

BEFORE THE BATTERY STARTED: MINING AT
WAIORONGOMAI FROM LATE 1881 TO LATE 1883

Philip Hart

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

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Contact: prhart1940@gmail.com



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Abstract: *Throughout 1882 and 1883 hopes remained high for developing a successful goldfield, with some encouraging ore being found and experts praising the reefs. Investors were interested in the field, which officials expected to succeed. Competition for ground continued, with some attempts to jump claims.*

Tracks were required to access the mines and to take out parcels for testing, but construction of these was slow, and parts of the upper road were too steep for pack horses and required almost constant repairs. As some men shepherded their claims for speculative purposes, the warden required claims to be worked. Although neither officials nor miners wanted ground locked up and not worked, intensive development was not possible until the tramway and a battery were constructed.

Share trading continued, and by April 1883 17 companies had been formed, often before their claims were adequately prospected. As the battery was readied, more miners returned, with high expectations for the results of the first crushing.

HIGH HOPES

Brett's Auckland Almanac for 1882 declared that Te Aroha had proved 'a rank "duffer" so far, but the fact of small and unpayable quantities of gold being discovered there encourages a little prospecting'. Now the discovery by Hone Werahiko¹ of what was 'supposed to be a palpable reef' had created 'a much better feeling respecting the field'.² A Thames poet, one J., expressed this feeling in a poem, written on 3 January 1882 entitled 'Te Aroha', which included the following verses:

Beneath thy shadow, near the river's side
A village stands, but where in future years,
Will rise a busy city, stretching wide,
With bank and warehouse built along the piers.

Thousands may congregate where now the few,

¹ See paper on his life.

² *Brett's Auckland Almanac, Provincial Handbook, and Strangers' Vade Mecum for 1882*, ed. Thomas W. Leys (Auckland, 1882), p. 89.

Commerce shall grow, and fortunes vast be made.
 Railways on every hand, appear in view,
 Gold, wool and wheat, contributing to trade.³

Such high hopes for the wealth to be created by a goldfield coupled with agriculture were common. In 1882 and 1883, no dissent was recorded to the sanguine expectations of all those who expressed an opinion. Almost all copies of the *Te Aroha Mail* have been destroyed, but one copy that survived, for 10 June 1882, expressed great confidence:

We do not expect large finds, or rich patches, such as marked the early history of the Thames, although even these may occur in isolated instances of great good luck; but those of us who have watched the development of goldfields, will be more content to see steady payable yields from such lodes as we have exposed to view, than even the rich patches of Caledonian fame. The latter benefited a few, and ruined more through reckless investments; but the former must steadily augment the revenue of the Colony, the income of the gold-seeker, and the prosperity of the district around.⁴

In its first editorial, in June 1883, the *Te Aroha News* had ‘no doubt of the richness of the reefs, of their extent, and of the ease with which the stone in bulk could be, we will not say won, but in many instances literally quarried from them’. The goldfield would be unique because

the work of goldmining and the plough of the farmer will go hand-in-hand in making, not a mere township of mines and batteries, all life to-day and deserted to-morrow, but the important centre of a large and growing and settled population.... *Te Aroha* is not simply a mining district. *Plutus* and *Ceres* walk lovingly together.⁵

Reports from local correspondents were uniformly positive, one, for example, stating, in an unintentionally oracular way, that the first returns from the battery ‘will surprise many’.⁶

³ J., ‘*Te Aroha*’, *Thames Advertiser*, 21 January 1882, p. 3.

⁴ *Te Aroha Mail*, 10 June 1882, p. 2.

⁵ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 9 June 1883, p. 2.

⁶ Own Correspondent, ‘*Te Aroha Goldfield*’, *Thames Advertiser*, 16 December 1882, p. 3.

ENCOURAGING PROSPECTS

Local residents were predictably hopeful. In March 1882, private letters received in Auckland stated that the field was 'beginning to look a little livelier, with increased prospects of the district quickly coming to the front'.⁷ The following month, a visitor noted that all he met 'were well satisfied with the prospects'.⁸ Local businessmen, 'most sanguine of the future of the field', were letting contracts for new buildings,⁹ an indication of the genuineness of their expectations.

Visitors were impressed. In February 1882, one returned to Thames with 'encouraging' news of optimistic shareholders and satisfactory progress in 'almost all the mines'.¹⁰ Also in February, a correspondent wrote to the *Waikato Times* 'in glowing terms of the prospects of the field'. He had 'no doubt that before long this will become one of the best gold-producing districts in the colony, if indications go for anything'.¹¹ Later that month, 'a large number of visitors' went to the mines, and were 'all, more or less, impressed with the prospect'.¹² To what extent they were competent to judge was not indicated.

Equally genuine were the anticipations of many claim-owners, whether they intended to work their claims or to sell interests in what they hoped would be valuable properties. At the beginning of January, it was reported that during the holidays 'several advance guard parties, so to speak', of miners had gone 'quietly round the mines for their own satisfaction, and to report generally to their friends. They all agree as to the value of the field'. Shares 'generally' were 'well held, owners in most cases preferring to wait and chance the dividends to selling now at low prices'.¹³ In some claims at least, offers of high prices were declined.¹⁴ In February 1883, a visiting reporter was given 'assurances, and assurances of a very practical nature, of the confidence' felt, even though the field was not

⁷ *Observer*, 25 March 1882, p. 30.

⁸ 'A Trip Up Country', *Thames Advertiser*, 26 April 1882, p. 3.

⁹ *Thames Star*, 3 April 1882, p. 2.

¹⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 20 February 1882, p. 3.

¹¹ Letter from 'a correspondent', *Waikato Times*, 16 February 1882, p. 2.

¹² *Waikato Times*, 28 February 1882, p. 2.

¹³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 5 January 1882, p. 3.

¹⁴ For example, *Te Aroha Mail*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 31 October 1882, p. 2.

properly opened up.¹⁵ It was expected that 200 tons a week would be sent through the battery, and the ‘truly great’ prospects meant that Te Aroha and Waiorongomai would merge into one large town.¹⁶

Investors saw potential benefits for themselves, in January 1882 a local correspondent writing that speculators were ‘beginning to visit ‘for the purpose of helping us, of course’.¹⁷ An Auckland sharebroker, Joseph Newman,¹⁸ ‘believed that the Aroha goldfield would be a field that would afford years and years of employment to a great number of people. He believed the reef mining there would be most extensive’.¹⁹ His belief was genuine, for he was an owner of one claim, and in the next two years became one in ten others and had shares in eight companies,²⁰ probably for resale. As an example of the latter, when he competed with another investor for the Hercules, it was proposed that Newman pay for the lease and the working of the claim until a company was formed. Shares then would be sold ‘to pay all preliminary expenses’ and one-third of the remainder would go to Newman and two-thirds to the rival who was being invited to become a partner.²¹

Late in January 1882, ‘several well known mine managers and experts’ inspected the mines, ‘satisfying themselves as to the value of the country generally’.²² The council decided to make the upper and lower roads after an experienced mining surveyor and an experienced engineer reported that the field would provide ‘profitable and permanent employment to a large number of miners’.²³ A Hamilton correspondent wrote in mid-February that there was ‘strong evidence of an immediate future prosperity’. It was ‘thoroughly’ (but inaccurately) ‘believed by men of practical mining

¹⁵ *Waikato Times*, 20 February 1883, p. 3.

¹⁶ *Waikato Times*, 27 February 1883, p. 3.

¹⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 21 January 1882, p. 9.

¹⁸ See *Auckland Weekly News*, 9 January 1892, p. 19.

¹⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 16 December 1881, p. 3.

²⁰ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 4, 5, 16, 19, 22, 46, 55, 79, 101, 102, 108, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 23 March 1882, pp. 489, 490, 22 June 1882, p. 895, 17 August 1882, p. 1131, 14 September 1882, p. 1264, 2 November 1882, p. 1616, 31 May 1883, p. 722, 6 September 1883, p. 1266.

²¹ J.M. Rowe to J.W. Walker, 7 June 1882, Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Memorials of Registrations of Claims 1882, BBAV 11559/1c, ANZ-A.

²² Thames Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 31 January 1882, p. 2.

²³ *Thames Advertiser*, 7 February 1882, p. 3.

experience that within six weeks time the population of Te Aroha will be trebled'.²⁴ The following month, 'all experienced miners' were 'sanguine' of 'payable returns' coming 'from a very large number of the claims'.²⁵ When the mayor of Ballarat visited in April, he 'expressed his unqualified surprise and delight at the great prospects'. The mayor, 'an experienced and successful speculator in quartz mines in Victoria', was 'so highly impressed with the richness' of the field that he intended 'immediately on his return dispatching two of his sons to Te Aroha to take advantages of the opportunities he feels sure the field will afford'.²⁶ These sons have not been traced as doing any mining.

A self-proclaimed expert, the colourful Captain William Jackson Barry,²⁷ in a lecture in Hamilton in June described Te Aroha as 'the most promising looking goldfield he had ever seen, and he had been at almost every goldfield in Australia, New Zealand, and California. He had taken up a claim there, and would in all probability go there to reside very shortly'. The area he pegged out was at Lipsey's Creek, near the Te Aroha township, where, he told the *Te Aroha Mail*, he had 'seen nothing to excel your network of reefs since I came to the Southern Hemisphere'. He would send samples from his claim and from other mines to friends in Dunedin, and felt 'sure they will be astonished at the richness of a district abounding in such stone' and with reefs of 'such an enormous size'.²⁸ His enthusiasm quickly faded, for although he took a half interest in one claim in the following month,²⁹ he did not register his own claim and did not, as promised, return at the end of his lecturing tour.

One Lee or Leigh, variously 'a well-to-do Victorian miner' or a mining expert from Melbourne, and certainly a representative of Victorian speculators, tested samples from most of the claims during July, 'with very satisfactory results'. Having the 'highest opinion of the results', he was so impressed that he took up some leases for Victorian capitalists before

²⁴ Hamilton Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 18 February 1882, p. 23.

²⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 2 March 1882, p. 2.

²⁶ *Auckland Weekly News*, 22 April 1882, p. 17.

²⁷ See *Observer*, 2 October 1880, p. 20, 8 October 1881, p. 58, 13 March 1886, p. 3, 7 March 1891, p. 17, 14 March 1891, p. 15, 23 September 1905, p. 4, 30 June 1906, p. 4, 21 July 1906, p. 4, 4 July 1907, p. 4.

²⁸ *Waikato Times*, 29 June 1882, p. 2; letter from William Jackson Barry, *Te Aroha Mail*, n.d., reprinted in *Waikato Times*, 1 July 1882, p. 2.

²⁹ *Observer*, 8 July 1882, p. 262.

taking his samples and test results back to Australia. He promised to forward capital as soon as he got back to Victoria.³⁰ The *Observer* warned of the consequences of introducing Victoria capital. ‘Our Auckland people should not allow outsiders to be first on the field; and if they are not quickly up and doing, the sister colonies will be taking away a large share of circulating capital, which, properly speaking, belongs to us’.³¹ In this case, there was no reason for concern, as these claims were never registered, the capital did not arrive, and this man was never heard of again. Others, including some experienced miners, continued to be quoted as having ‘entire confidence in the future of the field’, and commendations by visitors continued to be reported.³²

A member and future chairman of the Piako County Council, William Louis Campbell Williams,³³ inspected in April, accompanied by an experienced miner from Bendigo, in Victoria, and described what he saw in a private letter:

The reefs there are very large and showing gold freely across the face, some of the 5ft reefs show gold at present for 600 feet.... In the Excelsior claim, the owners traced gold down the reef 250 feet, then sank a shaft on the reef 60 feet which showed gold all the way down, every bit of stone giving a prospect when crushed. I visited the principal claims. All had gold, seemingly plenty of it.... I hope it will turn out well, as it will be a good thing for this part of the country.³⁴

Two months later, he wrote that he thought the goldfield would ‘make a Show next Spring’, and supported the council ‘doing all in their power to open up’ the field.³⁵ His enthusiasm did not extend to investing in any claims or companies.

³⁰ *Thames Star*, 19 July 1882, p. 2, 20 July 1882, p. 2, 21 July 1882, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 25 July 1882, p. 2.

³¹ *Observer*, 12 August 1883, p. 342.

³² For example, *Thames Star*, 10 July 1882, p. 2; *Te Aroha Mail*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 31 October 1882, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 8 September 1883, p. 2.

³³ See *New Zealand Herald*, 20 June 1928, p. 12, 30 November 1929, p. 10.

³⁴ W.L.C. Williams to F.D. Rich, 22 April 1882, W.L.C. Williams Letterbook 1880-1884, in private possession [punctuation added].

³⁵ W.L.C. Williams to F.D. Rich, 18 June 1882, W.L.C. Williams Letterbook 1880-1884, in private possession.

OFFICIALS' VIEWS AND ACTIONS

Officials and politicians were also optimistic about the prospects, which was important for obtaining public money to assist the development of roads and tramways. The warden, Harry Kenrick,³⁶ told the Minister of Mines in May 1882 that he felt 'no hesitation in expressing the opinion that the goldfield now opened up will be a permanent one employing a large amount of labour and that a large inland town will spring up at or near the present site'.³⁷ He had made his opinion public in his annual report, dated 18 April, stating that he had 'every belief that a permanent reefing district' had been discovered 'and that the ground taken up at present will prove but a small portion of the gold-bearing country'. He cited 'all experienced miners' as agreeing that all the country between Te Aroha and Waitekauri would be auriferous, but warned miners lacking capital 'to wait the advent of fine weather before committing themselves to prospecting in this heavily-timbered, precipitous, hilly country, where prospecting will always be a work of hardship, and require both time and money'.³⁸

Four Members of Parliament visited in early January and discussed the needs of the district with residents.³⁹ More importantly, the Premier, John Hall, was impressed by his inspection in February, accompanied by Frederick Whitaker (the Attorney General), the latter's son Henry Ernest,⁴⁰ the local Member of Parliament, the warden, the county engineer, two mine managers, and leading local figures. They viewed the main workings before inspecting the locations of the surveyed lower road and the proposed water race and batteries. Hall congratulated the miners 'on their very promising prospect',⁴¹ and sent a telegram to William Rolleston, the Minister of Mines:

³⁶ See paper on his life.

³⁷ Harry Kenrick to Minister of Mines, 5 May 1882, Mines Department, MD 1, 6/14, Part 1, ANZ-W.

³⁸ Harry Kenrick to Under-Secretary, Gold Fields, 18 April 1882, *AJHR*, 1882, H-19, pp. 11-12.

³⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 9 January 1882, p. 3.

⁴⁰ See paper on Harry and Charles: Henry Ernest Whitaker and Charles Stanislaus Stafford.

⁴¹ *Waikato Times*, 25 February 1882, p. 2.

I spent a day at Aroha with Whitaker. Valuable discoveries of reefs are stated to have been made. Whitaker thinks them important. Of course in such questions there is always very great uncertainty but if present prospects are realised success will be great and permanent. I think it very desirable the Minister of Mines should look round that way if he can.⁴²

Rolleston did as requested, in late March visiting the main claims and taking samples as well as receiving a deputation requesting money for tracks.⁴³ He promised Harry Whitaker that he would send financial assistance upon receipt of Kenrick's certificate that the money had been spent.⁴⁴ The quartz he took to Auckland for a trial was valued at one ounce of gold to the ton,⁴⁵ which must have encouraged him to provide support.

Officials were kept very busy. The mining registrar visited fortnightly, and in October 1882 Kenrick informed the under-secretary that for the past nine months his work had been 'unusually heavy'. To assist him, the local clerk of court, who was also a local policeman, had voluntarily worked 'till ten and eleven o'clock at night', for which he should be remunerated; £5 was granted.⁴⁶

COMPETITION FOR GROUND

In November 1881, shortly after the rush to peg out, the main feature of the new goldfield was the jockeying for ownership of the presumed best claims and any adjacent surplus ground. At the first sitting of the warden's court in November,

a number of applications for surplus ground were adjourned until next Court day, at the request of the plaintiffs, although really in the interest of the defendants, as the production of the plans at

⁴² John Hall to William Rolleston, 23 February 1882, Sir John Hall Papers, Folder 299, Telegrams 1882, MS 1784, Alexander Turnbull Library.

⁴³ *Thames Advertiser*, 25 March 1882, p. 3.

⁴⁴ County Clerk to Minister for Public Works, 12 August 1882, Mines Department, MD 1, 82/932, ANZ-W.

⁴⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 30 March 1882, p. 3.

⁴⁶ Harry Kenrick to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 12 October 1882; Under-Secretary, Mines Department, to Harry Kenrick, 1 November 1882, Mines Department, MD 1, 82/1171, ANZ-W.

present might injuriously affect defendants' interests in their respective claims, while it would not benefit the plaintiffs.

In other words, surveys were required to ensure that the regulations defining the area and shape of claims were adhered to. Hone Werahiko was accused of not working the Golden Crown and Diamond Gully claims, but his party was permitted to retain the first on payment of a fine of one shilling; the second had been abandoned. A correspondent wrote that settling these disputes had given 'general satisfaction', and hoped to see 'all the claims vigorously worked'.⁴⁷

A week later, another correspondent wrote that 'the only excitement is caused by the numerous attempts to jump claims'.⁴⁸ Shares in claims adjoining the New Find were in demand, as were the services of surveyors. People were 'daily on the wing, so to speak, up the hill to see for themselves, whether or not the reports re new find are exaggerated. They one and all return fully satisfied'.⁴⁹ One correspondent was

happy to say some of our old friends are showing up again. Your correspondent has the pleasure daily of welcoming old hands back to the field. Some of them say they always had a hankering after this field, and are now fully satisfied that the new find, as it is called, is one of the most important gold discoveries made in the North Island since the Thames opened.⁵⁰

Another correspondent wrote on 14 November that little work had been done: 'indeed, most of the time seems to have been frittered away in law suits of one sort or another'. These having been 'settled satisfactorily', work should now start, for Kenrick 'in giving his decisions was very emphatic on the subject of manning claims'.⁵¹ Legal battles continued in early December, however, Kenrick hearing 14 cases whilst another 25 were withdrawn. Six cases were claims for surplus ground, six were for forfeiture of a claim because of non-working, one was an objection to the granting of a license, and one sought the insertion of other names as owners.⁵²

⁴⁷ Te Aroha Warden's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 10 November 1881, p. 3.

⁴⁸ *Thames Star*, 17 November 1881, p.3.

⁴⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 17 November 1881, p. 3.

⁵⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 23 November 1881, p. 3.

⁵¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 19 November 1881, p. 2.

⁵² Te Aroha Warden's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 8 December 1881, p. 3.

All reports of discoveries were repetitiously optimistic, and will not be detailed here. For examples of the high hopes held, see the papers on two of the most promising claims, the New Find and the Eureka. Reports as in December 1881 of an ‘important discovery’ in Diamond Gully prompted the immediate pegging off of surrounding ground ‘for a considerable distance’ and applications for leases; samples were taken for testing or to show to potential partners.⁵³ For the year ending 31 March 1882, 262 claims had been pegged out, mostly at Waiorongomai, and 76 applications made for licensed holdings there.⁵⁴

TRACKS

Before the field could be developed beyond pegging out and initial prospecting, access was needed. A member of the first party that Werahiko led to his new find wrote of the horrors of the only track leading to it, which went over the very top of the mountain. He pointed out that ‘difficulty of access’ was ‘the great obstacle’, and recommended making a road ‘with a nice easy gradient’ to bring the new claims within walking distance of Te Aroha. Until that was done, ‘thorough prospecting’ was impossible.⁵⁵ An old gum track led into the area but not to Werahiko’s find.⁵⁶ In October 1881, Kenrick asked the council to provide a better and shorter track to the New Find, which he believed could be found ‘by going up the Waiorongomai Creek’, and assured it that goldfield revenue ‘would more than pay for’ its formation.⁵⁷ On 15 October, the mining inspector, George Wilson,⁵⁸ gave Kenrick a sketch of his recommended route and explained why it was the best one:

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

The best and easiest track to form and one which could be made suitable for conveying machinery to the upper part of Waiorongomai creek on the watershed of which Hone’s claim is

⁵³ *Thames Advertiser*, 10 December 1881, p. 3.

⁵⁴ *AJHR*, 1882, H-19, p. 12.

⁵⁵ Own Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 12 October 1881, p. 2.

⁵⁶ *Coromandel Mail*, 29 October 1881, p. 4.

⁵⁷ *Thames Star*, 14 October 1881, p. 2.

⁵⁸ See paper on his life.

situated would be from the flat at Block 14, High School Reserve, and along the eastern slope of the range which runs from the High School Reserve to the top of Te Aroha. A commencement might be made at a point where the Buck Reef crops out on the flat and continued on an equal grade up to the old pah [on Fern Spur] from then on to the spur on which the claim called the English Army has been marked out [on the southern side of Diamond Gully], and from there to a point on the spur on which Hone's Claim the New Find has been marked out, it would not be necessary to form the track so high up as the claims are as each one of them could make tracks 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 to the track.

The estimate which I have formed of the length of the track from the flat to the point on Hone's spur below the New Find Claim would be 4 miles, and the formation of a track for that distance of a sufficient width for packing would meet the immediate requirements of the place, when machinery was required the road could be improved to suit the traffic.

The time required to lay off the track would occupy several days as the natural obstacles of creeks and steep spurs might necessitate an alteration of the grade in some instances and care would be required in order to make the best of the job, however the line I have described will guide in a measure whoever may be employed to mark off the road.

If my estimate of the length of the track is nearly correct say 4 miles and the height to be attained say 1500 feet, the grade required will not be very steep, so that for all practical purposes it will be useful.⁵⁹

Kenrick immediately sent a telegram to the under-secretary: 'Track to New Discovery Aroha urgently needed supplies have to be sent on men's backs.... Discovery promises to be important'.⁶⁰ Two days later, the council's chairman was informed that a subsidy of £200 would be provided.⁶¹ George Henry Arthur Purchas, the county engineer,⁶² who had a personal interest in providing access because he was shortly to become an owner of six claims

⁵⁹ George Wilson to Harry Kenrick, 15 October 1881, with enclosed map, Mines Department, MD 1, 81/1118, ANZ-W.

⁶⁰ Harry Kenrick to Under-Secretary, Gold Fields, 15 October 1881 (telegram), Mines Department, MD 1, 81/1098, ANZ-W.

⁶¹ Under-Secretary, Gold Fields, to Chairman, Piako County Council, 17 October 1881, Mines Department, MD 1, 81/1098, ANZ-W.

⁶² See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 7, p. 58.

and sole owner of one,⁶³ was instructed to lay off the track. In the meantime, an interim route from Te Aroha 'by the track made by Morgan', presumably Rewi Mokena,⁶⁴ 'and the natives' took about three and a half hours, the return journey taking less than half that time.⁶⁵ Purchas was also surveying the New Find, Diamond Gully, and other claims, and had to request extra time because the hillside was 'very much more difficult to survey' than anticipated and the weather had hindered him 'very much'.⁶⁶

Prospectors did not wait for the construction of tracks. It was 'common' to see men starting out 'with three days provisions tied on their back, having to camp out under the log of a tree for the night, using a large stone for a pillow, and branches of trees for shelter'.⁶⁷ Thirty years later, 'Old Miner' recalled that, 'for several weeks, the men had to take everything out on their backs. They would start off on Monday morning, carrying their food for the week, their blasting materials, and mining tools'. Their route followed 'Waterfall Creek until they got into the bush at the back of the Bald Spur' behind Te Aroha:

They then made their way by a rough ill-defined track to the Trig on the top of Te Aroha mountain. In some places the track was so steep that they had to haul themselves up by the roots of trees, and this with a swag of fifty or sixty pounds was pretty stiff going. But they were all strong willing men and made light of all difficulties. On reaching the top they usually took a good spell and then dropped down the hill to their several claims.⁶⁸

Late in November 1881, a correspondent called for 'more energy displayed in the opening up of roads, &c'. The councillors were 'sucking still', presumably a slur about their being infantile in the way they tried to obtain government money, for he described them as not 'yet imbued with the goldfields go-aheadism'. He complained of them waited until a meeting

⁶³ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 245, BBAV 11567/1a; Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 47, 53-55, 98, 119, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

⁶⁴ See paper on his life.

⁶⁵ *Thames Star*, 22 October 1881, p. 3.

⁶⁶ G.H.A. Purchas to Harry Kenrick, 26 October 1881, Te Aroha Warden's Court, Memorials for Registrations of Claims 1881, BBAV 11559/1b, ANZ-A.

⁶⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 3 November 1883, p. 2.

⁶⁸ Letter from 'Old Miner', *Te Aroha News*, 31 January 1911, p. 3.

was held to accept tenders for the upper road instead of authorizing Whitaker 'to open and accept tenders on the spot.... Red tape is rampant!'⁶⁹ The 'sleepiness' of the council was raised at a meeting, and the same correspondent complained of their lack of understanding of the miners' need for roads. 'Being principally farmers', they were 'slow. They want a little of the Thames go-aheadism infused into their nature'.⁷⁰

A contract to make a 'Horse-track to new find' was let on 23 November for 16 shillings a chain, work commencing five days later. The contractors had a month to complete it.⁷¹ William Hetherington, a farmer,⁷² and Andrew McKnight won the contract; they were partners as carters and contractors at Te Aroha from 1881 until 1886, when McKnight joined the Kimberley rush in Western Australia.⁷³ They were also partners in one claim.⁷⁴

To provide interim access to the New Find and adjacent claims, a walking track from Te Aroha was cut during January 1882, its highest point being 2,700 feet above the flat.⁷⁵ This must have been one of the 'two new roads to the new find' being built at the beginning of that month 'over the hill and round by the buck reef'.⁷⁶ At a 'crowded meeting of miners and others interested in the claims' held on 10 January, several speakers claimed that the horse track, overdue for completion, 'would be of little use when done, and would be even unsafe for packing on'. A resolution was carried unanimously urging 'the necessity of at once proceeding with the construction of a proper sleigh track'. Another motion, moved by Peter

⁶⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 23 November 1881, p. 3.

⁷⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 26 November 1881, p. 3.

⁷¹ Piako County Council, Minutes of Meeting of 23 November 1881, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha; *Thames Advertiser*, 30 November 1881, p. 3.

⁷² See *Te Aroha News*, 13 June 1885, p. 7, 27 March 1886, p. 2, 17 July 1886, p. 2, 26 November 1887, p. 2, 17 March 1888, p. 2, 9 June 1888, p. 2, 24 November 1888, p. 2, 7 May 1907, p. 2, 6 January 1941, p. 1.

⁷³ Piako County Council, Minutes of Meeting of 14 December 1881, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha; *Waikato Times*, 24 April 1883, p. 2, Piako County Council, 2 April 1885, p. 2, 18 July 1885, p. 2, 13 February 1886, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 27 March 1886, p. 2, 10 July 1886, p. 2.

⁷⁴ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 28, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

⁷⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 31 January 1882, p. 2.

⁷⁶ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 5 January 1882, p. 3.

Ferguson⁷⁷ and passed unanimously, asked for the work to be done by day labour, 'as too much time would be wasted if tenders had to be called for, and unless trial crushings were brought down before the summer months pass, proving the reefs payable, no steps would be taken to have crushing plants and permanent tramways erected'. John Bullock, a local investor,⁷⁸ who chaired the meeting, was directed to ask Kenrick to forward the resolutions to the council 'and to urge on them the necessity of at once proceeding with the works'.⁷⁹ Ferguson was then an owner of two claims,⁸⁰ and Bullock of eight.⁸¹

On the following day, a correspondent inspected the track with Kenrick, Purchas, and Ferguson:

We proceeded up the track as far as it had been completed, and found that the greater portion fully justified the strictures which had been passed upon it at the meeting on the previous evening. Instead of being of gradual ascent, the track proceeds for a distance of more than a mile over a series of steep spurs and deep gullies, the least advantageous positions having been selected. The upper portions of the formation is more like what is required so far as gradient is concerned, but the whole track is much too narrow to allow of packing. Mr Kenrick suggested to Mr Purchas that if the Piako Council would authorise a sleigh track, it would be advisable to make use of only the upper portion of the present track.⁸²

Kenrick asked the council to make improvements, but councillors resolved that their finances prevented this.⁸³ Some improvements must have been made, for ten days later the same correspondent reported that

⁷⁷ See paper on Peter Ferguson and his New Era.

⁷⁸ See District Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 9 February 1877, p. 3; *Te Aroha News*, 13 October 1883, p. 3, 3 November 1883, p. 2, 23 April 1887, p. 2.

⁷⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 13 January 1882, p. 3.

⁸⁰ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 39, 45, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

⁸¹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 238, 244, BBAV 11567/1a; Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 4, 13, 30, 53-55, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

⁸² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 13 January 1882, p. 3.

⁸³ Piako County Council, Minutes of Meeting of 13 January 1882, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

‘the road to the new find’ was ‘now comparatively easy, and will soon be completed’.⁸⁴ Noting that some people continued to criticize the engineer for the way the tracks were being made, he responded that they had been ‘surveyed under great difficulties, and with a view to getting to the claim at once’; improvements could be made over time.⁸⁵ It would pass about 300 feet below the main mines.⁸⁶ Another correspondent wrote in late January that the track was ‘a credit’ to Purchas. ‘It would be difficult to find a better grade, and when widened it will be a capital sledge road’.⁸⁷ Shortly afterwards, a visitor commented on the ‘excellent bridle track’ he rode to its then-terminus near the Diamond Gully claim. The gradients were ‘by no means easy, but no difficulty or danger need be apprehended if a proper degree of care be exercised’.⁸⁸

At the council meeting on 1 February, a surveyor, Daniel Henry Bayldon,⁸⁹ and a civil engineer, Alexander Aitken,⁹⁰ recommended that the track, which had reached the Arizona, should be ‘made wide enough for a sleigh track’ and extended about 35 chains to the Golden Crown (later renamed the Premier after John Hall’s visit). ‘The track throughout to have a width of six feet in the solid, and the bush to be cut down a width of half a chain on the sunny side’. These recommendations were agreed to, the cost not to exceed £350.⁹¹ By August 1882, £98 14s had been spent on a foot track and £210 3s on the original pack track and another £349 on widening and extending the latter. This work was made possible by assistance from the government, for the council had other ‘liabilities of a pressing nature’.⁹²

⁸⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 23 January 1882, p. 3.

⁸⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 24 January 1882, p. 3.

⁸⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 31 January 1881, p. 2.

⁸⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 21 January 1882, p. 9.

⁸⁸ ‘On the Aroha Mountain’, *Waikato Times*, 31 January 1882, p. 3.

⁸⁹ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 7, p. 49; *Auckland Weekly News*, 14 November 1896, p. 18; *Observer*, 24 January 1903, p. 4.

⁹⁰ See *Thames Star*, 3 April 1890, p. 2, editorial, 26 October 1909, p. 2.

⁹¹ *Waikato Times*, 4 February 1882, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 7 February 1882, p. 3; Piako County Council, Minutes of Meeting of 1 February 1882, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

⁹² Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 1 August 1882, p. 2; County Clerk to Minister for Public Works, 12 August 1882; Memorandum by Harry Kenrick, 18 August 1882, Mines Department, MD 1, 82/932, ANZ-W.

Criticisms continued to be made of what had become known as the upper road (a lower road was being built alongside the Waiorongomai Stream to enable machinery to be conveyed to future batteries).⁹³ Late in February, the gradient was described as ‘very steep’, and ‘for practical working purposes’ it was ‘of very little service. Though serviceable for pack horses and other light traffic it would be useless for the conveyance of heavy machinery’, which was to be ‘placed near the new claims as soon as possible’.⁹⁴ A report of a woman visiting the New Find with some friends referred to ‘some hours of perilous up-hill work’ getting there.⁹⁵ That the vegetation had not been adequately cleared away was revealed in April 1882, when Thomas Gavin, a mine manager,⁹⁶ was riding downhill. ‘The reins of his horse caught in some small sprig or other impediment which was overhanging the road. This caused Mr Gavin to fall forward at the same time as the horse suddenly brought its head up, striking the rider in the face’ and breaking his nose.⁹⁷ The most dangerous part of the road crossed Diamond Gully Creek at the top of a high waterfall; in May 1883 a packhorse fell 100 feet from it.⁹⁸ Bad weather caused occasional slips, which interfered with sledging quartz.⁹⁹ The council was urged to employ two men constantly repairing the road, for it was ‘unreasonable’ to expect merchants ‘to pack goods up the hill as cheaply on bad roads as on good ones. Cheap transit of provisions will offer inducement to prospectors’.¹⁰⁰ In October 1883, a visitor ‘toiled up the steep, narrow cutting’, and complained of the ‘terrible state’ of the road.¹⁰¹ By December, ‘in fully a dozen places’ there was ‘a foot of soft clay on the roadway’, making ‘communication slow and laborious’.¹⁰²

⁹³ *Thames Advertiser*, 7 February 1882, p. 3.

⁹⁴ *Waikato Times*, 25 February 1882, p. 2.

⁹⁵ *Observer*, 18 March 1882, p. 9.

⁹⁶ See paper on his life.

⁹⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 20 April 1882, p. 3.

⁹⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 9 June 1883, p. 2, 8 September 1883, p. 2.

⁹⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 23 June 1883, p. 2, 30 June 1883, p. 2.

¹⁰⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 8 September 1883, p. 2, 22 September 1883, p. 2.

¹⁰¹ Own Correspondent, ‘From Christchurch to Te Aroha’, *Lyttleton Times*, 24 October 1883, p. 5.

¹⁰² *Te Aroha News*, 15 December 1883, p. 2.

In addition to the upper and lower roads, the council contributed to the cost of a track from the upper one to the Eureka claim.¹⁰³ It was recognized that the ‘very broken character’ of the topography meant a ‘considerable length of time must elapse before roads can be constructed for the conveyance of quartz’.¹⁰⁴ At the start of 1882, Kenrick said that, although ‘he wanted the miners distinctly to understand that they could not hold ground without working it’, should claim-owners seek ‘protection until the sleigh-track was completed he would grant it upon condition that four men were kept at work’.¹⁰⁵

SPECULATION AND THE NEED FOR CAPITAL

At the first warden’s court hearing for 1882 there were attempts to have one claim forfeited for illegal pegging (adjourned), two for non-working (in one case the plaintiffs received a third of the ground, in the other the whole claim was awarded to the plaintiffs), and one because the length of the claim was twice its breadth. When the applicant in the last case applied for an adjournment ‘as he had not been able to procure a plan’, because ‘there had been ample time to obtain’ one Kenrick refused the application, remarking that there were too many cases of this kind proceeding in which plaintiffs were laid merely on the chance of the claim being of irregular shape’. There was also an unsuccessful attempt to have a name added to the list of owners, and a plaint to obtain possession of surplus ground resulted in the applicant receiving three men’s ground.¹⁰⁶

Commenting on the next sitting, when Kenrick ‘decided some knotty questions’, a correspondent wrote that, as was ‘usual in these matters, there was great exultation and great disappointment’.¹⁰⁷ Another one reported that some miners were

endeavouring to hold on to too much ground for speculative purposes. I think it would be far better to hold one’s share and work it properly than to dodge round the country putting in pegs and applying for surplus ground; that kind of thing may put

¹⁰³ Piako County Council, Minutes of Meeting of 3 March 1882, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

¹⁰⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 31 January 1882, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 13 January 1882, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 13 January 1882, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 2 February 1882, p. 2.

money in the lawyers' pockets, and keep the officials busy, but will not develop the field.¹⁰⁸

Constantly payable returns were needed, which were obtainable only 'by steady hard work and the avoidance of any attempt to inflate the share market by absurd statements as to what is to come out of the ground while but little is being done to take it out'.¹⁰⁹ Kenrick's insistence that claims be manned and worked meant that 'those obstructionists to amalgamation of claims, some of whom are so sanguine that they will hardly listen to any terms, will have to become hatters, i.e. work their individual interests themselves, or allow them to be forfeited'.¹¹⁰ At another sitting in late February, 'several cases were disposed of and leases granted, so that there need now be no difficulty in forming mining companies to work the ground energetically. In the past, shareholders not feeling sure of their titles, in many cases did not care to do more work than they were actually compelled to'.¹¹¹

In January 1882, there were about 50 claims. If all were manned at the minimum level of four men per claim, 200 should have been prospecting and developing their ground.¹¹² At the beginning of February, Charles Featherstone Mitchell¹¹³ inspected the goldfield for the *Thames Advertiser*. He fossicked in as many claims as he could, obtaining encouraging prospects from testing the ore. 'The generally-received opinion amongst miners here is that the branch or cross-lobes will ultimately be found to be richer in gold than the main or mother lode, and a great deal of surface prospecting is being done in consequence'.

One thing necessary to develop the mines is capital, and the sooner that miners and others interested at Te Aroha tumble to that very important fact, the better it will be for them. They should leave no stone unturned - even to the extent of sacrificing the better part of their interests - with a view of enlisting capital for the purpose of erecting suitable crushing power, without

¹⁰⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 3 February 1882, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 17 April 1882, p. 3.

¹¹⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 11 February 1882, p. 2.

¹¹¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 4 March 1882, p. 2.

¹¹² *Thames Advertiser*, 13 January 1882, p. 3.

¹¹³ See paper on the Thames Miners' Union.

which quartz reefs, be they ever so rich, are utterly valueless to poor men.¹¹⁴

Despite his positive comments, Mitchell never invested in any Waiorongomai claims. In the same month, a local correspondent urged several payable claims to ‘amalgamate and form a company having sufficient area to induce some capitalist or capitalists to invest their money to erect machinery for the development of the field. Other claims would follow suit’. The ‘only difficulty’ was that ‘every shareholder in every claim’ thought ‘his individual interest worth more than any other persons’.¹¹⁵

The potential value of the reefs was revealed by a test later in February, which gave the remarkable result of eleven ounces to the ton, the gold being valued at £2 16s per ounce. ‘A very gratifying result’, wrote the *Waikato Times*, which recorded that the field was ‘gradually gaining in favour’ and that reports were ‘very encouraging’. Nearly all of the principal claims were at work, ‘but pending the erection of machinery not much can be done beyond prospecting and making preparation for ... permanent working’.¹¹⁶ The *Thames Advertiser* recommended that trial parcels be treated at the Te Aroha battery, for ‘nothing but actual results will satisfy investors now-a-days’. As gold was ‘unmistakably there’, the sooner this was proven the better, for the field required capital.¹¹⁷

MORE EXPLORATION, MORE HIGH HOPES

In 1921, one prominent miner, John McCombie,¹¹⁸ recalled ‘a prospecting tour’ with another miner ‘through the bush clad country between Karangahake and Te Aroha’ during ‘the summer of 1882’.

Starting at Karangahake, we took the Mangakino branch of the Waitawheta River, and followed it in a general southerly direction right up to the base of the main range upon which the Waiorongomai mines are situated. After travelling up-stream for several miles which trended away to the westward and seemed to take its rise in the ranges behind the Tui Creek mines. Here, at

¹¹⁴ Paeroa Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 4 February 1882, p. 3.

¹¹⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 2 February 1882, p. 2.

¹¹⁶ *Waikato Times*, 21 February 1882, p. 2.

¹¹⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 8 February 1882, p. 3.

¹¹⁸ See paper on Billy Nicholl.

the junction of the two streams, we picked up several quartz boulders, which evidently had detached themselves from a lode formation in the vicinity because they were neither water nor weather worn, and therefore it was a reasonable assumption that they had not travelled down hill for any great distance. When crushed up and panned up the bulk of this loose quartz yielded good prospects of free gold, and indications of the presence of silver were not wanting.

Because 'the mosquitoes were so troublesome that we had little or no sleep for several nights in succession', they 'did not stay long enough to give the place a fair trial'.¹¹⁹ As they never returned to this rugged country on the far side of the range from the mines, clearly the indications had not been that enticing.

At the beginning of March, 'all experienced miners' were 'sanguine of the payable returns that will come in from a very large number of the claims'. There had been 'satisfactory results' in almost every claim where work had been done, and 'almost every day fresh finds are reported'.¹²⁰ One miner inspected the Eureka, New Find, Young Colonial, and Golden Crown, testing as he went. 'I imagine I traveled at least three-quarters of a mile trying pestle and mortar tests, and out of three different reefs I obtained most satisfactory results'.¹²¹ At the end of the month, a visiting reporter noted 'a great number of mines getting out payable stuff in great quantities'. Most miners had 'a good show' and were 'determined to hold on to their claims as long as they can secure a meal, but it is impossible for them at present to get a crushing, owing to want of machinery'; they also lacked capital.¹²²

By April, gold had been traced for one mile from the New Find to the Werahiko and a 'large influx' of Thames miners was expected within a month or so.¹²³ At the beginning of that month, after good gold was found in the Werahiko No. 2 'the unoccupied ground east of the Werahiko Nos. 1 and 2 was immediately taken up, and some of it stands well for containing a

¹¹⁹ Letter from John McCombie, *New Zealand Herald*, 17 August 1921, p. 12.

¹²⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 2 March 1882, p. 2.

¹²¹ 'A Miner', 'My Visit to Te Aroha', *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 March 1882, p. 11.

¹²² Our Correspondent, 'From Te Aroha to Paeroa', *Thames Advertiser*, 29 March 1882, p. 3.

¹²³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 3 April 1882, p. 2.

portion of the newly discovered lode'.¹²⁴ In mid-April, a correspondent wrote that 'the question has been frequently asked of late, Does the gold go down?' This had been answered by miners in the Premier breaking out good gold well below the surface. 'This important discovery at such depth on a well-defined lode should ... speak more for the permanent establishment of the goldfield than anything else'.¹²⁵ Even more exciting was the first assay results from four claims, the names of which were deliberately withheld from publication. In the first, there was a return of 29oz 8dwt to the ton, the second gave 49oz 8dwt, the third 98oz 16dwt 8gr, and the fourth, extraordinarily, 137oz 4dwt.¹²⁶

During winter, the weather restricted surface prospecting.¹²⁷ Reports of finds of 3oz to the ton kept hopes high.¹²⁸ On 13 July, one correspondent noted prospecting and driving in 13 claims and Wilson giving notice to 'several' owners 'to commence operations'.¹²⁹ The *Te Aroha Mail* reported 'good prospects' being 'obtained in all parts of the goldfield, including the locality of the first workings'. Another newspaper complained of 'too little work' being done, 'the great majority of those occupying the ground preferring to hold it until someone else develops the resources of the field. The *Mail* urges vigorous prospecting as the only means of ascertaining the real value of the ground, and so turning it to profitable account'.¹³⁰ Early in August, this newspaper reported that Kenrick intended 'to compel work, instead of holding for mere speculative purposes, which hitherto has been the order of the day'. Wilson warned several claimholders that their ground could be forfeited for non-working.¹³¹ Its mining reporter found blatant examples of non-working. In the All Nations, recently awarded to a new owner because of non-working, 'not even a surface scratch was visible over the area we traversed', and in the Little Jimmy 'very little work' had been done apart from 'some trenching and driving' on one reef. 'No work was being done at the time of our visit, although workmen appeared to have

¹²⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 6 April 1882, p. 2.

¹²⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 15 April 1882, p. 2.

¹²⁶ *Waikato Times*, 11 April 1882, p. 2.

¹²⁷ See, for example, *Te Aroha Mail*, 10 June 1882, p. 2, and n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 3 July 1882, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 1 July 1882, p. 2, 5 July 1882, p. 2.

¹²⁸ *Te Aroha Mail*, n.d., reprinted in *Waikato Times*, 20 June 1882, p. 2.

¹²⁹ Our Semi-Occasional Correspondent, 'Te Aroha', *Thames Star*, 13 July 1882, p. 2.

¹³⁰ *Te Aroha Mail*, n.d., paraphrased in *Waikato Times*, 20 July 1882, p. 2.

¹³¹ *Te Aroha Mail*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 7 August 1882, p. 2.

been recently on the ground'. There was no work on three other claims, but the main claims were being mined systematically and with 'encouraging prospects'.¹³² Despite no work being done, demand for Little Jimmy and Queen of Beauty shares, for instance, 'continued, not in consequence of any new discovery' but because of 'a vague report that somebody of influence was going to do something with the claims, and this was taken to be indicative of a rise in the value of the ground, irrespective of prospects'.¹³³

A shortage of miners, despite some companies offering wages of ten shillings a day, was accepted by Kenrick as being a valid reason either for not working or for seeking protection. He stated that 40 men were needed immediately, and 150 more would be soon.¹³⁴ Extra miners were required because of action against those shepherding their claims. 'A Miner' wrote that the 30 miners working on the field were doing little work because 'those who have the ground pegged out do not want to work it, but merely hold it in the hope of raising a few pounds on it as best they can'. He wanted Kenrick to 'make the hungry crowd who have whole sheep runs pegged out work them, and then 400 men would be at work'.¹³⁵

In spring, a big improvement was recorded at Waiorongomai, as well as renewed prospecting on several of the original Te Aroha claims, reportedly finding good prospects.¹³⁶ At the beginning of October, positive developments were reported in all the leading mines.¹³⁷ At the end of the month, the *Te Aroha Mail* reported an important discovery in the Waitoki Extended,

a further proof of the advantages resulting from actual working instead of shepherding. In passing through the various claims, two things impress an observer; first, the generally very satisfactory prospects in those mines where - considering the fact that there is at present no crushing power available - a reasonable amount has been expended in labor. From the Premier to the Werahiko, a distance of about a mile and a quarter, there are few complaints of much labor being done without some show which enhances the value of the claims; while in some the fortunate proprietors could not be induced to part with their

¹³² *Te Aroha Mail*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 15 August 1882, p. 3.

¹³³ *Te Aroha Mail*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 7 August 1882, p. 2.

¹³⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 19 August 1882, p. 2.

¹³⁵ Letter from 'A Miner', *Thames Star*, 23 August 1882, p. 3.

¹³⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 27 September 1882, p. 3, 30 October 1882, p. 3.

¹³⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 4 October 1882, p. 2.

interest except at very high figures. The second very noticeable feature is the very large area held, and at present locked up, in which but little, and in a very large proportion of cases, nothing is being done. There can be no doubt that whilst on the one hand it may be expedient not to press the labor clauses in force as to manning fully, while there is no means of taking away the quartz, yet to hold valuable claims, which ought to be prospected in some way, and do no labour over a lengthened period, thereby hindering other parties from working the ground on their own account, or that of others, is keeping back the progress of the district to the injury of all. In all probability, if the present state of things continues, when the tramway up the hill is completed, it will not have one tenth of the use which it ought to have ... and as a consequence the impression will go abroad that the field is not generally payable.¹³⁸

A.L. gave the usual enthusiastic visitor's report, but warned that it was not a 'poor man's diggings'. Although the reefs required 'time and money', there was 'nowhere in New Zealand or Australia' that provided 'a better field for the enterprising capitalist'. His knowledge of geology was no better than any other self-proclaimed expert, for he predicted that the reefs would 'go down and prove permanent; and the quartz appears so free from base metal that, with fine screens, there will be no difficulty in saving the finer particles of gold'.¹³⁹

SHEPHERDING WHILST AWAITING THE TRAMWAY AND BATTERY

Until the tramway and battery were constructed the mines could not but be in a hiatus. Early in November, 'pending crushing power being made available, not very much work' was being done apart from 'a limited number of men' doing essential work opening up mines.¹⁴⁰ At least one large-scale development was being discussed that month, when the Smile of Fortune shareholders negotiated with the Battery Company to drive from the Hero 'and connecting with the Smile of Fortune, Vulcan, Little Jimmy and others'. This drive, of 'some thousand feet or more', would 'prove and open out these claims at a very Low Level, which we think is the best way to

¹³⁸ *Te Aroha Mail*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 31 October 1882, p. 2.

¹³⁹ A.L., 'The Te Aroha Goldfield', *Auckland Weekly News*, 28 October 1882, p. 20.

¹⁴⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 7 November 1882, p. 3.

prospect this part of the country'.¹⁴¹ This proposal came to nothing, but the concept of a low level drive passing through several claims would be revived in later years.

Late in November, Wilson issued a 'large number' of notices that he would forfeit claims for non-working. 'The intention in serving small holders (even quarter shareholders, in some instances, being served)' was to give them 'the fullest opportunity of defending individual interests' if their intention to work was 'bona fide'.¹⁴² Because of its plans for a joint low level, the Smile of Fortune hoped Wilson would 'take a Liberal View' and 'allow us protection or sufficient time to Amalgamate for each claim to pay their proportion of expenses'.¹⁴³ The Three Fools shareholders promised to employ two men 'during the present week', after which they wanted protection. 'We have spent a considerable sum already, certainly there is not much to see for it in consequence of bad weather during the winter'.¹⁴⁴ The Waitoki Extended had only stopped working a week previously because a company was being formed, which would 'commence operations as soon as they get a report from some one as to most economical way of working'.¹⁴⁵ The Little Jimmy shareholders explained it was 'not through negligence, that the ground is not worked as it might be', for it was negotiating with the Smile of Fortune, Pearl, Vulcan, Colonist, Premier, and Hero to drive this low level through all their claims and benefit 'the whole District. Hoping you will take these facts into consideration and give us a chance to show that we mean business and give us a hearing any time and place you might fix'.¹⁴⁶ A similar request and argument was put forward by the Pearl, which

¹⁴¹ John Bullock to George Wilson, 20 November 1882, Te Aroha Warden's Court, General Correspondence 1882, BBAV 11584/1c, ANZ-A.

¹⁴² *Te Aroha Mail*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 27 November 1882, p. 2.

¹⁴³ John Bullock to George Wilson, 20 November 1882, Te Aroha Warden's Court, General Correspondence 1882, BBAV 11584/1c, ANZ-A.

¹⁴⁴ Thomas Wood to George Wilson, 21 November 1882, Te Aroha Warden's Court, General Correspondence 1882, BBAV 11584/1c, ANZ-A.

¹⁴⁵ S.C. Macky to George Wilson, 22 November 1882; F.A. White to George Wilson, 23 November 1882, Te Aroha Warden's Court, General Correspondence 1882, BBAV 11584/1c, ANZ-A.

¹⁴⁶ H.C. Lawlor and H.H. Adams (for the Battery Company) to George Wilson, 22 November 1882, Te Aroha Warden's Court, General Correspondence 1882, BBAV 11584/1c, ANZ-A.

had 'spent a lot of money'.¹⁴⁷ The All Nations informed Wilson that over £40 had been spent and 'two men have resumed work & will remain on permanently for some time'.¹⁴⁸

The directors of the Battery Company responded by clarifying their views. After pointing out that they were 'intimately connected with many claims in the field', meaning that either individually or through the company they held interests, they argued that

any attempt to enforce the manning of the ground to any great extent would inflict most serious damage to the field at large, and for the following reasons. Though our Battery will be ready for work about the first of January next there will not be a single claim on the field, with the exception of the Lord Stanley, that will be able to forward quartz to it for many months, and this from no fault of any of the shareholders in the claims. As you are aware, the nature of the country has rendered the surveys for the tramways exceedingly difficult to complete in a reasonable time. We believe the engineers have not lost a day, but the weather and the nature of the country have prevented them from calling for tenders sooner than a month ago. A tender has now been accepted by the Piako County Council, but should this work be completed within contract time the laying of the rails and equipment of the line will require at least six months from this time, or say 1st June 1883. Under these circumstances you will perceive that the expenditure of shareholders' capital for some months to come is not only unnecessary for the development of the field, but would probably be fatal to its true interests. At present there are a sufficient number of mines opened to keep the battery fully at work night and day as soon as the tramways are prepared to deliver quartz. In the case of the rest of the mines on the field they may well be allowed to suspend the further investment of capital until the field has been proved sufficiently by the present battery. That cannot be done before say 1st August 1883. Should the field have then been proved to be a success further batteries will doubtless be erected, but with the utmost expedition it is impossible that a second battery can be at work before 1st January 1884. We respectfully put these considerations before you in order that you may have grounds for arriving at a right conclusion as to the proper course to be adopted in working the field. From your known character we have ventured to lay these

¹⁴⁷ H.H. Adams (for the Battery Company) to George Wilson, 23 November 1882, Te Aroha Warden's Court, General Correspondence 1882, BBAV 11584/1c, ANZ-A.

¹⁴⁸ William Wilson to George Wilson, 7 December 1882, Te Aroha Warden's Court, General Correspondence 1882, BBAV 11584/1c, ANZ-A.

considerations before you on behalf of the field and we are satisfied that you will give them the consideration to which they are entitled.¹⁴⁹

Wilson did not heed their advice; although there was no wholesale forfeiting of claims, 20 without any real prospect of success were forfeited between January and the end of November 1883.¹⁵⁰ Kenrick during the same period granted protection to 38 of them, normally requiring only two men to work for following three months.¹⁵¹ In mid-January, when one legal manager applied for protection for all the claims he managed, he stated 'that notwithstanding full protection has been applied for that several of the claims will still continue operations as at present'. The reasons for seeking protection were 'well founded' and if not granted the effect would be disastrous for the field.¹⁵² At the same time, the Battery Company sought protection for all its claims until 1 June, when it expected the tramway would be 'ready for use. While making this application we do not intend to cease work altogether, but will continue to keep some men employed'.¹⁵³

Throughout that year, non-working continued to be common. In February it was noted that, while several mines were getting quartz ready for the mill, 'a still larger number stopped work when they put in the pegs'.¹⁵⁴ At the beginning of April, a correspondent wrote that there was

no doubt owners of claims are getting disheartened at the delay in having the tramway ready, and in many instances have suspended operations in prospecting their claims. This fact is to be deplored, as when active operations have ceased in any of the claims, active interest also ceases to be shown in the field generally, and there is greater difficulty in collecting calls to work the claims already partly opened up, on which our immediate success depends when crushing is commenced.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ Henry Gilfillan, Jr, (for the Directors of the Battery Company) to George Wilson, 27 November 1882, Te Aroha Warden's Court, Applications 1882, BBAV 11582/2a, ANZ-A.

¹⁵⁰ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Letterbook 1883-1900, pp. 1, 3, 7, BBAV 11534/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁵¹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Applications 1883-1900, BBAV 11505/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁵² D.G. Macdonnell to George Wilson, 19 January 1883, Te Aroha Warden's Court, General Correspondence 1883, BBAV 11584/2a, ANZ-A.

¹⁵³ Henry Gilfillan, Jr., to George Wilson, 19 January 1883, Te Aroha Warden's Court, General Correspondence 1883, BBAV 11584/2a, ANZ-A.

¹⁵⁴ *Thames Star*, 8 February 1883, p. 2.

¹⁵⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 3 April 1883, p. 2.

In early August, when giving his verdict on an application for forfeiture of the Star claim for non-working, Kenrick

said the ground must be worked according to regulations, which had clearly not been done in this instance. During the wet winter months the regulations were somewhat held in abeyance, but the same excuse did not apply at the present time. The Te Aroha field was thought very favourably of by persons at a distance, and he intended to insist on all licensed holdings being worked in future, otherwise steps would be taken for their forfeiture. At the same time, if holders worked fairly to test their claim, on application being made he might allow a lesser number of men than the regulations required. If this was not done, however, on any complaint being proved, those offending would certainly lose the ground.... If a stranger came here he found the ground all locked up and unworked. He wished to give distinct warning that in every future case, without exception or distinction, where it was shown that the conditions of holding had not been complied with, the ground would in every case be forfeited, and no money penalty would, under any circumstances, be permitted. He trusted that this resolution would be made as widely known as possible, for it would in all future cases be strictly carried out.¹⁵⁶

Following up his words, on 11 August the *Te Aroha News* wrote a strong editorial about shepherding:

There can be no doubt that for some time past the mining regulations supposed to be in force in this district have been practically suspended, as far as those relating to the occupation of mining holdings go. The conditions have been systematically set at naught, and the men that they require, if strictly carried out, have in very few cases been employed. At the same time, nearly every available yard of ground has been secured on the Waiorongomai side, and a great majority of the claims secured on pure speculation. Men utterly without means to work them have taken up holdings, depending on finding others with some capital to work them, or by way of making a rise by the sale of shares, and then clearing out. As these speculative shares have not of late been very readily purchased, the ground has lain idle, no work whatever, or nothing in the least degree calculated to test its value having been done on it. In fact a most extensive, as well as pernicious, system of shepherding has been carried on, owing to laxity in enforcing the regulations, and a very large area of

¹⁵⁶ Warden's Court, *Te Aroha News*, 11 August 1883, p. 3.

undoubtedly auriferous land has thereby been locked up. In the face of present prospects it is very clear that this state of things cannot be long permitted.... The Mining Inspector ... has been actively exerting himself, and has caused confusion amongst the speculators by the vigorous way in which he has brought them to task. As was truly stated by the Warden, the shepherding both of business sites and mining claims has closed Te Aroha in a great degree to strangers who are anxious to obtain them for real occupation and working, and it has inflicted great injury on the district generally. There was reason in allowing some latitude in the depths of the winter and during bad weather, but with the incoming spring and approaching summer no excuse whatever should be accepted as justifying holding sites of any description, idle and unused.... No person or persons, on any pretence, should be permitted to hold interests unless they take immediate steps to develop the ground they are legally endowed with. There is no possible reason for doubting that the untouched claims are not in every degree as valuable as those on which much and profitable work has been done, and it is almost a crime to permit them to lie fallow, as of late. If the owners cannot get men with money to join them and are not able to work their holdings themselves, they certainly must give them up voluntarily or under compulsion.... We specially commend the remarks of the Warden.... That this is the proper course there cannot be a doubt, and that it will have a most beneficial effect, is unquestionable. Shepherding anywhere is a curse to a goldfield, and here there is not the smallest excuse or justification, the ground having been tested and shown to be of the highest value.... The resolution of the Warden has already struck terror into the hearts of many speculative shepherds, and it is to be hoped that he will carry out his pledge to the uttermost.¹⁵⁷

The following month, Kenrick warned that if some prospecting was not done 'between the time of application and granting of license, he would, after issuing the license, compel the shareholders to fully man the ground' with three men per acre. If only a 'few' were prospecting, 'consideration would be shown by allowing a fewer number of hands to hold possession, when a title had been secured'.¹⁵⁸ In October, action was taken against several parties who had breached regulations by failing to take out licenses within ten days of pegging out. Kenrick warned that in future he would 'insist on far stricter observation of the regulations, in view of the

¹⁵⁷ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 11 August 1883, p. 2.

¹⁵⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 22 September 1883, p. 2.

increasing prosperity of the field and the large amount of country' being taken up.¹⁵⁹

In February 1883, a correspondent commented that the only troubles facing the field were 'mosquitoes and a tightness of the chest',¹⁶⁰ the latter affliction being a lack of funds, which would remain a fundamental problem. The fact that, despite individual claims being undercapitalized, a great deal of capital was being invested in the battery, tramway, and townships was used by supporters of the field to justify their faith in it:

Is it likely that people who have spent the greater portion of their lives at mining pursuits, men who have been identified with the rise and progress of such fields as Coromandel and the Thames, as well as the mines of Victoria and New South Wales, in the face of all their experiences would settle at Te Aroha, and there invest their all, in the hope of bettering their condition, if they were not assured of success?¹⁶¹

The cost of the battery was 'an unmistakable indication of the confidence which men of experience and capital, the former as extensive as the latter, have in the prosperity of the field'. £20,000 was being spent on it, 'no small amount to invest in a speculation of this kind'. This writer underestimated the financial contribution by the government and the council to the tramway and other works as being over £10,000, meaning about £30,000 was being spent before there was 'any return whatever'.¹⁶²

SHARE TRADING

Small investors speculated in claims as soon as Werahiko announced his discovery. At the end of October 1881, shares in it were 'changing hands at a good figure'.¹⁶³ By the middle of the following month, shares in claims adjoining the New Find were in demand, £100 being paid for shares in both the Canadian and the Diamond Gully.¹⁶⁴ Late that month, 'several' visiting

¹⁵⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 13 October 1883, p. 2.

¹⁶⁰ *Thames Star*, 8 February 1883, p. 2.

¹⁶¹ *Waikato Times*, 17 February 1883, p. 3.

¹⁶² 'Te Aroha and Waiorongomai: Progress of the Goldfield', *Waikato Times*, 20 February 1883, p. 3.

¹⁶³ *Thames Star*, 31 October 1881, p. 2.

¹⁶⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 17 November 1881, p. 3; *Thames Star*, 17 November 1881, p. 3.

Auckland speculators bought shares in the New Find for £400 and in the Young Colonial for ‘something like £200’; interests in other mines had been sold ‘at rates ranging from £50 downwards, according to locality’.¹⁶⁵ In the middle of December, ‘interests in certain claims’ were being ‘enquired for’ on the Auckland Stock Exchange.¹⁶⁶

During 1882, correspondents continued to report that, despite large quantities of payable ore being extracted, capital was needed. To tempt small investors, ‘very fine specimen stone’ was displayed in urban centres, as in Hamilton in March.¹⁶⁷ This, combined with good news, meant that once again ‘the yellow fever’ was ‘apparent among our Hamilton tradesmen’, including the mayor and town clerk.¹⁶⁸ News of finds had immediate impact on prices. For example, when a shaft in the Arizona cut the lode and 40 pounds valued at four pennyweight to the pound was extracted, a special messenger was sent to Thames and Auckland and ‘shares which were unsaleable at £10 rose to nearly £100 at once’.¹⁶⁹ Sometimes prospectors would only sell their interests ‘at very high prices’.¹⁷⁰ Investors displayed only periodic interest, as at the end of March when there was a sudden demand.¹⁷¹ Good prices were paid for shares in some claims early in the year, but interest was fading by April, then ceased altogether before it picked up again with shares being more in demand than in other mining areas, to decline again to almost nothing by September.¹⁷²

In August, despite no trial crushings of any importance having been done, investment continued, prompting a *Thames Star* warning:

¹⁶⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 30 November 1881, p. 3.

¹⁶⁶ *Auckland Weekly News*, 17 December 1881, p. 24.

¹⁶⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 29 March 1882, p. 3; *New Zealand Herald*, 9 March 1882, p. 3.

¹⁶⁸ ‘Waikato Whisperings’, *Observer*, 18 March 1882, p. 10.

¹⁶⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 27 February 1882, p. 3.

¹⁷⁰ *Te Aroha Mail*, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 31 October 1882, p. 2.

¹⁷¹ *Waikato Times*, 30 March 1882, p. 2.

¹⁷² See *Auckland Weekly News*, 25 February 1882, p. 24, 11 March 1882, p. 24, 18 March 1882, p. 24, 25 March 1882, p. 24, 8 April 1882, p. 24, 22 April 1882, p. 24, 29 April 1882, p. 24, 6 May 1882, p. 24, 20 May 1882, p. 24, 17 June 1882, p. 24, 24 June 1882, p. 24, 1 July 1882, p. 24, 8 July 1882, p. 24, 15 July 1882, p. 24, 22 July 1882, p. 24, 20 July 1882, p. 24, 12 August 1882, p. 24, 19 August 1882, p. 24, 16 August 1882, p. 24, 2 September 1882, p. 24, 9 September 1882, p. 24, 16 September 1882, p. 24, 30 September 1882, p. 24, 7 October 1882, p. 24, 4 November 1882, p. 24.

Numerous claims find purchasers of their scrip at prices ranging from 3s 6d to 10s. No quartz worthy the name of specimens, or even picked stone, has been found, nor is there likely to be an opportunity of crushing regularly for six months hence. But with all Te Aroha stocks are active and firm, being staple mining business in 'Change.... The Te Aroha field may not yet have reached the zenith of its first blush, but it will be a matter for wonderment if many of the shares now so much in demand are not procurable considerably cheaper when the batteries are ready to start crushing. What a grand thing it was for the Aroha that it started its career under such influential auspices. Much of the scrip of the mines in the Aroha district are now fetching fictitious prices, and these scrip "rackets" invariably lead to a bitter disappointment, with an ultimate loss of confidence lasting for a considerable time, and fraught with danger.¹⁷³

'A very general feeling of confidence' early in 1882 prompted claimholders to discuss amalgamating claims to form 'strong companies'. They intended to keep 'in hand a good proportion of unallotted shares for sale from time to time, as required for the development of the mine. This would do away with the necessity of calls, and give shareholders much more negotiable property to dispose of in scrip, than as now, in halves or quarter shares, etc'.¹⁷⁴ Late in the year, a correspondent could not account for the 'rage' for forming companies 'in ground that has had little or nothing done in it' and appeared not to contain reefs. 'The money spent in forming companies would be better spent in testing the ground, and if those holding shares would only come to this conclusion it would stop a great waste of money, and the probability of the winding up of a lot of wild-cat companies'.¹⁷⁵ By April 1883, 17 companies had been registered, with a nominal capital of £345,000.¹⁷⁶ To tempt investors, sharebrokers displayed specimens taken from several mines.¹⁷⁷

Investors became more interested as the tramway and battery neared completion. Noting in early April that two full shares in the Lucky Hit had changed hands 'at the satisfactory figure of £400', a Thames newspaper

¹⁷³ *Thames Star*, 4 August 1882, p. 2.

¹⁷⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 2 March 1882, p. 2.

¹⁷⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 4 October 1882, p. 2.

¹⁷⁶ *AJHR*, 1883, H-5, Appendix, p. 60.

¹⁷⁷ For example, *Thames Advertiser*, 4 January 1883, p. 2, *Thames Star*, 10 September 1883, p. 2.

commented that there were ‘spirited people still quite willing to put money into the mines there if a good thing is shown in the shape of a genuine reef and honest working of it’.¹⁷⁸ In mid-June, the *Te Aroha News* was ‘glad’ that confidence in the field was ‘increasing every week, as shown by the far greater interest taken by persons residing at a distance, as well as by those intimately acquainted with its value’.¹⁷⁹ By August, there was ‘a general demand’ for shares and prices had ‘advanced’.¹⁸⁰ Timothy McLaughlin of Reefton,¹⁸¹ according to the *Te Aroha News* ‘one of the most fortunate and practical mining speculators in New Zealand’, visited and expressed ‘most flattering’ opinions about the mines and predicted that the battery would ‘most certainly’ be ‘very profitable’.¹⁸² As with other such visitors, he did not appear in any list of shareholders. When six ounces was extracted from a ton of F Claim ore at the start of October, this ‘increased the confidence already felt in regard to the field, and holders of shares evince a disposition to retain their interest’.¹⁸³ Writing at the same time, a Thames correspondent expected the goldfield to be ‘large and rich’. Shares in several companies had ‘been in demand at advanced prices’, Premier ones being 17s and New Find 9s, despite neither company having crushed even a ton of ore. This showed ‘the confidence of the public in their prospects’.¹⁸⁴

To assist investment and to make personal profits, during 1883 more local people became sharebrokers.¹⁸⁵ The *Te Aroha News* commented in October that if the goldfield realized ‘to the very utmost all the sanguine expectations formed’ and there was ‘the avalanche of sharebroking business anticipated, without doubt there is an ample army of brokers to transact twice as much’.¹⁸⁶ Even a former local policeman, Nicholas Cleary, became a

¹⁷⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 10 April 1883, p. 2.

¹⁷⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 16 June 1883, p. 2.

¹⁸⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 7 August 1883, p. 2.

¹⁸¹ See *Inangahua Electoral Roll, 1881*, p. 22; *Inangahua Times*, District Court, 23 January 1884, p. 2, letter from Isaac Lewis, 10 June 1896, p. 2, 16 July 1896, p. 2.

¹⁸² *Te Aroha News*, 18 August 1883, p. 2.

¹⁸³ *Waikato Times*, 9 October 1883, p. 2.

¹⁸⁴ Thames Correspondent, *New Zealand Industrial Gazette and Pastoral and Agricultural News*, 3 August 1883, p. 27.

¹⁸⁵ *Waikato Times*, 28 June 1883, p. 3, 4 October 1883, p. 2, 6 November 1883, p. 2, 17 November 1883, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 8 September 1883, p. 2, 29 September 1883, p. 2, 13 October 1883, p. 2, 20 October 1883, p. 2, 17 November 1883, p. 2.

¹⁸⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 20 October 1883, p. 2.

broker.¹⁸⁷ In August, there was talk of forming 'a company for the investment of capital':

The promoters, believing that the scrip and shares of the several companies are at a nominal value at the present time, and also that many men of limited means, and others (especially our country friends) have not the opportunity of investing *generally* in the field, and by that means sharing in the good things to come, propose to form an Investment Company wherein all who are desirous may participate. The capital to consist of £1 shares, payable by instalments of 1s per week per share until the £1 is paid up, so that there may be few, if any, that cannot take some interest, however small, if they wish to do so, the directors to be appointed by the shareholders to sanction all purchases and sales of shares.¹⁸⁸

This company did not eventuate, but by October a Te Aroha Brokers' Association with over a dozen members had been formed. It agreed to have twice weekly meetings and to display lists of quotations in their office windows. 'Buyers will thus have confidence, and will be able from day to day to note the fluctuations of the market'.¹⁸⁹

In his report dated 25 May, the Inspecting Engineer of the Mines Department, Henry Andrew Gordon, reported that Waiorongomai was 'as promising a gold field' as any in the North Island and was 'likely to give fair returns'. The average thickness of the reefs was

about 3 feet, and so far as they have been opened out they show gold fairly distributed through the whole of the stone. There have been 91 mining claims taken up, containing 1,216 men's ground, and about £15,000 has been spent in prospecting and opening up the mines. Very good stone has been obtained from some of the claims; but there has never yet been any of the quartz crushed, beyond a few specimens, to test their true value; and until this is done, and the reefs developed to a much greater depth, the permanency of the field cannot be said to be established.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 20 October 1883, p. 2.

¹⁸⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 4 August 1883, p. 2.

¹⁸⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 20 October 1883, p. 2, 3 November 1883, p. 2.

¹⁹⁰ H.A. Gordon to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 25 May 1883, *AJHR*, 1883, H-5, p. 1; see also S. Herbert Cox, 'Gold Fields of the Cape Colville Peninsula', in *Reports of Geological Explorations During 1882* (Wellington, 1883), p. 38.

REQUIRED: ONE OR MORE BATTERIES

From the start, there was concern about how to treat the ore. In April 1882, it was described as ‘very light and difficult to save’.¹⁹¹ Early that year, the main claims discussed devising terms for the erection of a small battery to test the quartz.¹⁹² After tests were made, Josiah Clifton Firth¹⁹³ arranged from three leading mines proved to unnamed experts ‘the urgent necessity of opening up the country without delay’, in late February he announced that he would build one. Some miners negotiated with him to obtain guaranteed access to an agreed number of stampers, ‘and very general regret was expressed when it was known that others sought to throw obstacles in the way of an amalgamation of claims to facilitate the erection of machinery’.¹⁹⁴ There was talk of other investors building batteries,¹⁹⁵ but none did, making Firth and Clark’s battery the only one when treatment started, causing considerable discontent in later years.¹⁹⁶ Delays in its erection were reportedly likely to cause miners to lose heart, and certainly slowed mine development.¹⁹⁷ Other batteries were needed, for Firth’s 40-head one was too small for the amount of quartz anticipated, and one investor, John Cook, did make preparations for a battery further up the valley.¹⁹⁸ Cook’s interest in the field was modest, being an owner of only two claims,¹⁹⁹ and his proposed battery was not built. A proposal to erect one on

¹⁹¹ W.L.C. William to F.D. Rich, 22 April 1882, W.L.C. Williams Letterbook 1880-1884, in private possession.

¹⁹² *Thames Advertiser*, Te Aroha Correspondent, 24 January 1882, p. 3, 31 January 1882, p. 2, 3 February 1882, p. 3, 8 February 1882, p. 3.

¹⁹³ See paper on the Battery Company.

¹⁹⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 24 February 1882, p. 3.

¹⁹⁵ *Waikato Times*, 21 February 1882, p. 2.

¹⁹⁶ See papers on the Battery Company and Peter Ferguson and his New Era.

¹⁹⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 29 March 1882, p. 3, 10 April 1882, p. 3.

¹⁹⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 17 April 1882, p. 2, 27 May 1882, p. 3; *Te Aroha Mail*, 10 June 1882, p. 2; Harry Kenrick to Under-Secretary, Gold Fields, 19 April 1883, *AJHR*, 1883, H-5, p. 16.

¹⁹⁹ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Licensed Holdings Grant Book 1882-1886, folio 29, BBAV 11549/1b; Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 29, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

his site by another investor was foreshadowed in June 1883 and confirmed in August,²⁰⁰ but nothing came of this.

Until the battery commenced work, little testing of ore was done. One trial was brought to the attention of the newspapers in July 1883, when Adams collected five-pound parcels from the main mines for testing by Ashcroft's Gold Separator in Wellington. The yield, unspecified, 'somewhat astonished the visitors'.²⁰¹ Kenrick noted in his annual report, written on 19 April, that only a few ounces of gold had been obtained from 'trial crushings of small parcels of stone'.²⁰² However, all tests had given 'excellent returns'.²⁰³

DEVELOPMENTS IN 1883

Development was slow during most of 1883, in particular because of continual delays in completing the tramway. At the beginning of February, work was increasing 'after a long spell of idleness'. In some claims 'a large amount of preparation' was needed. Some reportedly substantial but unspecified finds were made.²⁰⁴ 'The Premier still maintains its position as the premier claim of the field. The visitor cannot help being struck with the abundant evidences there are of the existence of gold in considerable quantities in the vicinity of this claim', which a visiting reporter considered was similar to that found at Waitekauri. The gold in the Premier and most of the adjacent mines was 'very fine in the grain, but it is surprising how readily it separates from the stone when crushed'. He found it 'somewhat difficult to name the mine which ranks next in importance to the Premier', for the Colonist, Diamond Gully, Eureka, and Werahiko had 'all obtained excellent prospects. In the New Find and Colonist especially large bodies of quartz have been exposed, which must prove highly remunerative unless all previous experience in quartz reefs' was 'to be set at naught when applied to' this district. Besides these claims, many others 'coming into prominence'

²⁰⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 9 June 1883, p. 2; 'Te Aroha', *Observer*, 7 July 1883, p. 248; John Bullock to George Wilson (telegram), 11 August 1883, Te Aroha Warden's Court, General Correspondence 1883, BBAV 11584/2a, ANZ-A.

²⁰¹ *Waikato Times*, 10 July 1883, p. 2, 24 July 1883, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 13 July 1883, p. 3.

²⁰² Harry Kenrick to Under-Secretary, Gold Fields, 19 April 1883, *AJHR*, 1883, H-5, p. 15.

²⁰³ *Thames Star*, 8 September 1883, p. 4.

²⁰⁴ *Te Aroha Mail*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Advertiser*, 5 February 1883, p. 3.

might 'outstrip' them when more developed. 'Considering the small amount of work noticeable in the way of actual mining, for it must not be forgotten that much useful fossicking work has been done of which the casual visitor has but little knowledge, it is really surprising there are so many satisfactory results to show'.²⁰⁵ Several mines were getting quartz ready for treatment, and prospects improved 'daily'.²⁰⁶ However, most mines were still only 'engaged in surface operations'.²⁰⁷

In March, work in the main claims continued steadily, although lack of capital meant that in the Diamond Gully work was 'not vigorously prosecuted' and it was rumoured that the miners were 'to be knocked off until calls can be collected to pay wages'. A find was reported near Waiorongomai township in an area that would never produce anything worthwhile, but which at the time caused several claims to be pegged off.²⁰⁸ Nothing new was reported in April, for many mines were 'laying by to see the completion of the mill and tramways'.²⁰⁹ One correspondent argued that those who had 'taken up claims and sold shares on the strengths of the rich prospects' were doing insufficient work. As the rugged country made it 'utterly impossible' for the tramway to be 'close to the workings of all the mines', many claimholders would have to make connections to it, as soon as possible, so that they could turn their quartz 'into money without loss of time'. If successful, they would 'find that claims will attain a value much more important than if they lie on their oars and trust to the few well-worked claims to advance the value of the whole field'.²¹⁰ According to a private letter written on 20 April, the mountain was 'being riddled by what an old Maori called rat holes, in search of gold. As yet the search has not been very successful, but a long time elapses before miners will confess to "that sickness of the heart which arises from hope deferred"'.²¹¹

²⁰⁵ Own Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 5 February 1883, p. 6.

²⁰⁶ *Thames Star*, 8 February 1883, p. 2.

²⁰⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 27 February 1883, p. 2.

²⁰⁸ *Waikato Times*, 20 March 1883, p. 3, Te Aroha Correspondent, 27 March 1883, p. 2.

²⁰⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 12 April 1883, p. 2; see also *Waikato Times*, 17 April 1883, p. 2.

²¹⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 3 April 1883, p. 2.

²¹¹ Letter of J.J. Barugh, of Hamilton East, written on 20 April 1883, printed in *Waikato Times*, 2 August 1883, p. 3.

Some parties reworked parts of the old Te Aroha field.²¹² In June, several claims were taken up at Waiorongomai, and although five licenses were forfeited, within a week three of these had been taken up again.²¹³ July saw some prospecting on the Te Aroha side of the mountain. According to the *Te Aroha News*,

though nothing special has resulted, the indications have been of a most favourable nature. A suggestion has been made that the townspeople should each subscribe a small sum weekly, in proportion to their means and business, for the purpose of carrying on prospecting on an organised system if even on a small scale. The proposal seems to be a reasonable one, for there is scarcely a resident who cannot spare a shilling or two a week.²¹⁴

This idea was not implemented, but would be carried out in later years. Also in July, when a bridge was being constructed over Stoney Creek (on the road between Te Aroha and Waiorongomai), the contractor ‘found a small piece of quartz among the gravel wash, which on being broken turned out to be a very rich specimen’.²¹⁵ This news created hopes of finding payable gold on this portion of the mountain,²¹⁶ which was to be prospected more intensively in future years.

During August, several new claims were taken up, ‘satisfactory’ work continued in the leading mines, ‘and a general feeling of confidence in the ultimate results’ was ‘daily gaining ground’.²¹⁷ Late that month, a correspondent noted ‘a reaction’ amongst claim owners: ‘great energy’ in collecting calls and ‘employing men to prospect on ground which has lain for some time past without any work being done in prospecting’. Several old claims were to be manned, and new ones were being marked out.²¹⁸ The

²¹² *Waikato Times*, 8 May 1883, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 22 May 1883, p. 2.

²¹³ *Waikato Times*, 16 June 1883, p. 2, 19 June 1883, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 16 June 1883, p. 2.

²¹⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 14 July 1883, p. 2.

²¹⁵ *Waikato Times*, 10 July 1883, p. 2.

²¹⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 14 July 1883, p. 2.

²¹⁷ *Waikato Times*, 14 August 1883, p. 2; see also J.C. Firth’s statement to Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 18 August 1883, p. 2, and Alex Saunders’ Sharemarket Report, *New Zealand Industrial Gazette and Pastoral and Agricultural News*, 3 August 1883, p. 27.

²¹⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 28 August 1883, p. 2.

local newspaper was delighted that ‘amongst other arrivals’ was William Albert Hunt, a partner in the Shotover, which produced the first bonanza at Thames, had ‘resolved on casting his lot at Te Aroha and again trying his future in goldmining’. That ‘so good a judge’ had come to this decision was ‘an abundant proof of his faith in the fortune of the district’.²¹⁹ Hunt was not mentioned again, for he did not acquire any interests.

Early in September there was a miniature rush close to the Te Aroha township:

Monday morning last brought to the minds of several of the old residents of this place, scenes of early days in the shape of pegging out. On Sunday busy rumor had it that a rich discovery had been made on this side of the hill. News usually flies fast, and so did the news of the reported discovery, towards evening little knots of people engaged in close discussion were to be found in all the darkest corners of the township, and speculations of the wildest kind were freely indulged in by all as to the locality and richness of the quartz. At the first dawn of day on Monday, the knowing ones could be distinguished from their less fortunate neighbours, being armed with large lumps of timber in the shape of pegs, a departure of many of our worthy townspeople and miners was made for the hills between the early hours of the morning and 4 o’clock in the afternoon. Towards noon the locality of the discovery became pretty well known, and proved to be a few chains in the bush, from the top of what is known as the bald spur at the back of the Hot Springs Reserve. The reef is standing out in bold relief quite bare of all vegetation, the country is of sandstone formation, the reef being 12 feet thick. The quartz is of a nice kindly nature free from minerals and with gold visible to the naked eye distributed through portions of the reef. The find may fairly be described as of a promising nature, and certainly well worthy of being thoroughly prospected.²²⁰

As this find was worthless, soon it was heard of no more. By September, with crushing expected to be a month or so away, miners arrived from elsewhere, notably from Thames, where mining was ‘terribly dull’. ‘Old miners’ were ‘without hesitation’ predicting a ‘great future’, some thinking Te Aroha would ‘surpass’ Thames ‘in its golden days’.²²¹ ‘A stream of visitors’ arrived, and all who inspected the reefs were ‘convinced of their

²¹⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 25 August 1883, p. 2.

²²⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 8 September 1883, p. 3.

²²¹ Thames Correspondent, *Freeman’s Journal*, 28 September 1883, p. 7.

great value'.²²² 'Old Miner', who had 'travelled in many countries, and seen many goldfields', was 'astonished at the nature of the stone' in the Premier and Colonist mines, never having seen such rich quartz.²²³ In October, most of the miners at Owcharoa left, 'many' being 'attracted by the fabulous quantities of gold reported to be sticking out of the hills on both sides of the rocky Waiorongomai'.²²⁴ A grocer and mine owner there was bankrupted because of the 'exodus to Te Aroha of most of the mining population'.²²⁵ At Coromandel, 'everything' was 'very dull, many of our best miners having gone to Te Aroha'.²²⁶ The 'large majority' of Karangahake miners also went to Waiorongomai.²²⁷ Early in the month, trial crushings in the Inverness and F claims gave 'most handsome returns', which helped to make Waiorongomai the most favoured district on the Hauraki Peninsula while mining elsewhere was depressed.²²⁸

On 13 October, a Christchurch reporter who inspected the goldfield with eight others provided a detailed description of the field and his assessment of its prospects:

Although the weather suffered from intermittent fits of rain and sunshine, and the riding was very hard work, I thoroughly enjoyed the trip. The mountain is said to be about 3400ft high, and the Premier Gold-mining Company's claim is very near the top. The whole way up you pass great masses of quartz standing out in all directions. We at last arrived at this point, and at once proceeded to examine the drive and the reef. The width of the reef of the Premier Gold-mining Company is from three to four feet thick, and shows gold in abundance. It has two cross reefs, Nos. 1 and 2. The mining manager and the men are very sanguine as to the results of the forthcoming crushing. The large quantity of quartz to hand has a very rich appearance, and should show a very favourable result. The capital of this Company is £20,000, in £1 shares – 9d per share paid – and they are worth in the open market at present 15s. A little lower down is the Colonist Gold Mining Company, which has a reef of 12 to 14ft thick, and shows fine gold throughout the stone. The yield may not be as large at

²²² *Te Aroha News*, 29 September 1883, p. 2.

²²³ Letter from 'Old Miner', *Auckland Weekly News*, 6 October 1883, p. 18.

²²⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 20 October 1883, p. 2.

²²⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 31 October 1883, p. 3.

²²⁶ Coromandel Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 8 October 1883, p. 6.

²²⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 24 November 1883, p. 3.

²²⁸ *New Zealand Herald*, 6 October 1883, p. 5, 8 October 1883, p. 6.

the first crushing as the Premier Company, but I anticipate that it will be of a very permanent and improving character. The stone grows richer as they drive into the reef. I was very favourably impressed with this mine. The capital is £20,000, in £1 shares – sixpence per share paid up – and the shares are now worth 8s to 8s 6d. The Werahiko Gold Mining Company has a very promising reef, from 2 to 12ft in thickness, showing good gold in a run of 42ft. The capital is £30,000, in £1 shares – 3d being paid up – and are worth 6s to 6s 6d per share. The New Find Gold Mining Company is one of the favourite Companies. It has struck gold in two reefs – one about 4ft thick, and the other about 8ft. The capital is £20,000, in £1 shares – 9d per share paid – and the shares are worth about 8s 9d. The Canadian Gold Mining Company is also in a good position, between the New Find Company and the Colonist Gold Mining Company. The main reef is said to traverse the ground. The Waitoki Gold Mining Company has a reef seven to eight feet thick, showing gold, and of a very promising character. The Eureka Gold Mining Company has a well-defined reef, of 5 to 6ft. The Inverness Gold Mining Company has an excellent gold-bearing reef of 2 to 3ft thick, which in a trial crushing produced 4 1/2 ounces of gold to the ton, worth £3 7s per ounce. Nearly all these companies have capitals of £20,000 (one pound shares), with very small sums paid. The other companies which promise well are the Diamond Gully Gold Mining Company, the Vermont Company, and the Waiorongomai Company. The Vermont have just struck rich stone in a reef 4ft thick, and the shares have taken a great rise in value. It should get the rich leader in the Welcome Company. The Welcome claim is getting specimen stones in two leaders, which are going away on to the back of a highly mineralized reef. A good shot of gold is likely to be found soon. The Vulcan claim has a reef 3ft wide, said to be the Premier No. 1 reef. Gold is seen in the reef, and steady work, now started, will probably prove this to be good ground. Arizona claim: this ground lies under the New Find ground. The richest piece of stone found on the surface was found here. It has a fine sandstone country, and a deep level, which should soon cut something good. The shares are very low in price on the market....

At a small crushing of five tons from the Inverness Gold Mining Company, 21oz 15dwt of gold was produced; and from two tons of quartz from the Welcome Gold Mining Company yielded 115oz of gold, worth £3 7s 8d per ounce. This claim is getting the richest stone on the field, and the farther they sink the richer the stone grows. There are many very strong believers in the richness and permanency of the Te Aroha reefs, but there is not the wild excitement that existed about 13 years since [a reference to the Thames fiedld], though should the results of the forthcoming crushing realize near what is expected, I have no doubt a general

rise in values will take place. The heavy outlay upon these batteries, and upon the tramway, clearly shows the confidence the owners entertain of the richness and permanency of these reefs.²²⁹

Commenting on the revival of interest as the first crushing approached, Wilson wrote that ‘the greater part’ of the approximately 40 licensed holdings applied for in the second half of 1883 were taken up ‘for speculative purposes, very little prospecting’ being done.²³⁰ In the year to 31 March 1883, before these additional claims were taken up, 102 licenses had been granted, covering a total of 389 acres.²³¹ With miners returning to the district, 245 miner’s rights were issued during 1883.²³² Therefore an 1899 recollection of the field, ‘when some hundreds of miners were at work night and day’ in 1883, ‘and payable returns and dividends’ were paid,²³³ was wildly inaccurate.

EXPECTATIONS ON THE EVE OF THE FIRST CRUSHING

Brett’s Auckland Almanac for 1884, written late in the previous year, gave an assessment of the goldfield on the eve of the first crushing:

Visitors coming to Te Aroha to inspect the goldfield must not expect to see grand shows of specimens such as were seen in some of the rich mines at the Thames, but when impartially inspecting the various reefs, one cannot fail to be convinced that enormous quantities of payable quartz are to be obtained easily, while the large district over which the innumerable auriferous reefs extend is capable of supporting a very large mining population. Considering the amount of work done, there is a very promising show; but even in the richest mines there is no display of specimens. The gold appears to be well distributed through the reefs, and though fine, is believed to be easily saved, and generally payable. Shareholders must have a little patience, and the battery will give its report with unfailing accuracy. Although

²²⁹ Own Correspondent, ‘From Christchurch to Te Aroha’, *Star*, 24 October 1883, p. 3, and *Lyttleton Times*, 24 October 1883, p. 5.

²³⁰ George Wilson to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 8 April 1884, *AJHR*, 1884, H-9, p. 20.

²³¹ *AJHR*, 1883, H-5, Appendix, p. 61.

²³² *Te Aroha News*, 9 February 1884, p. 2.

²³³ *Thames Advertiser*, 16 August 1899, p. 3.

an enormous amount of work has been done in connection with tramways, roads, races, battery, &c, the actual mining work done is comparatively little, so that it is impossible to speak with certainty as to the precise strike of various reefs and the nature of the country, excepting at the localities where present operations are being carried on, and it must be remembered that even this portion of the field has not yet had a fair trial. Masses of quartz lay stripped all the year in various claims ready for being shot down and sent to the mill, but it was useless to do this, as the stuff could not have been got to the battery; but now facilities for transporting and crushing quartz are provided, there is encouragement for men to go to work. In thus commenting on the restricted character of operations, it is not intended to convey an impression that there has not been as much work done as might have been. On the contrary, all praise is due to the pioneer miners on Te Aroha for the severe labour they must have undergone to do the prospecting work already done long before roads and tramways were constructed.... However, a fair start has now been made, mine after mine is being re-manned, and our knowledge of reefs and country will increase with the number of workings, and as the lodes are traced further across country or followed deeper down.²³⁴

The completion of the tramway meant, in the words of one correspondent, that the time was 'near at hand when the hopes of the sanguine and the fears of the despondent shall be tested by the true tell-tale - the battery. Your correspondent has no doubt whatever as to the payable quality of the stone' in the Premier, Colonist, New Find, Werahiko, and Waitoki', and hoped

that the working miner that voluntarily subjects himself to the hardships attendant upon the development of this very rough, and, I may say, unexplored district may be well rewarded for his toil, and the capitalists who responded so cheerfully by supplying the sinews of war to sustain the hopes of honest labour, deserve to be well remunerated, thus proving in this instance that capital and labour united for a common object can work harmoniously.²³⁵

'Notwithstanding the many false alarms, exciting the hopes to ecstatic heights only to be wrecked on the barren rocks of despair', he anticipated 'a

²³⁴ *Brett's Auckland Almanac for 1884*, p. 120.

²³⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 27 October 1883, p. 3.

long and prosperous future'.²³⁶ To the *Te Aroha News* the start of the battery 'should make the Upper Thames Valley the most prosperous district in New Zealand, and recoup the large outlay that has been so pluckily and perseveringly invested from time to time'.²³⁷ And according to rumour, the 'ruling powers' at Te Aroha had 'everything in training for giving their fancy stock a spark when the time arrives'.²³⁸

CONCLUSION

This long-anticipated time had indeed arrived, and everyone looked forward with great hopes to the first crushing. The long delay in erecting a battery frustrated both miners and investors, and meant that work in many claims was spasmodic at best, for without any return on their labours, miners could not develop their mines adequately. Expectations remained high, boosted by occasional good finds, but proof that these expectations were valid would not come until the battery was at work. As this moment neared, more miners came to the district because of the anticipated success of the mines and the anticipated consequent benefit to the whole district.

Appendix

Figure 1: G.H.A. Purchas, portion of blueprint of Waiorongomai goldfield, from top of Fern Spur Incline to the top of Butler's Spur Incline, 8 January 1884, University of Waikato Map Library.

Figure 2: G.H.A. Purchas, portion of blueprint of Waiorongomai goldfield, from Butler's Spur Incline to May Queen Incline, 8 January 1884, University of Waikato Map Library.

Figure 3: G.H.A. Purchas, portion of blueprint of Waiorongomai goldfield, from May Queen Incline to the end of the tramway, 8 January 1884, University of Waikato Map Library.

²³⁶ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 8 November 1883, p. 2.

²³⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 3 November 1883, p. 2.

²³⁸ *Observer*, 7 July 1883, p. 248.



Figure 3: G.H.A. Purchas, portion of blueprint of Waiorongomai goldfield, from May Queen Incline to the end of the tramway, 8 January 1884, University of Waikato Map Library.