

RUMOURS OF GOLD AT TE AROHA

Philip Hart

Te Aroha Mining District Working Papers

No. 60

2016

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

ISSN: 2463-6266

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Contact: prhart@waikato.ac.nz



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

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Abstract: *From the time of the opening of the Thames goldfield, miners were tormented by the belief that the best gold would be found in Te Aroha mountain, on their southern horizon - so near and yet so far because of Maori resistance to prospecting that district. Some Maori claimed to have found gold there, and visiting Pakeha from at least the 1850s onwards detected gold in the vicinity. The first time gold in the Waiorongomai valley was noted was in 1868. Several prospectors claimed to have explored the district, illegally and, potentially, dangerously, especially after Ohinemuri was opened to mining in 1875. But not until Hone Werahiko found gold in 1880 and the field was officially opened on 25 November would it be possible to prove whether a payable goldfield existed.*

EARLY REPORTS

From the early 1860s at least, Maori informed Pakeha that gold existed at Te Aroha. Donald McLean, then Chief Land Purchase Commissioner, had informed Sir George Grey in July 1862 that ‘Manaia and the whole of the range up to the Aroha’ was ‘spoken of as a very rich goldfield’.¹ In January 1881, there was a rush ‘some dozen miles up river to a spot near where, in the early days, a rich specimen was brought by a Maori, and shown to the then Governor’.² No date was given other than ‘the early days’, but this sounds like a reference to Sir George Grey’s trip through the district in mid-December 1849. In the account of this journey there was no mention of any gold being shown to him.³ A report on prospecting at and near Thames in 1865 mentioned that Te Aroha had ‘always been spoken of as gold-producing, both by the natives and white men who have resided in the locality’.⁴ In November 1867, when meeting Ohinemuri hapu to encourage them to open their lands for mining, the

¹ Donald McLean to Sir George Grey, 7 July 1862, Purchase of Coromandel Goldfield, Legislative Department, LE 1, 1862/101, ANZ-W.

² *Auckland Weekly News*, 8 January 1881, p. 9.

³ George Sisson Cooper, *Journal of an Expedition Overland from Auckland to Taranaki, by way of Rotorua, Taupo, and the West Coast: Undertaken in the summer of 1849-50 by His Excellency the Governor-in-Chief of New Zealand* (Auckland, 1851), pp. 42-58.

⁴ Own Correspondent, ‘Gold Prospecting on the Thames’, *Daily Southern Cross*, 3 November 1865, p. 5.

Superintendent of the Auckland Province stated that, whilst at Wellington, he had been ‘informed that gold had been discovered in those hills above here, at Te Aroha’.⁵ In the following September, a newspaper was informed that a member of Ngati Haua had arrived in Auckland

with several pieces of quartz in which gold was distinctly visible. These were obtained at Te Aroha, where for years back there has been a belief that a goldfield existed. This belief has rested on stores from natives or from native traders, for Te Aroha ... has not been prospected, the natives being exceedingly jealous of gold-seekers.⁶

Six months later, 73 of the principal rangatira of Hauraki, in their March 1869 petition seeking a rehearing of the Aroha Block by the land court, described the land at Te Aroha as ‘auriferous’.⁷ In early January that year a map was produced of ‘Te Aroha Gold Field’, being a block named Paharakeke running from the summit of ‘Aroha Auta’, as the mountain was called, most of the way to the old Maori road beside the Wairere falls and over the range, the river being its other boundary.⁸

But whilst Maori tantalized Pakeha with such statements, they were not willing to permit them to prospect, and until 1880 only furtive, illegal prospecting took place, with unproven results. Rumour exaggerated the wealth locked in the hills, and prospectors, believing that the unattained was likely to be better than the attained, were frustrated by the delays in permitting thorough testing. From Thames, Te Aroha mountain was clearly visible to the south, so near and yet so far. As *Punch, or the Auckland Charivari*, wrote in 1869, to the south of Thames was ‘the great Aroha mountain, inaccessible as yet to the gold-digger, and by that very fact a land longed for as of great wealth’.⁹ At the time of the opening of Thames, an Auckland newspaper lamented that the prospect of gold culminated ‘at the Aroha mountain, where we have no chance of getting for some

⁵ *Auckland Weekly News*, 9 November 1867, p. 17.

⁶ *Daily Southern Cross*, 17 September 1868, p. 3.

⁷ ‘Petition to Governor of 73 Principal Men of Hauraki’, 30 March 1869, Legislative Department, LE 1, 1869/133, ANZ-W.

⁸ ‘Thames District [Te Aroha Gold Field], 9 Jany 1869’, H. Hanson Turton, *Plans of Land Purchaes in the North Island of New Zealand: vol. 1: Province of Auckland* (Wellington, 1877), Deed no. 388.

⁹ *Punch, or the Auckland Charivari*, 1869 [exact date not known], p. 103.

considerable time. Even Paratene', who had discovered the gold at Thames when prospecting on behalf of Wirope Hoterene Taipari,¹⁰ 'would not get leave to carry his tin dish within a long distance of that'. Even should some rangatira consent to prospecting their land, other owners were 'so minded that prospecting could be a very dangerous occupation'. At Ohinemuri a line had been drawn dividing 'the dominions of King Tawhiao from those of Queen Victoria', and as the mountain was within this boundary there was 'little hope of testing the most promising country for some time to come'.¹¹

In 1880, a Waitoa correspondent wrote that 'the Maoris have always called the mountain "the Father of Gold." We used in old Thames days to look up at its head towering above the surrounding hills and say, "Ah! If we could only get up to Te Aroha then we should be all right" '.¹² An alternative Maori description of the mountain was that it was the 'mother of gold'.¹³ To prove this belief, in January 1872 'a well-known and much-trusted chief' of the Thames district (Taipari?) went to Te Aroha 'to bring down specimens, and to put the pakeha in possession of certain information as to the alluvial character of the upper country'.¹⁴ Nothing further was heard of this endeavour, which was probably discouraged by Ngati Rahiri and others.

When Thames was about to be opened to miners in 1867, the *Daily Southern Cross* wrote that the mountain was 'the most promising country' for gold. It had 'little doubt' that Te Aroha, rather than Thames, contained 'the best goldfield, perhaps the only one'.¹⁵ The *Weekly News* stated that it was 'known that the "prospect" improves as the Thames is ascended till it culminates at the Aroha mountain'.¹⁶ In 1872, James Mackay, a mining warden during the early days of the Thames goldfield, wrote that the Ruakaka Block, below Mount Te Aroha, was 'a valuable property and likely to be the site of a Town if that country is opened up for goldmining. There is auriferous land immediately at the back of it'.¹⁷ The following year, he

¹⁰ See paper on Joseph Harris Smallman.

¹¹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 27 July 1867, p. 4.

¹² Waitoa Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 19 October 1880, p. 2.

¹³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Observer*, 18 December 1880, p. 126.

¹⁴ Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Thames Guardian and Mining Record*, 24 January 1872, p. 3.

¹⁵ *Daily Southern Cross*, 23 July 1867, p. 3.

¹⁶ *Auckland Weekly News*, 27 July 1867, p. 4.

¹⁷ James Mackay to Daniel Pollen, 24 June 1872, Te Aroha Block, Maori Affairs Department, MA 1, 13/85, ANZ-W.

stated that he was ‘personally acquainted with the fact’ that part of the Aroha Block was auriferous.¹⁸ When Ohinemuri was proclaimed a goldfield in 1875, ‘practical miners expressed the opinion that the boundary was short of the real gold country’.¹⁹ William Moon, who farmed near Te Aroha,²⁰ and assisted Mackay to purchase the Aroha Block, anticipated finding gold once it was thrown open.²¹ When it was, he did not become an owner of any claim, suggesting that any prospecting he did was unsuccessful.

DISCOVERIES CLAIMED

The foundation for such confident pronouncements was persistent rumours of gold of good quality. According to a twentieth century mining inspector, there was ‘reason for thinking that gold was first found at Te Aroha as early as about 1838’.²² He produced no evidence to support such an early date, and no other source suggests any find prior to 1852. In that year, the brothers Charles and Frederick Ring, back from the Californian goldrush, ‘at a considerable labour and pecuniary outlay, and no little risk from native hostility, systematically prospected the whole country between Coromandel and Te Aroha, discovering gold in various places, as far as Ohinemuri and beyond’.²³ The precise locations were obscure; for instance, in 1854 it was reported that they had ‘found gold in the direction of the Aroha mountain’.²⁴ In 1895 it was claimed that Charles Ring ‘proved the country auriferous from Te Aroha to Cape Colville, and back eastward to

¹⁸ James Mackay, ‘Blocks under Negotiation, but Price not Finally Arranged’, 24 March 1873, *AJHR*, 1873, G-8, p. 13.

¹⁹ Editorial, *Waikato Times*, 27 November 1880, p. 2.

²⁰ See *Waikato Times*, 27 February 1877, p. 2.

²¹ William Moon to ‘My Dear Mother’, 20 September 1874, William Moon Papers, typescript provided by Peter Barker, Waihou.

²² J.F. Downey, *Gold-Mines of the Hauraki District, New Zealand* (Wellington, 1935), p. 255.

²³ *Thames Advertiser*, 31 August 1877, p. 2; see also *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 431.

²⁴ Charles Heaphy [given as Heapley], ‘On the Coromandel Gold-Diggings in New Zealand’, *Proceedings of the Geological Society*, 8 March 1854, in *Quarterly Journal of the Geological Society*, vol. 10 part 3 no. 39 (1 August 1854), p. 322.

the Tauranga district'. He found gold in the Katikati district,²⁵ which cannot have been of much significance, as illustrated by the unprofitable Eliza mine worked in the late nineteenth century.²⁶ Allegedly they found gold 'at the foot of the mountain, immediately behind' Te Aroha township.²⁷ If that was so, they did not reveal the site to others, and no finds of any consequence were to be made there.

THE CHESNEY FIND

Also in 1852, Francis Rawden Chesney, of the Royal Engineers,²⁸ found what he believed to be gold close to the Waihou River, upstream from Te Aroha. He kept silent about his discovery until February 1864, when he wrote to the Colonial Secretary:

SIR,- I have the honor to inform you that a gold field, which I believe to be of considerable value, was observed by me in the year 1852. It is on the right bank of the Waiho or Thames River, a few miles above Waiharakeke.²⁹ The land being then in Native hands I kept this discovery to myself; but it might now be useful to the Province of Auckland to have the spot tested. - I have, &c.,

F.R. CHESNEY,

Captain R.N. and Lieut-Colonel³⁰

Mackay, appointed Civil Commissioner for the Hauraki District in May 1864, was informed of the discovery by the government and asked 'to form and head a prospecting party, but the disturbed state of the country caused the idea to be abandoned'.³¹

²⁵ 'Old Identities', *New Zealand Herald*, 19 October 1895, Supplement, p. 1.

²⁶ Downey, p. 254.

²⁷ 'Old Identities', *New Zealand Herald*, 30 November 1895, Supplement, p. 1.

²⁸ Maori War files, WO 100/18, p. 63, ANZ-W.

²⁹ For map showing location of Waiharakeke [here recorded as Waiarakiki], see 'Index to Portion of Te Aroha and Adjoining Survey Districts, November 1880' [map], Lands and Survey, LS 1/2344, folio 4, ANZ-W.

³⁰ *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 36, p. 13 (6 July 1880).

³¹ 'Report of Mr Commissioner Mackay Relative to the Thames Gold Fields', *AJHR*, 1869, A-17, p. 4.

Chesney was believed to have found alluvial gold on the eastern bank of the Waihou,³² and rumours about it may have encouraged Maori prospectors to investigate Waiharakeke in December 1880.³³ But this was not an auriferous area, and, whatever Chesney may have thought he had found, he had not found gold. In 1900, Chesney, who alone could solve the mystery of the precise location and nature of his find, wrote a detailed description of his February 1852 trip from Thames to Rotorua. Then an officer in the 58th Regiment, he always spent part of each summer exploring the countryside around Auckland. He claimed that he and his two companions, also officers of this regiment, were the first Europeans to visit the ‘terra incognita of the Hot Lakes’. On 2 February, their boat travelled up the Waihou River to Waiharakeke, where a mosquito-plagued night was spent. The following day, they travelled further south; his article neither mentioned Te Aroha nor finding gold. Any minerals that were found must have been collected at Waiharakeke, but perhaps by 1900 he realized that he had been mistaken and chose to pass over his ‘find’ in silence. In considering the reliability of his recollections, it should be noted that his boat, powered by sail not steam, had made a remarkably quick journey up the river, even with the assistance of wind and tide. He was below the junction with the Ohinemuri River ‘when the afternoon floodtide came up, and a little before sunset’ reached Waiharakeke;³⁴ there was no mention of delays caused by snags or the quartz reef across the river at Waiorongomai that blocked the passage of even small boats until destroyed by Josiah Clifton Firth.³⁵

Many garbled rumours spread about Chesney’s find, with varying details about its location. In late 1865 Maori living at Thames were ‘ignorant of the fact of his having got gold’ at Te Aroha, though a Thames correspondent had ‘no doubt of the existence of it in that quarter’.³⁶ In 1874, the *Thames Advertiser* stated that Chesney, whom it believed had belonged

³² Alfred George Allom, ‘Prospecting in the Upper Thames’, *Thames Star*, 19 January 1881, p. 2; see ‘Report of Mr Commissioner Mackay’, p. 4.

³³ *Thames Star*, 10 December 1880, p. 2.

³⁴ General Chesney, ‘Trip to the Hot Lakes in the Early Days. The First European Visitors to Rotomahana’, *Auckland Weekly News*, 28 December 1900, p. 36.

³⁵ See *Auckland Weekly News*, 8 June 1878, p. 16; Josiah Clifton Firth, *Nation Making: A story of New Zealand: Savagism v. civilisation* (London, 1890), pp. 230-232.

³⁶ Own Correspondent, ‘Gold Prospecting on the Thames’, *Daily Southern Cross*, 3 November 1865, p. 5.

to the Royal Engineers, had ‘discovered gold between Ohinemuri and Te Aroha’ in 1863.³⁷ The following year, Mackay muddled his dates by stating that Chesney had found gold ‘in 1862, the year before the war’, apparently in Ohinemuri.³⁸ In July 1880, the *Thames Advertiser* located his find three miles to the north of Te Aroha,³⁹ the wrong distance and the wrong compass bearing. Others believed that Chesney had found the gold on the southern end of the Wairakau Block, east of Te Aroha.⁴⁰ In November 1880, when Te Aroha was finally being prospected intensively, a correspondent for the *Thames Advertiser* met ‘an old resident on the field’:

He stated that he was a member of the Government survey party under Colonel Chesney, which visited the Aroha district in 1852 ... for the purpose of erecting a trig station on the top of the mountain. One day whilst his men were busy doing their work, Chesney, who was fossicking about, picked up something, and immediately became quite excited, and continued so for several hours. He did not inform the party what he discovered, although several of them had seen him stoop and pick up the substance, but on arriving in Auckland some time after he disclosed the nature of his discovery to the Surveyor-General, and showed that official a piece of quartz showing a little gold. Nothing was, however, done in the matter ... the reason being, no doubt, that as the land in question was in the hands of the natives, it would not be advisable to prospect and discover a payable goldfield for the benefit of Maoris. Our informant noticed when with the surveyors that plenty of loose quartz was lying about on the surface, and thought gold must be in some of them; but the hurried way in which the survey was made prevented him from testing the stone.⁴¹

This story, probably retailed by William Nicholls, a Pakeha Maori,⁴² seems to be pure invention, for in 1900 Chesney wrote that he spent only one day passing through the district. While others stated that he had been surveying when he found gold;⁴³ this could not have been in 1852, and there was no mention of his making two trips to Te Aroha, once as a tourist and

³⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 23 December 1874, p. 3.

³⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 15 March 1875, p. 3.

³⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 19 July 1880, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 December 1880, p. 11.

⁴¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 5 November 1880, p. 3.

⁴² See paper on his life.

⁴³ *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 December 1880, p. 11.

once as a surveyor. Whoever did the survey, the site of the survey camp was about a mile below Te Aroha township,⁴⁴ a different place to the alleged site of Chesney's find. Shortly before the goldfield was opened, an 'intelligent search' was launched to discover his discovery. The party formed had 'the additional advantage of possessing other information likely to be of assistance to them in the search'.⁴⁵ Nothing came of this, and Chesney's find was never rediscovered. The 'old resident' probably had been correct in stating that there had been haste in making the first survey and a desire to hide a potentially lucrative discovery from Ngati Rahiri.

In 1870, Chesney himself, one of the 26 prospectors seeking a reward for having found a payable goldfield in the Auckland Province, stated that he had found one on 13 September 1869, at Thames. He did not mention Te Aroha.⁴⁶

THE FIRST PROSPECTING AT OR NEAR WAIORONGOMAI

Some prospectors sneaked into the district to discover the truth about the rumours. In December 1880, the *Te Aroha Miner* reported that for some time

rumours have been current of sluicing operations having been carried on in one of the creeks towards Wairakau. One day last week these were verified by a prospector coming on an old sluice box in the bed of the creek, while axe-felled trees showed that at one time civilization had penetrated these forest clad solitudes. The sluice box was completely rotten and might have been fifteen or twenty years old.⁴⁷

This was possibly the first attempt to find gold in the Waiorongomai Stream. Clearly alluvial gold was being sought, prospectors not realizing that it did not exist. The first man that can be proved to have investigated the Waiorongomai Valley was James Bodell, who in 1886 recorded his prospecting trip into the ranges behind Katikati and beyond in September 1868. He had 'heard so much about gold having been got' in 'the vicinity' of

⁴⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 4 April 1881, p. 3.

⁴⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 1 November 1880, p. 3.

⁴⁶ Report of Goldfield Reward Commission, *Daily Southern Cross*, 29 April 1870, p. 4.

⁴⁷ *Te Aroha Miner*, n.d. [December 1880], cited in *Waikato Times*, 9 December 1880, p. 2.

Te Aroha,⁴⁸ and because of rumours of gold having been found there and elsewhere in the ranges he set out with two other men, led at one stage by a son of a rangatira, Te Moananui, of Ngai Te Rangi,⁴⁹ and later by two half-castes, Joseph and Harry Bidois.⁵⁰ They soon realized that claims by elderly Maori that 'they had seen Gold half the Size of their thumb' were false. After finding some quartz leaders containing very small specks of gold, they were guided down into the Waihou Valley by the old Maori track beside the Wairere Falls before travelling down the valley towards Te Aroha. 'For years Gold was seen in this locality', and when camped in a gorge about six miles from Wairere they found some quartz. When, closer to Te Aroha, they were taking shelter from the rain in a whare, Riki, a rangatira of Ngati Haua, who had found them in his settlement, decided 'to send us down the Waikato River to Auckland as Prisoners as we had no business in their territory looking for Gold. This was true. A short time previously the Superintendent of the Province had published Gazette Notices forbidding Europeans prospecting on native Territory and the Natives knew this'. Then Riki saw that they carried two new tomahawks, asked for one, and was given it on condition that they were not taken prisoner.

In the long run we became great friends and we invited Riki to pay Tauranga a Visit and we would welcome him. After all this talk night was close upon us and nearly all our Provisions were consumed. Through talking so much with Riki I was not aware the Natives had been taking too free a liberty with our rations. I told him this and he promised us a Supply of Kumaras or Sweet Potatoes. At last they told us if we promised to leave at daylight next morning and go over the Ranges they would let us go. We promised and the Natives departed, one returning with a small Kit about 10lb of Kumaras and this with a little wet Biscuits Sugar tea and Bacon fat all mixed together was all the rations we had. We were very glad when the Natives left.

After travelling for two hours next morning, 'we came across the Creek the Natives said gold had been got some years before. We certainly found good looking Quartz and a small speck of Gold. (The last five years Gold has been found here and a small Town formed called Waiorongomai.)' They had

⁴⁸ J[ames] B[odell], 'Reminiscences', *Bay of Plenty Times*, 31 March 1888, p. 2.

⁴⁹ Whose eldest sister had married William Nicholls: see paper on his life.

⁵⁰ J.B., 'Reminiscences', *Bay of Plenty Times*, 31 March 1888, p. 2, 13 April 1888, p. 3; see Google for a detailed family tree.

headed for the Waiorongomai Stream after one Maori, who was related to the Bidois family, 'said if we took to the bush, pointing to a creek in a certain direction about two miles away, we should get some good looking quartz'.⁵¹ In another version of his story, Bodell's party 'came across the creek and good looking quartz was found. I commenced to light a fire while the others prospected'. No success was reported, and because of heavy rain and shortage of provisions the party struggled over the range to Katikati.⁵² On the basis of reports that Maori had found gold in the Kaimai area, on the other side of the range, in 1872 Bodell, with others, would seek permission from the Maori landowners to prospect their land.⁵³

The earlier discoveries of gold at Waiorongomai had, presumably, been made by Maori, perhaps the reason why in January 1881 and afterwards they were the majority of those pegging out claims near the entrance to the valley. However, the first to peg out this area were four Pakeha, and all the claims were in the high country around Buck Rock, not around the stream.⁵⁴ Bodell had the quartz samples taken from Waiorongomai and elsewhere tested and 'came to the conclusion it would take £5 to get one ounce of Gold worth £3 10s'.⁵⁵

In early 1876, the *Daily Southern Cross* was informed 'by an intelligent native' (could he have been Hone Werahiko?) that gold had been found 'in the creeks of the Waihou' and that 'coal also exists in the Aroha ranges. Certain evidences in the creeks and streams of this large tract of country clearly indicate the presence of iron'. Since receiving this report, 'which, in a matter of this kind, is the better of confirmation from other sources, we have obtained information that an old Australian miner at present residing in the Upper Thames country, has twice successfully prospected a creek' running into the Waihou River

⁵¹ *A Soldier's View of Empire: The Reminiscences of James Bodell, 1831-92*, ed. Keith Sinclair (London, 1982), pp. 169-176; see also Evelyn Stokes, *A History of Tauranga County* (Palmerston North, 1980), p. 276.

⁵² J.B. 'Reminiscences', *Bay of Plenty Times*, 16 April 1888, p. 2.

⁵³ *Daily Southern Cross*, 27 April 1872, p. 3.

⁵⁴ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Notices of Marking Out Claims 1880, no. 43, BBAV 11557/1a; Notices of Marking Out Claims 1881, nos. 159-163, 184, 204, 221, 226, BBAV 11557/1b, ANZ-A.

⁵⁵ *A Soldier's View of Empire*, pp. 177-178.

a little way above the main peak of the Aroha range. The gold was good creek gold, quartz well impregnated with the metal, and is declared by a gentleman who saw the specimens to be excellent. The Maoris heard of the miner's visit, and on the second occasion, when he also found more specimens in the creek, they warned him not to come again. He disregarded the warning, and visited the creek a third time; and once more he found specimens of quartz containing gold. He was again met by some Maoris, who told him that if he came again prospecting for gold they would shoot him. Not willing to run the risk of any such disagreeable casualty, the prospector made no further visit. But he had already achieved his primary object, and is in possession of the samples.⁵⁶

OTHER ILLEGAL PROSPECTING

Another report of Maori taking prospectors prisoner was published in 1880. 'In the year 1868, quartz, containing gold, was picked up in the creeks at Te Aroha by George McLeod (Tokatea), James Mackay and Captain Goldsmith', the latter being the mining inspector at Thames.⁵⁷ 'The party were, however, taken prisoner by the natives and bundled off down the river in a canoe'.⁵⁸ George McLeod was a prospector who in early 1868 found gold at Harataunga, at the north of the peninsula, and the following year on the Tokatea range behind Coromandel township.⁵⁹ He took no part in the Te Aroha rushes. While Mackay was certainly interested in opening up the land for both settlement and mining, and wanted to know whether gold existed, he may not have actively prospected personally, and during 1868 and later was removing prospectors from Ohinemuri to avoid conflict with iwi.⁶⁰

Late in July 1868, some specimens of auriferous quartz were 'exhibited' in Auckland by Robert Kirkwood, later a farmer and publican in

⁵⁶ *Daily Southern Cross*, 28 March 1876, p. 2.

⁵⁷ See *Thames Advertiser*, 4 November 1878, p. 3.

⁵⁸ *Observer*, 27 November 1880, p. 89.

⁵⁹ J.H.M. Salmon, *A History of Goldmining in New Zealand* (Wellington, 1963), p. 204; *Auckland Weekly News*, 7 August 1869, p. 19.

⁶⁰ 'Report of Mr Commissioner Mackay', pp. 8-10.

the Waikato,⁶¹ who said they had been obtained from ‘the vicinity of Te Aroha’.

Some of the specimens were tested, and yielded what would be gold in payable quantities if diffused throughout the body of the stone according to sample. That there is auriferous quartz at Te Aroha has been proved beyond a doubt, many excellent samples having been brought into Shortland at various times.⁶²

That Kirkwood took no part in the Te Aroha rush indicated that he had lost faith in its prospects.

In 1875, rival prospectors gave evidence to the warden to justify their claims to be the first to find gold at Ohinemuri. Thomas Baird⁶³ claimed to have prospected at Ohinemuri in October 1868 and at the end of the following month worked there with Charlie Brown, Ben Brown, George Campbell, and John Smith,⁶⁴ despite being warned that he could be fined £50. Having found gold, he asked the authorities whether he could secure his find against other prospectors. On being told that this was not possible because he had worked on land closed to mining, he ‘let the matter stand, and went prospecting to Te Aroha and other places. Some of my mates went with me’.⁶⁵ In 1880, it was reported that in 1870, Baird, Adam Porter, a prominent Thames miner,⁶⁶ and James Mackay had a claim at Te Aroha that showed a little gold, but did no work on it. ‘For obvious reasons they kept their discovery secret’. It was some distance from the 1880 find.⁶⁷ No such claim was registered. In early December 1880, George Lipsey and others pegged out the Auckland claim in a gully to the north of his house, and worked on a leader one foot thick ‘discovered by Mr Thomas Baird, a

⁶¹ See *Waikato Times*, 7 December 1872, p. 2, 22 February 1876, p. 2, ‘Cincinnatus’, ‘The Bruntwood Estate’, 8 March 1881, p. 2; *Waikato Electoral Roll, 1878*, p. 4.

⁶² *Auckland Weekly News*, 1 August 1868, p. 3.

⁶³ See *Thames Star*, Magistrate’s Court, 14 September 1874, p. 2, Magistrate’s Court, 27 November 1874, p. 2, Warden’s Court, 15 March 1875, p. 2, Warden’s Court, 14 July 1875, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, District Court, 3 March 1876, p. 3, Death Notice, 20 November 1878, p. 2.

⁶⁴ These men’s lives have not been traced, as they did not acquire interests in the Te Aroha goldfields.

⁶⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 13 March 1875, p. 3.

⁶⁶ See paper on his life.

⁶⁷ *Thames Star*, 19 October 1880, p. 2.

prospector (since deceased) six years ago'.⁶⁸ As Lipsey was Mokena Hou's son-on-law and had been living at Te Aroha from 1873 onwards,⁶⁹ he must have been aware of any prospecting near his house. The Auckland claim turned out to be valueless.

One of Baird's mates in this party, Ben Brown, gave evidence in 1875 that in April 1868 he had assisted the party to prospect Ohinemuri and that in June they 'were in the ranges, but where we went I cannot explain, as I do not know the names. We went to Aroha. We followed the river up, as that was the first place we got a prospect'.⁷⁰ If so, why he did take no part in the Te Aroha rush? (He may have left the colony; he had not died in New Zealand.)

Patrick O'Neill, who prospected Ohinemuri before it was opened,⁷¹ claimed to have prospected in September 1868 with John Minogue,⁷² Michael Mulqueen,⁷³ Patrick Dillon, another early prospector of Ohinemuri,⁷⁴ James Smyth,⁷⁵ and Martin McCauley⁷⁶ (or McCarthy or

⁶⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 6 December 1880, p. 3.

⁶⁹ See chapter on his life.

⁷⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 13 March 1875, p. 3.

⁷¹ See *Thames Advertiser*, 7 January 1873, p. 3, 6 March 1875, p. 3, 13 March 1875, p. 3, 15 March 1875, p. 3, 16 March 1875, p. 3.

⁷² Mis-spelt as Minope in 15 March edition; correct spelling in *Thames Advertiser*, 16 March 1875, p. 3; his life has not been traced.

⁷³ His life has not been traced.

⁷⁴ See *Thames Advertiser*, 16 February 1875, p. 3, 15 March 1875, p. 3; *AJHR*, 1875, I-3, p. 28; Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 25, 90, 97, 112, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

⁷⁵ Name sometimes recorded as Smith. For examples of his involvement in Thames mining, see Thames Warden's Court, Thames Claims Register 1868, folio 268, BACL 14397/1a; Register of Deeds 1869, folios 256, 279, BACL 14417/3a, ANZ-A; for his prospecting at Ohinemuri before 1875, see James Smyth to Superintendent, Auckland Province, 8 January 1874, Auckland Provincial Government Papers, ACFL 8170, 906/75; James Smith and Michael Coleman to Superintendent, Auckland Province, 5 October 1874, Auckland Provincial Government Papers, ACFL 8170, 3755/74, ANZ-A; James Smyth to A.J. Cadman, 4 August 1894, Legislative Department, LE 1, 1894/5, ANZ-W.

⁷⁶ His life has not been traced.

McGauley or McGawley or McCauliffe).⁷⁷ They divided into two parties, and the last three men listed ‘went to the Aroha to look after a great reef, called Baird’s reef.’⁷⁸ This was six to seven feet wide, with ‘good looking stone, but no gold visible’. They spent ten to 12 days prospecting there.⁷⁹

James Smyth (sometimes recorded as Smith) stated that he came to Ohinemuri ‘in 1869’, possibly a mistake for 1868, ‘by myself. I fell in with two men, whose names I don’t know, about 3 weeks after coming up’, and they prospected at Ohinemuri for 15 days, ‘found several reefs, but got no gold. Some time after that, I went to the Aroha in company with Dillon and, I think, O’Neill. We prospected there for 10 or 12 days’ before returning to Ohinemuri. ‘O’Neill had a tracing or map, supposed to be a tracing of Tom Baird’s reef. O’Neill was with us that time. Subsequently, Dillon, myself, and another man went to the Aroha again to look for that reef’, but he did not claim that they had found either Baird’s reef or any gold. ‘I prospected the country from Waihi to Wairere above the Aroha’, implying that he did this on his own.⁸⁰ In the 1880 rush, Smyth would obtain shares in only two claims and one company, and there was no indication that his earlier prospecting had enabled him to find a reef.⁸¹

Of the other prospectors who claimed to have investigated Te Aroha, only two would take up any shares in 1880, and their actions during that rush indicated that they had not found gold earlier. O’Neill participated in the rush but did not take up any interests then.⁸² His only shareholding was in one Waiorongomai claim and the company formed to work it.⁸³

⁷⁷ The newspaper report gave the first two variants on 15 March, the third was the warden’s, the fourth was in a letter quoted in the newspaper on 16 March, and the latter was the name in the electoral roll: see *Thames Electoral Rolls, 1873*, p. 36; *1874*, p. 42.

⁷⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 15 March 1875, p. 3.

⁷⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 15 March 1875, p. 3; Thames Warden’s Court, Warden’s Notes made at Ohinemuri 1875-1877, 12 March 1875, BACL 14566/1a, ANZ-A.

⁸⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 15 March 1875, p. 3.

⁸¹ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 153, 193, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 20 January 1881, p. 111.

⁸² Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Miner’s Right no. 987, issued 25 November 1880, Miners’ Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1b, ANZ-A.

⁸³ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 103, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 27 September 1883, p. 1369.

Dillon did not become an owner of any claims prior to acquiring two interests in two close to Te Aroha township in 1883.⁸⁴

Also in 1875, Alexander Mackay tried to prove that he had been one of the first to prospect Ohinemuri, but made no claim to have investigated Te Aroha.⁸⁵ Not till 1901 did he claim to have found gold there, allegedly in 1869;⁸⁶ but over time he would claim to have been the first prospector of most of the Ohinemuri goldfields.⁸⁷ He did not participate in the Te Aroha rush, first taking out a miner's right in the following November and acquiring shares in two Waiorongomai claims, neither of which he had discovered.⁸⁸

Other, anonymous, prospectors continued to explore the ranges at or near Te Aroha. An Auckland newspaper was told in November 1871 of a discovery 'in the country between Te Aroha and Tauranga, where prospectors have been out for some time'.⁸⁹ A Bowentown, Katikati, correspondent wrote in February 1872 that, although not a digger himself,

still I have confidence in the statements of those whose profession is to search and find the precious minerals, and I am assured by them that the whole district from Hikutaia, across the range, following the backbone of it into Tauranga, coming over to Te Aroha, is all auriferous, reefs on the surface being known to exist, specimens of which I have seen, and which three years ago, were lodged with the Government.⁹⁰

As was usual, these prospectors exaggerated greatly, although indeed there were patches of gold in this large area. In July 1869, the Ohinemuri correspondent of the *Thames Advertiser* reported that 'W.G. Nicholls' was 'tunnelling into the Aroha Mountain, and had arrived at the distance of 150

⁸⁴ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 297, 298, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

⁸⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 15 March 1875, p. 3.

⁸⁶ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 19 July 1901, p. 2.

⁸⁷ See paper on his life

⁸⁸ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 1791, issued 25 November 1881, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1881, BBAV 11533/1h; Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 12, 27, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

⁸⁹ *Daily Southern Cross*, 30 November 1871, p. 5.

⁹⁰ Bowentown, Katikati, Correspondent, *Thames Guardian and Mining Record*, 10 February 1872, p. 3.

feet, when he struck gold'. For once, this rumour was disbelieved, on the grounds that Nicholls was too lazy.⁹¹ If the miner was William Grey Nicholls,⁹² as the initials suggest, he may also have been too young, being then only 16 years old.⁹³ Nicholls would assist Maori to peg out two claims in December 1880.⁹⁴ Perhaps his father, William, was meant; he was living close to the mountain, for his wife Hera Te Whakaawa was an owner of the Ruakaka Block.⁹⁵ After mining started in 1880, there was no mention of anyone finding a tunnel dug by Nicholls or either of his sons. When Nicholls' second son, James Ponui Nicholls, was in charge of the Homeward Bound, at Tui, in 1881, he was not able to re-use an existing tunnel but had to drive a new one.⁹⁶ James helped to peg out a claim at Waiorongomai in October 1881, and the following month with his father helped to peg out two more.⁹⁷

At the beginning of the 1870s, a Pakeha visitor to the Bay of Plenty referred to 'longing eyes' being cast on 'the mountain range of the Aroha, believed to be a continuation of the auriferous chain of the Thames'.⁹⁸ The following 'somewhat curious narrative' told to a reporter at Ohinemuri in March 1875, if true, indicated that it was best to gaze from afar:

It appears that a man named James Liddell and some others were on the 13th of February last prospecting in an unfrequented place between here and Aroha. They came on the remains of a burnt camp, where a tent had stood, and amongst the debris they found the barrels, locks, &c, of two rifles, from which the stocks had been burnt; also several broken bottles, and one whole one

⁹¹ Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 7 July 1869, reprinted in *Auckland Weekly News*, 10 July 1869, p. 10.

⁹² See paper on his life.

⁹³ Death Certificate of William Grey Nicholls, 15 May 1915, 1915/278, BDM.

⁹⁴ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Notices of Marking Out Claims 1880, nos. 74, 112, BBAV 11557/1a, ANZ-A.

⁹⁵ Maori Land Court, Auckland Minute Book no. 2, p. 346; Hauraki Minute Book no. 31, p. 276; *Auckland Weekly News*, 28 March 1868, p. 12; *New Zealand Herald*, 13 May 1871, p. 3; Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 21 December 1900, p. 24.

⁹⁶ *Auckland Weekly News*, 22 January 1881, p. 21; Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 201, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

⁹⁷ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Notices of Marking Out Claims 1881, nos. 210, 255, 309, BBAV 11557/1b, ANZ-A.

⁹⁸ J.H.A. St John, *Pakeha Rambles Through Maori Lands* (Wellington, 1873), pp. 121-122.

about half full of rum. Where the camp was discovered is considerably off the track, in a sort of blind gully. It is supposed that the debris had been in its present state for at least three years.... It may be recollected that some time ago it was rumoured that the skeleton of a man with a hole through his skull had been found on a hill adjoining this locality. It is quite possible that some unfortunate prospector had been discovered in the ranges and summarily disposed of either by a bullet or a blow on the head.⁹⁹

Perhaps it was this discovery that one of the first settlers at Paeroa, Charles Featherstone Mitchell,¹⁰⁰ referred to in 1880 when claiming that Hone Werahiko's find was 'not quite so new as it looks, one discoverer having been now for many years in his grave, and at least three others having been shot'; he did not name these unfortunates. Mitchell stated that discoveries had been reported to the Auckland Provincial Council in 1870 and 1871.¹⁰¹ A reporter visiting Te Aroha in 1871 believed that there was gold there; he was accompanied by some diggers who agreed that alluvial gold would be found between there and Wairakau. They were prevented from prospecting, Maori frequently examining their boats to see whether they had 'anything like mining tools' on board.¹⁰²

Possibly one of the diggers on this trip was Richard Kennan, a miner, speculator, and stockbroker at Thames.¹⁰³ In December 1880, when claims were first pegged out in the Tui portion of Te Aroha field, the Catran brothers' claim, in a side branch of the Omahu Creek,¹⁰⁴ was reported to be

⁹⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 16 March 1875, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ See paper on the Thames Miners' Union. For some details of his life there, see *Thames Guardian and Mining Record*, 12 January 1872, p. 3, advertisement, 10 February 1872, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 18 September 1872, p. 3, Ohinemuri Correspondent, 7 April 1873, p. 3, 15 April 1873, p. 3, 16 April 1873, p. 3, 30 April 1873, p. 3, 14 May 1873, p. 3, 25 May 1873, p. 3, 24 May 1873, p. 3.

¹⁰¹ Paeroa Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 27 October 1880, p. 3; for his membership of the Provincial Council, see *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 5 October 1870, p. 397, 5 December 1870, p. 435, 7 February 1871, p. 25; *Thames Guardian and Mining Record*, 12 December 1871, p. 3.

¹⁰² Special Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 13 May 1871, p. 3, 20 May 1871, p. 5.

¹⁰³ See *Thames Advertiser*, 29 November 1875, p. 2; *Thames Electoral Roll, 1880*, p. 24; Death Certificate of Ethel Laura Bliss Kennan, 14 January 1879, 1879/1230, BDM.

¹⁰⁴ For details of the brothers and their find, see paper entitled 'The Te Aroha Goldfield from its Opening until Christmas 1880'.

‘the same reef that Dick Kennan prospected some nine years ago, and from which he took a crushing that yielded at the rate of 2oz to the ton. Kennan kept quiet about it then, no doubt hoping that the field would be opened some day, when he would be able to take advantage of it’.¹⁰⁵ Such a good yield must have been exaggerated, otherwise Kennan would have come back to claim his prize, but neither in 1880 or afterwards did he have any involvement in mining at Te Aroha. In fact, William Nicholls, who had lived in the district for many years, had told the Catrans about this reef in 1879.¹⁰⁶ The initial response to their discovery was that it was ‘not considered important, as Mr Kennan fairly tested the same lode some years ago, and would not look at it again, although he knew the district was to be thrown open before he left for the West Coast a few weeks ago’.¹⁰⁷ The Catrans did not investigate the area in 1879 because of unsettled relations between Pakeha and Maori following the shooting of Daldy McWilliams at Rotokohu by Ngati Hako earlier that year.¹⁰⁸

In November 1880, when several people were vying to be recognized as the first discoverer of gold, John Dixon (or Dickson)¹⁰⁹ claimed to have prospected in 1871 and to have found gold in loose stone in the creek below the future Prospectors’ Claim. He was the first to claim to have had the consent of Ngati Rahiri, ‘He took one of the native owners to the spot and showed him where he had obtained gold, and asked him to allow the district to be opened. He said he would, but thought it would not do to say anything to the other owners, as the tribal rights were not then settled’. Accordingly, Dixon ceased work.¹¹⁰

In 1872, the owner of a small steamer trading on the Waihou River urged the opening of Ohinemuri and Te Aroha because ‘everybody knows there is gold there, and plenty of it too’.¹¹¹ According to the ‘old resident’ at Te Aroha who in 1880 told a reporter about Chesney’s visit, from 1872 onwards

¹⁰⁵ *Thames Star*, 9 December 1880, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ *Thames Star*, 11 December 1880, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 13 December 1880, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ See paper on the Daldy McWilliams ‘outrage’.

¹⁰⁹ The latter spelling was used in 1878, when he was mining at Owharoa: *Thames Electoral Roll, 1878*, p. 20.

¹¹⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 19 November 1880, p. 3.

¹¹¹ Letter from J.W. Pearse, *Auckland Weekly News*, 17 February 1872, p. 21.

He spent nearly two years, off and on, in vigorous prospecting. He discovered several reefs and leaders, but none of them showed gold. He however found nice gold in pieces of brown quartz lying on the surface after he had burnt off the scrub, and on one occasion he brought down to Grahamstown a kit containing 22lb of nice specimens, which he caused to be crushed privately, and which gave a yield of 11oz 4dwt melted gold. The cake was sold at the Bank of New Zealand in Auckland, and fetched £3 12s per ounce, as it was of splendid quality. He informs us that all the gold he obtained at Te Aroha never went less than £3.... He says that although he failed to discover gold in any of the reefs, the late Sir Donald McLean visited the Aroha some years before his death, and was shown the most promising of the lodes by our informant. The Native Minister caused several pounds of the stone to be broken out, and taken to Wellington, where it was tested at the Government Laboratory, and yielded at the rate of 4oz to the ton. Our informant knows where the reef in question is situated, and intends to take it up as soon as the field is opened.¹¹²

Whilst typical of many a prospector's tale and not in itself unlikely, it was undermined by the fact that McLean did not visit Te Aroha in the 1870s. The only 'old resident' of Te Aroha who might have been involved in an 1852 survey party, William Nicholls, who did some prospecting before the goldfield was opened. In 1879, he told Pakeha prospectors about gold in the Tui Stream, where in December 1880 he was an owner of two claims.¹¹³

In 1880, Abraham Warbrick, an interpreter living at Tauranga,¹¹⁴ indicated that residents of that township had been interested in the possibility of mineral wealth in the Kaimai range. Before 1875 he had received a letter from James Mackay, 'accompanied by several letters to the chiefs of Tauranga and other settlements on the other side of the Mountain, acquainting me with the existence of gold in the 'Te Aroha district' and on the eastern side of the range. Mackay 'expressed an anxious desire that the whole district should be thoroughly prospected', and sought approval from rangatira. According to Warbrick, an unnamed Thames prospector did find gold in a gorge leading from Katikati to Te Aroha, probably that of the Waitekohe River, where the Eliza mine briefly operated in the late

¹¹² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 5 November 1880, p. 3.

¹¹³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 9 December 1880, p. 3; Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 177, 189, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

¹¹⁴ *Tauranga Electoral Roll, 1882*, p. 38.

nineteenth century.¹¹⁵ Perhaps this was the discovery, about which no details were published then or later, reported in November 1871 to have been made 'in the country between Te Aroha and Tauranga, where prospectors have been out for some time'.¹¹⁶

Another miner who claimed to have worked at or near Te Aroha before 1875 was Denis Murphy.¹¹⁷ In 1886 he stated that 'from his experience 12 years ago, he ... knew there was a belt of auriferous country behind the Premier' mine at Waiorongomai.¹¹⁸ In 1909 he stated that his party had 'found a belt of splendid auriferous country coming under Te Aroha mountain. We got loose gold, and loose stone with gold in it, but we could never find the reef'.¹¹⁹ If the country was so 'splendid', why did he restrict his involvement once the field opened to having shares in one Te Aroha company and trying to jump one claim at Waiorongomai?¹²⁰ Not till 1909 did he make a serious attempt to develop a mine, Murphy's Find, below the original Prospectors' Claim.¹²¹

PROSPECTING AFTER THE OPENING OF OHINEMURI

In 1875, the long-awaited opening of Ohinemuri made it easier for prospectors to explore closer to Te Aroha, although prospecting in the Aroha Block was still forbidden. In March, 'several parties' worked in the streams leading from the Waihi plains towards the mountain.¹²² Two months later, one prominent early prospector of Thames, William Albert Hunt,¹²³ chartered a steamer to take him to Te Aroha.¹²⁴ There were no reports of his making any discoveries, and it is likely that Ngati Rahiri did not allow him to prospect. He took no part in the Te Aroha rushes. In 1880, one newspaper wrote that it knew 'of at least one party' which 'by stealth crossed the range

¹¹⁵ *Bay of Plenty Times*, 9 November 1880, p. 3 [printed as Waitikohe]; Downey, p. 254.

¹¹⁶ *Auckland Weekly News*, 2 December 1871, p. 13.

¹¹⁷ See paper on his life.

¹¹⁸ Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 2 September 1886, p. 2.

¹¹⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 18 February 1909, p. 2.

¹²⁰ *New Zealand Gazette*, 24 February 1881, p. 258; Te Aroha Warden's Court, *Plaint Book* 1880-1898, 76/1881, BBAV 11547/1a, ANZ-A.

¹²¹ See paper on Denis Murphy.

¹²² *Thames Advertiser*, 18 March 1875, p. 3.

¹²³ See Salmon, pp. 183-184.

¹²⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 24 May 1875, p. 3.

from the Rotokohu', the gorge on the side of Karangahake traversed by the road between Paeroa and Te Aroha, 'and made a hasty examination of the country, being prevented from prosecuting their researches through the hostility of the natives'.¹²⁵ Mitchell claimed in 1877 to have 'personally examined the country ... almost from Parawai to considerably above the Aroha', but gave neither dates nor details.¹²⁶

The main reason why interest so speedily turned from Ohinemuri to Te Aroha was that initially the Karangahake, Waitekauri, and Tairua goldfields were disappointing and few miners worked there in the late 1870s.¹²⁷ As one newspaper wrote, although Te Aroha was kept 'strictly tapu' after 1875, Maori 'tradition kept alive interest in the place, and one or two white men who had surreptitiously examined the country stoutly averred that both alluvial and quartz gold existed there. The Maoris called the place the "Mother of gold", and many inflated reports found currency'.¹²⁸

Late in 1877, according to his account, John Dixon returned to Te Aroha, but 'other prospectors also arrived, and caused the natives to be watchful. Finding that the natives objected to any prospecting, I hid my tools in the bush, and left. Shortly afterwards, hearing that the Te Aroha had been purchased by the Government', which dated his visit as being after August 1878,¹²⁹ 'I left the work I was at and returned to Te Aroha'. Meeting the Native Agent, Edward Walter Puckey, at the hot springs, he asked

if anything had been done in the way of prospecting, and if gold had been discovered. He said not that he was aware of. I told him that I would show him gold at that distance from the house when I met him. He immediately asked me, as a favour, not to say anything about it for a time, as things were not settled with the natives, and it would hinder negotiations. Believing, I went to the spot where I had formerly found gold, and found that no one had been fossicking in my absence. I then left the district.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ Editorial, *Waikato Times*, 27 November 1880, p. 2.

¹²⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 7 March 1877, p. 3.

¹²⁷ For example, *Thames Directory for 1881* (Thames, 1881), p. 6.

¹²⁸ *New Zealand Times* [n.d.], cited in *Thames Advertiser*, 18 December 1880, p. 3.

¹²⁹ See *Thames Advertiser*, 12 August 1878, p. 2, 20 August 1878, p. 3, 27 August 1878, p. 2.

¹³⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 19 November 1880, p. 3.

Whilst this account of Puckey not wishing to complicate land purchases by revealing that gold existed is accurate,¹³¹ Dixon's claim to have found good gold would have been more convincing had he pegged out a claim when the field opened. In October 1880, when he told the warden of his find, he was asked to 'show him a payable reef and he would protect me. At that time I could not, being afraid that my discoveries would be taken up by others. Since then I have been prospecting, watched every day by others, and prevented from working'.¹³² Just before the proclamation of the goldfield, Dixon took a party to peg out what he claimed to be a payable reef to the south of the prospectors' claim, but when he could not show them any gold in it, they returned to Te Aroha in disgust.¹³³ Dixon did not peg out any claim nor become a partner in any claims.

In February 1878, the *Thames Advertiser* wondered what had become of 'the embryo goldfield' at 'the new El Dorado at Te Aroha'. Maori had for long talked of gold deposits and

held out hopes of immense riches in store in that direction. Is it all a myth? With the example of the opening of Ohinemuri before us, we confess the prospect is not half so attractive as it would have been at first sight. The stories of treasure to be revealed on the opening of that district, which turned out mere fallacies, seem to have their counterpart at the Aroha, and we apprehend the same results. But until the crucial test has been made the unsatisfactory doubt still remains, and men are anxious to see the test applied. There are not wanting individuals sanguine enough to like the look of the expected goldfield.

Although 'the land looks promising to the experienced eye of the miner', it had 'lost all hope in the so-called fabulous wealth of the mountain, however jealously it may be guarded by fanatical Maoris of the old school'. It saw no need for haste. 'The reports, so far, are too vague even to be encouraging', and certainly not good enough 'to test the ground against the wish of the natives who reside at the settlement under the mountain, and profess to guard the gold contained in the hills behind and beyond'.¹³⁴

¹³¹ See paper on the Aroha Block to 1879.

¹³² *Thames Advertiser*, 19 November 1880, p. 3.

¹³³ *Thames Advertiser*, 26 November 1880, p. 3.

¹³⁴ Editorial, *Thames Advertiser*, 25 February 1878, p. 2.

The following month, the Inspector of Miners' Rights visited Te Aroha because of reports of several prospecting parties being there,¹³⁵ but whether he either found or discouraged them was not reported. In April, a special reporter visiting Te Aroha was informed that gold had 'been discovered in some of the hill streams, and it is said the system of reefs extending from the Waitekauri to Owharoa have been traced to the summit of the mountain'.¹³⁶ Either the 'fanatical Maoris of the old school' were becoming less assiduous in defending their mountain from prospecting, or the latter were exaggerating the extent of the areas they had covered.

From that month until 1880, there were no more reports of prospecting, although in October 1880 Peter Ferguson, a Thames miner,¹³⁷ claimed that he had explored the mountain over a year previously. He made this claim when attempting to prove he was one of the first to find gold, his 'prospecting tour' having taken him to the eastern side of Te Aroha, crossing the ranges above Wairakau.

I got sufficient encouragement by the prospects to make me believe that the ranges were auriferous - and determined to prospect the district - I made application in writing to the Waste Land Board for a site for a Landing store opposite Morgan's [Mokena Hou's] house - the Board refused the application, had the site been granted I would have had a store built and as the steamer would only require my presence two days in the week I would have had four days for prospecting - I returned to the Thames.¹³⁸

CONCLUSION

Not until Hone Werahiko's 1880 discovery was there any real indication that payable gold deposits might exist in the mountain. After 25 November 1880, when the field opened, beliefs in the existence of great wealth could either be proved or disproved. Until then there was nothing but rumours, spread over several decades, all very enticing to potential miners but based on nothing but unsubstantiated claims which were really just hopes – and possibly illusions.

¹³⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 27 March 1878, p. 3.

¹³⁶ Special Reporter, 'A Visit to the Upper Thames', *Thames Advertiser*, 14 April 1878, p. 3.

¹³⁷ See paper on Peter Ferguson and his New Era.

¹³⁸ Peter Ferguson to Warden, 18 October 1880, Thames Warden's Court, Letters and Telegrams to Warden 1879-1896, BACL 13388/1a, ANZ-A.

Appendix

Figure 1: 'Thames District [Te Aroha Gold Field], 9 Jany 1869', H. Hanson Turton, Plans of Land Purchases in the North Island of New Zealand: vol. 1: Province of Auckland (Wellington, 1877), Deed no. 388.

THAMES DISTRICT

[TE AROHA GOLD FIELD]

9 Jan^y 1869.

