortunes were ensured, but proving they were mistaken, and finding mining operations meant hard work, they have gradually disappeared, and their ground is "to let." But because some have failed - either from a

¹⁰⁷ Hamilton Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 1 June 1881, p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ Thames Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 2 June 1881, p. 6.

¹⁰⁹ Letter from 'Argus', *Thames Advertiser*, 11 June 1881, p. 2.

lack of practical knowledge, or a want of that indispensable commodity cash, there is no reason why our goldfield should not, if systematically prospected, prove as lucrative as any other golden belt of country in the colony. It is often the case not only in goldmining, but in other commercial enterprises - that those who are pioneers of most undertakings come to grief as well as exhaust their capital, and immediately afterwards capitalists follow up where they leave off and make a success of the undertaking. Such bids fairly to be the case here, for during the past week "strangers," though known to some persons as a species of vultures, have been hovering around, and rumour hath it that the sequel of their visit will be the systematic working of some of the abandoned claims. There is undoubtedly good gold here, which will be eventually demonstrated, but the advent of the capitalists is first requisite to keep the pick and shovel in motion until the preliminary and often costly work can be got through.

He hoped to be able to report 'operations being vigorously commenced in the direction of turning this goldfield to proper account',¹¹⁰ but was unable to, although work continued in more than seven claims.¹¹¹ Even the Te Aroha correspondent of the *Waikato Times* admitted that 'dullness' prevailed and that the field was 'enduring one of those stages of disappointment of exaggerated expectations'.¹¹²

TUI FADES ALSO

The first crushing of quartz from the Tui district produced a poor result.¹¹³ 'Owing to the cost of conveyance to the battery', the second, of five tons, 'was not considered payable'.¹¹⁴ The *Waikato Times* correspondent continued to be impressed with these claims, especially the Tui, for the ore could be carted to the battery cheaply, the ground was 'easily worked', and the first reef found was 'practically inexhaustible, being from 16 to 18 feet in breadth'. The first crushing, of stone 'taken at haphazard', and 'not expected to return anything' was 'a decided proof' of payable gold in 'the poorest part of the ground'. A drive on this reef of about 40 feet was 'well

¹¹⁰ Own Correspondent, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 14 June 1881, p. 3.

¹¹¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 15 June 1881, p. 3.

¹¹² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 11 June 1881, p. 2.

¹¹³ *Thames Star*, 27 April 1881, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 30 April 1881, p. 3.

¹¹⁴ *Thames Star*, 2 May 1881, p. 3.

timbered, and a thousand tons of quartz can be got out at any time with a few days work'. The new drive on a reef of 'flowing black quartz' had 'very fair prospects', and a lower level was planned. 'This claim alone could afford enough to keep our battery going. The five tons already crushed, were joisted by a block and tackle about 80ft up the side of the gully, and carried down on the men's shoulders in three days'. To avoid repeating this, they would construct a 148-foot chute to the creek and a dray road on the flat. All the other claims had 'first rate prospects', and alluvial gold was likely to be found in the creeks.¹¹⁵

LAST DAYS

At the beginning of June, all claims were reportedly still at work,¹¹⁶ but when a government geologist visited late in the month, he discovered that, out of 79 claims registered, only four were being worked and 'two or three' were protected. About 50 tons had been crushed, 'the yield varying from 2dwt to 7dwt per ton, with some richer specimens, possibly bringing the total yield of the field to nearly 50oz, although I was unable to get reliable returns'. He believed the field had not had 'a fair trial', for although it had been 'clearly demonstrated' that reefs carried 'some gold', as no rich patches had 'been discovered at the start, it has been abandoned without sufficient work being done to prove the ground'. It would 'probably lie idle' until tributaries or others found a rich patch.¹¹⁷

The *Waikato Times'* correspondent insisted that the crushings had not indicated the ore's true worth, for much 'rubbish' was sent down.¹¹⁸ Early in July he wrote that a 'few' claims were still working, maintaining 'their good prospects',¹¹⁹ but later in the month he admitted the extent of the decline. 'Very poor, very dull, and very hopeless is the appearance of a goldmining locality after the first rush has given place to the inevitable despondency and desertion that succeed. From the 600 or 1000 men who were here six

¹¹⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 7 May 1881, p. 2.

¹¹⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 1 June 1881, p.3.

¹¹⁷ S. Herbert Cox, 'On Certain Points Connected with the Geology of the Auckland District' [30 June 1881], in *Reports of Geological Explorations During 1881* (Wellington, 1882), pp. 96-97.

¹¹⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 21 June 1881, p. 2.

¹¹⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 5 July 1881, p. 2.

months ago, there would not be found 30 now'.¹²⁰ On 13 July, the six claims still registered were recorded as abandoned.¹²¹ By then the mining inspector reported there were 'only 12 miners working at Te Aroha and about the same number of Maoris out prospecting'.¹²²

LACK OF CAPITAL

In June, the *Waikato Times* correspondent hoped that 'real capitalists' would step in, 'get the claims at a discount', and 'work them systematically'. If 'properly managed' they might produce returns 'varying from 10 to 50% per annum if carried on with perseverance'. It was 'known by anyone able to see further than his nose' that the field was 'healthy enough as a real money-making concern'. It required 'capital to go on with, and proper working and a little time'. As the prospects were 'as fine as any seen in New Zealand', now was 'the time for men of steady work and companies well funded, with capital to work with, to make their show, and there is no doubt that they will come, if properly guided and made to see the advantages of the place'.¹²³

An example of the consequence of insufficient capital was the Don, worked by Cambridge men. In late July, the manager, Peter Thompson, formerly a carter,¹²⁴ sought protection. The owners had 'continuously worked the mine for 8 months without receiving any return – their means being exhausted they require protection to enable them to obtain means to carry on work'.¹²⁵

According to a later assessment by the *Te Aroha News*, the land in the district 'was chiefly occupied in large areas by men of considerable means'. When gold was discovered, 'most of them 'put all the money they could raise by mortgaging their holdings, and in other ways, into goldmines, and lost

¹²⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 23 July 1881, p. 2.

¹²¹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 203-205, 211, 215, 216, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

¹²² J.M. McLaren to Harry Kenrick, 7 July 1881, Mines Department, MD 1, 85/990, ANZ-W.

¹²³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 11 June 1881, p. 2.

¹²⁴ See advertisement, *Waikato Times*, 29 July 1879, p. 3; *Waikato Electoral Roll, 1880*, p. 13.

¹²⁵ Peter Thompson to Warden, 22 July 1881, Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1881, BBAV 11289/9a, ANZ-A.

all but their heavily encumbered holdings'.¹²⁶ Auckland had provided little capital.¹²⁷ 'Since our Waikato friends have found that the mountain is not all gold they have given us the cold shoulder, and are spending their revenue elsewhere',¹²⁸ another correspondent lamented. As Charles Featherstone Mitchell¹²⁹ commented, although Te Aroha had been 'able to boast of a posse of capitalists flocking' there, they have not been of much practical use.¹³⁰ 'Argus', of Thames, suspected that reports of rich finds at Waihi were, as at Te Aroha, 'merely an attempt to raise the price of certain shares', and believed that some persons 'did well' by such tricks at Te Aroha.¹³¹

MINING COMPANIES COLLAPSE

By mid-1881, the companies had either collapsed or were about to collapse. Details about the Aroha and Waitoa companies and the Te Aroha Quartz Crushing Company are given in other chapters. Of the other four companies, the Morning Star expired quietly at an unknown date without attracting the attention of the press. On 21 February, the Te Aroha No. 1 South made its first call of 6d per share,¹³² but shareholders were 'rather long-winded in paying' and the directors were still trying to compel them to do so in April.¹³³ Some prospecting was still being done in late April, but when treated the ore proved that the nearly 1,000 feet of driving had produced 'unprofitable results'.¹³⁴ In August, its ground was forfeited.¹³⁵ The Waikato made a call of 3d per share in January, but had been forced to stop work for nearly eight weeks from March to May because some

¹²⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 12 October 1927, Supplement, p. 1.

¹²⁷ *Thames Star*, 14 April 1881, p. 2.

¹²⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 29 June 1881, p. 3.

¹²⁹ See paper on the Thames Miners' Union.

¹³⁰ Own Correspondent, 'Ohinemuri Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 2 March 1881, p. 2.

¹³¹ Letter from 'Argus', *Thames Advertiser*, 9 June 1881, p. 3.

¹³² *Thames Star*, 23 February 1881, p. 2, 7 March 1881, p. 3.

¹³³ *Thames Star*, 12 March 1881, p. 2, 12 April 1881, p. 2.

¹³⁴ *Thames Star*, 30 April 1881, p. 2; Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 June 1881, p. 3.

¹³⁵ *Thames Star*, 18 August 1881, p. 2.

shareholders objected to paying it.¹³⁶ Late in April, they were threatened that if not paid within a week legal proceedings would be taken ‘for its recovery or forfeiture’.¹³⁷ On 7 May, the 617 shares owned by Thomas Dawson were auctioned for non-payment. Dawson, a hotelkeeper of Hamilton East,¹³⁸ had become bankrupt. ‘There was a fair attendance, but only one bid was obtained’, and all the shares were sold for a halfpenny each.¹³⁹ Five thousand forfeited shares auctioned in mid-June were purchased by the legal manager on behalf of the company. ‘Great confidence’ was reportedly still felt and as the rest of the shares were ‘held by a wealthy proprietary’, unnamed, it was expected the company would be able to develop its property.¹⁴⁰ Nothing further was heard until its ground was forfeited in September.¹⁴¹

The fourth company, the Bonanza, ceased work late in January when a meeting to elect directors lapsed for want of a quorum and the manager did not wish ‘to take upon himself the responsibility of expending money’.¹⁴² At that time the company had a credit of about £120, enough to enable it to mine for another two or three months.¹⁴³ A meeting in late February elected directors and agreed on work to be done, but by July all operations were suspended.¹⁴⁴ In October, a correspondent wrote that it ‘would be well if the shareholders of the Bonanza claim were put in possession of necessary information regarding the affairs of the Company. When they ceased operations, there was a considerable sum of money in hand, and explanations would be extremely welcome’.¹⁴⁵ The *New Zealand Herald* also hoped that the directors, ‘some of whom’ were ‘interested in further gold prospects’, would ‘clear up the mystery’ about the funds in hand when the company ceased work. Inability to hold a directors’ meeting had created the

¹³⁶ *Waikato Times*, 22 January 1881, p. 2, Te Aroha Correspondent, 12 May 1881, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 14 May 1881, p. 2.

¹³⁷ *Waikato Times*, 26 April 1881, p. 2, which called it a Godmining Company.

¹³⁸ *New Zealand Gazette*, 30 December 1880, p. 1797.

¹³⁹ *Waikato Times*, 10 May 1881, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 10 May 1881, p. 3.

¹⁴⁰ *Waikato Times*, 16 June 1881, p. 2.

¹⁴¹ *Thames Star*, 7 September 1881, p. 3.

¹⁴² *Thames Star*, 1 February 1881, p. 2.

¹⁴³ *Thames Advertiser*, 19 February 1881, p. 2.

¹⁴⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 19 February 1881, p. 2, 29 October 1881, p. 3.

¹⁴⁵ Waitoa Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 18 October 1881, p. 2.

mystery.¹⁴⁶ As no further discontent was reported, presumably the shareholders' questions were answered.

FORFEITING UNWORKED GROUND

On 10 May, Kenrick told McLaren that most claims were 'not manned at all'. He had told him in February that the Bonanza was unmanned and was sought by other miners, but as McLaren had done nothing he was ordered to act 'at once' to 'remedy an evil which is found to cause serious complaints amongst the miners'.¹⁴⁷ At the end of the month, there was 'a great deal of justifiable grumbling at the unfairness of allowing leased claims to remain unworked'. Many of the best claims had 'been left unworked for months' and would 'reap all the benefit of the success of a hardworking labour without any expense or labour'. Those working their claims were discouraged and asked 'why the old miners' law that a claim if left unworked by at least half its gang for 24 hours should be forfeited, should not be enforced'.¹⁴⁸ At the end of June, McLaren finally served notice of forfeiture on more than 14 licensed holdings unless manned within ten days. Over 27 claims would be certified as abandoned if no valid objections were received.¹⁴⁹ One correspondent expressed pleasure but considered 'the authorities very much to blame for delaying so long, as many have left who would have stopped had this been done before'.¹⁵⁰ The *Waikato Times* correspondent expected forfeiting so many claims would 'impart a little life' and 'open some of the best claims that since the commencement of the diggings here have never been touched'.¹⁵¹ The clearance, he hoped, would

have the effect of actual cautery, in causing new and more wholesome blood to take the place of what was no use, and the ground will then be open for the operations of the prospecting parties that are to start as soon as possible. It would seem to be rather disheartening to mark the long list of disappointed anticipations that were formed over these claims, some of which

¹⁴⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, reprinted in *Thames Advertiser*, 29 October 1881, p. 3.

¹⁴⁷ Harry Kenrick to James McLaren, 10 May 1881, Mines Department, MD 1, 85/990, ANZ-W.

¹⁴⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 31 May 1881, p. 2.

¹⁴⁹ Incomplete lists in *Waikato Times*, 30 June 1881, p. 2.

¹⁵⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 29 June 1881, p. 3.

¹⁵¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 28 June 1881, p. 2.

seemed so particularly justifiable, but is really no more than has always taken place with every other gold diggings.... The mistakes made in the first excited rush have to be rectified, and the broom has to be put in to sweep out the rubbish left by the false start with experience and perseverance for guides. It is really a very good thing for Te Aroha to get rid of all those abused leases and protections that have kept many of the best claims untouched, and prevented more active workers from coming in. The next thing will be perseverance when the right direction has been properly ascertained. Those men who are now so successful at Waitekauri have been many months holding on in the face of difficulties, and many a claim has been abandoned when the gold was within a few feet, and the new-comers have made thousands directly.¹⁵²

On 18 July, McLaren told Kenrick he believed only seven claims remained, three of which were working, another three were protected, and the remaining two were seeking protection. He had initiated forfeiture procedures against all licensed holdings except the Tui, which had just been granted, and the Morning Star, which was still being worked.¹⁵³ A correspondent commented that the presence of some men who seemed 'to do no work' was explainable by supposing that they were 'waiting for some of the locked-up ground to be declared open'.¹⁵⁴ Yet when the forfeited claims were made available, only two were pegged out in that month, the same number as in June, and none were pegged out during August or September.¹⁵⁵ Tributers now worked some claims,¹⁵⁶ without success.

EXCUSES FOR FAILURE

Various excuses were made for the failure. The *Waikato Times* correspondent continually blamed the poor quality of miners and mine managers. In June, for instance, he wrote that some drives had been 'put in at too high or too low a level through want of good management, and the

¹⁵² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 30 June 1881, p. 3.

¹⁵³ J.M. McLaren to Harry Kenrick, 18 July 1881, Mines Department, MD 1, 85/990, ANZ-W.

¹⁵⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 19 July 1881, p. 3.

¹⁵⁵ *Waikato Times*, 23 August 1881, p. 3; Te Aroha Warden's Court, Notices of Marking Out Claims 1881, BBAV 11557/1b, ANZ-A.

¹⁵⁶ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 12 July 1881, p. 2, 30 July 1881, p. 2.

reef has not been struck. Some have been abandoned that a few more feet would have made payable'.¹⁵⁷ Another correspondent wrote that 'a great deal of the work' was done 'by new chums, and as timber was not used where required, and in many places where put in the work done was simply labour in vain', for drives were 'tumbling in every day'.¹⁵⁸

The council was widely criticised for failing to assist by making roads to the battery.¹⁵⁹ Without this assistance, claims such as the Morning Star had to pay £2 10s per ton to convey their stone.¹⁶⁰ In fact, the council was well aware that roads were required and sought government assistance, in May telling it that if these were made the population would remain during winter: 'Future of district depends upon this expenditure'.¹⁶¹ Kenrick enlisted the assistance of the local Member of Parliament, John Blair Whyte, whose support did not extend to taking up any interests. Whyte's telegram stated: 'Warden tells me that the success of the field depends very much upon something being done at once. If battery stops, population must leave'.¹⁶² In July, the government agreed to grant half the £400 needed to construct roads and tracks.¹⁶³ Kenrick was thanked for his 'exertions',¹⁶⁴ but the money came too late to assist the now closed battery. In August, Porter's request that the council meet half the cost of making tracks to two claims was declined because it had not been consulted in advance.¹⁶⁵ Also in August, Whyte asked the Minister to allocate 'say £500' for tracks and roads, for the goldfield was 'of course impecunious'; no response was recorded.¹⁶⁶

¹⁵⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 21 June 1881, p. 3.

¹⁵⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 14 July 1881, p. 3.

¹⁵⁹ *Thames Star*, 29 April 1881, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 30 April 1881, p. 3; Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 7 May 1881, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 23 May 1881, p. 2, 30 May 1881, p. 2.

¹⁶⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 25 April 1881, p. 3.

¹⁶¹ Piako County Council to William Rolleston, 11 May 1881, Mines Department, MD 1, 82/11, ANZ-W.

¹⁶² J.B. Whyte to William Rolleston, 18 May 1881 (telegram), Mines Department, MD 1, 82/11, ANZ-W [punctuation added].

¹⁶³ Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 5 July 1881, p. 2.

¹⁶⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 7 July 1881, p. 2.

¹⁶⁵ Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 16 August 1881, p. 3.

¹⁶⁶ J.B. Whyte to William Rolleston, 16 August 1881, Mines Department, MD 1, 81/1098, ANZ-W.

SOME STILL RETAIN HOPE

Despite all the evidence indicating that the field was a duffer, some refused to abandon all hope. In mid-June, the *Waikato Times* correspondent reported ‘active steps’ being taken ‘to organize prospecting parties for the systematic opening up of further tracts’ where gold was ‘known to exist’. The ‘general dullness’ was ‘beginning to work its own cure, and altogether a more promising spirit seems ready to prevail’.¹⁶⁷ On 20 June, a ‘numerously attended’ meeting considered forming a prospecting association to send out ‘one or more prospecting parties to further explore the neighbourhood, under experienced and practical direction’. This proposal ‘was warmly supported by all present, and a large number of names were at once entered for a subscription of £3 a head for three months working’. A committee was elected to work out details and report to a future meeting.¹⁶⁸ The *Waikato Times* correspondent noted that ‘the dullness that always follows the first excitement of the opening rush has fallen upon us precisely as I have always foreseen’, and now came the ‘systematic working that invariably follows’.¹⁶⁹ Another correspondent commented that residents lived in hope, ‘knowing that the tide is now full ebb, and that the flood must make’.¹⁷⁰

By the middle of July, the prospecting association was about to be ‘in full swing’ once Kenrick produced ‘a promise of government support’.¹⁷¹ But a party was never sent out, ‘owing to the parsimoniousness of the Government’ in not providing assistance.¹⁷² Individual prospectors found ‘nothing of any importance’ apart from ‘bringing in of wonderful prospects by fossicking about’.¹⁷³ Despite this outcome, the *Waikato Times* correspondent continued to insist that gold existed. ‘A chance find will one day reveal the right source, and all of a sudden it will be found that someone in two or three places was within two or three inches of success, when he knocked off’.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 18 June 1881, p. 2.

¹⁶⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 23 June 1881, p. 2.

¹⁶⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 28 June 1881, p. 2.

¹⁷⁰ Occasional Correspondent, ‘Te Aroha’, *Thames Advertiser*, 23 June 1881, p. 3.

¹⁷¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 16 July 1881, p. 2.

¹⁷² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 10 September 1881, p. 3.

¹⁷³ *Waikato Times*, 21 July 1881, p. 2.

¹⁷⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 23 July 1881, p. 2.

In late July, this correspondent reported a different mineral had been found. ‘Some excellent indications of silver have been found, and there is every possibility of the place turning out well in this respect, even though it should fail as a gold-field’.¹⁷⁵ John Leech Allen, a baker,¹⁷⁶ planned to become a silver miner because specimens he took from a silver lode in August appeared to be valuable.¹⁷⁷ He must have soon discovered this was incorrect, because he did not peg out a claim. In September, the *Waikato Times* was shown ‘some good specimens of silver-bearing stone’; the discoverers intended ‘to prosecute their enquiries as soon as possible’ and lease the abandoned ground.¹⁷⁸ Nothing more was heard of this.

There was talk, but no action, about sending out a strong prospecting party to where Hone Werahiko¹⁷⁹ was supposedly finding gold.¹⁸⁰ Some prospectors continued to work during August and September, and government geologist James Hector said one sample showed promise. It also showed the complexity of the ore, containing some free gold, blende sulphide of zinc, galena sulphide of lead with some silver, and chalcopyrite sulphide of copper.¹⁸¹

At the beginning of August, at ‘poor Te Aroha’ only the *Morning Star* was at work, extracting ‘some good stone’.¹⁸² One week later, there was ‘little or nothing doing’. A ‘couple of men’ were tributary in the *Morning Star* and ‘a few others’ might be working ‘in different parts of the field, but the sum total of their efforts would amount to very little’.¹⁸³ The *Thames Star* was told ‘by private letter’ from Te Aroha that the *Morning Star* shareholders were ‘getting capital stone’ and were ‘most sanguine of getting a remunerative return’.¹⁸⁴ The tributaries working this mine created

¹⁷⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 26 July 1881, p. 2.

¹⁷⁶ See *Thames Star*, 15 November 1880, p 2, 25 January 1881, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 7 July 1883, p. 2, 19 January 1884, p. 7, 25 April 1911, p. 2.

¹⁷⁷ *Thames Star*, 17 August 1881, p. 2.

¹⁷⁸ *Waikato Times*, 8 September 1881, p. 2.

¹⁷⁹ See paper on his life.

¹⁸⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 6 August 1881, p. 3.

¹⁸¹ *Thames Star*, 1 September 1881, p. 2.

¹⁸² *Auckland Weekly News*, 8 August 1881, p. 13.

¹⁸³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 13 August 1881, p. 2.

¹⁸⁴ *Thames Star*, 17 August 1881, p. 2.

excitement on 3 September when it was rumoured that they had found good gold, but this report was ‘exaggerated’.¹⁸⁵

Only the Morning Star and Buck Reef were being worked actively, the latter being on the edge of the future Waiorongomai goldfield.¹⁸⁶ In early September, ‘one or two prospecting parties’ were out, finding ‘it hard lines’, being ‘entirely, or nearly so, on their own hook’,¹⁸⁷ meaning having bad luck and relying on their own efforts.¹⁸⁸ One visiting reporter claimed to detect a ‘better feeling’, with several parties prospecting and some ‘good stone’ coming from the Morning Star.¹⁸⁹ Reports continued that this mine was producing ‘some very good quartz’ and had cut a large reef which looked ‘better every shift’. To assist this party the battery company gave them free use of its machinery, ‘they themselves working it’.¹⁹⁰ By the end of the month, this claim had 500 tons ready for crushing ‘which, well informed people think, will turn out payable’.¹⁹¹ By the end of October, a large amount of ore was being sledged to the bottom of the hill, ‘but owing to the apathy of the council the road to the battery was ‘impassable’.¹⁹² In mid-November, the battery was treating ‘stuff brought down after much trouble and labour by tributers’, but ‘nothing grand’ was produced.¹⁹³ After obtaining only six ounces from 16 loads, the tributers were ready to give up the ground after one last test, from which ‘a large return was not anticipated’. Nevertheless, ‘so sanguine’ were the tributers that gold in payable quantities existed that they had ‘determined at all hazards to drive another 100 feet or so before giving it up’.¹⁹⁴ If they did so drive, it was not reported, for they were unsuccessful. The ‘strong party’, to be formed ‘to give a more thorough trial of some of the more promising’ mines,¹⁹⁵ did not eventuate.

¹⁸⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 10 September 1881, p. 3.

¹⁸⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 12 August 1881, p. 3, 24 August 1881, p. 3.

¹⁸⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 10 September 1881, p. 3.

¹⁸⁸ Jonathon Green, *The Cassell Dictionary of Slang* (London, 1998), pp. 563, 873.

¹⁸⁹ Travelling Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 13 September 1881, p. 3.

¹⁹⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 17 September 1881, p. 2.

¹⁹¹ ‘A Correspondent’, ‘Through Piako to Te Aroha’, *Waikato Times*, 29 September 1881, p. 4.

¹⁹² *Thames Star*, 31 October 1881, p. 2.

¹⁹³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 17 November 1881, p. 3.

¹⁹⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 23 November 1881, p. 3.

¹⁹⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 19 September 1881, p. 3.

A DUFFER

At the end of September, a Thames newspaper noted a gradual revival of Hauraki mining. ‘Tapu, Waiomo, and even the promising El Dorado of Te Aroha’ were ‘again quietly being set in motion’, with ‘systematic prospecting’ about ‘to supersede the old habit of surface scratching’.¹⁹⁶ But there was almost complete silence throughout October about mining at Te Aroha, the general view being that it was a duffer. George Enos Holloway, a Cambridge baker who took part in the original rush,¹⁹⁷ in 1936 described it as ‘an eighteen shilling to get a £1 field’.¹⁹⁸

CONCLUSION

The reason why the Te Aroha field was a duffer was the nature of the ore that had prompted the original rush; as a geophysicist explained later, ‘the reef was only fault crush’.¹⁹⁹ The field grew and collapsed like a mushroom, all the optimistic talk (by the local *Waikato Times* correspondent in particular) being unrealistic. But although they did not know it, while Te Aroha was fading fast its discoverer, Hone Werahiko, was hard at work prospecting, and would soon reveal his latest, and best, discovery, which would revive the township and district.

Appendix

Figure 1: Portion of photograph of miners standing outside first wooden buildings at Te Aroha, n.d. [mid-1881?], showing mine workings above the settlement, Te Aroha and District Museum; used with permission.

¹⁹⁶ Editorial, *Thames Advertiser*, 30 September 1881, p. 2.

¹⁹⁷ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 197, 199, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *Waikato Times*, 16 December 1880, p. 2, re Don claim; *Waikato Electoral Roll, 1880*, p. 6.

¹⁹⁸ Cited in *Te Aroha News*, 17 July 1936, p. 6.

¹⁹⁹ J.B. Misz, ‘Te Aroha Mountain Geophysical Survey’ (typescript, 1952), p. 6, Mines Department, MD 1, 23/2/1218, Part 2, ANZ-W.

Figure 2: Burton Bros., view of Te Aroha showing cleared areas and sites of mine workings on Prospectors' Spur, 1884, Burton Brothers Collection, O.034350, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongawera.

Figure 3: A.N. Breckon, 'View of Te Aroha, Waikato, Auckland, from the River – Landscape Class', *Auckland Weekly News*, 16 April 1908, showing areas of Prospectors' Spur cleared by miners, AWNS-19080416-3-3, Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries; used with permission.

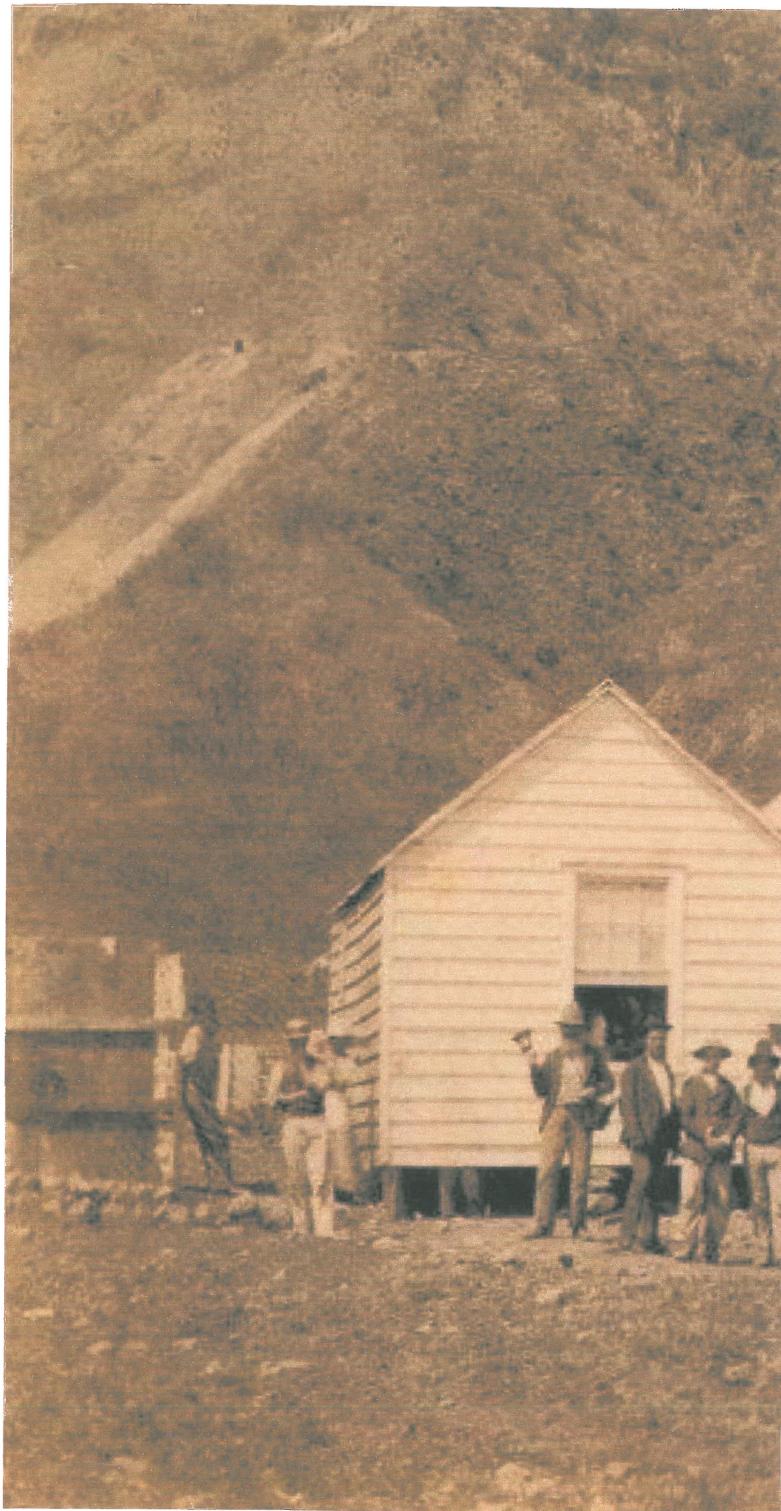


Figure 1: Portion of photograph of miners standing outside first wooden buildings at Te Aroha, n.d. [mid-1881?], showing mine workings above the settlement, Te Aroha and District Museum; used with permission.



Figure 2: Burton Bros., view of Te Aroha showing cleared areas and sites of mine workings on Prospectors' Spur, 1884, Burton Brothers Collection, O.034350, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongawera.

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

A. N. Breckon Photo.

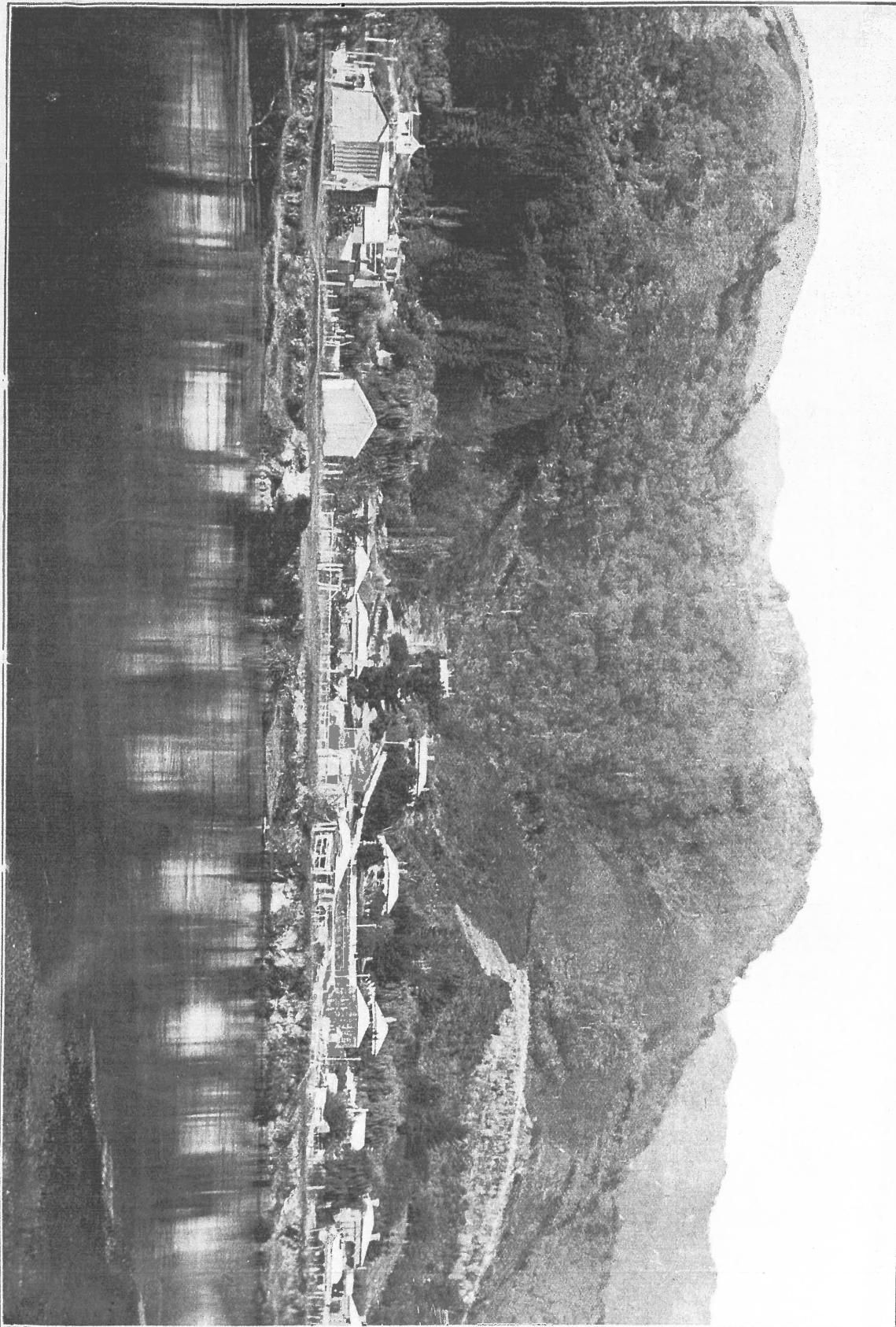


Figure 3: A.N. Breckon, 'View of Te Aroha, Waikato, Auckland, from the River – Landscape Class', Auckland Weekly News, 16 April 1908, showing areas of Prospectors' Spur cleared by miners, AWNS-19080416-3-3, Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries; used with permission.