

THE PROSPECTORS' CLAIM AT TE AROHA

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Abstract: *High up the mountain, on the edge of a precipice, the Prospectors' Claim was at first examined only on the surface, producing some valuable stone. After the goldfield was proclaimed, two tunnels were driven under the supervision of experienced miners, but despite encouraging signs, no reef was struck. Once the first parcel was tested in Thames in early December, the owners realized the value of their ore was less than anticipated, and when a crushing was made in the new Te Aroha battery in 1881 the returns were lower than expected. Consequently, mining ceased, and the ground was abandoned.*

In September 1882 four experienced miners acquired part of the ground as the optimistically named Golden Hill, but after obtaining the usual 'encouraging' results their work came to nothing. There was some interest in the ground subsequently, but a lode was never found, and seemingly will never be found.

THE GROUND DESCRIBED

At the end of November 1880, John McCombie,¹ a miner who was also a correspondent for the Auckland press,² gave a detailed description of the claim:

Standing at Morgantown, and looking up the mountain side, the claim appears to take in a small spur jutting out of the main spur, but on climbing up to it, the visitor finds that there is no small spur at all, but that what appears to be such is only a shoulder which has fallen away from the main spur. The leader in which the gold has been found is running across this shoulder, and almost on the same line with the spur. The claim lies wholly on the western side of the spur, and where the gold has been cut is near the top or eastern boundary line, and about the centre of the shoulder. About 25 or 30 feet to the north of the line of the leader the ground falls over a steep bank, or cliff, caused by the shoulder bursting from the spur, and down this cliff the leader outcrops. It was from this outcrop that the trial crushing, taken to Grahamstown about a month ago, was taken. No gold has been seen in the leader here. About 10 or 15 feet southward from the spot where the gold is found the leader has also been cut, and no

¹ See paper on Billy Nicholl.

² *Thames Advertiser*, 26 May 1881, p. 3.

gold seen, so that it is very evident that near the surface, at least, the run of gold is of no great length. Beyond this nothing certain can be said, as all the workings on the leader, so far, are merely surface scratchings, and nothing has been proved. Where the gold is it shows in the stone pretty freely, but it is flaky, showy gold, and would given anyone unacquainted with quartz gold the idea that there is a much larger quantity of gold in the stone than really is the case. In some of the stone broken out the precious metal shows in the solid, and this must be taken as a very good feature. Besides this leader the owners suppose there is a larger lode running across their claim, but this had not yet been found.³

SEARCHING FOR A LODGE

The *Thames Star* of 30 October described work done to that date as being ‘only the scraping out of a few paltry holes’, and argued that the only way to find the reef was to form a company with sufficient financial resources to drive a crosscut through the base of the spur.⁴ On the same day, the *Thames Advertiser*’s special reporter wrote a detailed description of his visit:

Breakfast over, the party proceeded in twos and threes to visit the locality of the recent “find,” and reached it after an hour’s stiff climbing. The place in question is situated on a very steep spur behind [George] O’Halloran’s Hotel,⁵ slightly towards the right, a narrow Maori track leading to it. For a great portion of the distance the path runs through the bush, on emerging from which is the foot of the spur on which the prospector’s claim is situated. The ridge was a few months ago covered with trees and scrub, but prospects of gold having been obtained, the bush was burnt off in order not to impede the prospectors in their work. The party of which I was a member had for guide a person who is the head of one of those who have pegged out claims adjoining the prospectors’. The first claim we visited was that of the prospectors’. The men were down on the flat enjoying a respite from their labours. The first working we came to was a large trench into the hill. It was about ten or twelve feet long, and would, I suppose, be eight feet deep. Quantities of small boulders, some of them of hard blue metal, and other quartz peculiar to the district, were seen on the sides of the working, and, judging from the quantity of boulders lying outside on the surface, I think the

³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 29 November 1880, p. 6.

⁴ *Thames Star*, 30 October 1880, p. 2.

⁵ See paper on his life.

persons who put the trench in must have encountered considerable difficulty in doing so, and from what I could learn had not been rewarded for their labours, the stone proving of an unpromising character, or at least not containing sufficient gold to warrant them in continuing work there. After abandoning it they proceeded further up the rise, and opened another trench, but in different kind of ground. The soil is very light and contains quartz boulders. From appearance one is inclined to believe that the spur is an upheaval, or has been released from some main body, because it has appearance of dis-connection with the main Aroha mountain. Two tunnels⁶ have been put in, one higher up than the first. From the first one some nice looking rock, containing gold freely, was taken out, but as the tunnel was pushed ahead the ground become too dangerous to work in, as no timber was employed to stay it, and it was filled up, and operations commenced in the second on a larger scale, and with a greater amount of success. It is now in about ten feet, and during the past week nearly a hundred pounds weight of what may be called good specimen stone has been obtained from it. No reef or leader of any kind is to [be] seen, the auriferous stone being from boulders. In one day no less than 50lb were broken out, one boulder being fully 15lb weight, and containing gold all through it. Walking further up the spur we came to where the only leader in the whole of the claims pegged out is situated. It is in a short cutting of two or three feet, and is on the very edge of the spur, about two hundred feet below being a creek. The width of the lead is from five to seven inches, and its colour is a dark brown. From it was taken the 95lb of quartz tested on Wednesday at the Herald battery by order of the Warden, and from which the payable yield of one pennyweight three grains was obtained. The prospectors have not worked it because they wish to see first whether they are to have the ground, but should it be given them they intend to drive on it and ascertain its value. Until they know they are to have the ground they say it would be foolish for them to open out and then to find that they have been doing work for other people. In the meantime, they are working in the trench, where they can pick out auriferous boulders, and convey them to the flat on their backs, for shipment to the Thames, which they could not do with quartz until a proper sledge track has been formed. Six men are now working the ground - three extra hands have been taken on during the past week - but with two exceptions none are practical miners. Hone Werahiko,⁷ the chief claimant of the ground, superintends their operations....

On returning to the flat I was shown a quantity of specimen stone taken from the prospectors' claim during the past week. The

⁶ Incorrectly printed as 'trenches'.

⁷ See paper on his life.

parcel must have weighed 50 pounds, and each stone carried gold freely; in some of the richer pieces a band of gold was running round them. The latter would probably yield half-an-ounce to the pound. Altogether about a hundredweight of good picked stone and specimens have been obtained from Hone's ground, and for safe keeping it has been lodged at the chief Morgan's [Mokena Hou's]⁸ house.... Each evening the result of the day's work is carried there. Hone says the quartz on hand will not be crushed until more has accumulated.⁹

To take the first sample to the Herald battery, the warden, Harry Kenrick,¹⁰ chose two miners with 'no connection whatever with the claims already pegged off'.¹¹ Two days later, a Te Aroha correspondent wrote that for the past ten days he had

traversed the prospectors' ground from peg to peg, and, excepting the small vein from which the trial crushing was broken out, have failed to notice the semblance of a gold-bearing reef. And, moreover, I have it from the prospectors themselves that the exact locality of the reef, from which the gold-bearing stones picked upon the surface have detached themselves, is as yet a sealed book to them, as, indeed, it is to every other prospector.

Hoping to intersect the supposed line of reef, they were 'trenching the surface, which varies in depth from 6 to 12 feet'.¹² A week later, a correspondent reported what some miners had told him:

I was shown a very rich specimen said to have come from the prospectors' claim and on someone present suggesting that the stone was in appearance similar to that found at Waitekauri, further specimens were produced. Some of these showed the gold in them pretty rich, whilst in others the inexperienced eye could catch no trace of the precious metal. The miners, or perhaps more correctly speaking, the prospectors, appeared very sanguine though no lode had as yet been found. Indications for gold could be found on almost any part of the mount, and from this they argued that the reef must be near. One of them not quite so

⁸ See paper on his life.

⁹ Special Reporter, 'A Visit to the Prospectors' Ground at Te Aroha', *Thames Advertiser*, 1 November 1880, p. 3.

¹⁰ See paper on his life.

¹¹ *Thames Star*, 27 October 1880, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 28 October 1880, p. 3.

¹² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 3 November 1880, p. 3.

sanguine as the others, and who appeared from his conversation to be an experienced miner, said he had seen similar fields worked for years without a reef being found, and if the value of the reef could be judged from the specimens picked up, it was most probably a rich one.

Rewi Mokena,¹³ a partner in the claim, showed them ‘a very rich specimen’, which he refused to part with even when offered £5, and refused to say where it had been found.¹⁴ One reporter claimed the low level drive being put in to cut the leader was progressing so slowly that it would ‘take months to get the desired length’. The boundaries of the claim had not been surveyed because Hone Werahiko was at Thames and had not indicated the area he wanted marked out.¹⁵ Shortly afterwards, it was rumoured that good gold was being found in loose stones eight feet below ground level.¹⁶

The views of the Te Aroha correspondent of the *Waikato Times* were published on 11 November:

The prospectors are now putting in a drive about sixty feet below where they first found the leader, and have got now into very nice, kindly-looking country, in which, if they get a leader, gold may well be looked for. As for the lode, where it is opened on the top level is concerned, it is very poor looking, pinched in between hard, rocky country, and anything but auriferous looking. Another thing, this lode is almost certain to follow the rock, and will not get into any good country, and I do not think they will get it in the country they are now driving through, although another leader may be found close to it. The whole of the side of the hill is covered with quartz boulders, large and small, for some distance below the workings, but little or none is to be found on the top of the spur, or below toward the creek. In fact I think that the quartz is what is commonly known as a “blow” [an outcrop], and as so many golden stones are found among the quartz, it is more than probable that good gold may be found underneath, certainly not above, and a drive put into the spur in a northerly direction from the South-western face of the hill with a cross-cut when well in, (providing nothing was found in the drive) would be more to my way of thinking as the best means of proving the value of the ground.... There is, of course, a great deal of mystery about, and many openly state that the Prospectors’ claim, now so called, is

¹³ See paper on his life,

¹⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Bay of Plenty Times*, 11 November 1880, p. 2.

¹⁵ *Thames Star*, 8 November 1880, p. 2.

¹⁶ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 10 November 1880, p.2.

not the spot from which the gold shown has come but that they are simply working the ground as a blind to cover the real locality, but this I do not believe for many reasons.¹⁷

On the following day, the *Thames Advertiser* was cautious:

During the past week the prospectors have driven their tunnel a distance of 15 feet. The country in the face has now become so hard as to necessitate the use of the hammer and gad, indicating that the spur is not a landslip from higher country, but that it is composed of solid formation, which, in the estimation of mining men, enhances the value of the prospectors' ground. It is impossible to form anything like a correct idea as to when or where the reef for which the prospectors say they are tunnelling will be met with. They may intersect it within a few feet of the point of present operation, or, on the other hand, they may have to drive several hundreds of feet before meeting with it.¹⁸

WILLIAM McLEAN'S DISCOVERY

By early November William McLean, an experienced Coromandel miner,¹⁹ was in charge of the workings. On 11 November, he struck rich gold in a six-inch leader about eight feet to the south of where the sample for the trial crushing had been taken.²⁰ He had found it 'within 68 hours' of starting to search for it.²¹ The *Thames Star*, whilst admitting that it was 'very possible' that it was 'only a surface "blow"', considered it 'gratifying as the first gold found' in a lode, and recorded 'great excitement'.²² A reporter who visited early the next morning

¹⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 11 November 1880, p. 2.

¹⁸ Own Correspondent, 'The Aroha Goldfield: Its Progress and Prospects', *Thames Advertiser*, 12 November 1880, p. 3.

¹⁹ See Thames Warden's Court, Miners' Rights Register 1868-1869, no. 3028, BACL 14358/3a; Register of Mining Coromandel Claims 1868-1872, no. 130, BACL 14396/1a; Coromandel District Engineer's Office, Tenders for Waikoromiko Bridle Track, March 1873, AAAE 15177/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 28 January 1879, p. 2, 15 November 1880, p. 3.

²⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 13 November 1880, p. 2.

²¹ John McCombie, 'Random Recollections: Te Aroha Goldfield', (typescript, n.d. [1910]), p. 1, MS 838, Library of the Auckland Institute and War Memorial Museum.

²² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 13 November 1880, p. 2.

saw at once that the find was a heavy one, gold being visible in the face quite distinctly. The leader is about 9 or 12 inches thick, and lies in most kindly country, and gold shows plainly in the solid stone as well as in the mullock, which carries large quantities of flaky or scaly gold. The leader has only been opened out for about 5 or 6 feet, so that the size of the patch is not yet known, but that the lode is rich is certain.

McLean had gone 'straight to the leader, and in a couple of hours unearthed what certainly is the richest show of gold found' since the early Thames days. 'Very little work' would be possible 'for a day or so', as visitors were 'so numerous that the prospectors are pretty well occupied in showing what they have got'.²³ A Hamilton correspondent was told that

the patch proved a very rich one - heavy gold being seen in the solid stone, whilst the mullock in the crevices of the leader was heavily charged with gold all through. The specimen stone visible in the face is estimated to be worth three quarters of an ounce to the pound. This may be only a patch, but, so far as it goes, it is a grand prospect.²⁴

Thirty years later, McCombie recalled that

as a surface show it was one of the best that I have ever seen, either before or since. The reef formation was about 1ft wide on the average, and when the hangingwall was stripped for a length of about 50ft along its line, the ore exposed to view fairly glittered with gold. Some of the stone was worth as much as 1oz of gold to the lb, and the general ore was very high grade.²⁵

A draft of this article gave the length of the stripping as 30 feet.²⁶ The day after this find, the *Thames Advertiser's* special reporter returned to Te Aroha, where he met several residents 'more or less excited' by the find.

From what I could gather, good gold had been struck in the leader on the previous day, increasing the value of the claim

²³ Special Reporter, 'Te Aroha', *Waikato Times*, 13 November 1880, p. 2.

²⁴ Hamilton Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 20 November 1880, p. 9.

²⁵ John McCombie, 'Early Days of Te Aroha', *Auckland Weekly News*, 8 December 1910, p. 17.

²⁶ John McCombie, 'Random Recollections: Te Aroha Goldfield', p. 2.

considerably; and one person to whom I spoke assured me that the stone was like that in a jeweller's window. Knowing to what a pitch of excitement the discovery of gold will work some men to,

he took the report with a grain of salt and inspected the claim with 'two well-known miners'.

Since my last visit to the spot, ten or twelve days ago, a good deal of work has been done on it. The trench the prospectors were then working in has been abandoned and filled up, and another put into the spur side a little higher up. This has been converted into a tunnel, properly timbered up, and an endeavour was made to strike a reef which is believed to exist in that direction; but good gold having been discovered in the leader above, the drive was abandoned, and the attention of the prospectors directed solely to the new find. The leader which has created so much interest during the past few days is the same one from which the test crushing of 95lb was recently taken. The stone in question was broken from the outcrop on the side of the spur.

He gave details of the ore:

In order to get at it a trench, about three feet wide and eight feet along the bottom, was dug, exposing the cap of the lode. The honey-combed and crystallized portions of the quartz were found to be thickly impregnated with the precious metal, but a gentleman, who was present at the time, informs me that he failed to discover a colour of gold in the solid stone. Gold was, however, freely distributed through the seams of clay on the hanging and footwalls. A little work was done on the leader on Friday, but the quantity of quartz taken out was very small. At the time of my visit a couple of pieces of stone, which had been loosened the previous day, were taken out of the lode and shown me. Gold was freely showing, and the practical miners of the party expressed themselves highly pleased at noticing that the precious metal ran right through the quartz. In the leader small blotches of gold were visible five or six paces off; but, as was the case on the day the discovery was made, it appeared to be thicker about the honeycombed and crystallised portions than in the solid. The show is undoubtedly a good one for that part of the country, but is not rich enough to cause a rush to take place.

The prospectors had

started to put in a low level tunnel for the purpose of intersecting the leader. About 20 feet have been driven, but so far it has not

been necessary to use timber. The ground through which it is going abounds with boulders, and there appears to be a likelihood of some difficulty being encountered in driving it in consequence of the presence of so much rock. It is expected that in about 30 feet more driving the lode will be cut. At the present rate of progress this will be accomplished in about four days. The result of the work will be waited for with great interest, as it will then be known what is the value of the lead, and perhaps determine the future of the field.

Visiting for a second time before returning to Thames, he discovered that the prospectors had broken out from the lode cut in their trench

a few pounds of very fair specimen stones, scarcely a piece of which but showed free, flaky gold, and what, to my mind, is still more encouraging, although it escaped my notice in the early morning, is the very important fact that gold, visible to the unaided eye, is in many places diffused throughout the solid stone.

At this point the lode is somewhat broken up. This, in the opinion of many experienced men, is but a surface irregularity, and will undoubtedly disappear at lower levels. Crowds of men, and I noticed two ladies ... visited the prospectors' bonanza during yesterday and to-day, and all unite in the belief that it is the cap of the lode which shed the gold-bearing stones found on the surface immediately below its line.

The prospectors themselves, however, insist that there is still another gold-bearing lode, situate somewhat lower down the spur, and running parallel with the one with which they at present have in hand. They ground their opinions upon certain specimen stones picked up on the surface, which they affirm are entirely different in appearance and general character to those obtained from the lode already alluded to....

Last evening, soon after I heard of the new find, I made it my business to hunt up one of the prospectors, and informed him that it was my intention to visit the ground early on the following morning, in order to obtain reliable information for the press. He replied that he intended camping on the ground, and led me to believe that he would be found there in the morning. He failed, however, to put in an appearance, and, rather than lose time by going back to his camp, I took the liberty of breaking out from the cap of the lode a few pieces of stone in order to satisfy myself of its genuineness. During the day an impression had gone abroad that some person or persons had broken stones out of the reef with a view to purloining the choice pieces. Upon hearing this I at once proceeded to the prospectors and gave them a detailed account of the circumstances surrounding the first case of alleged specimen

stealing from a defined reef on the Te Aroha goldfield, and they expressed themselves satisfied with my explanation.

James Gribble, a prominent Thames mine manager,²⁷ who had made ‘a close inspection’, told him he was ‘favourably impressed with the leader’ showing gold and believed the lode would be ‘patchy’.²⁸

Visitors on the first coach trip from Hamilton, on 17 November, went straight up the hill, where John McSweeney, another partner,²⁹ revealed the latest developments. A reporter accompanying this party saw ‘just sufficient of the earth opened to discover the reef, which looked exceptionally rich. Indeed one of the party, which has had considerable experience with quartz mining, said he had never seen anything finer’.³⁰ Another correspondent described the new leader as ‘of very kindly description, though rather disturbed’, because it was ‘a slip from the main mountain’.

Very little work has been done so far, the prospectors being satisfied with showing a patch of gold spread loosely all over the face.... Loose specimens have also been picked up in the neighbourhood, but of a different class of stone, and the inference is there is yet a better and richer reef than the one found. The present find runs north and south underlying to the west, when it gets lower down and in more substantial country a great improvement in its character is fully expected to take place.³¹

DEVELOPMENTS UNTIL OPENING DAY

By mid-November, surveyors had almost finished laying off the boundaries, work ‘of more than ordinary difficulty’. Being 135,000 square feet, or nine men’s ground,³² it was

surveyed about square, and the leader in which the gold was seen has been cut near the eastern or top boundary, and runs across

²⁷ See *Thames Advertiser*, 13 November 1880, p. 3, 26 November 1880, p. 3; *Waikato Times*, 4 September 1886, p. 2.

²⁸ Special Reporter, ‘The Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 15 November 1880, p. 3.

²⁹ See paper on his life.

³⁰ *Waikato Times*, 20 November 1880, p. 2.

³¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Bay of Plenty Times*, 25 November 1880, p. 2.

³² Special Reporter, ‘The Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 15 November 1880, p. 3.

the claim nearly due north and south. Where the workings are at present there is a considerable quantity of gold to be seen. Much of the gold is leafy and very showy, and to a stranger there would appear to be a great deal more than there really is. In some places the gold, however, shows pretty freely in the solid stone. The extent of the deposit it is difficult to say at present, as very little work has been done on the leader, but it cannot be of any length near the surface, as a short distance to the north of the workings the leader has been cut, and no gold seen in it, and also some fifteen or twenty feet on the south side of the workings, and no gold seen. Where the gold has been found the leader will average from six to nine inches thick, and if the gold holds well down into the spur there will be a good deposit of it. The workings, however, at present are nearly on the surface, and it is impossible for anyone to give any decided opinion of what there is in the ground. The country wherever it has been exposed is loose, jumbled up ground, and nothing very solid or firm is showing anywhere. Besides this leader it is supposed that there are one or two other lodes.³³

Shortly before opening day, the prospectors ‘suspended all work’ because of being ‘put to considerable inconvenience and annoyance by the number of visitors’. The gold in the leader cut by the trench was ‘said to be very good’, but as only a ‘very small portion’ was exposed it was ‘quite premature to attempt to give any opinion’ of its probable extent.³⁴ It was expected that work would not recommence ‘until the field is opened, or until the adjustment of shares is settled’.³⁵ Three days before the goldfield was proclaimed, a half share was sold for £60; ‘considering the work done on the ground and the show, it was a fair price’. Share dealings by the partners were alleged to be creating conflicts, for ‘it would appear that all the prospectors promised more than they can now give’, and the warden, Harry Kenrick,³⁶ by reducing the size of their claim to three acres had ‘interfered with their proposals’.³⁷

On 22 November, the Aroha Gold Mining Company³⁸ was established to work the ground.³⁹ Little was being done, work in the low level being

³³ *New Zealand Herald*, 26 November 1880, p. 5.

³⁴ Thames Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 20 November 1880, p. 9.

³⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 18 November 1880, p. 2.

³⁶ See paper on his life.

³⁷ Special Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 22 November 1880, p. 2.

³⁸ See paper on this company.

‘slow’ because the ground was ‘very loose’, requiring ‘close timbering. Indeed some delay has been occasioned by the collapsing of one set of timbers’.⁴⁰ A correspondent noted that the leader showing gold had been ‘scarcely touched, little or no work being done to prove it’, despite its appearance being ‘very good at present, with gold in the stone and even in the mullock surrounding it’. He considered the workings had not ‘been carried on any but a fossicking principle. No doubt when they start again an efficient manager will [be] appointed, and systematic mining and prospecting be gone into’.⁴¹

On the morning before opening day, the prospectors had started ‘to break out quartz from the leader in the trench; but the number of visitors to the spot was so large that work had to be suspended for a day or two’. During that time, however, ‘about sixty pounds of fair specimen stone was obtained, and taken down to the Warden’s Office, where it was lodged for safety’. Eight men were at work,⁴² supervised by James Corbett, an experienced Waitekauri miner turned storekeeper and publican.⁴³ Corbett had so much faith that he was the second largest shareholder in the Aroha Company.⁴⁴ It was believed that half a ton of specimens and picked stone were ready for crushing, which would be done when another half ton was obtained.⁴⁵

DEVELOPING THE MINE AFTER OPENING DAY

At 9 o’clock on 25 November, the Prospector’s Claim was registered as License No. 1. As Kenrick had arranged, the interests were divided between Werahiko (4 men’s ground), Adam Porter⁴⁶ (3 men’s ground), and

³⁹ Special Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 23 November 1880, p. 2.

⁴⁰ *Auckland Weekly News*, 27 November 1880, p. 9.

⁴¹ Te Arhoa Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 18 November 1880, p. 2.

⁴² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 26 November 1880, p. 3.

⁴³ See *Thames Advertiser*, 16 February 1875, p. 3, 17 April 1875, p. 3, 10 May 1875, p. 3, Ohinemuri Correspondent, 17 November 1875, p. 3, 17 December 1878, p. 3.

⁴⁴ *New Zealand Gazette*, 30 December 1880, p. 1796.

⁴⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 26 November 1880, p. 3.

⁴⁶ See paper on his life.

McSweeney (2 men's ground).⁴⁷ It was visited by 'at least three hundred persons, and diverse opinions were expressed as to the show in the face'.⁴⁸ One correspondent estimated its height above the plain as 800 feet, which was,

as an old miner said to me - too much up among the crows. Even when they come down to their lowest level, they will have no amount of backs, and the claim below them, if the reef continues the same dip will have a better show. The opinion of many experienced men of the old hands who saw the workings yesterday was that there was no properly defined reef, and the manner in which it has been left unworked leaves the question quite undecided. As to the adit commenced to cut the lode at a lower level, that is a mere nothing, two miners could have put it in a day and a-half. The work, so far as any has been done on this claim, does not appear to have been performed by miners, nor with any view to really ascertain the real character of the body of stone touched upon at the surface. There is a great deal of flaky gold in the honeycombed crevices of the stone and in the loose mullock; but what best pleased me was the examination of a box containing nearly 1cwt of specimens taken from the lode, and amongst these was a large proportion of solid stone with the gold in it. Quartz miners will attach more value to this than to the sight of any amount of loose or hanging, flaky gold.⁴⁹

Immediately after the proclamation of the field, the much-commented-on failure to develop the ground was rectified. Porter and Corbett showed a reporter good specimens taken from the upper drive and told him that the lower one would 'be opened up at once, the contract for boring having been let at a price that indicates the favorable nature of the country for reefing'.⁵⁰ This lower drive, 90 feet below the existing workings, was intended to cut another reef, Porter believing the gold 'all came from the same leader and that this large leader was payable'.⁵¹ The contract to drive 50 feet, for 12 shillings per foot,⁵² was awarded to Denis Murphy, an early Thames

⁴⁷ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 150, BBAV 11567/1a; Licensed Holdings Grant Book 1880-1882, appended to front of volume, BBAV 11549/1a, ANZ-A.

⁴⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 26 November 1880, p. 3.

⁴⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 December 1880, p. 11.

⁵⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 27 November 1880, p. 2.

⁵¹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 11 December 1880, p. 19.

⁵² Own Correspondent, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 3 December 1880, p. 3.

miner,⁵³ and another Thames miner.⁵⁴ Corbett suspected that twice the distance would be required to strike the lode.⁵⁵

The drive will intersect one reef in the ground, already cut higher up, and two feet six inches in width, from which good prospects were obtained. A small leader found on the surface will also be cut, beside the main or Prospector's leader, from which all the golden stone has been obtained. The drive will give 100 feet of backs, and will enable Mr Corbett to open the mine systematically.⁵⁶

At midnight on Sunday, 28 November, the contractors started work with three shifts of two men each, and in 16 hours drove seven feet.⁵⁷ In two days, good progress was made and 'encouraging stone' was found.⁵⁸ Work in the small upper drive was stopped and the face covered up 'in order to prevent pieces of the quartz being purloined by visitors - a practice which many indulge in during the absence of the workmen'.⁵⁹ This did not please those who sought assurance about the worth of the field. 'Many people think the Prospectors should take the gold out of the face, and have a crushing forthwith in order that the public may be satisfied of the bona fide character of the find'.⁶⁰

On 2 December, it was reported that the drive was progressing at such a rate that the reef should be reached in a week or less.⁶¹ But on that same day, the ground became much harder, necessitating the use of blasting powder.⁶² The contractors believed the tunnel was going through a large boulder, which would take two or three shifts to cut. Once more driving on the leader in the upper level, they immediately struck good gold, and

⁵³ See paper on his life.

⁵⁴ See Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 3 December 1880, p. 3, 16 December 1880, p. 3; *Thames Electoral Roll, 1880*, pp. 36, 37.

⁵⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 December 1880, p. 3.

⁵⁶ *Thames Star*, 27 November 1880, p. 2.

⁵⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 December 1880, p. 3.

⁵⁸ *Thames Star*, 30 November 1880, p. 2.

⁵⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 December 1880, p. 3.

⁶⁰ *Thames Star*, 1 December 1880, p. 2.

⁶¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 2 December 1880, p. 3.

⁶² *Auckland Weekly News*, 11 December 1880, p. 9; Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 3 December 1880, p. 3.

Corbett created ‘some little excitement’ by taking a dishful of about 20 pounds of good specimen stone down to the settlement.⁶³ When stripped for 12 feet, ‘the lode was solid and widening downwards. The quartz showed gold freely, and the lode altogether never looked so well’.⁶⁴ ‘The action of the company in taking out the gold has quite restored confidence, and new life seems to be imparted to prospecting’ elsewhere.⁶⁵ Another report confirmed that ‘excellent specimen stone’ had been found. The ‘splendid’ quartz body had increased to a foot thick, the gold ‘improving as it drops downward’. Driving was temporarily suspended while the miners were ‘humping the quartz down to the flat’ to be sledged to the landing at the river.⁶⁶

This discovery ended any doubts about the mine’s ‘richness and permanence’, and raised the property ‘very considerably in value and importance’.⁶⁷ The renewed excitement meant that ‘numbers of people’ climbed the spur after the announcement ‘to ascertain the truth or otherwise’ of the news. One reporter found that since his last visit the lode had increased to ‘about a foot thick, with a very good show of gold, the solid stone appearing now to have more of the metal diffused through it’, and the ground was ‘excellent for working’.⁶⁸ Porter reported that the reef ran ‘down a precipice’, making gold ‘visible for a considerable distance’, and that gold had been found on both the northern and southern boundaries.⁶⁹

A TWO-TON PARCEL CRUSHED

On 4 December, Corbett took two tons to Thames to be treated by the Alburnia battery, under his supervision.⁷⁰ ‘A variety of opinions’ were expressed about the probable result.⁷¹ Porter told shareholders in the Aroha Company, of which he was managing director, that the parcel could produce

⁶³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 3 December 1880, p. 3; *Thames Star*, 3 December 1880, p. 2.

⁶⁴ *Te Aroha Miner*, 4 December 1880, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 6 December 1880, p. 2.

⁶⁵ *Thames Star*, 3 December 1880, p. 2.

⁶⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 6 December 1880, p. 3.

⁶⁷ *Te Aroha Mail*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Advertiser*, 4 December 1880, p. 2.

⁶⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 6 December 1880, p. 2.

⁶⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 7 December 1880, p. 3; *Auckland Weekly News*, 11 December 1880, p. 19.

⁷⁰ *Thames Star*, 6 December 1880, p. 2.

⁷¹ ‘The Goldfields: Monday’, *Auckland Weekly News*, 11 December 1880, p. 9.

eight or ten ounces to the ton, 'but if they got half that it would be highly payable'.⁷² Werahiko and McSweeney were amongst the 'large number of people' observing the treatment. After the crushing, the amalgam was

collected and subjected to the usual process of squeezing in hot water through chamois leather cloths, and on being put into the scales, was found to weigh exactly 44oz. It was then put into the retort, and allowed to remain on the fire for two hours, by which time the quicksilver had completely evaporated, and it was taken out and weighed at 12 o'clock, when there was found to be 20oz 5dwt retorted gold. The gold was taken to the Bank of New Zealand, and after melting realised 19oz 10dwt. An assay was then made, to ascertain its quality, and it proved to be worth £2 15s 11d per ounce.⁷³

Whereas the owners were 'disappointed' by what they considered to be an 'unsatisfactory' result, the *Thames Star* thought it a good return.⁷⁴ The *Thames Advertiser* agreed, for the sample was not picked stone but 'general dirt, with which was mixed a considerable quantity of stuff from the walls of the leader'.⁷⁵ A Thames correspondent was also positive:

The parcel crushed contained the whole of the stone broken out of the prospectors' leader from the first day gold was struck up to Friday last [3 December] excepting the few stones which have been given away. The loose specimens picked up on the surface were not included in this parcel. The value of the gold is £2 15s 3d per ounce. On the whole the result of this crushing is most satisfactory, but there are some who are disappointed. As has already been said, the gold in some of the specimens was of a very showy description, and was likely to lead any one unacquainted with that class of stone astray, and give the impression that there was a great deal more gold in the stone than was really the case. To old miners, it was very potent that the stone is nothing like so rich as had been stated, but yet they were convinced that it was stone of good quality. A very good feature about the leader is the fact that it is getting stronger and more compact the deeper it is worked, and from this cause the shareholders can gather much encouragement. If the numerous parties who are now at work in

⁷² *Waikato Times*, 9 December 1880, p. 2.

⁷³ *Thames Advertiser*, 7 December 1880, p. 3, 8 December 1880, p. 3.

⁷⁴ *Thames Star*, 9 December 1880, p. 2.

⁷⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 8 December 1880, p. 3.

the district can only find other leaders similar in quality to this one, the future of the field will be established beyond a doubt.⁷⁶

McCombie considered the result of the trial crushing to be ‘really excellent, and establishes beyond a doubt that this leader, in some places at any rate, will pay well for working’.⁷⁷

DEVELOPMENTS BEFORE CHRISTMAS

Corbett’s work for the company ended with his supervising this crushing, for he had commercial interests at Waitekauri that required ‘his sole attention’.⁷⁸ On 4 December, John Hoey Moore took over as mine manager.⁷⁹ Another experienced Waitekauri miner, Moore had ‘long and varied experience in quartz mining’ and gave ‘great satisfaction’ immediately upon taking over.⁸⁰ In future years, he would be a prominent and respected mine manager at Waihi, Waitekauri, Owharoa, and Maratoto.⁸¹

Three shifts continued to drive the lower tunnel, ‘the face being in good shooting country’. The stone was ‘well mineralized’, indicating that a lode ‘in this class of country’ would ‘be of excellent quality, and equal the expectations of the most sanguine. Operations on the leader in the surface workings have been suspended’. One reporter considered ‘it would be a great mistake’ to continue breaking out stuff from the lode’ which they could neither stockpile nor treat locally.⁸²

During December, there were regular updates, with the drive for a time in ‘tight’ country necessitating the use of dynamite before striking ‘much easier’ ground.⁸³ All signs that a lode might soon be hit were eagerly

⁷⁶ Thames Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 8 December 1880, p. 5.

⁷⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 13 December 1880, p. 5.

⁷⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 3 December 1880, p. 3.

⁷⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 6 December 1880, p. 3.

⁸⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 8 December 1880, p. 3.

⁸¹ See *New Zealand Herald*, 12 December 1884, p. 5; *Thames Advertiser*, 1 October 1887, p. 2, 3 October 1887, p. 2, 19 October 1887, p. 2; *Auckland Weekly News*, 19 September 1885, p. 21, 9 June 1888, p. 36, 3 June 1893, p. 10, 8 December 1910, p. 17, 27 November 1913, p. 17.

⁸² Own Correspondent, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 8 December 1880, p. 3.

⁸³ *Thames Advertiser*, 11 December 1880, p. 3, 13 December 1880, p. 3.

relayed; for instance, on 13 December it was reported that the ‘sandstone’ being driven through was ‘favourable for carrying gold-bearing leaders or reefs’.⁸⁴ Two days later the six contractors threw in the job, ‘as they found it would be ruinous to carry it on any further at the price they were receiving’. Having driven 36 feet, it was expected the lode would be hit at ‘any time’. They had worked ‘in a thorough workman-like manner, and to the satisfaction of the manager and managing director’, who employed wages men until another contract was let. A winze started on the leader in the upper tunnel would meet the lower one after the latter was extended another 57 feet. When sunk 18 feet on the ‘small’ leader, good gold was seen all the way.⁸⁵ When excavating to put in sills for timbering the winze, more ‘splendid specimens’ were broken out from a parallel leader which showed ‘fine gold’.⁸⁶

On 17 December, Murphy’s tender to extend the lower tunnel another 50 feet for £1 12s per foot was accepted; the previous contract had been for 12s. He started work at once, hoping ‘to make better progress’, and a ‘few pounds of good picked stone’ were obtained every day the winze was deepened.⁸⁷ Using three shifts, he made such good progress that when his contract was completed there would be at least 90 feet of backs.⁸⁸ A lode discovered in the footwall was

found to run out upward in the form of a wedge, a small cavity being left at the extremity. On the winze being continued the old leader was found to decrease in size altogether, while the new lode gradually took its place. It is evident that what we have hitherto called the new lode is really a portion of the Prospectors’ leader which had formed a somewhat peculiar joint or splice giving the idea at first of a new lode coming in. In the present bottom of the winze 15 feet down, the leader is about six inches thick, and some stones showing gold were taken from it yesterday.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 13 December 1880, p. 3.

⁸⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 16 December 1880, p. 3.

⁸⁶ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 17 December 1880, p. 3; see also *Thames Star*, 17 December 1880, p. 2.

⁸⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 20 December 1880, p. 3.

⁸⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 21 December 1880, p. 3.

⁸⁹ *Te Aroha Miner*, 23 December 1880, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 24 December 1880, p. 2.

By late December, the winze was only 'down 15 feet, through very shaky ground', requiring 'timbering-up' being 'closely attended to'. Moore said that the 'outward side of the winze' was 'composed of worse ground than ever he worked in'. The leader in it, 'contrary to general expectations', appeared not to be improving, causing 'some disappointment'. The level had been driven about 46 feet through 'hard' country. Work was suspended in the winze until after the Christmas holidays 'and quartz in the paddock protected from the "attacks" of visitors'.⁹⁰ Concerning these 'attacks', Porter had told shareholders that a 'considerable quantity of specimens had been taken away by people visiting the mine, but that would be stopped' because men had been 'appointed to prevent it'.⁹¹ Late in the month, Foy Bros, photographers of Thames, encouraged more to visit by selling and displaying in their window the first photographs of the district, including 'The Prospectors' Claim',⁹² which has not survived.

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Although Murphy continued driving with three shifts during the holidays, he could drive only 13 feet in a fortnight because of 'extremely hard rock'.⁹³ Blasting powder was 'found to tear it better than dynamite'.⁹⁴ Full work resumed on 6 January, and four days later the two shifts sinking the winze found the country 'very much improved, a fine solid sandstone giving place to the hitherto broken ground. The leader in the bottom was five inches in thickness, and some stones showing gold were obtained'.⁹⁵ Greater progress was made in the lower drive because the 'sandstone' was easier to tunnel through. Although hard, it was more 'jointy', enabling a larger quantity to be dislodged with each shot.⁹⁶

In mid-January, Moore considered that the contractors had made only 'small' progress, having driven only 20 feet since starting.⁹⁷ McCombie was

⁹⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 28 December 1880, p. 3.

⁹¹ *Waikato Times*, 9 December 1880, p. 2.

⁹² *Thames Star*, 24 December 1880, p. 2.

⁹³ *Thames Advertiser*, 6 January 1881, p. 3.

⁹⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 12 January 1881, p. 3.

⁹⁵ *Te Aroha Miner*, 11 January 1881, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 12 January 1881, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 21 January 1881, p. 3.

⁹⁶ *Te Aroha Miner*, 20 January 1881, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 21 January 1881, p. 3.

⁹⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 21 January 1881, p. 3.

more positive, crediting them with making 'fair headway' in what he called 'one of the best tunnels on the field'. Seven feet high and four feet wide, 'where required' it was 'strongly and handsomely timbered, presenting a striking contrast to the timbering of many other tunnels'.⁹⁸ Moore cautioned that, although some gold had been found in the leader, there was 'nothing good enough to be called specimens'. The 'very broken' hanging wall had to be 'timbered closely'.⁹⁹ McCombie agreed the indications were that it 'not going to prove a very rich claim. The country near the surface seems to be loose disjointed ground, while immediately under this there is a hard belt'.¹⁰⁰

Using wages men, Moore started to drive further down the hill on a reef supposedly the same as the big one in the adjoining Bonanza. He said 'the stone looks well, but I cannot form much of an opinion about it yet, as the country is very much broken, but I expect to get into the solid in a few shifts more'.¹⁰¹ By late January, the stone in the low level had 'improved slightly' and was

much easier to work than it was last week, consequently better progress is being made in the extension of the drive. The winze was measured this afternoon, and found to be about 29 feet deep. The leader in the bottom averages 9 inches wide, and at every breaking down a few pounds of picked stone are obtained. On Friday the quartz was richer than any got during the week, clearly showing that although the leader is smaller than it was on the surface it is quite as good below as it was above. In the new drive the lode got soon after starting is a nice, well-defined body of quartz, but no gold is visible in it.¹⁰²

When the winze was down 31 feet, 'a few pounds of nice golden stone were broken from the leader', but there was 'no change in the main tunnel', in 68 feet. 'The ground still requires to be shot down. In the new tunnel, further down the hill', the new lode was 'of good size', and Moore believed that from it 'the rich boulders found by Hone Werahiko originally came'.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 22 January 1881, p. 21.

⁹⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 21 January 1881, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 15 January 1881, p. 9.

¹⁰¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 21 January 1881, p. 3.

¹⁰² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 25 January 1881, p. 3.

¹⁰³ Te Aroha Goldfield Reporter, *Thames Advertiser*, 27 January 1881, p. 3.

By late January, most newspaper reports were about other claims, although the Prospectors' was still 'watched with interest', for the future of the field largely depended upon its success.¹⁰⁴ The council assisted by agreeing to improve the track to its mine 'to make it practicable for dray traffic'.¹⁰⁵ By mid-February, the contract in the main drive was completed without having struck the lode, although it was assumed that this would be intersected within a few more feet.¹⁰⁶ Work had stopped two feet from where the drive would intersect with the winze, by then down 50 feet.¹⁰⁷ Nor had the lode been struck in the new low level: although specimens 'of excellent quality' were found, these were only 'loose stones' which Moore considered probably came 'from a leader not yet discovered'.¹⁰⁸ This 'small quantity of highly auriferous stone ... caused a little excitement until it became known that it did not come from a reef, but from loose boulders'.¹⁰⁹

In late February, Moore showed a reporter about ten pounds 'of first class specimens which he had obtained whilst preparing a quartz paddock for the new drive'. They were 'about as good as I have seen from this mine; but the discovery is not worth very much, the stone having not come from a lode, but been picked up loosely'. Even though it was only 20 feet from the winze, work had not resumed in the low level because this part of the mine was 'very unprofitable'. Work stopped temporarily in the winze because of the first discovery of gas at Te Aroha, which escaped from 'the jointy country'.¹¹⁰ At the end of the month, 'several hands' were dismissed,¹¹¹ but in mid-March a reporter wrote that 'the usual complement of men' were at work.

The tunnel which was started between the winze and the low level some weeks ago has been driven a distance of 30 or 35 feet, at almost a right angle with the leader. On reaching this lode it was driven on northwards and communication effected with the drive from the winze, affording ventilation to the upper workings and enabling operations to be resumed in them. Stoping is now

¹⁰⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 22 January 1881, p. 21.

¹⁰⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 22 January 1881, p. 21.

¹⁰⁶ *Thames Star*, 18 February 1881, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 17 February 1881, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ *Thames Star*, 15 February 1881, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 17 February 1881, p. 3.

¹¹⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 28 February 1881, p. 3.

¹¹¹ *Thames Star*, 1 March 1881, p. 3.

proceeding. A leading stope has been taken along, and a start made with another. The stuff obtained is a fair quality, and is considered payable.... No work is going on in any other part of the claim. The directors have decided not to continue the low level tunnel, the face of which is only 20ft from the winze, for the present. A good quantity of general dirt and picked stone will be on hand when the battery starts.¹¹²

Periodically, hopes were raised by finds of good stone. William Cumming, a Hamilton brewer,¹¹³ in mid-March 'found a little excitement about some really excellent specimens just brought in' by Moore that were 'almost covered with heavy flaky gold'.¹¹⁴ As stoping from the winze had not found the lode, where this loose stone came from remained 'a mystery'. There was 'no doubt' that 'one of these days' a good reef would be struck,¹¹⁵ but only loose specimens were found.¹¹⁶ Early in April, Moore was stoping out the leader north of the winze, but although gold was seen every day, the lode was very small. 'In stoping south of the winze, the leader ran out to a mere shell' after about 20 feet. A crosscut about 50 feet to the south had not found 'even a trace of the leader', making further prospecting there 'useless'. He still had 'a small block between the winze and Bonanza boundary to turn over'. The only quartz he was saving contained visible gold, 'as the cost of fetching it to the battery will be considerable, and I don't think it advisable to go to any expense in making a road'.¹¹⁷

The ever-optimistic *Waikato Times* correspondent considered it 'one of the most promising claims'. After the winze had been sunk for 50 feet the leader 'got rather small, and sinking was discontinued', as was the low level intended to cut the leader 'at 100 feet deep'; as Moore considered it 'would not carry down through the hard country', the miners 'opened out' at this depth and 'stoped the leader out to the surface'.

¹¹² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 16 March 1881, p. 3.

¹¹³ See *Waikato Times*, advertisement, 5 February 1878, p. 3, letter from Patrick Leslie, 6 July 1878, p. 2, advertisement, 23 January 1879, p. 3, 19 March 1881, p. 3, advertisement, 26 March 1881, p. 4, District Court, 20 March 1884, p. 2; *Waipa Electoral Roll, 1880*, p. 5.

¹¹⁴ *Waikato Times*, 19 March 1881, p. 3.

¹¹⁵ *Thames Star*, 12 March 1881, p. 2.

¹¹⁶ *Thames Star*, 21 March 1881, p. 3.

¹¹⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 9 April 1881, p. 3.

They have also a drive on the surface level of about 50 feet cutting the leader at 25 feet, after which they come again on the hard rock and they have a third drive of 60 feet on a big reef of about 5 or 6 feet in width. It is intended to continue prospecting at this point, the quartz being of a likely nature to contain gold, and should a patch of gold be met with they would be able to turn out a large amount of crushing stuff.

There are about eight tons of material, from which good prospects have been obtained, ready for the battery; and the stuff turned out every day shows promising and steady traces that may, according to very trustworthy judges, justify confident expectations of an average continued yield of from two to two and a half ounces per ton. Wonderfully fine patches have been found near the surface, but stray specimens are not taken into account in the estimate of what may be expected as a return.¹¹⁸

Thomas Goodman Sandes,¹¹⁹ a surveyor who had invested in two other claims and three companies,¹²⁰ gave a more cautious assessment, Although the lode carried ‘gold all through’, it was ‘small, the last specimens taken out being about three inches thick (the width of the leader)’.¹²¹

A CRUSHING IN THE TE AROHA BATTERY

As none of the paddocked ore had been treated, its value remained conjectural. Sending stone to the new Te Aroha battery was ‘rather costly and tedious, owing to the want of a road up the gully’.¹²² When crushing began on 27 April, the owners expected to get from one-and-a-half to two ounces of gold per ton.¹²³ ‘The stuff after an hour’s run asserted its quality, by forming a good show of amalgam on the plates, a sight new to a great many miners at Te Aroha’.¹²⁴ On ‘the authority of the battery manager’, a reporter predicted a return of two ounces to the ton.¹²⁵ One account gave

¹¹⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 14 April 1881, p. 2.

¹¹⁹ See paper on the Te Aroha battery.

¹²⁰ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 161, 223, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 30 December 1880, p. 1797, 28 April 1881, p. 476, 9 June 1881, p. 744.

¹²¹ Letter from Thomas Goodman Sandes, *Auckland Weekly News*, 16 April 1881, p. 21.

¹²² *Thames Star*, 12 April 1881, p. 2.

¹²³ *Thames Star*, 27 April 1881, p. 2, 30 April 1881, p. 2.

¹²⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 30 April 1881, p. 3.

¹²⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 30 April 1881, p. 2.

seven tons producing 22oz 5dwt, or more than three ounces to the ton; another reported eight tons producing 21oz 3dwt.¹²⁶ Whilst deemed a 'fair yield', the return was 'not as much as was anticipated', although the *Waikato Times* correspondent (as always) was impressed by the 'favourable results'.¹²⁷

ABANDONING THE MINE

Not only was the return lower than expected but the underground workings were discouraging. As Murphy later described, his driving had 'cut the lead at the lowest depth, and it got into hard country, pinched almost out to two inches or less, but with no gold in it. The prospectors lost heart and myself and others ... also lost heart and gave it up'.¹²⁸ After the directors suspended work, Moore remained in charge, and at the end of May invited tenders for tributes.¹²⁹ A geologist was told in June there was 'some probability' that a party would take over this and another claim,¹³⁰ but this did not eventuate.

At the end of June, the mining inspector gave ten days notice of forfeiture for non-working.¹³¹ As the company took no action to man the claim, when the time expired on 9 July it was re-pegged by Werahiko and his party as the 'Half Past Twelve known as the Prospectors Claim Te Aroha'.¹³² This party comprised some shareholders who were 'disgusted with the late management'.¹³³ After they failed to register their claim, Werahiko decided to explore other parts of the mountain.¹³⁴ In October,

¹²⁶ *Waikato Times*, 10 May 1881, p. 3; *Thames Star*, 9 May 1881, p. 2, 11 May 1881, p. 3.

¹²⁷ *Thames Star*, 9 May 1881, p. 2; Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 17 May 1881, p. 2.

¹²⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 18 February 1909, p.2.

¹²⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 June 1881, p. 3.

¹³⁰ 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), p. 96.

¹³¹ *Waikato Times*, 30 June 1881, p. 3.

¹³² Te Aroha Warden's Court, Notices of Marking Out Claims 1881, no. 231, BBAV 11557/1b, ANZ-A; *Thames Star*, 14 July 1881, p. 3.

¹³³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 11 August 1881, p. 3.

¹³⁴ See paper on his life.

applications were invited to occupy the ground 'lately held by' the company,¹³⁵ but none were received.

THE GOLDEN HILL MINE

In September 1882 the optimistically named Golden Hill was registered, which included part of the Prospectors'.¹³⁶ Its four owners were all working miners. John Purvis had been a soldier.¹³⁷ He had participated in the rush and been an owner and secretary and treasurer of the Magnet, and an owner of the gloomily named Forlorn Hope.¹³⁸ Henry Hughes may have mined earlier at Coromandel;¹³⁹ at this stage he held no other interests, but during the later 1880s he mined at Waiorongomai.¹⁴⁰ Joseph Wilson had mined at Thames and Ohinemuri before becoming an owner of two claims, including the Forlorn Hope.¹⁴¹ James Madden had been an early Thames miner before moving to Ohinemuri.¹⁴² After participating in the

¹³⁵ *Thames Star*, 21 October 1881, p. 3.

¹³⁶ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 266, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Herald*, 27 September 1882, p. 3.

¹³⁷ See Auckland Magistrate's Court, Old Age Pensions Minute Book 1899, folios 348-349, BADW 10496/1, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 14 August 1894, p. 2.

¹³⁸ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 502, issued 25 November 1880, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1d; Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 194, 229, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *Waikato Times*, 8 January 1881, p. 3.

¹³⁹ See *New Zealand Gazette*, 25 August 1881, p. 1124.

¹⁴⁰ *Te Aroha News*, Warden's Court, 29 September 1883, p. 2, 2 June 1888, p. 2, 9 June 1888, p. 2, 18 August 1888, p. 2, 4 December 1888, p. 2, 16 March 1889, p. 2.

¹⁴¹ For Thames, see Thames Warden's Court, Thames Claims Register 1868, folio 22, BACL 14397/1a, ANZ-A; for Ohinemuri, see Thames Warden's Court, Miners' Rights Butt Book for District of Ohinemuri 1875, no. 240, BACL 14043/7h; Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Ohinemuri Claims 1875, folio 55, BBAV 11568/1a, ANZ-A; for Te Aroha, see Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 671, issued 25 November 1880, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1e; Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 190, 229, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁴² For Thames, see Thames Warden's Court, Register of Miners' Rights 1868-1869, no. 13418, issued 29 October 1868, BACL 14358/2a, ANZ-A; *Thames Guardian and Mining Record*, 31 October 1871, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 7 June 1873, p. 2, 3 September 1877, p. 3; for Ohinemuri, see Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Ohinemuri Claims 1875, folios 20, 330, BBAV 11568/1a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 13 May 1875, p. 329.

rush, he was an owner of the Lucky Hit.¹⁴³ Madden's sense of humour was reflected in his name for the mine he worked in the later 1880s: Madden's Folly.¹⁴⁴ The *Te Aroha Mail* described Madden as

an old hand on the field, having been here before the opening, and his faith in the auriferous nature of the hill seems never to have left him. Obtaining excellent dish prospects in the ground in question, he followed the lode downwards, and this led to the opening up of a rich gold-bearing reef, from which some splendid stone was obtained.¹⁴⁵

At the end of September, they found a leader 'just below where the gold was discovered at the first rush. They obtained about 10lb of magnificent specimens far richer than anything hitherto found'. They had known where to search, for Purvis had found good gold there 18 months previously but been unable to develop his discovery because the ground was still owned by the Aroha Company.¹⁴⁶

The discoverers deemed it prudent to open the lode at a lower level, and to secure the ground around before making known the discovery. This object having been attained in the pegging out of three five-acre leases, called Golden Hill, Nos. 1, 2, and 3, a fine dish of specimens was exhibited in the township ... and left on view at the request of several gentlemen, who wished the discovery to be known. The stone was much admired for its richness, but some distrust was felt as to the genuineness of the discovery, owing to the secrecy maintained by the discoverers. Several parties proceeded to the hill, and endeavored to see for themselves the lode from which such rich stone was obtained, but none was visible. In consequence of this, our reporter proceeded to the locality yesterday, the prospectors having previously consented to show him the lode. The ground was found to be carefully covered with mullock from surface, but after this had been removed a nice compact reef was visible, and the first stone broken off showed rich flaky gold in abundance running through the quartz, leaving an equally rich show in the reef. The piece

¹⁴³ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 906, issued 25 November 1880, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1b; Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 186, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁴⁴ *Auckland Weekly News*, 12 June 1886, p. 22; *Te Aroha News*, 3 July 1886, p. 3, 24 August 1889, p. 2.

¹⁴⁵ *Te Aroha Mail*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 25 September 1882, p. 3.

¹⁴⁶ *Waikato Times*, 3 October 1882, p. 3.

broken off was about six inches by two, and showed gold all over it. The lode was about six inches wide where uncovered, but was opening out much larger, and had been cut in a working about 10 feet lower down, where the lode showed even richer than above. The stone taken out would average about an ounce to the pound.

The find was thought to be about 100 feet from the Bonanza, but when surveyors found it to be within the Bonanza's ground they were allowed to keep the quartz broken out.¹⁴⁷ Within a couple of days, they found 'very good stone' in another good reef within their own ground, close to the Prospectors' workings.¹⁴⁸ By mid-October, in Golden Hill No. 1 they had cut

three more leaders running into the main reef, all carrying rich gold. They have shut up this drive for the present, and last week commenced to drive about 40 feet lower with the assistance of two men from the Bonanza Company. They have now got the gold in the lower drive, and as rich, if not richer than above, and the reef is much thicker.... This is not the same leader which the old prospectors were working about 18 months ago, it is supposed, but it is expected that their leader will run into this one. There is every indication of this turning out a very rich reef, for the country in which it is embedded is a sandstone, as was the richest deposits at the Thames.¹⁴⁹

Because of public interest, specimens were exhibited in Hamilton.¹⁵⁰ Work was 'vigorously pushed on', with 'a little gold' seen 'frequently'.¹⁵¹ In December, three-quarters of a ton of ordinary, not picked, stone from a 'good looking reef' was treated in Thames for a return of 8oz 10dwt melted gold. The *New Zealand Herald* believed this to be 'the most satisfactory crushing ever brought from Te Aroha'.¹⁵² A load of 'general dirt' produced a good return in February 1883. 'The proprietors having now pretty well proved the large block lying between where the two parcels were obtained to be payable, intend to drive on the leader from a low level which will give them 60 feet of backs', and to erect a shoot and hopper.¹⁵³ In July, they claimed to

¹⁴⁷ *Te Aroha Mail*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 25 September 1882, p. 3.

¹⁴⁸ *Thames Star*, 28 September 1882, p. 2, 4 October 1882, p. 2.

¹⁴⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 19 October 1882, p. 2.

¹⁵⁰ *Waikato Times*, 19 October 1882, p. 2.

¹⁵¹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 20 October 1883, p. 9.

¹⁵² *New Zealand Herald*, 18 December 1882, p. 3.

¹⁵³ *Thames Star*, 5 February 1883, p. 2.

have found 'some very rich stone' when opening up the Prospectors' lower drive, prompting an offer of a fifteenth interest for £15.¹⁵⁴ Three tons were treated in Thames at the beginning of September for a yield of 6oz 3dwt melted gold. By then the Golden Hill Company¹⁵⁵ had been floated to work the Golden Hill and Bonanza, the latter being acquired for £30,¹⁵⁶ with a very modest working capital of £150 and Madden as manager.¹⁵⁷

In early October, 'some few pounds of very good stone' were obtained 'a short distance from the workings in the old Prospectors' Claim'.¹⁵⁸ The following month, eight to ten pounds of 'very good specimens of rich gold-bearing quartz' were displayed in a sharebroker's office in Auckland. Some contained 'loose, leafy gold' while others were 'thickly impregnated with fine gold'.¹⁵⁹ By late November, two men driving on the old lode had reached good sandstone country showing gold.¹⁶⁰ In January 1884, one ton produced 11 ounces.¹⁶¹ By February, explorations had revealed that the original owners had confined their mining 'to a bifurcation of the main lode. Had the Prospectors driven from the bottom of the winze ... they could hardly have avoided striking the Golden Hill main lode'.¹⁶² In that month Henry Thornton Rowe, a civil engineer and surveyor who had been involved in Thames mining,¹⁶³ became supervisor; previously he had prospected at Tui and managed mines at Waiorongomai.¹⁶⁴ 'From his long knowledge of the

¹⁵⁴ *Waikato Times*, 19 July 1883, p. 3, 21 August 1883, p. 2.

¹⁵⁵ See paper on this company.

¹⁵⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 1 September 1883, p. 2.

¹⁵⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 8 September 1883, p. 2.

¹⁵⁸ *Te Aroha Correspondent*, *Thames Star*, 4 October 1883, p. 2.

¹⁵⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, 2 November 1883, p. 4; see also *Thames Advertiser*, 3 November 1883, p. 3.

¹⁶⁰ *Waikato Times*, 22 November 1883, p. 2.

¹⁶¹ *Te Aroha News*, 12 January 1884, p. 2.

¹⁶² *Te Aroha News*, 9 February 1884, p. 2.

¹⁶³ For example, Applications for Land Grants 1889-1892, no. 657, Lands and Survey Department, LS 66/7, ANZ-W; Thames Warden's Court, Thames Claims Register 1868-1869, no. 1343, BACL 14397/3a, ANZ-A; *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 November 1871, p. 4, 22 February 1873, p. 7, 3 January 1874, p. 9, 10 December 1881, p. 9; *Thames Advertiser*, 20 October 1876, p. 2, 7 March 1881, p. 3.

¹⁶⁴ Auckland Land Board Minute Book 1882-1884, Minutes of Meetings of 15 March 1883, p. 44, 12 April 1883, p. 64, BAAZ 4019, 12/1, ANZ-A; *Thames Star*, 17 December 1883, p.

ground' he was 'confident' that Werahiko's first discovery would, 'by persevering, turn out to be not far behind the best mine' in the district.¹⁶⁵ However, nothing further was to be heard of this mine, and in March 1885 the claims were forfeited for non-working.¹⁶⁶

THE LAST PROSPECTING IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Despite this outcome, during 1885 the Aroha Mining and Prospecting Association tested samples of 'a very encouraging show of precious metal', with 'rich stone' giving 'satisfactory' yields.¹⁶⁷ In August it confined its operations to the 'old prospectors' leader', and tested this and other reefs in the original claim for silver, initially with promising results.¹⁶⁸ And then silence until early in the twentieth century, when Murphy decided to find the elusive mother lode by driving a low level crosscut.¹⁶⁹

SEEKING A NON-EXISTANT LODE

Not understanding the geology, the miners had driven tunnels and sunk a winze almost blindly, assuming a lode must be hidden somewhere. As a later mining inspector wrote, the 'very good show of gold on the surface' proved 'to be only a portion of a reef in a large land slip'.¹⁷⁰ A geologist described it as 'merely a fragment in "slip country" - *i.e.*, fault

2; *Waikato Times*, 22 December 1883, p. 2; advertisement, *Te Aroha News*, 6 January 1884, p. 1.

¹⁶⁵ *Auckland Weekly News*, 2 February 1884, p. 13, 26 January 1884, p. 10.

¹⁶⁶ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 122, 126, 129, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A,

¹⁶⁷ *Waikato Times*, 28 April 1885, p. 3, 9 June 1885, p. 2, 18 July 1885, p. 3, 13 August 1885, p. 4, 27 August 1885, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 2 May 1885, p. 2, 20 June 1885, p. 2.

¹⁶⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 22 August 1885, p. 3, 29 August 1885, p. 3.

¹⁶⁹ See paper on Denis Murphy.

¹⁷⁰ Matthew Paul to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 17 July 1909, Inspector of Mines, Waihi, BBDO A902, S79, ANZ-A.

crush'.¹⁷¹ McCombie wrote that there was 'no continuity about the patch of rich ore'.

Vertically it rested on a hard diorite rock, which was not favourable to the existence of payable ore bodies. Horizontally, it had no extension either north or south. Briefly, it was an oblong lense of ore, comprising about eighty tons throughout which gold was freely distributed. Amongst the assembled gold diggers were a good many men with previous experience on all the principal goldfields of the world, and none of them had ever seen, heard, or read of a similar occurrence.

With three others, McCombie had spent weeks further up the hillside above Werahiko's find 'without finding an atom of payable ore', and where his gold came from was 'a problem still unsolved'.¹⁷² Such was the disappointment that one man who settled in Te Aroha in 1880, carpenter George Devey,¹⁷³ in 1927 expressed doubts that the find that had led him to join the 1880 rush had been genuine.¹⁷⁴

CONCLUSION

The discovery of gold that led to the opening of the Te Aroha goldfield turned out to be illusory, for although a claim was granted to the original prospectors, who, under expert guidance, did their best to find a reef rather than just stray auriferous boulders, no such reef existed. This was a major disappointment, and had the non-existence of this reef been known earlier the field might not have been proclaimed. Only the discovery of much better gold, and much more of it, at Waiorongomai saved it from being totally abandoned.

Appendix

¹⁷¹ John Henderson, assisted by J.A. Bartrum, *The Geology of the Aroha Subdivision, Hauraki, New Zealand: Geological Survey Bulletin No. 16 (New Series)* (Wellington, 1913), p. 13.

¹⁷² John McCombie, 'Random Recollections: Te Aroha Goldfield', *Auckland Star*, 7 November 1925, p. 21.

¹⁷³ See paper on George Devey and his family.

¹⁷⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 12 October 1927, Supplement, p. 1.

Figure 1: Grant of Prospectors' Claim to Adam Porter, John McSweeney, and Hone Werahiko, 25 November 1880, Te Aroha Warden's Court, Licensed Holdings Grant Book 1880-1882, appended to front of volume, BBAV 11549/1a, ANZ-A [Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Auckland Regional Office]; used with permission.

Figure 2: Plan of Prospectors' Claim, Te Aroha Warden's Court, Licensed Holdings Grant Book 1880-1882, appended to front of volume, BBAV 11549/1a, ANZ-A [Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Auckland Regional Office]; used with permission.

Know all men that I Harry Kerrick
 Warden of the Court constituted for the Hauraki Gold Mining District, do hereby
 grant unto Adam Pater, John M. Sweeney
and Hone Merahiko their executors
administrators and assigns

sole and exclusive License and authority to enter upon and occupy the land
 described in the Schedule hereto, and delineated on the plan in the
margin for the purpose of Mining for Gold, and erecting Machinery
 and constructing works connected therewith, and doing all lawful acts incidental or
 conducive thereto: To hold the said Land License and authority for the term of

Twenty one years subject to the
 conditions and provisions of "The Gold Mining Districts Act 1873," and to
 the same granted to the said parties as
Prospectors the respective shares in their claims
being Hone Merahiko four men's ground Adam
Pater three men's ground and John M.
Sweeney two men's ground

paying therefor yearly in advance the Sum of £ 9-0-0 on the
25th day of November in every year.

In witness whereof I have hereunto subscribed my name, and affixed the seal
 of the Warden's Court of the Hauraki Gold Mining District this 25th
 day of November 1880

Harry Kerrick
 Warden.

Signed by the said Harry Kerrick
 and the seal of the Warden's Court affixed
 in the presence of

SCHEDULE.
 DESCRIPTION OF LAND.

All that piece or parcel of land situated
 on that portion of the Te Oroha mountain
 known as the Prospectors Spur in the
 Te Oroha Gold Mining District containing
 three acres more or less contained within
 straight-lines drawn from angle to
 the manner delineated on the plan
 in the margin hereof at each and
 every angle of which is erected a post
 marked with the distinguishing mark
H.

Te Atoka

(Prospectors)

Registrar.

18

day of

Registered

