

THE DISCOVERY OF THE WAIORONGOMAI GOLDFIELD IN
1881

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Abstract: *The first reports of gold being found in the vicinity of the Waiorongomai Stream were made in early November 1880, and after the opening of the goldfield a small rush took place to this part of the mountain. The first claims were pegged out in December and the following January, encouraged by some gold being found, but few claims were registered, for most prospectors were quickly disappointed. Prospecting was difficult because of the rugged terrain and heavy bush, and interest quickly faded.*

Then, in early October, Hone Werahiko announced his latest and best find and provided samples of payable ore taken from a large reef. Immense excitement ensued, as this was the first payable reef to be found, and after Werahiko led miners on an exhausting trip to his 'New Find' a rush set in and many claims were pegged out. The first official to inspect the ground anticipated that the reefs could be easily worked, once an access track was constructed. The small settlement of Te Aroha was revived because a real goldfield had been found, at last.

FIRST REPORTS OF DISCOVERIES

One month before the opening of the Te Aroha goldfield on 25 November 1880, a rumour spread that gold had been found in the Thames High School Endowment, adjacent to the Waiorongomai Stream.¹ Nearly two weeks later, the Thames evening newspaper stated that good gold had been found there.² This report provoked the wrath of the Te Aroha correspondent of its morning rival, who had spent a few days prospecting. Despite having 'obtained a few colours of gold by panning off', he considered the story that 'anything of a payable nature' had been discovered was 'utterly false and without the slightest foundation'. Most of the reserve was, 'in mining parlance, "too hard for gold to live in"'.³

At least one prospector, John Dixon, or Dickson,⁴ had faith in the area, and on opening day there was the smallest of rushes to Waiorongomai:

¹ Paeroa Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 27 October 1880, p. 3.

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

³ Fraterville Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 12 November 1880, p. 3.

⁴ See *Thames Advertiser*, 19 November 1880, p. 3; *Thames Electoral Roll, 1878*, p. 20.

Some little excitement was caused in the township at the beginning of the week by the announcement to the Warden by Mr Dixon, an old Te Aroha prospector, that he had discovered a payable reef two or three miles from the burnt spur.... Mr Dixon offered to show Mr [Harry] Kenrick⁵ the lode he had found if he (the Warden) would grant him a claim of fifteen men's ground in extent. This Mr Kenrick declined to do; but agreed that if the show was anything like what Dixon represented it to be he would grant him protection for the number of men he had working with him. This condition did not suit Dixon, who went away saying that he would bide his time. In the course of conversation with a gentleman yesterday, he informed me that Dixon had taken out a party to peg a claim, but could not show them a colour of gold in the reef, and in consequence the men had returned.⁶

Not all these men returned, and two days after the opening Dixon pegged out four men's ground as the Lone Star with William Snodgrass, John Casey, and Robert Kelly Cannell. Not being sure of the name of the area, they recorded it as both Wairongini Creek and Wairongomai.⁷ Snodgrass, a young man who had participated in the rush, was an owner of one claim and assisted to peg out another.⁸ Casey, who had also participated in the rush, was an owner of five claims, and for a time was a member of the Waitoa Prospecting Association that tested the hillside behind Te Aroha.⁹ Cannell, a blacksmith,¹⁰ had arrived at Te Aroha shortly after the rush, becoming an owner of one claim and later pegging out another.¹¹ Nobody else recorded having marked out ground, despite the

⁵ See paper on his life.

⁶ Own Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 26 November 1880, p. 3.

⁷ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Notices of Marking Out Claims 1880, no. 43, BBAV 11557/1a, ANZ-A.

⁸ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 355, issued 25 November 1880, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1a; Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 224, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; Warden's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 December 1881, p. 3.

⁹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 493, issued 25 November 1880, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1c; Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 155, 160, 176, 217, 218, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Star*, 7 January 1881, p. 2.

¹⁰ See *New Zealand Gazette*, 13 July 1882, p. 961; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 6 August 1892, p. 8.

¹¹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 554, issued 29 November 1880, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880-1888, BBAV 11533/1d; Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 224, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Star*, 15 January 1881, p. 2.

statement in the *Thames Star* that ‘many claims have been pegged off on the school reserve, and it is reported that a very rich discovery will be announced to the Warden in a day or so’.¹²

In late November, John McCombie¹³ reported in detail on this portion of the field:

An examination of the whole district ... has led those acquainted with gold-mining, and especially quartz mining, to express the opinion that ultimately the best portion of the field will be found to lie eastward of the mountain along the range at the back of the Thames High School reserve. The country in this direction has all the characteristics of gold-bearing ground. Several large lodes have been found in this locality, and good prospects of gold have been washed out of the creeks at various times. So general is the opinion that the main portion of the golden run will extend in this direction that Warden Kenrick has advised the Government not to erect any permanent buildings at Morgantown [Te Aroha] at present, but to await the further development of the field before going to any great expense.¹⁴

At the beginning of December, ‘James Liddell,¹⁵ the well-known Thames and Ohinemuri prospector, with others, have been prospecting out towards Wairakau’, the next stream upriver from Waiorongomai, and reported having found ‘several likely looking lodes’.¹⁶ Perhaps they did, but they did not mark out any claims, and Liddell (who had participated in the Te Aroha rush),¹⁷ like Dixon, soon left the district.

THE FIRST CLAIMS

¹² Pigeongrams, *Thames Star*, 27 November 1880, p. 2.

¹³ See paper on Billy Nicholl.

¹⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 29 November 1880, p. 6.

¹⁵ See Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 18 April 1876, p. 4, 8 May 1876, p. 3, 7 October 1876, p. 3, 18 September 1885, p. 3, 27 September 1887, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 25 July 1895, p. 3.

¹⁶ *Te Aroha Miner*, 2 December 1880, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 3 December 1880, p. 3.

¹⁷ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Miner’s Right no. 479, issued 25 November 1880, Miner’s Right Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1c, ANZ-A.

The only other report about the area published in December was of party pegging out the Young Naval at 'Wairongomai Creek'.¹⁸ On 17 January, William McLear or McClear, formerly a Thames miner,¹⁹ who for several years had lived with Ngati Rahiri,²⁰ pegged out the Mint on the High School reserve, two and a half miles south of the Prospectors', and the Last Hope, 'about three miles from [the] prospectors in [a] southerly direction on creek name unknown surrounded by unoccupied ground'.²¹ He had pegged out both for other prospectors.²² Also on 17 January, 15 Maori marked off the Taute, near the Last Hope, at Kohaturahirahi, recorded as Kohatu Rahi Rahi,²³ meaning a very large thin rock,²⁴ an appropriate name for the immense quartz outcrop high above the western entrance to the valley. Two more claims at Kohaturahirahi, the Rupi (adjoining the Mint) and the Miranda, were pegged out two days later by Maori parties.²⁵

On 20 January, the *Te Aroha Miner* reported rumours two days previously of

a rich discovery made some distance to the south of the township. We were shown a piece of stone which it was asserted had been taken from a reef in the new locality, and it is certainly the richest specimen stone we have yet seen here. The quartz is the description usually met with in this vicinity. Some color was given to the statements by a claim of fifteen men's ground being pegged off by McLear and party. Yesterday morning quite a small rush took place to the locality of the reported find, and two or three large areas have been pegged out.... During yesterday a

¹⁸ *Te Aroha Miner*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 17 December 1880, p. 2.

¹⁹ See Thames Warden's Court, Register of Deeds 1869, folio 498, BACL 14417/3a; Thames Claims Register 1869, no. 1602, BACL 14397/4a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 2 August 1875, p. 3.

²⁰ See paper on 'Pakeha Bill': William John McClear'.

²¹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Notices of Marking Out Claims 1881, nos. 160, 159, BBAV 11557/1b, ANZ-A.

²² Te Aroha Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 22 January 1881, p. 5; *Thames Advertiser*, 22 January 1881, p. 3; *Te Aroha Miner*, 29 January, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 1 February 1881, p. 2.

²³ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Notices of Marking Out Claims 1881, no. 162, BBAV 11557/1b, ANZ-A.

²⁴ Tom Roa (University of Waikato) to Philip Hart, 16 September 1897, email.

²⁵ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Notices of Marking Out Claims 1881, nos. 163, 164, BBAV 11557/1b, ANZ-A; Te Aroha Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 22 January 1881, p. 5.

number of outsiders proceeded to the locality but were unable to glean any information respecting the finds, and indeed the whole affair is wrapt up in an unsatisfactory halo of mystery and uncertainty. We would warn our readers against placing any faith in the rumors going round till something definite and tangible is to hand.²⁶

The *Thames Advertiser* revealed that Snodgrass and party, all experienced Ohinemuri miners, had created the ‘excitement’ by showing ‘a splendid piece of golden stone, weighing about a pound. The precious metal is diffused throughout the quartz and the specimen is the best that I have seen on the field - being even better than the richest of those obtained from the Prospectors’ claim’. This ‘specimen was taken from a reef that they have found toward the Wairakau, and that they have pegged off a claim on the supposed course of the lode. Beyond this, I am able to ascertain nothing, as the shareholders appear to be reticent regarding their discovery’.²⁷ As they did not register their claim, the only ground to be formally registered was the Maori-owned Taute.²⁸ The day after the specimen was displayed, ‘a large number of persons’ visited the area where it had been found, and because of rumours of ‘two good “finds” ’ being made within a week, ‘about a score of claims have been taken up between the two places’.²⁹ None were registered, and all were abandoned as quickly as they had been marked out.

Amongst those who struggled up the steep hillside to inspect Snodgrass’ find, near the claims pegged out by McLear and the Maori prospectors, was the *Thames Advertiser* correspondent:

On arrival there we found that no work was going on in the claim, some of the prospectors being down in the town, whilst the others were engaged in cutting timber for the tunnels. The claim has been named the Orient, and is supposed to contain fifteen men’s ground, but one of the men informs me that it is probable there are not more than ten, the pegs having been put in so hurriedly that the matter of measurement was not looked at at the time. Three tunnels are being put into the hillside, and each is being driven ten or twelve feet, through first-class sandstone country. In the upper one the lode, from which the specimen picked up on

²⁶ *Te Aroha Miner*, 20 January 1881, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 21 January 1881, p. 3.

²⁷ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 20 January 1881, p. 3.

²⁸ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 219, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

²⁹ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 21 January 1881, p. 3.

the surface is supposed to have originally come, has been tapped, and is without doubt a promising looking body of quartz; but not a colour of gold has, so far, been seen in it, although one of the shareholders informs me that nice dish prospects can be obtained from it. It must be remembered, however, that only the footwall has been reached, and until the hanging-wall is exposed the real value of the lode cannot be known. In the intermediate and low level drive the reef has not yet been cut.

‘I was disappointed with what I saw, as I was led to believe before I started for the claim that I should see something worthwhile walking six miles’ (there and back), but ‘saw nothing better than can be seen half a miles from the township’. He later had a conversation with Snodgrass, who

denied that he or any of his mates had said or done anything to cause the recent rush to the locality where they are working. They simply picked up a piece of golden stone on the surface, and in consequence pegged out a claim, which they are determined to give a fair trial, believing that the lode from which the specimen in question came from exists in some portion of the ground. They believe the reef which has been cut in the three tunnels will be found to junction with the buck reef, which is of enormous size, being over 100 feet wide.³⁰

According to another reporter, a ‘considerable number of men went prospecting’ near the find, ‘some of whom are still out, but the majority have returned disappointed, pronouncing the whole affair to be a sell’.³¹

McCombie had observed, at an ‘early hour’ of the morning, ‘quite a number of natives and Europeans’ wending their way to the new find. When he followed them, on 19 January, he was impressed, his first report being headlined ‘An Extraordinary Reef’.³² Two days later, an expanded version described his inspection of Buck Rock and the surrounding area:

I started yesterday morning in company with two others for the scene of the new rush. After an hour’s sharp walking, we reached the prospectors’ camp, where we were informed that if we wanted to visit the prospectors’ claim there was still a two hours’ up-hill journey before us, which assertion proved to be only too true. From this point the track leads up and over a spur, which

³⁰ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 22 January 1881, p. 3.

³¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 22 January 1881, p. 2.

³² Te Aroha Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 22 January 1881, p. 5.

towards the top was so precipitous that we were obliged to cling like so many parasites, to its rugged face. In due course, we reached the summit, where we paused to gaze upon the wonders of nature. From here we looked down into a deep gorge through which flows the Waiorongomai stream, and on every hand was a charming view of rocky buttresses and thickly wooded heights. We now turned our attention to the object of our visit, namely, to find the prospectors' whereabouts - no easy matter - considering that we were about to enter the heart of a dense forest, seemingly impenetrable to man or beast, with no guide other than that afforded by a scarcely perceptible blazed line, which led up a steep spur, bearing off at an angle to the one we had just traversed. Upon gaining the summit of this spur, we were confronted by the outcrop of an immense reef, which the natives term "the mother of reefs," and it undoubtedly is the mother lode of this region. We spent the best part of an hour in examining this conglomerate mass of basalt quartz and sandstone. It outcrops for a distance of fully one and a-half miles from where it rises, amid the hills, to where it dips on the plains. It stands up in places to a height of 200 feet above the surface, towering proudly above the neighbouring hills and terraces. At several points along its wall, from wall to wall, it would measure fully 150 feet, covering a surface area that would make a tidy farm for a small "cockatoo" [small farmer]. Its general course is north and south, with an irregular underlie. But to resume. On the eastern side of the big reef we found the prospectors, who were busily engaged in cutting the boundary lines of that claim, which was pegged out on a line of reef running at an acute angle to and junctioning with the parent lode. There were about one dozen miners assembled here, and one of them pointed out to us the prospectors' workings, consisting of three tunnels, varying from ten to twenty feet in length. In one of these the reef has been intersected, and it is about four feet in thickness. The stone is of a bluish white in colour, interspersed with black seams about the eighth of an inch in thickness, and is thickly impregnated with good mineral indications. I made a careful examination of the stone, and failed to detect a colour of gold, but was favourably impressed with the appearance and general character of the reef, as well as with the belt of country through which it is running. In the other two tunnels several lodes have been intersected, all of which have a kindly appearance. There is an extensive quartz field here, and a large area of ground has been marked off, several sections of which are being systematically prospected by men who are practically acquainted with the work they have in hand, and who are quite sanguine as to the results.

We now retraced our steps and upon reaching the township I had a conversation with one of the prospectors (Snodgrass), who was not on the ground at the time of my visit, in the course of which

he said that neither himself nor his mates had done or said anything to cause a rush, and of course could not be held responsible for the actions of those who had quartz on the brain. He believed the specimens exhibited in the township formed, at one time, part and parcel of the reef which he had pegged in, because the specimen was found on the surface immediately below its line. He had tested the reef at different points for a considerable distance along its line, and mortar prospects were obtainable at every point; but so far no gold visible to the naked eye was seen. He intends giving the reef a fair trial, and believes that he will ultimately find the exact spot from which the specimen broke away.³³

As Snodgrass failed to find it, his claim was not registered, and little more was heard about this area over the succeeding months. By October if not before, he was mining at Waitekauri,³⁴ and would never return.

FADING INTEREST

On 3 February, Aubin Ahier, a Pirongia storekeeper,³⁵ pegged out the Pretty Jane, 'bounded by the Waihorongomai Creek on the South and East, on the North and West by Unoccupied Ground';³⁶ it was never heard of again. In mid-March, Maori prospectors marked out Buck Reef,³⁷ not an encouraging name, for a 'buck' reef was valueless. It was registered by its 15 Maori owners on 6 April and would become the Three Brothers in October.³⁸ In mid-April, a local correspondent reported that 'a number of Maoris and two Europeans' were 'working or dabbling about claims they

³³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 24 January 1881, p. 6.

³⁴ *Thames Star*, Warden's Court, 14 October 1881, p. 2, 28 October 1881, p. 3.

³⁵ *Waikato Times*, 30 September 1884, p. 3; obituary of Julia Ahier, *Rodney and Otamatea Times*, 15 July 1964, pagination not known, in obituaries held in Alexander Turnbull Library.

³⁶ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Notices of Pegging Out Claims 1881, no. 184, BBAV 11557/1b, ANZ-A.

³⁷ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Notices of Marking Out Claims 1881, no. 204 [19 March], BBAV 11557/1b, ANZ-A.

³⁸ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 226, 231, BBAV 11567/1a; see also Notices of Marking Out Claims 1881, nos. 221, 226, BBAV 11557/1b, ANZ-A.

have taken up there. I have not heard what success they have met with'.³⁹ In June, the *Waikato Times* correspondent reported that 'nothing definite' was yet known of 'the reported wonderful find of a few weeks back, but it is pretty generally understood that the Buck reef is the spot alluded to, and that it is a remarkably promising neighbourhood of which something more will be heard before very long'.⁴⁰ In mid-July, he wrote that 'the Buck reef' was 'trying to get up a sensation, and tales come in of great finds, but they all want the one great point of a good story - interest'.⁴¹ Clearly even this ever-sanguine correspondent did not believe what he was told. There was no further mention of Waiorongomai until early October, either in the press or in the warden's office files.

HONE WERAHIKO'S GREATEST DISCOVERY

Over winter, Hone Werahiko⁴² patiently followed the main reef from Buck Rock, or Kohaturahirahi, towards the main range. As Kenrick explained in his annual report of April 1882, his original discovery had been on the western slopes of the mountain. 'Strange to say, little or no prospecting was done on the eastern slope', perhaps because of 'the heavy timber and precipitous nature of the country', until Werahiko 'thoroughly prospected the valley'.⁴³

On 6 October, the Thames evening newspaper reported that Werahiko, 'the well-known native prospector, has arrived here from Te Aroha, and states he has found a rich gold-bearing reef on the High School Reserve. He has some of the stone with him, and it shows gold freely'.⁴⁴ The following morning, the *Thames Advertiser* wrote that the discovery would 'direct attention once more to that forsaken locality, and if it should turn out that the quartz brought down is from a promising reef, as indicated, confidence will soon be restored'. Previously 'the great drawback' was 'the absence of such a reef, although encouraging stone was not wanting'. Large pieces of stone displayed at Thames by Werahiko were inspected by a 'large number

³⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 14 April 1881, p. 3.

⁴⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 18 June 1881, p. 2.

⁴¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 14 July 1881, p. 3.

⁴² See paper on his life.

⁴³ Harry Kenrick to Under-Secretary, Gold Fields, 18 April 1882, *AJHR*, 1882, H-19, p. 11.

⁴⁴ *Thames Star*, 6 October 1881, p. 2.

of mining experts, who pronounced the stone to be of excellent quality'.⁴⁵ The *Waikato Times* was shown 'some very fine specimens' showing gold freely, and had no doubt that should these 'prove to be a fair criterion of the whole there is little doubt that brighter days will dawn upon Te Aroha'.⁴⁶ A parcel of ore given to Kenrick produced 2oz 7dwt per ton, the gold being exceedingly fine and not mixed with base metals.⁴⁷ Another report stated that the stone 'was seen by a number of mining experts, who agreed that if the reef was as good as sample, it would be the salvation of Te Aroha. Some of the stone was tested in the Bank of New Zealand, and the Union Bank, and was found to average 3oz to the ton'.⁴⁸

ANOTHER BIG RUSH

The news prompted 'quite a rush' from Thames and Ohinemuri, although Werahiko would not reveal the site of his discovery until he obtained a prospector's claim. On Sunday, 9 October, he took the first party to inspect his find, 'which afforded much satisfaction' and the day after they returned 'a large number' pegged out claims. Within five days of the announcement, claims were pegged out along the reef and two applications were made for water races.⁴⁹ 'Some little excitement was caused in Hamilton' when stone found by two parties on Werahiko's reef was displayed. 'All endeavours to find out the exact spot have failed', but as soon as Werahiko's claim was granted 'there will probably be a larger rush than ever. The stone contains visible gold, and, unlike that found at Te Aroha hitherto, the stone appears as thoroughly saturated with the precious metal, having a solid greenish appearance'.⁵⁰ At Paeroa, the find caused 'great excitement', many believing it would 'turn out to be a good thing'.⁵¹

After the first inspection, a Thames correspondent learnt 'from a reliable source' that Werahiko's discovery was

⁴⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 7 October 1881, p. 3.

⁴⁶ *Waikato Times*, 8 October 1881, p. 2.

⁴⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 11 October 1881, p. 3.

⁴⁸ *Thames Star*, 12 October 1881, p. 2.

⁴⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 11 October 1881, p. 3; *Waikato Times*, 11 October 1881, p. 2.

⁵⁰ Hamilton Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 15 October 1881, p. 9.

⁵¹ *Thames Star*, 12 October 1881, p. 2.

a most important one. The lode is of great size, and can be traced along the outcrop for several miles. On the claim taken up by the prospectors, gold is showing for 30 or 40 feet along the line of the reef. Some parties who have visited the claim exposed gold by merely rubbing off the moss, which had accumulated from exposure to the weather.... The discovery is certainly the most important that has yet been made in the Aroha district.⁵²

A *Thames Star* correspondent gave a vivid description of the first inspection of the find:

Under the invitation of the Prospector, a number of Thames experts agreed to accompany him, to judge by ocular demonstration the correctness of the reported discovery. Starting from Shortland on Saturday morning by steamer, after a slow but pleasant journey, we made Paeroa, where we put up for the night, agreeing to hark away by horse early in the morning. By the time we were mustered on Sunday morning, our cavalcade had been joined by equestrians from the up country, all bent on seeing the new find.

Led by Werahiko, they left Te Aroha accompanied by 'half' its residents and 'commenced a laborious ascent to the new find'.

The only track to Hone's claim is by the top of the mountain and down its eastern side, which means full five hours' walking. To enter into particulars of that awful journey is too much for human nature, the memory of it shall remain green. I heard one of the party express an opinion that he would not undertake the journey again for £50, and he and I are one in sentiment. But there is an end to all things; at last we came to where the gold was found. There is a large blow of stone standing about 40 feet out of the ground, and from 20 to 33 feet thick, running north and south in the direction of Waihi. We examined the reef carefully, and we found gold freely distributed throughout the face. In places moss had grown over the stone; on pulling away the moss, gold was seen. The gold is in spots, all over; indeed, very little stone could be broken off without seeing the precious metal. No work has been done, but claims have been pegged off for miles along the reef. Hone has called his claim the "New Find," and there is every chance that it will prove a rich find.

⁵² Thames Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 15 October 1881, p. 9.

The greatest obstacle was ‘the difficulty of access’, and until a road, ‘with a nice easy gradient’, was made to bring the claims ‘within two hours walk’ of Te Aroha, ‘a thorough prospecting cannot be entered upon’. He noticed several men who would ‘give the place a thorough prospecting’ had returned ‘to try their luck again’.

About seven o’clock our party returned to Morgantown, weary, wet, hungry, and generally miserable, but quite satisfied with the prospects of Werahiko’s find.

To-morrow (Wednesday) the Warden, with several others from the Thames, means to visit the find. I wish them every success and a pleasant journey.⁵³

On the following day, there were ‘ever so many applicants for the surplus ground in Hone’s claim’. The hillside ‘for miles around the new find’ was pegged out, and Thomas Gavin⁵⁴ and party reported finding another gold-bearing reef.⁵⁵ The Te Aroha correspondent of the *Waikato Times* for once did not exaggerate when he headed his article: ‘Rich Find at Te Aroha’. He described ‘a terrible epidemic’ of ‘fever such as diggers generally get when they catch a glimpse of the precious metal. The fever is doing dreadful havoc, and our friends are being carried off by the raging disease. It has made the town once again look like itself’. Although many at Te Aroha did not believe the find was worthwhile, he was not one of them. ‘The reef is an enormous one, and in Johnny’s claim there is to be seen gold in almost every part of it. By good judges it is expected to yield five ounces to the ton, which means a large fortune to the lucky digger’. A battery close to the mines was needed, and he advised those ‘not in funds’ to stay away. ‘We have something worthwhile for those who could afford to spend a few months without immediate return, or for men who can speculate on their own money. Great excitement prevails amongst the business people, and many allotments were taken up to-day’.⁵⁶

⁵³ ‘A Correspondent’, ‘The New Find of Gold at Te Aroha’, *Thames Star*, 12 October 1881, p. 2.

⁵⁴ See paper on his life.

⁵⁵ *Thames Star*, 13 October 1881, p. 2.

⁵⁶ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 13 October 1881, p. 2.

George Wilson, the underviewer at Thames and soon to be the mining inspector at Te Aroha,⁵⁷ on 15 October described the find to Kenrick, who had not attempted the climb:

I have the honor to report having visited the "New Find" or Hone's Claim situated on the eastern slope of Te Aroha mountain about 1200 Feet lower than the Trig station at the top.

The track to the claim is from Morgantown up the bald spur [Whakapipi] and on in the most direct line to the summit of the mountain and from there down a spur leading to the eastward until the claim is reached, the time taken by parties who walk over without a load is from 3 to 4 hours.

Hone's reef is in the line of the "Buck Reef" at the High School Reserve, and crops out at several points along the line the quartz standing up above the surface without any covering and is easily traced along its course.

There are other reefs found running nearly in the same direction, but those have not yet been tried. Quartz crops out for 3 miles or thereabout on the line.

Hone has found gold in the Reef where it crops out on crossing one of the Spurs of the mountain. Very little work has been done as yet to prove it but at 3 different places a considerable distance apart gold in payable quantities can be seen in it. However until it is further opened up the extent of the run cannot be estimated. One thing however I feel confident in saying is that there is every appearance to guide one in anticipating that a portion of the reef on the eastern side will be found to yield payable quartz.

The reef at this part being comparatively clear of the surrounding rock will not be difficult to prospect as drives may be commenced at different levels on the quartz without much trouble.

This reef is about 8 feet in thickness where the gold is but only 2 feet of it has as yet been tried and found to prospect favourably.

The other claims marked out on the line have not been worked by the owners and nothing can be said about the shew in them. Some time must elapse before much prospecting can be done as the country is very rough.

I have taken a careful note of the lay of the country in order to ascertain the best route to open a track to this part of the field.

The track at present used over the mountain can only be fit for a foot road and could not be made a pack track suitable for all purposes.

He outlined his recommended route for a four-mile-long track, which need not be as high as the claims, 'as each one of them could make tracks

⁵⁷ See paper on his life.

leading up from the main one, to suit themselves, and Hone's spur is so steep that shoots might be made to send their quartz down' to it.⁵⁸ Two days later, Kenrick reported that little work had or could be done because of the difficulty of access, the present track via the summit of the mountain requiring everything to be carried on men's backs, and recommended the government provide funds for a road following Wilson's route. All of the 'many experienced men' who had visited concurred that the country was 'very favorable - and the indications good - very different from the hard barren looking country on the Western side of the range. A considerable extent of fresh ground will be opened up by the discovery for prospecting'. He had contacted the county council about a road and hoped that they would at once commence making one. 'Some twenty claims each of fifteen men's ground have been marked out' and seven licensed holdings had been applied for. In enclosing Wilson's report and sketch of the proposed road he stressed that the reef 'bears directly for the Waitekauri reefs. Much weight is attached to this fact here'.⁵⁹

On 14 October, under the headline, 'The New Gold Find: Brilliant Prospects', a *Thames Advertiser* reporter in describing his visit commented that 'Hone deserves all he gets for the energy and perseverance he has shown'.

News from the new find is most encouraging, and if the big reef answers half the sanguine expectations of those who have seen and tested it Te Aroha will yet astonish the public. Notwithstanding the great difficulty experienced in getting at Hone Werahiko's find, several parties taking from 8 in the morning until nearly dusk to arrive on the ground, quite a number have gone through the fatigues of the journey to satisfy themselves. The Warden, who has been in the district, anxious to see the discovery, is waiting until a track can be obtained, which should not be difficult, before venturing out. The rock on which good gold was obtained is about one thousand feet high, and the route taken to arrive at it is past the Trig Station. To arrive at some idea of the altitude of this station even we may quote the words of one who has returned affirming that he could see all over the world from this spot. The reef can be traced for at least two miles, and tends in the direction of Maungatautari. It crosses the

⁵⁸ George Wilson to Harry Kenrick, 15 October 1881, Mines Department, MD 1, 81/1118, ANZ-W.

⁵⁹ Harry Kenrick to Oliver Wakefield, Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 17 October 1881, Mines Department, MD 1, 81/1118, ANZ-W.

Waihou river, and has been blown up with dynamite there by Mr J[osiah] C[lifton] Firth⁶⁰ in order to make a channel for his steamer.⁶¹ The explored part of the reef takes its rise on lot 14 of the High School endowment, an allotment which was reserved from sale owing to the presence of rock, and its unsuitability for agricultural purposes. At this point it rises abruptly at least 150 feet, and is known as the buck reef, from its barren appearance here. That it is highly auriferous, however, has now been fully demonstrated by the discovery of Hone at the point indicated, where quite a good show of gold is left standing. A shot was put into it in presence of our informant which disclosed a better show, and brought down stone containing at least three ounces to the ton. Some of this is now in the hands of the prospector, and has been shown to the Warden, who is thoroughly convinced of the importance of the discovery.

In response to Kenrick's prompting, the council had called tenders to form the first part of a road 'from the mouth of the Waiorongomai Creek to the big reef, and along to the claims pegged off', which was vital to aid prospecting and open up the area to 'the thousands for whom it offers profitable employment'. He listed 12 claims pegged off in addition to the prospectors' (soon to be known as the New Find). A 'cross reef' from which 'good colours' were obtained had already been traced through two of them, and the main reef had been followed 'for a considerable distance' from near the mouth of the valley.⁶² On the same day, this newspaper published an account by its Paeroa correspondent, who wrote that the reef could be

seen above the tops of the trees for miles. It runs direct for the Waihi Plains, and seems a continuation of the same run of reefing country, the stone being very similar. Mr T[homas] Gavin and myself bored a hole two feet deep in the footwall portion of the reef, displacing about 2 tons quartz, which showed gold freely. I should estimate it to be worth about 2 ounces per ton. Leaving gold showing freely, we discovered a nice patch of specimen stone about thirty feet further along. The gold is very fine, but thick in the stone, making it quite a yellow colour.... The ground is pegged off for a distance of about three miles in five acre leases, so there is little chance for outsiders, the holders being all Te Aroha people and natives.⁶³

⁶⁰ See paper on the Battery Company.

⁶¹ See paper on developing the Te Aroha district.

⁶² Own Reporter, 'The Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 14 October 1881, p. 3.

⁶³ Paeroa Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 14 October 1881, p. 3.

'Most encouraging reports' were noted on the following day. One declared that those 'conversant with the district' were convinced that the reef was the 'one from which the loose stones showing gold so freely were obtained in November last, and which led to the opening of the field'. The discovery was 'also believed to be the one referred to as Col. Chesney's find'.⁶⁴ These reputed experts were wrong; the reef was quite separate from the elusive mother lode at Te Aroha, and Colonel Chesney never discovered the Waiorongomai reef.⁶⁵ According to this report, the stone brought to Thames was 'similar to much that was found in the Kuranui Creek district in the early days' of that goldfield, 'the quality of which for the production of gold has not been excelled in large reefs. Those who have explored the reefs in the Waitekauri district also refer to the similarity of the stone discovered in the two places'. Everyone who had seen the Prospector's Claim and the adjacent ground spoke 'in the highest terms of its undoubted richness'.⁶⁶ A report published in Tauranga stated that the reef was

25 to 30 feet thick, and a splendid-looking friable quartz, showing gold freely all through. The lode lies in good country, and will be very easily and cheaply worked, with great conveniences of both timber and water for battery purposes. Practical miners from the Thames and Waihi have expressed an opinion as to its value, and concur in believing it to be a continuation of the noted Waihi reef, having much the same characteristics.

The find was near the big buck reef: 'Those who went out to Dickson and Billy McNeill's rushes will have a lively remembrance of the place'.⁶⁷ (The latter rush, clearly in late 1880, was not referred to elsewhere. Any exploration by William McNeil, a Coromandel miner, would have been brief, for in February 1881 he was prospecting at Tokatea, at Coromandel, in readiness for applying for a claim there.)⁶⁸ The reef was quickly pegged out 'for a long distance, the claims running consecutively on the line of reef, a

⁶⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 15 October 1881, p. 3.

⁶⁵ See paper on rumours of gold at Te Aroha.

⁶⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 15 October 1881, p. 3.

⁶⁷ *Bay of Plenty Times*, 17 October 1881, p. 2.

⁶⁸ Supreme Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 12 January 1878, p. 3; advertisement, *Thames Star*, 1 March 1881, p. 3.

circumstance hitherto unparalleled in the history of this field, but quite common on Australian reefs'.⁶⁹

Although there was little additional prospecting before the end of October, because of disputes over the ownership of some claims,⁷⁰ and there was no access road, many people continued to visit the find and were 'well satisfied with its genuineness'.⁷¹

CONCLUSION

As prospectors could hardly have been unaware of the buck reef rising so prominently near the initial Te Aroha goldfield, it was the scene of a small rush once the field was opened. The usual encouraging stones were found, but without a reef being found in the heavy bush and steep ground at the entrance to the Waiorongomai Valley interest soon faded, and had ended entirely by July. One who had not lost interest was Hone Werahiko, who, with minimal aid, discovered the principal portion goldfield of the Te Aroha Mining District. Excitement over a genuine find with a payable reef was intense, and moves commenced immediately to develop this new discovery, which had revived interest in a despised field.

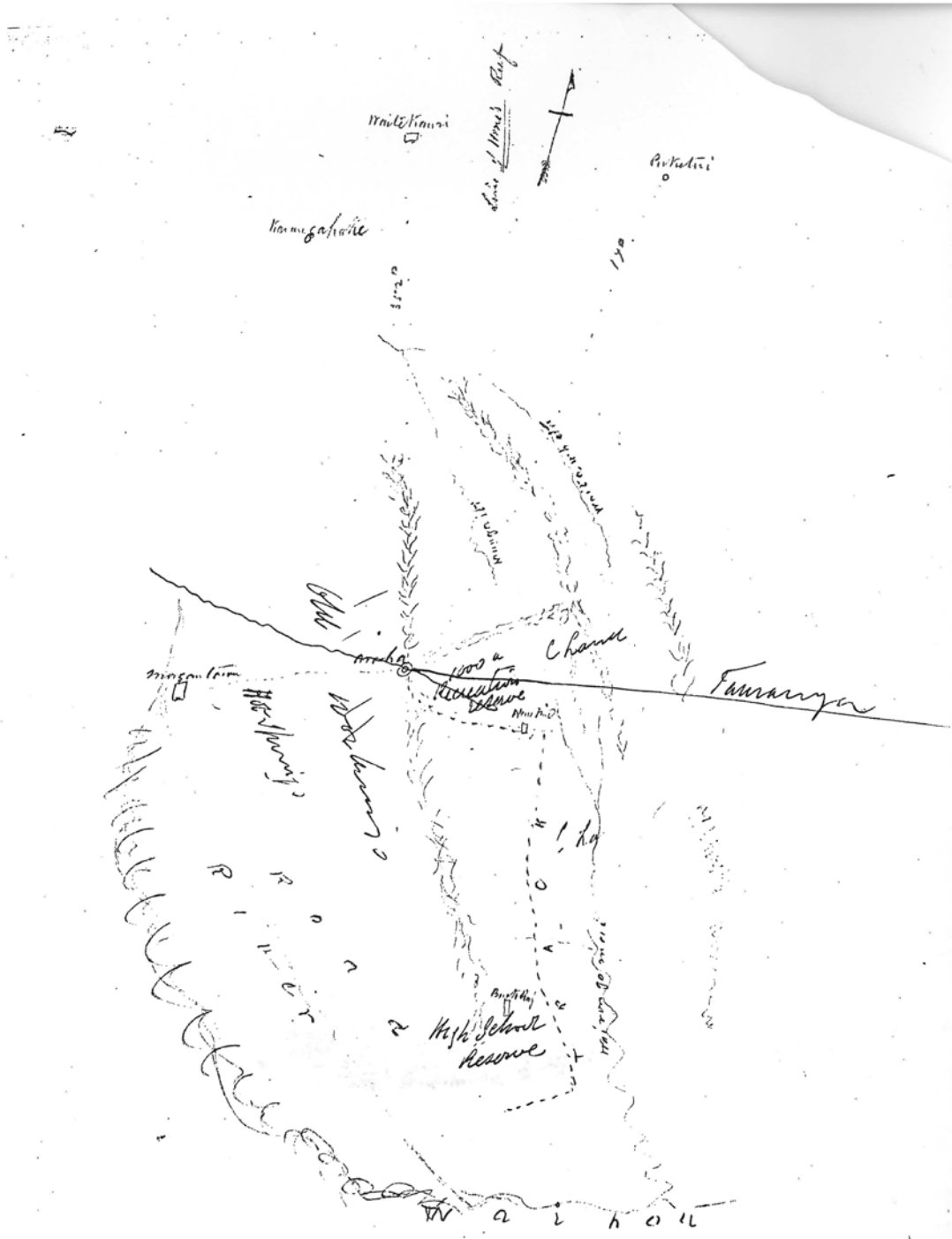
Appendix

Figure 1: George Wilson, sketch showing the route to the New Find from Morgantown, and his recommended track to it up the Waiorongomai Valley, attached to George Wilson to Harry Kenrick, 15 October 1881, Mines Department, MD 1, 81/1118, ANZ-W [Archives New Zealand The Department of Internal Affairs Te Tari Taiwhenua]; used with permission.

⁶⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 25 October 1881, p. 3.

⁷⁰ *Thames Star*, 31 October 1881, p. 2.

⁷¹ *Thames Star*, 21 October 1881, p. 2.



Sketch of Aroha