

THE DISCOVERY OF GOLD AT TE AROHA AND ITS
CONSEQUENCES: JANUARY TO OCTOBER 1880

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Te Aroha Mining District Working Papers

No. 64

2016

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ISSN: 2463-6266

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

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Abstract: *By mid-1880, when there were expectations that gold would be found at Te Aroha, at last Ngati Rahiri permitted prospecting. A government-subsidized prospecting party under Hone Werahiko set out in early August and announced an apparently valuable find one month later. As the discovery was on Ngati Rahiri land, a goldfield could not be declared open immediately, but despite this increasing numbers of prospectors arrived. Newspapers were cautious, not wanting to encourage a rush based on nothing but rumours, some of them extravagant, notably one of finding ore that would produce 200oz to the ton.*

Despite being doubtful about the prospects, officials prepared to proclaim a new goldfield. In late October, good specimens were shown in Thames, encouraging more to leave both there and the Waikato to explore. After the warden inspected the ground where Werahiko had found gold, which was off limits to everyone except the original prospectors, he arranged to have the only test made before the field was opened. Although this gave an uncertain indication of whether the ore was payable, and little real work was being done outside the prospectors' claim, regulations were devised permitting the proclamation of the new field.

EXPECTING A DISCOVERY

There was no prospecting at Te Aroha at the beginning of 1880, but on 7 January the prominent Thames miner and investor, Adam Porter,¹ asked the Waste Lands Board, which dealt with 'waste land' acquired by the Crown from Maori, to reserve from sale that portion of the Aroha Block from Mangaiti Creek to 'the large creek above the Hot Springs', meaning the Waiorongomai Stream.

In that portion of the Block there are several Quartz reefs that are auriferous and it would be undesirable that they should fall into private hands until such time that portion of the District has had a fair trial by the Miners, this they have had no chance of

¹ See paper on his life.

doing up to the present and several parties are anxious of giving the District a trial as soon as it is open for prospecting.²

He was told that, as this land was reserved for Ngati Rahiri, the board had no control over it.³ In February, the Te Aroha Correspondent of the *Thames Advertiser*, George Stewart O'Halloran,⁴ wrote that, as there was 'every indication of gold', it was 'a pity' that nobody was prospecting. As there was 'any amount of loose quartz knocking about', he had 'no doubt but that gold will be discovered if only looked for'.⁵ In May, when a committee of the Thames High School Board of Governors made an initial report on their endowment, situated mainly on flat land alongside the Waiorongomai Creek, they referred to the 'probability of gold being found' in the hills.⁶ At the end of that month, the chairman of the county council informed a commission investigating the construction of a railway to Thames that 'there was a possibility of a goldfield being established in the Te Aroha district shortly'.⁷

In July, a Waitoa Correspondent saw specimens that 'would compare favourably with anything that has been obtained from the Lower Thames'. As the mountain was 'a mass of quartz reefs and leaders', after this ore was found some Waitoa landowners were forming an association to employ two prospectors.⁸ At the end of that month, O'Halloran, who as the local publican had everything to gain from an influx of settlers, tried to prompt Thames prospectors by writing that 'for years past, miners and others have been under the impression that gold' existed in the mountain. Although members of various hapu had previously driven off prospectors, Ngati Rahiri now permitted exploration. 'No better field' for prospecting existed in the North Island, this untried country having 'every indication of gold, plenty of wood and water, and provisions cheap. The double prospect of a Government reward, and a good claim ought surely to start some of your

² Adam Porter to Chairman, Waste Lands Board, Auckland, 7 January 1880, Mines Department, MD 1, 85/1006, ANZ-W.

³ Waste Lands Board, *Auckland Weekly News*, 31 January 1880, p. 15.

⁴ See paper on his life.

⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 12 February 1880, p. 3.

⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 11 May 1880, p. 3.

⁷ *Thames Star*, 29 May 1880, p. 2.

⁸ Waitoa Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 22 July 1880, p. 2.

practical but perforce idle men up this way'.⁹ O'Halloran did not prospect himself,¹⁰ and by the end of 1880 had shares in only two claims, both in the Tui district; he would later have shares in seven Waiorongomai claims.¹¹

AT LAST, A FIND

Early in August, a prospecting party organized by Porter, who had obtained a government subsidy, set out for the mountain,¹² under the leadership of Hone Werahiko.¹³ A week later, two unnamed prospectors, presumably from this party, attended O'Halloran's luncheon to celebrate the commencement of a new punt across the river.¹⁴ In the middle of the month, it was briefly reported that they had 'struck several reefs'.¹⁵ Details were unknown, even to those few Pakeha living at Te Aroha. O'Halloran could not report on the success of 'our prospectors' because they were 'very dark as the Maoris express it. In other words they are not communicable'.¹⁶ At the beginning of September, another resident wrote that, 'with all the talk about prospecting', only two men from Porter's party were at work. He claimed that reefs were as plentiful as at Thames, but whether they contained gold remained to be proved.¹⁷ One day after this was published, Charles Featherstone Mitchell,¹⁸ the Paeroa correspondent of the *Thames Advertiser*,¹⁹ reported that the party had returned to Waitekauri with the news that they had found gold:

As I have prospected this country - Paeroa to the Wairere Falls ...
and have never found a colour, - I am not at all sanguine. At the

⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 30 July 1880, p. 3.

¹⁰ See paper on his life.

¹¹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 189, 207, 254, BBAV 11567/1a; Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 4, 30, 118, 169, 170, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A; Warden's Court, *Te Aroha News*, 1 September 1883, p. 2.

¹² *Thames Star*, 4 August 1880, p. 2.

¹³ See paper on his life.

¹⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 13 August 1880, p. 3.

¹⁵ *Thames Star*, 18 August 1880, p. 2.

¹⁶ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 20 August 1880, p. 3.

¹⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 3 September 1880, p. 2.

¹⁸ See paper on the Thames Miners' Union.

¹⁹ *Thames Star*, 19 October 1880, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 20 October 1880, p. 3.

same time, one of my old mates at Waitekauri, whom I saw on Sunday last, assured me that he got a prospect this (Paeroa) side of Te Aroha.... I cannot find the whereabouts of the prospectors to-day; but if the police should report me as having been seen with a shovel, prospecting pan, pick, and a pair of new moles [moleskin trousers] marked with clay, you will know what you may expect next.²⁰

The *Thames Star* reported the claim of a payable reef being found.²¹ This discovery was not reported officially until five days later, when Porter informed the under-secretary for goldfields, Oliver Wakefield, that his party had 'found some splendid stone'. Convinced there were 'good payable Reefs' he had 'sent particulars' to the warden, Harry Kenrick,²² and asked 'for protection to try the ground'.²³ On the same day he told Kenrick that good gold had been 'found in several places', the 'best prospects' being on land reserved for Ngati Rahiri. He wanted the right to all minerals reserved by the government and applied 'for protection for - say 25 Acres to see if the Reefs are payable - also for a portion of the Reward offered should the find prove of any value'.²⁴

After Porter went to Auckland to discuss his find with the Attorney General, Frederick Whitaker, the latter sent a surveyor to determine its precise location, which was, as Porter feared, on Maori land. After being shown samples by Porter, Kenrick, who was impressed, informed Wakefield that it was 'exceptionally rich' and 'a very valuable discovery has been made'. While negotiations took place with Ngati Rahiri and arrangements were made to extend the existing goldfield boundary to include Te Aroha, he did not want the find publicized; accordingly, Porter had removed his

²⁰ Ohinemuri Correspondent. *Thames Advertiser*, 6 September 1880, p. 3.

²¹ *Thames Star*, 6 September 1880, p. 2.

²² See paper on his life.

²³ Adam Porter to Oliver Wakefield (Gold Fields Under-Secretary), 11 September 1880, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/353, ANZ-W.

²⁴ Adam Porter to Harry Kenrick (Warden), 11 September 1880, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/353, ANZ-W.

party.²⁵ As part of this discretion, at Whitaker's request Kenrick took no steps to verify the discovery.²⁶

RESPONSES TO REPORTS OF THE FIND

Rumours had already spread, to be greeted with scorn by Mitchell, who charged the prospectors with milking the government:

The new goldfield has not yet been discovered, but there is no doubt but that it will be when they find it. Kort [one of Hone Werahiko's German mates?] and his mate are carefully studying the map of the district, and have found that the right bank of the river is the Paeroa side. The tucker will last for some time yet, and the men are very hopeful that they will be able to get through the £400 before the next session of Parliament.²⁷

Others were less cynical. By the middle of the month, 'a number of people' were 'busily prospecting the Aroha range, so that we shall soon know whether former reports in regard to the auriferous nature of the country were correct'.²⁸ Late in the month and at the beginning of October, two parties of miners applied for subsidies.²⁹ One was to be led by Peter Ferguson,³⁰ and the other by 'Stackpole and others', probably Robert Stackpole junior, as his father was a shoe- and bootmaker at Thames, not a miner like his son.³¹ The father would participate in the rush,³² but did not

²⁵ Harry Kenrick to Oliver Wakefield, 23 September 1880 (telegram and letter), Mines Department, MD 1, 12/353, ANZ-W.

²⁶ Harry Kenrick to Oliver Wakefield, 5 October 1880, 22 October 1880, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/353, ANZ-W.

²⁷ Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 24 September 1880, p. 3.

²⁸ *Waikato Times*, 16 September 1880, p. 2.

²⁹ Warden to Under-Secretary, Gold Fields, 28 September 1880, 4 October 1880, Mines Department, Register of Inwards Correspondence, MD 2/1, ANZ-W [the files containing these letters have been destroyed].

³⁰ For details of both this prospecting and his life, see paper on Peter Ferguson and his New Era.

³¹ For the father, see Supreme Court, *Auckland Weekly News*, 12 March 1870, p. 10, Police Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 12 December 1873, p. 3; advertisement, *Te Aroha News*, 14 July 1883, p. 1; for the son, see *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 841; *Thames Star*,

acquire any interests; his son would mine at Waiorongomai from 1882 onwards, and be sole owner of one claim and an owner of another.³³ At Thames, ‘the rumours that have been current for some days’ about a rich find received a fresh impulse when miners arrived from Ohinemuri. There was ‘much of the wish-it-may-be-true character about all that has been said’, commented the *Thames Star*; ‘as well, the find being on Maori land ‘may account for the reticence respecting it’.³⁴ This fact prompted rumours of a ‘considerable delay in opening the land’.³⁵ These reports provoked the *Thames Advertiser*, which had been told of the find by Porter but, at his request, had not published the news,³⁶ to comment on its prospects:

We have every reason to believe that a competent prospecting party could not fail to discover rich gold in the Aroha district, and if we mistake not the discovery has already been made by a party who are out in the locality at the expense of the Government. This being the case it does seem singular that the bone and the sinew of the colony should be hurrying away from our towns in search of a mere will-o-the-wisp, reaching after the shadow and overlooking the substance at their very feet. For years it has been maintained that Te Aroha would prove the El Dorado of the future, and find profitably employment for thousands, and yet since the Government has acquired a large slice of the land in its neighbourhood, and facilities have been offered for prospecting the mountain, little or nothing has been done, and men are leaving for other fields rather than spend time and money in this promising district. We have a horror of those who would seek to detain or to decoy men with the prospect of failure before them; but we believe, from what we can learn, that the Aroha is not a mockery, and that the labours of the prospector would be amply rewarded.... The prospecting party ... has met with most promising indications - having, in fact, discovered gold and no

30 July 1902, p. 4; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 6 July 1906, p. 2; for both father and son, see *Waikato Electoral Roll, 1884*, p. 20.

³² Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Miner’s Right no. 615, issued 25 November 1880, Miners’ Rights Butt Book 1881, BBAV 11533/1e, ANZ-A.

³³ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 142, 150, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 841.

³⁴ *Thames Star*, 21 September 1880, p. 2.

³⁵ *Thames Star*, 7 October 1880, p. 2.

³⁶ Editorial, *Thames Advertiser*, 28 October 1880, p. 2.

mistake - which must shortly lead to the opening up of a new and, perhaps, wonderful field in this long-closed district.³⁷

Later, its response to the charge of prematurely informing the public was that 'it would be as easy to mop up the Pacific as to keep a newspaper man from publishing the glad tidings, when satisfied of the *bona-fide* nature of the find'. It was only fair to inform men leaving Thames for other fields about a discovery in their own district.³⁸ When samples of ore reputedly taken from a reef were seen in Thames for the first time, it stated that these 'fully' corroborated its editorial 'regarding the importance of the discovery'.³⁹ The *Thames Star*, 'besieged by enquiries' about reports of 'rich stone' being found, could not 'find any very reliable foundation for the various rumours'.⁴⁰ The Te Aroha correspondent of the *Waikato Times* was also cautious, reporting stories of 'very good stuff' being found 'but, as usual in such cases', these were 'much exaggerated, and any news from there must be taken *cum grano salis*' ['with a grain of salt'].⁴¹ Even more cautious was the Auckland response. The *Auckland Weekly News* reprinted details taken from both Thames newspapers under the headline 'Alleged Gold Discovery at Te Aroha', and noted that there seemed 'to exist a considerable amount of dubiety on the subject'.

An important gold discovery at the present juncture would be an event of very great importance, not only to the Thames, but to the colony at large. It would have the effect of forwarding the settlement of the Thames Valley, and afford a much-needed scope for the useful employment of surplus labour. Such discoveries as those reported are by no means unlikely, for the whole of the Thames Peninsula has been proved auriferous, and in Maori legends Te Aroha is known as the mother of gold.⁴²

By the end of September, two prospecting parties claimed to have found gold and were intending to mark off their ground,⁴³ but until a goldfield was proclaimed it was not possible to register claims, prompting

³⁷ Editorial, *Thames Advertiser*, 18 September 1880, p. 2.

³⁸ Editorial, *Thames Advertiser*, 28 October 1880, p. 2.

³⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 22 September 1880, p. 2.

⁴⁰ *Thames Star*, 23 September 1880, p. 2.

⁴¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 25 September 1880, p. 2.

⁴² *Auckland Weekly News*, 25 September 1880, p. 9.

⁴³ *Thames Advertiser*, 28 September 1880, p. 3.

all prospectors to be very discreet. As the *Thames Advertiser* complained, until it was known whether the find was within the boundaries of Crown or Maori land, prospectors were ‘patiently kicking their heels in Auckland, or at the Thames - anywhere, rather than in the direction of their discovery, with no defined title to the land’.⁴⁴ O’Halloran felt it was ‘strange that we, living on the spot’, knew so little. ‘Few, if any’ doubted that gold existed, but he did not know of payable gold having been discovered. He added that Waikato had ‘veritable gold fever’.⁴⁵ And on the last day of the month miners were passing through Paeroa ‘for the new rush at Te Aroha’.⁴⁶

At the beginning of October, a *Thames Star* reporter ‘noticed a well-known pioneer of this goldfield “dodging around” to-day with a new tent rolled up under his arm, and making enquiries respecting the Te Aroha gold discovery’.⁴⁷ To enable Thames residents ‘to visit the celebrated Te Aroha district’, the steamer ‘Vivid’ was chartered to take an excursion party, and the ‘Memsahib’ offered twice weekly trips to the Ngati Rahiri settlement of Omahu.⁴⁸ The first named experienced miners going to inspect were David Martin McIntyre and Peter Ferguson, who both left for ‘the supposed goldfield’ on 5 October.⁴⁹ McIntyre had been a mine manager at Thames, a director of mining companies in several localities, and one of the early prospectors of Ohinemuri.⁵⁰ Ferguson, who had recently managed a mine at Thames,⁵¹ was intending to show his mate ‘a spot where auriferous indications have been met with’.⁵²

Claims of having found gold continued to be published. For example, one man told the *Thames Star* that he had found specks of gold in a creek,

⁴⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 30 September 1880, p. 3.

⁴⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 30 September 1880, p. 3.

⁴⁶ Paeroa Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 1 October 1880, p. 2.

⁴⁷ *Thames Star*, 2 October 1880, p. 2.

⁴⁸ *Thames Star*, 2 October 1880, p. 2, 4 October 1880, p. 2.

⁴⁹ *Thames Star*, 4 October 1880, p. 2.

⁵⁰ For examples of his being a company director, see *Thames Guardian and Mining Record*, 17 October 1871, p. 3, 31 May 1873, p. 3, 31 December 1873, p. 2, 2 February 1874, p. 3; for examples of being a mine manager, see *Thames Advertiser*, 15 August 1877, p. 3, 12 June 1878, p. 3; for his prospecting Ohinemuri, see *Thames Advertiser*, 7 January 1875, p. 2, 11 January 1876, p. 3, 2 September 1876, p. 3.

⁵¹ *Thames Star*, 18 February 1880, p. 2, 25 March 1880, p. 2, 9 July 1880, p. 2, 24 July 1880, p. 2.

⁵² *Thames Star*, 7 October 1880, p. 2.

but would not give the exact location.⁵³ This newspaper reported ‘a great many persons’ were prospecting and expecting to find good reefs.⁵⁴ Both Thames newspapers treated the alleged discoveries with caution. An editorial in the *Thames Advertiser* stated that ‘the most exaggerated reports have gained credence’, and was pleased that ‘care had been taken not to encourage other than mere prospecting parties to go out to the locality’.⁵⁵ It clearly wanted to avoid a rush based on rumour, as had happened earlier. It dismissed as an ‘absurd story’⁵⁶ a Piako correspondent’s report that 12 pounds of rich specimens had been found ‘in a single piece of stone by the natives near the head of the navigation, and not *in situ*’, washed from an unknown reef. (In fact, this correspondent had made the qualification that it was ‘just possible it may have been a portion of ballast, or brought for some other purpose from the Thames’,⁵⁷ implying deliberate fraud). On the following day, the *Thames Advertiser* announced that ‘from an authoritative source’ it had learnt that ‘the importance of the find’ had been ‘somewhat exaggerated’.⁵⁸ Its evening rival agreed:

For want of something to talk about persons interested in mining both here and in Auckland have occupied their time in surmising the probabilities of the supposed Te Aroha goldfield, and gulping down wholesale the many unreliable and pernicious statements and rumours which have been made concerning it. All sorts of stories have been going round, some in favour of the goldfield in prospective, others to its detriment, and the probabilities are that only the slightest modicum have any foundation in fact. We must deprecate these cock-and-bull stories, especially those writing in terms of praise of the “Te Aroha goldfield” as likely to mislead people at a distance. The prospectors have the best reasons for keeping the particulars of their find secret.

While there was no doubt that gold existed, it was not known if it was payable, and a lot of capital would be required to test the field.⁵⁹

⁵³ *Thames Star*, 4 October 1880, p. 2.

⁵⁴ *Thames Star*, 5 October 1880, p. 2.

⁵⁵ Editorial, *Thames Advertiser*, 8 October 1880, p. 2.

⁵⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 8 October 1880, p. 2.

⁵⁷ Piako Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 7 October 1880, p. 5.

⁵⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 9 October 1880, p. 3.

⁵⁹ *Thames Star*, 9 October 1880, p. 2.

Unconfirmed reports continued that specimen stone had been taken from a reef,⁶⁰ and those who claimed to know the district well made positive assessments. Josiah Clifton Firth,⁶¹ for instance, told the Waste Lands Board that it was auriferous: 'he had seen specimens', and 'the country about Te Aroha and on to the Wairere Creek was filled with quartz stringers'.⁶²

Officials prepared for the possible proclamation of a goldfield. S. Herbert Cox, a geologist, inspected the find on behalf of the Mines Department,⁶³ and to determine the ownership of the auriferous land surveyors defined the precise boundaries of Ngati Rahiri reserves.⁶⁴ Their surveys showed that the find, about 30 chains southeast of the Hot Springs Reserve,⁶⁵ was on Ngati Rahiri land. Porter showed some specimens to Whitaker, who told the Premier that they 'were good but being taken from cap of a leader about 4 inches wide may be deceptive but discovery well worth prosecuting'.⁶⁶ Others agreed, and by the middle of the month there were reportedly six or seven parties prospecting 'within a radius of three or four miles'.⁶⁷

Almost every steamer that leaves for Te Aroha now-a-days takes away several prospecting parties. By the Memsahib yesterday two well-known gentlemen have proceeded to the Upper Thames to try their luck. They were provided with a tent, provisions, and mining tools, and intend to give the country a thorough good trial.

⁶⁰ *Auckland Weekly News*, 9 October 1880, p. 17.

⁶¹ See paper on the Battery Company.

⁶² Waste Lands Board, *Auckland Weekly News*, 9 October 1880, pp. 18, 19.

⁶³ His report is not included in the Mines Department files, many of which have been destroyed.

⁶⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 14 October 1880, p. 2.

⁶⁵ Frederick Whitaker (Attorney General) to John Hall (Premier), 14 October 1880, Sir John Hall Papers, Telegrams to and from F. Whitaker 1880-1882, MS 1784, folder 296, p. 39, Alexander Turnbull Library.

⁶⁶ Frederick Whitaker to John Hall, 14 October 1880, Sir John Hall Papers, Telegrams to and from F. Whitaker 1880-1882, MS 1784, folder 296, p. 38, Alexander Turnbull Library.

⁶⁷ *Thames Star*, 15 October 1880, p. 2.

Two more parties were to leave Thames in two days' time.⁶⁸ This despite the fact, noted in Auckland, that nothing had been found 'to be greatly elated about. Better specimens were found in many parts of the Thames which subsequently turned out nothing, and better specimens were found at Ohinemuri'.⁶⁹

MITCHELL'S FIND

On 14 October, Mitchell quoted a claim made at Paeroa 'by the people who profess to know everything, that one of the up-river steamers had brought an ample supply of specimens from Shortland in the early part of the week', but commented that there was 'nothing to warrant this vain assumption'. Because of rumours that gold was being brought to Te Aroha rather than being found there, he reported 'a strong effort' was being made 'to form a party to go out and find the prospectors', for people thought 'that if there be a find, it is high time it was found'.⁷⁰ Four days later, it was announced that Mitchell himself, with others, had pegged out a claim.⁷¹ He published a long account of his visit:

As the accounts of gold, or no gold, become every hour more contradictory here, and men told you things which you, yourself, knew to be untrue, I, on Friday morning ... took horse for Te Aroha itself. I may now state, once for all, that I was assured by the deputation from the County Council on its return here on Thursday, that there was nothing found; so that if I tell you more than some persons may like, it may teach them on some future occasion that "specials" are not half as foolish and innocent as they look. I reached Te Aroha in company with one of the old identities of the Thames. We travelled the main County road, and a track in more abominably bad condition than some parts of it is, it would be hard to find, even in this deplorably neglected country. At the Aroha the tale was the same as at Paeroa; only at Paeroa it was "they" said it; here men told me they had pounded the stone, ground it, washed it; quicksilvered it [used mercury] even, and still there was nothing. Fortunately, I had previously a little better information than all this, having a very good specimen in my pocket; and all I wanted to know was - did this stone actually come from the Te Aroha range? I had no possible

⁶⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 16 October 1880, p. 3.

⁶⁹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 16 October 1880, p. 17.

⁷⁰ Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 15 October 1880, p. 3.

⁷¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 19 October 1880, p. 3.

doubt that it did; but my commission told me to “report faithfully to the best of my own judgment,” and so the following morning I made a start for the mountain, accompanied by one of the oldest natives of the district and his youngest son David [Mokena Hou and his son Rewi Mokena]. As we went along David, who has a very fair English Education, was quite as anxious as I was about the gold, and we broke up any amount of stones. As a result, we found gold three times, twice in masses of stone too large to carry away, and once in what I took to be, and what Mr T[homas] L[eitch] Murray, the manager of the Bank of New Zealand, whom I found here with the Warden on my return, pronounced to be the cap of a reef.⁷²

Murray, who had invested in Thames and Ohinemuri mines and been a director of mining companies,⁷³ would acquire only one interest in a claim in 1880 and abandoned it four days later.⁷⁴ After Waiorongomai was discovered, he held shares in eight claims.⁷⁵

Mr Warden Kenrick, in whose hands the specimens now are, also pronounced the metal carried by the stone to be gold. All this time I was making my way up the mountain until I came to the ground held by the native Hone Werahiko, who is the original discoverer. Here I was told there was gold to be found on the surface, but no gold in anything like a reef. On looking from where I was sitting I could see what I know to be a reef from 5 to 6 feet through. My friend, the prospector, whom I had known before-time, whether from his being only an unsophisticated savage or not I can't tell,

⁷² Upper Thames Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 20 October 1880, p. 3.

⁷³ For his investments at Thames, see for example Thames Warden's Court, Register of Agreements and Licenses 1868-1870, folios 122-124, BACL 14417/1a; Register of Thames Licensed Holdings 1875-1882, nos. 92, 107, 108, folios 61, 84, 180, 183, BACL 14397/10a, ANZ-A; for his directorates, see for example *New Zealand Gazette*, 7 September 1876, p. 633, 14 September 1876, p. 652, 7 February 1879, p. 200; for his shareholdings in Ohinemuri, see for example *New Zealand Gazette*, 27 May 1875, p. 376, 22 July 1875, p. 499, 28 October 1875, p. 675; for his career, see *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 7 (Wellington, 1898), pp. 96-97.

⁷⁴ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 176, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

⁷⁵ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 1, 30, 46, 53, 54, BBAV 11500/9a; Licensed Holdings Grant Book 1880-1882, New Find No. 1 and Victoria, BBAV 11549/1a; Mining Applications 1882, 322/169, BBAV 11582/2a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 23 March 1882, p. 489.

was not quite so adept at lying as other people; but even he declared that what was in the stone was not gold, but he admitted having, some time ago [1877],⁷⁶ washed out of the adjoining creek 4dwt of gold in half a day. As to this same creek, I helped to build a bridge over it, more than seven years ago, at its outfall into the Waihou, but I saw nothing to lead me to suspect gold. I now made as careful an examination as I could of the reef - for I say there is a reef, and a good 'un - and the country. The conclusion that I arrive at is: the stone will yield from 2 to 10oz to the ton, for a battery test. The "show" is in some cases equal to 200oz to the ton. There are much better specimens than those which I have handed to the Warden, but the owners will not part with them. Briefly, the matter now stands: Hone (or Johnny) for himself, Mr Adam Porter and Party, have pegged off fifteen men's ground; Mr C.F. Mitchell, for himself, the native owners, and others, has pegged twelve men's ground; Messrs Michael Marrison and Tom Corbett, for selves and party, what I take to be eight men's ground, but as they denied pegging out, I can only guess.⁷⁷

Marrison (sometimes Marrison) was a prospector at Thames and Ohinemuri whose career has not been traced because, although he participated in the Te Aroha rush,⁷⁸ he did not become an owner of any claims. Thomas Corbett was an early miner at Thames and then a prospector at Ohinemuri,⁷⁹ who would acquire shares in one claim and two mining companies at Te Aroha in December.⁸⁰ In 1896, he claimed to have explored part of the Waiorongomai Stream in 1880 and to have held 'a high opinion' of it, for he had 'taken splendid prospects from the claim';⁸¹ yet

⁷⁶ See paper on Hone Werahiko.

⁷⁷ Upper Thames Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 20 October 1880, p. 3.

⁷⁸ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 373, issued 25 November 1880, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1a, ANZ-A.

⁷⁹ For Thames, see for example Thames Warden's Court, Thames Claims Register 1868-1869, nos. 1204, 1250, BACL 14397/3a, ANZ-A; *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 6 September 1869, p. 953, 4 October 1869, p. 1269, 1 November 1869, p. 1452; for Ohinemuri, see for example Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Ohinemuri Claims 1875, folios 11, 93, 111, 113, 123, BBAV 11568/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 20 October 1877, p. 3, 24 April 1878, p. 3.

⁸⁰ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 202, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 30 December 1880, p. 1797, 20 January 1881, p. 111.

⁸¹ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 24 October 1896, p. 5.

neither in 1880 nor in 1896 did he peg out ground or acquire interests in any claims.

Mitchell's account continued:

I had neglected to state that as I was starting for the mountain in the morning, Joe [Joseph Harris] Smallman⁸² came past with a large party of natives on horseback, and reported a find which would give about eight (8) dwt to the ton up the Wairakau valley [the only time any ore was reported in that area], beyond what are here called the "Long Timers," the holders of deferred payment lands. I have also information of another find between Johnny's and Joe Smallman's; but it will only tend to show that the gold belt runs - as it always has done, so far as I know - with the true main range. I find, on my return to Paeroa, that you [the editor] deprecate any rush to this country until more is known, or until some imaginary native difficulty is settled. I cannot see why diggers, if at all worthy of the name, should not come at once. Why call them diggers at all, if the country is to be opened up and explored for them? That is their work; let them do it or let it alone, as they like. I am told here the diggers won't like what I am now doing, giving the public the most reliable information I can procure. Well, I do not care whether they do like it or not. These sort of "diggers" trade upon other men's labours and discoveries, and don't put their own swags on their backs, or take their own pick and shovel in their hands. You want a railway! You want employment for the unemployed! Then in Heaven's name "Hang out your banners on the outward walls," and let the cry be, "Still they come."

LATER.

It is current here that the claim first marked out has been jumped. A certain well-known jumper at the Thames, of pious memory, but who has since adopted literature as a profession, is at the head of the party. If so, they will be ugly Jokers. Several additional applications have been made to the Warden for ground at Te Aroha. It is believed that the Government will declare the country open for gold-mining. It is almost beyond doubt that gold has been found over a wide area, and by several different persons.⁸³

⁸² See paper on his life.

⁸³ Upper Thames Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 20 October 1880, p. 3.

This was an example of Mitchell's many opinionated articles.⁸⁴ His estimation of extraordinary values would provoke controversy and encourage more people to hurry to Te Aroha to find such wealth. 'Eureka', for instance, wrote to the rival newspaper that he abandoned mining at Thames to go to Te Aroha on the strength of this article. 'If only half the statements' were true, he could 'make more up there than here'; if they were false, he promised to tar and feather the editor and his correspondent.⁸⁵ (This was not the only time Mitchell over-estimated the value of a find. Nine years later he claimed that some ore discovered at Puhipuhi, near Whangarei, was 'worth fifteen pounds per ton and not two pounds as reported';⁸⁶ in fact this was a worthless field.)

O'Halloran's assessment, written on 17 October, was far more sober:

There is nothing of a payable nature about our gold prospecting as yet, though a good deal of work is being done. The so-called prospectors' claim is pegged out on a sharp steep spur on the Aroha Mountain immediately behind the Hot Springs. Beside the Prospectors (Porter and party), claims have been pegged out by C.F. Mitchell and party, McIntyre, Ferguson, and a son of the Chief Morgan (the owner of the land).... As far as I have been able to find, *no* payable gold has yet been struck. There is a reef about four feet wide, but, on crushing, it barely shows the colour of gold. The stone is white, hard and hungry looking. One or two small promising looking leaders have been met with, but no gold. Some isolated stones have been found on the Spur showing gold. There is also a section of the ground of a kindly sandstone formation.⁸⁷

The *Thames Star's* reporter agreed that 'if any discovery of importance' had been made, everyone was 'keeping very dark about it'. As the rock was 'exceedingly hard', time and money would be needed to develop mines.⁸⁸ This newspaper, then involved in a war of words with its rival, accused the latter of exaggerating the value of the find by publishing Mitchell's account

⁸⁴ For example, see extracts from his *Hauraki Tribune* reprinted in *Bay of Plenty Times*, 9 December 1881, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 26 January 1884, p. 2, 29 October 1887, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 27 April 1889, p. 2; see also *Observer*, 25 November 1899, p. 2.

⁸⁵ Letter from 'Eureka', *Thames Star*, 22 October 1880, p. 3.

⁸⁶ C.F. Mitchell to Minister of Mines, 24 December 1889 (telegram), Mines Department, MD 1, 6/4/31, Part 1, ANZ-W.

⁸⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 19 October 1880, p. 3.

⁸⁸ *Thames Star*, 19 October 1880, p. 2.

of a possible return of 200 ounces of gold to the ton, and noted that three times in the past month-and-a-half Mitchell had denied the existence of any gold. It was pleased that, though many sensational telegrams were being published in Auckland, no shares were being sold, for sales would indicate fraudulent booming. 'All the prospectors asked for was that all mineral rights should be reserved, and that no auriferous lands should be allowed to fall into the hands of speculators, or be partitioned off as native reserves'. Anyone contemplating going to Te Aroha should wait until 'more authentic and reliable information' had been provided.⁸⁹

In fact, no particularly sensational telegrams were being published in the Auckland press, the *New Zealand Herald* normally reprinting extracts from the *Thames Advertiser*, though its correspondent occasionally added his own opinions. Commenting on the encouraging reports appearing in mid-October, he warned that

the facts published are nothing more than what has been well known for some weeks now. The statement that good golden stone has been broken out of a lode is not true, but loose stones have been picked up which, on breaking, show gold pretty freely. Hitherto, all the tests of quartz from the lode have not given a payable prospect.

However, he believed there were signs of a good reef.⁹⁰ This newspaper declined to be 'too sanguine' about the prospects.⁹¹ The Waitoa correspondent of the *Waikato Times* was also cautious, because he 'found that all those who might be supposed to know about it were most mysterious, and positively no information was to be gleaned at all'. He was 'very skeptical as to the existence of "known gold" at present, although I myself have got a nice specimen which I have every reason to feel certain did come from a creek on the mountainside, and the Maoris have always called the mountain "the Father of Gold" '. He had met 'an old Thames hand who had been in the district some nine years ago' who 'looked like prospecting, but said nothing, as he started away up the ranges' from the hotel.⁹²

⁸⁹ *Thames Star*, 20 October 1880, p. 2.

⁹⁰ Own Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 21 October 1880, p. 5.

⁹¹ *New Zealand Herald*, 22 October 1880, p. 5.

⁹² Waitoa Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 19 October 1880, p. 2.

PREPARING TO PROCLAIM A GOLDFIELD

No official statements about the finds were made because Whitaker was seeking to acquire the land for the Crown. On 18 October, when at Paeroa, Kenrick received four applications for prospecting claims 'for alleged discoveries - these applications being supported by some very rich pieces of stone', and on the following day learnt that about 20 miners were at Te Aroha and that Ngati Rahiri was well aware of gold being found. Accordingly, he immediately went to Auckland to ask Whitaker to reach an agreement with Ngati Rahiri to enable mining to start.⁹³ Although Whitaker considered the prospects to be 'very doubtful', he agreed with Kenrick, explaining to the Minister of Mines that it was 'necessary that something should be done to prevent confusion'. At a long meeting with Kenrick and George Thomas Wilkinson, the Native Agent,⁹⁴ they decided to create a new mining district under the Gold Mining Districts Act of 1873. Wilkinson was to meet the owners, for the discovery was on land 'promised them for reserves but if Goldfield should turn out of any extent the principal portion will be on Crown land'.⁹⁵ Kenrick intended to prevent 'a recurrence of the scandal that took place at the opening of the Ohinemuri Field',⁹⁶ when some miners' rights were issued in advance, illegally,⁹⁷ by issuing these some days prior to the proclamation.

I also propose to investigate the various prospectors claims sent in in open Court, and having settled upon those who, having made a bona fide discovery may fairly be entitled to such consideration, proceed to mark off the ground allotted to them before the field is open, reserve the same, and then the ground will be open to all comers.

He was more optimistic than Whitaker, for 'various pieces of stone, some of considerable size and undoubted richness, have been shown to me',

⁹³ Harry Kenrick to Oliver Wakefield, 22 October 1880, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/353, ANZ-W.

⁹⁴ See paper on Merea Wikiriwhi and George Thomas Wilkinson.

⁹⁵ Frederick Whitaker to Minister of Mines, 21 October 1880, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/353, ANZ-W.

⁹⁶ Harry Kenrick to Oliver Wakefield, 22 October 1880, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/353, ANZ-W.

⁹⁷ See *Auckland Weekly News*, 6 March 1875, p. 11, 9 October 1875, p. 7; *AJHR*, 1875, I-3.

and a five-foot reef 'with minerals indicating gold' had been traced some distance. He wanted police to be sent 'for the security of the settlers from the vagaries of drunken natives or miners'.⁹⁸ Late in October, Constable Hogan was sent from Thames to establish a police station in readiness; he was to be assisted by the Maori policeman already living there,⁹⁹ Te Meke Ngakuru.¹⁰⁰ Neither policeman was sufficiently swept up in the excitement to become shareholders, although Ngakuru did acquire an interest in one Tui claim in 1888.¹⁰¹

In late October it was announced that a goldfield would be soon be gazetted, along with some details of the proposed regulations. 'No rights or claims or any kind will be recognised which are sought to be acquired before the proclamation of the field, and care will be taken that no person shall be entitled to attain undue priority'. Should prospectors prove that they had made a genuine discovery before the gazetting of the district, their interests would be protected under a section of the 1873 Act permitting the granting of leases to discoverers of gold on Crown land. New miner's rights would be required, and it was 'hoped that the confusion and dishonesty' at Ohinemuri would be avoided.¹⁰²

MORE DISCOVERIES, INCREASED HOPES

On 22 October, some prospectors arrived in Thames with a quartz specimen showing 'gold plainly throughout, and was in appearance like stone found on the Thames in small surface leaders'.¹⁰³ On that date, and on the following day, there was 'a considerable rush' to Te Aroha.

The natives have found rich stone on one side of a conical hill behind O'Halloran's hotel, and a party of Europeans on the other side of the hill have got good stone. The ground for a considerable

⁹⁸ Harry Kenrick to Oliver Wakefield, 22 October 1880, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/353, ANZ-W.

⁹⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 25 October 1880, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ See paper on Maori Te Aroha before the opening of the goldfield.

¹⁰¹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 325, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁰² *New Zealand Herald*, 22 October 1880, p. 5.

¹⁰³ *Thames Star*, 22 October 1880, p. 2.

distance has been pegged off, and all round the hotel a great number of tents are pitched. There is a good deal of excitement.¹⁰⁴

Despite this news, the *Thames Star* still urged caution on those whose 'minds have been much agitated of late' concerning the reported discovery because 'as yet everything' was 'buried in a mist of uncertainty'. As Thames residents had learnt from the disappointments of the Tairua and Ohinemuri rushes, they rightly appeared 'determined not to become heated with gold fever until they have something tangible'.¹⁰⁵ The Thames correspondent of the *New Zealand Herald* considered that the eagerness of people leaving for Te Aroha was

retarding the opening of the district. There can be very little doubt that the publicity which has been given to the reported discovery ... has caused a great deal of delay, and if the matter had only been left in obscurity a little longer, it is probable the discovery by this time would have been an established fact.... It is scarcely to be expected that the prospectors who discovered the gold will make known the exact locality until they are in a position to secure their rights.¹⁰⁶

Two days later, he had little doubt that Te Aroha would 'some day be a permanent goldfield', but because of 'the very contradictory reports' a rush 'should be deprecated until the reported discovery has at least received confirmation'.¹⁰⁷ An editorial noted that this correspondent revealed a 'much calmer feeling' at Thames than at Hamilton, and that he had neither seen the stone nor been able to give a 'very precise statement':

To people who have had acquaintance with the Thames gold field, and who are not naturally of a very sanguine disposition, many reminiscences may occur to dash the hopes of a great rush to Te Aroha. Tapu Creek, where, undoubtedly, rich specimens were found, has faded away; the Tairua district, of which such high hopes were formed, is now deserted; Ohinemuri exists as a gold field only by a few claims at Waitekauri. Even the Te Aroha land itself, although not within any gold field, has been gone over pretty closely by skilled prospectors,

¹⁰⁴ Hamilton Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 25 October 1880, p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ *Thames Star*, 23 October 1880, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ Thames Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 23 October 1880, p. 5.

¹⁰⁷ Thames Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 25 October 1880, p. 5.

and any gold should have been discovered. Yet although ‘the probabilities’ were ‘all against it’, Te Aroha might prove to be the richest Hauraki goldfield.¹⁰⁸ The *Thames Advertiser* reprinted these cautionary words,¹⁰⁹ but the lure of gold meant that many only heeded the last prediction. Still seeking to refute what it claimed were over-enthusiastic reports in its rival,¹¹⁰ the *Thames Star* sent a ‘special reporter’ to inspect. His tale of jolly adventures on the frontier of Pakeha civilization was published on 25 October:

ALL ABOARD.

The morning of Saturday, the 23rd October, in the year of grace 1880, broke dull and calm, and those who had decided to make a trip to the Upper Thames by the special trip of the smart river steamboat Te Aroha, as they stood on the rickety old Grahamstown Wharf wondered whether the appearance of the sky predicted the voyage would be made under the auspices of King Sol or Jupiter Pluvius. The passengers numbered about 15 all told, and were a motley crowd. The list showing a publican, a schoolmaster, an itinerant preacher, a few prospectors, a sharebroker, a telegraphist, a police constable, while an odd pressman or two made up the heterogeneous assemblage. Time was pretty dull on our hands, and the conversation chiefly turned on the new goldfield and its prospects. It was surprising the number of contradictory stories and reports that were in circulation, and numberless bets arose, to be settled on arrival at the land of promise. On reaching the Ohinemuri junction we landed from the steamer for a few minutes, and in the course of conversation with the few persons on the wharf we were led to believe that “great work” had been going on at the Aroha; “a patch of gold found” and “jumping and what not” being some of the terms used. We all, however, took everything *cum grano salis* [with a grain of salt], some rich specimens which were shown mysteriously to one of the passengers by a Paeroa resident. Capt. [Henry] Dalton presently gave the order to cast off, and in a few moments we were ploughing the tortuous, turbid Waihou, with cloud-capped Te Aroha rearing its head proudly in the distance. The skill of our navigators in getting round sharp bends and avoiding barely visible snags was something wonderful. We were not at all sorry when we reached the Omahu landing, and were all safe in Mr [William] Dibsell’s comfortable and hospitable

¹⁰⁸ Editorial, *New Zealand Herald*, 25 October 1880, p. 4.

¹⁰⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 26 October 1880, p. 3.

¹¹⁰ *Thames Star*, 25 October 1880, p. 2.

hotel. This hostelry I can confidently recommend to all paying a visit to the Aroha. It is situated within twenty minutes walk of the Hot Springs, and though separated from the mountain by the river it is no drawback as there are two excellent punts. The proprietor is one of the jolliest of fellows, and all visitors to his place can depend on having what is commonly known as a “high old time.” Those who were cute enough went straight off to bed, and when the balance came to look for a place on which to lay their weary heads, they found there was nothing available but a long table and a corner of the dining room. Those places were speedily occupied. I relate this to pave the way for telling

AN AMUSING OCCURRENCE

that happened during the night. A Press man, who is an inveterate practical joker, was unable to enjoy the sleep of [the] just himself, and he was determined that Mr James Baggott, who was sleeping calmly on the table, should not either. He therefore placed his back under the table and the next moment the bewildered sharebroker was lying on the floor. He soon espied our friend, and concluded that that gentleman had something to do with his downfall, and the remembrance of the sight of the nimble Press man dodging the infuriated Baggott will long irritate my risible faculties. I may mention here that Mr Baggott was the life of the party, and throughout the whole of the trip created much amusement by his unavailing attempts to pronounce Mr Onyon’s name. “Ing-in” was the nearest he could get to the correct pronunciation of that gentleman’s patronymic.¹¹¹

All those named would acquire small interests in the new goldfield. Henry Dalton was the captain of a river steamer during the 1870s and 1880s.¹¹² Although he did not participate in the Te Aroha rush, in 1882 he acquired interests in two Waiorongomai claims.¹¹³ William Dibsell ran the Waihou Hotel, situated at Te Kawana, across the river from Te Aroha,¹¹⁴ and at other stages of his career was a storekeeper and baker.¹¹⁵ He acquired shares in one Te Aroha company and in six Waiorongomai

¹¹¹ Special Reporter, ‘The Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Star*, 25 October 1880, p. 2.

¹¹² See *Thames Advertiser*, 3 January 1873, p. 3, 17 November 1874, p. 3, 4 June 1875, p. 2, 14 January 1880, p. 3, 3 October 1881, p. 3.

¹¹³ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 12, 13, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

¹¹⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 25 October 1880, p. 2.

¹¹⁵ See paper on his life.

claims.¹¹⁶ James Baggott¹¹⁷ was a prominent if semi-literate Thames sharebroker and the butt of many jokes.¹¹⁸ He did not acquire any interests during the Te Aroha rush but would become an owner of one Waiorongomai claim.¹¹⁹ Richard Onyon, a shipping agent at Thames,¹²⁰ would take part in the rush but shared ownership of only one claim.¹²¹

On Sunday morning, after visiting the hot springs, they

attempted to find the prospector's claim, but being informed it was a good two hours' walk to the spot, and up a precipitous and trackless hillside, and none of the prospectors being on the ground it would be difficult to find the reefs, it was decided to return to O'Halloran's [Hot Springs] Hotel. Here were assembled a motley assemblage of natives and Europeans, all eagerly talking about the goldfield and its prospects.

From what he was told by Hone Werahiko and others, he was 'exceedingly dubious that any gold has been yet obtained from a reef, and this opinion was joined in by many disinterested persons, who being on the spot, should be able to have a pretty good idea of how matters were going'. From Werahiko's description, he drew a rough plan of the original claims.

BAGGOTT IN TROUBLE.

Finding that it was impossible to get any of the prospectors to guide me to the reef, and the hour being too late to start and look for it on my own account, I asked Davy Morgan [Rewi Mokena] if he could show me any stone. He cheerfully assented, and brought over from the whare [Mokena Hou's house] about a dozen pieces of quartz, evidently surface stone, and all of which showed gold

¹¹⁶ *New Zealand Gazette*, 9 June 1881, p. 744; Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 247, BBAV 11567/1a; Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 57, 64, 118, BBAV 11500/9a; Mining Applications 1895-1899, 24/1895, 1/1899, BBAV 11582/4a, ANZ-A.

¹¹⁷ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 878.

¹¹⁸ *Observer*, 'Thames Jottings', 1 April 1905, p. 17, 28 April 1906, p. 17, 14 July 1932, p. 4.

¹¹⁹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Memoranda of Assignments Butt Book 1882, folio 154, BBAV 11535/1d, ANZ-A.

¹²⁰ See *Thames Advertiser*, District Court, 7 July 1875, p. 3, 12 February 1879, p. 3; *New Zealand Herald*, 12 February 1889, p. 5.

¹²¹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 612, issued 25 November 1880, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1e; Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 173, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

more or less. The natives said that these were chiefly from boulders, and only one piece did they assert to have been obtained from a lode. While the pieces were being handed round Mr Baggott, desirous of obtaining a souvenir of his visit, clandestinely broke a small piece from one of the specimens. The natives speedily missed it and became very angry, whereupon the stone was dropped on the ground and was speedily discovered by a lynx-eyed Maori. After some trouble I managed to obtain this piece of stone, which shows a little gold, from Morgan, and the curious can inspect it at this office. During my stay at O'Halloran's, I learnt from Mr Frank Horne that he, some weeks ago, discovered gold in boulders in a gully perhaps two or three miles from the other claims, and he intends prospecting on behalf of himself and some Thames people.¹²²

Frank Horne, whose life has not been traced, did participate in the rush and become an owner of one claim and a shareholder in one company,¹²³ but had no further involvement; clearly his discovery had turned out to be worthless.

Convinced that they had obtained all the information available, the party returned to Thames, passing the 'Vivid' conveying Kenrick, Wilkinson, and an interpreter to inspect the find and make arrangements to open the field. The account concluded by strongly advising 'no one to think of going to Te Aroha until something more definite' was known; Kenrick's visit was expected to 'greatly assist in bringing matters to a head'.¹²⁴

The *Thames Advertiser* also sent a special reporter, who was very cautious in his assessment and noted that, although the steamer had provided a cheap opportunity to visit Te Aroha, few had availed themselves of it. Presumably having been the perpetrator of the outrage on Baggott, he did not mention it, merely referring to the good quality of Dibsell's accommodation and that after a 'substantial breakfast' the party had gone

to discover the whereabouts of the alleged "find." I may here mention that we found the residents of the district were not in the least excited at the discovery - a fact which surprised many of the party - and several of them even seemed amused when informed for what purpose we had made such a long journey. They

¹²² Special Reporter, 'The Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Star*, 25 October 1880, p. 2.

¹²³ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 610, issued 25 November 1880, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1e; Plaintiff Book 1880-1898, 3/1880, BBAV 11547/1a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 24 February 1881, p. 258.

¹²⁴ Special Reporter, 'The Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Star*, 25 October 1880, p. 2.

admitted that gold had been found, and attached some interest to the fact, but did not consider the “find” of such an important nature as to warrant people from the Thames going to the trouble and expense of rushing up the river merely to have a look at the locality.

When he asked Werahiko for details of the find and its location, he was not surprised that he ‘declined to do either of these things, his reasons for refusing being that he was afraid if he told me anything that the publication of it would complicate matters, and perhaps have the effect of causing some persons to “jump” his claim’. The reporter described some quartz samples, the best of which would probably yield from half an ounce to an ounce to the pound:

The stone was, however, found on the surface, having been broken from a boulder, and the value of that part of the discovery is therefore not so important as it would have been had the quartz in question come from a leader or reef. The gold showing in all the pieces of stone Johnnie [Hone Werahiko] had in his possession was of good quality, and was worth - a gentleman competent to judge informed me, - at the rate of about £3 per ounce. The richest specimen obtained from the Aroha is in the possession of Mr Adam Porter, and is, I believe, the one which caused do much excitement in town a few weeks ago.

Unable to find anyone to guide him, he doubted that, even if he had seen the claims he would have learnt much, ‘as no work has been done’ apart from pegging out the boundaries. Werahiko provided him with details of his prospecting, and claimed Porter was trying to trick Mokena into leasing 35 acres to him.¹²⁵ The reporter warned against a ‘rush taking place’ because no gold existed in payable quantities. ‘Those who have taken up claims do not, I believe, intend to work them until the field is opened; and it would be well for persons who contemplate trying their luck in that part of the country to “Look before they leap,” in order that hereafter they may not be disappointed’.¹²⁶

Late in October, the Waihou correspondent of the *Waikato Times* wrote that ‘a number of men’ were living in O’Halloran’s hotel, ‘anxiously waiting for something to turn up’.

¹²⁵ See paper on Adam Porter.

¹²⁶ Special Reporter, ‘The Gold Discovery at Te Aroha: History of the Find - The Prospects’, *Thames Advertiser*, 25 October 1880, p. 3.

Many of the men have actually thrown up employment in other places in order that they might lose no time in the event of a rush.... Owing to the unwillingness of men to go any distance from the supposed Eldorado, I fear some difficulty will be experienced in getting labour to carry out the very necessary works which the Waitoa Highway Board are about to undertake.¹²⁷

A Waitoa resident visiting on Sunday 23 October found about 50 people at the hotel, where he was shown 'some very good specimens which I was assured came from the locality'. He had 'passed several men going down from Piako and Waihou, and found a number of men at [Edwin] Missen's¹²⁸ preparing to go across to the mountain'. He expected that as soon as the field was proclaimed 'a large number of men will be on the road'.¹²⁹ (Missen had erected a large hotel at Waihou in 1879.¹³⁰ He did not participate in the Te Aroha rush until January 1881, taking up interests in only one claim and one company, instead concentrating on making his hotel profitable.)¹³¹

On 28 October, the *Waikato Times* reported that 'several of the leading business men of Hamilton' were going 'to have a look round'.¹³² A Thames newspaper quoted 'a friend writing from Te Aroha' that

business people of the Thames must have their eyes shut not to at once take steps to open up trade relations with that district. If they don't mind the Auckland people will cut them out. There is every prospect of payable reefs being found, but at any rate the settlement of the country is progressing rapidly.¹³³

¹²⁷ Waihou Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 26 October 1880, p. 2.

¹²⁸ See *Thames Advertiser*, 11 April 1882, p. 2.

¹²⁹ *Waikato Times*, 28 October 1880, p. 2.

¹³⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 6 November 1878, p. 2, *Auckland Weekly News*, 23 November 1878, p. 8, 28 June 1879, p. 13; *Waikato Times*, 3 May 1881, p. 2.

¹³¹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 1674, issued 4 January 1881, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880-1881, BBAV 11533/1g; Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 228, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 9 June 1881, p. 744; Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 16 November 1880, p. 2.

¹³² *Waikato Times*, 28 October 1880, p. 2.

¹³³ *Thames Star*, 27 October 1880, p. 2.

The numbers coming from Thames did increase; for instance, on 26 October 20 left from there, many to prospect.¹³⁴

‘Joe’, whose identity is unknown, encouraged more to come by writing that he had been at ‘many new rushes in Australia, and where ever there was such rich gold found on the hills, there was generally a good reef opened up’. He claimed that ‘experienced men’ at Te Aroha were ‘well pleased with the sandstone country’ surrounding the find. He would like ‘some of the old Beechworth sluicers to see the wash dirt in the various creeks’, for he could ‘safely say’ that he had ‘seldom seen better country for carrying gold’. Whilst admitting that the true value would not be known until the ground was opened up, he stated that the Thames field,

at its commencement, never produced better indications of gold than that now discovered at Te Aroha. I strongly advise poor men to stay at their present work, but to the independent miner I say, visit that district, and probably you will remain for some time prospecting the great range of mountains, and possibly to your advantage. To the legitimate miners of the field I say that such men as James Lavery, Ned Quinn, McCombie, &c., are not such duffers as to lose their time over indefinite information.¹³⁵

(James Lavery was a builder and contractor at Paeroa and Waitoa who moved his business to Te Aroha in 1880.¹³⁶ During October that year he was a partner in a claim to the north of the Prospectors’ Claim,¹³⁷ and in the rush had shares in two claims and three companies.¹³⁸ He would acquire shares in eight Waiorongomai claims.¹³⁹ Edward Quinn, an old Thames and

¹³⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 27 October 1880, p. 2.

¹³⁵ Letter from ‘Joe’, *Thames Advertiser*, 27 October 1880, p. 3.

¹³⁶ See *Thames Advertiser*, 13 April 1877, p. 3, 14 July 1877, p. 3, 15 October 1879, p. 2, 30 November 1880, p. 3, 28 September 1881, p. 2; *Descriptive Handbook to the Waikato* (Hamilton, 1880), p. 66; *Te Aroha News*, 28 January 1888, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 15 July 1913, p. 5.

¹³⁷ *Thames Star*, 25 October 1880, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 27 October 1880, p. 3.

¹³⁸ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 223, 228, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 20 January 1881, p. 111, 28 April 1881, p. 476, 9 June 1881, p. 744.

¹³⁹ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Ohinemuri and Te Aroha Claims, folios 252, 254, 286, 287, BBAV A485/4; Register of Licensed Holdings, folios 6, 47, 62, 65, BBAV A485/5, ANZ-A.

Ohinemuri miner,¹⁴⁰ in June had started to drain part of the Aroha Block, close to the future township.¹⁴¹ He would participate in the rush, becoming an owner of two claims and a shareholder in one company, and later was part owner of one claim at Waiorongomai and of three at Tui.¹⁴² John McCombie¹⁴³ had mined at Thames from 1868 onwards, and during the late 1870s was a mine manager and director at Ohinemuri as well as prospecting the future Waihi goldfield.¹⁴⁴ In the Te Aroha rush, he would have shares in four claims and one company.)¹⁴⁵

Kenrick and Wilkinson, led by Werahiko and Porter and accompanied by one or two others, 'at a very early hour' on the morning of 25 October visited the prospectors' claim.¹⁴⁶ Kenrick reported to Whitaker two days later, typically misspelling Werahiko's name as Wharekino (corrected here):

I visited the ground marked off by Hone Werahiko, the prospector, - the same ground claimed by Adam Porter. I found about four or five chains of ground cleared and burnt on the steep slope of a spur of the Aroha range, about three quarters of a mile from the Hot Springs Hotel. On this cleared space loose stones, with gold freely visible, have been found in considerable numbers. I have about twenty five pounds weight of these stones given to me by various individuals - Hone Werahiko, Adam Porter, Mr Mitchell, David Morgan [Rewi Mokena] &c, together with a piece about four pounds weight that I picked up myself. In all these

¹⁴⁰ See paper on his life.

¹⁴¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 22 June 1880, p. 3, 2 November 1880, p. 3.

¹⁴² Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 352, issued 25 November 1880, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1a; Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 192, BBAV 11567/1a; Plaintiff Book 1880-1898, 1/1880, 1, 2/1887, BBAV 11547/1a; Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 132, 193, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 20 January 1881, p. 111.

¹⁴³ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 471-472; *New Zealand Herald*, 4 September 1926, p. 12.

¹⁴⁴ For his first involvement in mining at Thames, see Thames Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 8095, issued 21 July 1868, Register of Miners' Rights 1868, BACL 14358/2a, ANZ-A; for mining at Ohinemuri, see *Thames Advertiser*, 9 May 1877, p. 3, 20 October 1877, p. 3, Thames County Council, 2 May 1879, p. 3.

¹⁴⁵ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 173, 181, 193, BBAV 11567/1a; Plaintiff Book 1880-1898, 3/1880, BBAV 11547/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Star*, 6 December 1880, p. 3; *New Zealand Gazette*, 24 February 1881, p. 258.

¹⁴⁶ *Thames Star*, 27 October 1880, p. 2.

gold can be seen freely. At the top of the cleared part of this spur Hone Werahiko had put in a cutting or drive about ten feet. In this there was a well-defined leader of about six inches thick, but no gold visible in the stone that was taken out while I was there. About sixty feet lower down the spur another cutting has been put in for a few feet upon a well-defined leader, supposed to be the same as that shown in the drive above. Stone was taken out of this lower drive in my presence but no gold was visible. Hone Werahiko states that he had seen gold in this leader and has crushed a little of the stone roughly, obtaining the color from the stone. Later in the day he brought me down two pieces of stone, with a speck or two of gold showing in them, that he said (I believe truly) had been just taken out of the leader. I arranged for two of the men on the ground, unconnected with the claim, to take out two bags of the stone - one of them to bring the stone to Grahamstown and see it crushed. This has been done and the result will be known this morning. I have come to the conclusion that good payable stone will be found in this locality. The quantity of loose stones on the surface, all showing gold, some pieces in considerable quantities, the existence of this leader with gold in it, the fact that a reef crops out at the level of the creek - some five feet thick - with minerals attached, indicating gold, though none can be seen all in my opinion lead to the conclusion that gold-bearing reefs are in the immediate locality of this Spur, if not on the same. The miners on the ground - some thirty in number, are evidently of the same opinion.¹⁴⁷

MITCHELL'S FIND IS LOST

Kenrick noted that rumours had exaggerated the values:

The immediate importance of the discovery has been much over-rated in consequence of rich stone having been shown about stated to have been taken from leaders or reefs, when in fact they were picked up on the surface of the hill. Mr Mitchell put in a claim, some days ago, supporting it by three specimens said to have formed portion of the cap of a leader. On Monday, Mr Mitchell being at the Aroha, I called upon him to point out the spot to me - We went up the same spur that the prospectors were upon, but after searching half an hour or so, Mr Mitchell was

¹⁴⁷ Harry Kenrick to Frederick Whitaker, 27 October 1880, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/353, ANZ-W.

unable to point out the leader he spoke of in his letter or any indication of the same.¹⁴⁸

As the *Observer* put it, ‘the sudden and mysterious disappearance of the famous 6-foot reef (6 ounces to the ton) has created an immense sensation. It appears the worthy finder thereof proceeded to Mount Buster [a mountain ‘of superior size or astounding nature’]¹⁴⁹ ... to show it to some friends, but when the place was reached, nothing but flax bush could be found’.¹⁵⁰ A full account of Mitchell’s attempt to rediscover his discovery was given by a rival reporter:

Kenrick met the miners in front of O’Halloran’s at 11.30 a.m., and presently Mitchell was seen coming up on horseback. One in the crowd said to Kenrick, “Here’s Mitchell who discovered the 200oz reef.” This raised a derisive laugh, and on Mitchell coming up Mr Kenrick said, “Can you show me this reef which you showed me specimens from and wrote the application [for protection of his find] about.” The Warden, with Mitchell as guide, and followed by the miners, proceeded to the prospectors’ camp, when Mitchell said he could not find the reef without the Maori boy (meaning Davy Morgan), who had broken the stone from the reef with him. When Mitchell said this, Quinn, Horne, and others sat down, and Quinn said to Mitchell, “If you were on another goldfield you would have the ears cropped off you” [the traditional punishment for prospectors who started false rushes]. Mitchell appealed to the Warden for protection. Quinn and others then sat down and refused to go further, but [James] Maguire¹⁵¹ and others went on, and to the former I am indebted for the report of what then took place. When Mitchell arrived on the spot he looked round, but soon admitted he couldn’t find the reef, saying there was a cabbage tree he used as a landmark, but which he could not discern. Mitchell kept fossicking without success for two hours, and then after seeing the prospectors’ claim, all hands returned to the flat.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Harry Kenrick to Frederick Whitaker, 27 October 1880, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/353, ANZ-W.

¹⁴⁹ Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, 8 ed., ed. Paul Beale (London, 1984), p. 163.

¹⁵⁰ *Observer*, 6 November 1880, p. 60.

¹⁵¹ See *Thames Advertiser*, 28 May 1897, p. 2.

¹⁵² Pigeongram, *Thames Star*, 1 November 1880, p. 2.

(McGuire would participate in the rush and become an owner of one claim and a director of a company.¹⁵³ He had mined at Thames, Coromandel, and Ohinemuri.)¹⁵⁴ The exploding of Mitchell's claim to have found a fabulous reef provoked a mocking letter from one Te Aroha resident, allegedly named Bridget:

Hearing the boys continually talking in reference to the gold find up the big mountain, I thought to myself if I start now I will be the first petticoat that has managed to go up in that part of the world. Judge, then, my surprise last Thursday when I started, as I thought, by myself to astonish the proprietors, and if possible to get some of them lumps of gold, that Mr More Pork [Mitchell's nickname from at least 1873]¹⁵⁵ has been writing about that he found in *quarts*. Says I, if I only get a *pint* for my trouble, my time will not be lost. Away I started, and to my astonishment I found two ladies up before me; both of them young and beautiful, while I, as my old man says, am getting "rather ancient." "Good morning, boys," says I. "Good morning, Bridget," says they; "and where are you going?" "Up Mount Buster, where all the gold is getting." So up I went to the ground pegged out by the Prospectors, and a good turnip field they have pegged out.

Boys, says I, have you got any gold? At this one of them - the hero of the find - at once showed me a piece of stone as big as my head, and that is not over small, in which gold was to be seen all through it. I looked at the stone, and at once came to the conclusion that it was an old stone, and in all probability was one used by Noah at the time of the flood for ballasting his big ship. I sat down on the spot where the special of the Advertiser had squatted, and from where he saw the wonderful things. I beheld on this occasion, one wonderful thing to relate. I saw the two prospectors from Hamilton that have come over to thoroughly try the 200oz reef, and I heard that the first dish they tried contained

¹⁵³ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 320, issued 25 November 1880, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1a; Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 192, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 6 December 1880, p. 2; *New Zealand Gazette*, 24 February 1881, p. 258.

¹⁵⁴ For Thames, see Thames Warden's Court, Thames Claims Register 1868, folio 353, BACL 14397/1a; Thames Claims Register 1868-1869, nos. 474, 507, 603, 654, 716, 724, BACL 14397/2a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 9 March 1874, p.2; for Coromandel, see *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 22 October 1869, p. 1373, 11 November 1871, p. 295, 25 June 1872, p. 183; for Ohinemuri, see *Thames Advertiser*, 16 March 1878, p. 2, 17 January 1879, p. 3, 18 March 1879, p. 3.

¹⁵⁵ See *Thames Advertiser*, 3 November 1873, p. 4.

one flax bush and one brass button, which had been used by a Pollen-street grocer in making specimens to show that he had not been idle, as he always starts at 4 a.m.¹⁵⁶

The *Thames Star* correspondent who accompanied Kenrick in the search noted that Mitchell told Kenrick that ‘if young Morgan, the native, was there he could find it - so much for that lot’. He also endorsed Kenrick’s comment that ‘he could not say he had seen any payable reef or leader’.¹⁵⁷ According to the *Thames Advertiser*, at the end of the meeting between Kenrick and the miners, a ‘fire-eating individual’, a contractor not a miner, threatened violence against ‘a person who maintained the accuracy of Mitchell’s statements’.¹⁵⁸

Mitchell created another controversy by charging Porter and others with trying to monopolize the goldfield,¹⁵⁹ and reported another rumour that gold had been found on the Thames High School Reserve, for which a lease was ‘being sought by certain persons’ who were ‘not members of the Thames County Council’, an allusion implying that councillors were seeking to benefit themselves. He also asked whether the ‘Stranger’ that Firth had mentioned at the Waste Lands Board was a 28-foot-wide reef, ‘carrying surface gold?’¹⁶⁰

PROPOSED REGULATIONS

In his report, Kenrick told Whitaker of his meeting with the miners in front of the hotel:

They met and passed a resolution that it would be advisable to throw the ground open as a goldfield. The men on the ground will not work or prospect unless they can get protection for the ground they peg off, and as they all wish to peg off as near to Hone Werahiko as possible. Their request could not be complied with even if the power to grant it existed. I believe that until the ground is thrown open for gold mining it will not be thoroughly prospected. The number of men on the ground in enforced idleness is daily increasing and I can see no other solution for the

¹⁵⁶ Letter from ‘Bridget’, *Thames Star*, 8 November 1880, p. 2.

¹⁵⁷ *Thames Star*, 27 October 1880, p. 2.

¹⁵⁸ Own Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 27 October 1880, p. 3.

¹⁵⁹ See paper on Adam Porter.

¹⁶⁰ Paeroa Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 27 October 1880, p. 3.

complications that have arisen and will continue to arise from their presence there than to give them the right to dig for gold where they will.¹⁶¹

The *Thames Star* provided more detail:

After a great deal of talk, the following resolutions were passed by the meeting:-

1st. That the Warden be requested to protect six men's ground for 14 days to enable the Maori to find the lode that was supposed to have thrown off the loose specimens.

2nd. That there was nothing in the shape of a payable reef to warrant the Warden granting a prospecting claim.

3rd. That this meeting recommends the Warden to have the Te Aroha proclaimed a goldfield, but there is nothing found to induce a rush of people to this district. The meeting is of opinion by the number of loose specimens found on the surface, there is reason to believe some of them came off a large sized reef, showing a fair amount of gold, and there is sufficient signs of gold to authorise the throwing open of the district as a goldfield.¹⁶²

The *Thames Advertiser's* report noted that when Quinn, seconded by Mitchell, successfully moved that the ground be opened,

many of those present did not vote. Some further discussion took place as to whether the resolution previously arrived at would not tend to cause a rush, while the country was as yet comparatively unproved, and Mr C[lement] A[ugustus] Cornes¹⁶³ moved that it was not yet proved that this was a payable goldfield; in fact, the same resolution in effect as that most sapient one proposed eight days before the discovery of Hunt's claim, namely, "That the Thames was a duffer, and not a payable goldfield." The Warden, in reply to a question asked, said he was now prepared to grant protection to the prospectors' ground, a miner having stated to him that there was gold in stone that he had taken from Hone's leader a short time before. Mr Tom Corbett was his authority. Mr Corbett was challenged on the statement, and said he had found a speck, undoubtedly gold, in the stone taken out. After a great deal

¹⁶¹ Harry Kenrick to Frederick Whitaker, 27 October 1880, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/353, ANZ-W.

¹⁶² *Thames Star*, 27 October 1880, p. 2.

¹⁶³ See paper on his life.

of conversational discussion, the meeting broke up without passing any other resolution.¹⁶⁴

(Thomas Corbett had mined in Australia, Thames, and Ohinemuri.¹⁶⁵ He participated in the Te Aroha rush but became an owner of only one claim and a shareholder in two companies.)¹⁶⁶

The *Observer's* version of this meeting of 'numerous swamper jumpers and bumpers' was that 'it was unanimously resolved that all who got in pegs into Mount Buster should be allowed to keep them there until such a time as the field was opened, except Adam Porter, he being the only man who had given the Government timely notice and paid any money to try the district'.¹⁶⁷ This inaccurate account reflected the general opposition to Porter's party holding too much ground. There was some grumbling amongst the miners that Kenrick had inspected the prospectors' claim without them 'and before the time arranged on the previous evening'. They considered that 'prospectors, miners and all should have accompanied the Warden on his first visit', reputedly the practice on other goldfields.¹⁶⁸

Kenrick's report to Whitaker made detailed suggestions about how the goldfield should be proclaimed:

I would recommend, first - that the ground should be thrown open for gold mining - next that not less than fourteen days public notice should be given of the day and time on which it will be open. Also that notice will be given that Miners' Rights will be

¹⁶⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 27 October 1880, p. 3.

¹⁶⁵ For Australia, see *Freeman's Journal*, 28 March 1884, p. 13; for Thames, see Thames Warden's Court, Thames Claims Register 1868-1869, nos. 1204, 1250, BACL 14397/3a, ANZ-A; *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 6 September 1869, p. 953, 4 October 1869, p. 1269, 1 November 1869, p. 1452, 4 November 1869, p. 1485; for Ohinemuri, see Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Ohinemuri Claims 1875, folios 11, 93, 111, 113, 123, BBAV 11568/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 20 October 1877, p. 3, 14 April 1878, p. 3.

¹⁶⁶ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 371, issued 25 November 1880, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1a; Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 202, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 30 December 1880, p. 1797, 20 January 1881, p. 111.

¹⁶⁷ *Observer*, 6 November 1880, p. 60.

¹⁶⁸ Pigeongram, *Thames Star*, 1 November 1880, p. 2; see also *Thames Advertiser*, 27 October 1880, p. 3.

issued prior to the opening of the field so that all might start equal in the probable event of a rush being made to the one place. Should the ground be declared open under "the Gold Mining District Act 1873," some restrictions must be placed upon the power given therein to mark off the ground for Licensed Holdings. If this is not done it would be in the power of the first man on the ground to mark off a claim large enough to cover the greater part of the spur upon which the gold has been found - five acres being allowed by section 3 of the Gold Mining Districts Act Amendment Act 1875 for a quartz claim....

The object to be attained, if possible, is to limit the amount of ground that can be taken up at the first rush to less than fifteen men's ground (5 acres) say to nine men's ground (3 acres) - next, to cancel the ten days protection for non-working and compel men taking up a claim to be on the ground to represent the same at the time it is marked out.

These are the principal difficulties that will have to be encountered at the first opening, and I must confess that it appears to me extremely doubtful whether the peremptory provisions of the clauses I have quoted ... can be evaded....

I would suggest that a claim not less than six nor more than nine men's ground (2 or 3 acres) be reserved prior to the proclamation of the goldfield as a claim for the prospectors, and that the question as to who the prospectors really are be settled on the ground or in Court by myself after taking evidence.¹⁶⁹

In his notes for drafting this letter, which were shown to the *Thames Advertiser*, Kenrick also wrote that nothing had yet been discovered that could 'possibly justify a rush to the ground at present. All well-wishers to the district most strongly deprecate anything of the sort'. His 'only fear' about declaring the goldfield open was that 'undue expectations may be raised'. He reiterated that there was 'sufficient known to encourage prospecting, and that those who go there must go with that intention only'. The only rights or claims that he would recognise were those of prospectors, 'and, at present, Hone Werahiko and party are the only claimants in that capacity'.¹⁷⁰

The *Thames Advertiser* believed that Kenrick had 'acted with that caution which only a long experience could dictate', and should men be 'misled after perusing his very careful notes' it would be 'no fault of his'. It accepted that, as the find was on Maori land, a new goldfield would have to

¹⁶⁹ Harry Kenrick to Frederick Whitaker, 27 October 1880, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/353, ANZ-W.

¹⁷⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 27 October 1880, p. 3.

be proclaimed and separate miner's rights issued, and supported issuing these some days beforehand, thereby giving everyone 'time to prospect, to some extent'. This arrangement was 'an improvement on the Ohinemuri scramble, although there will certainly be a scramble, even under this arrangement, for the choice spots'. Only a small area should be granted to the prospectors,

and not a sheep run, which would simply mean excluding all others from the likely locality. In a new discovery of this kind the object should be to give as many men as possible a fair show, instead of allowing one party - who, in this instance, have claimed Government aid - to monopolise a large slice of the most promising part of the country.¹⁷¹

The *New Zealand Herald* commented that, as a considerable number of men would soon be at Te Aroha, 'goldfield law must be introduced for the maintenance of order'.¹⁷² It also published Kenrick's report, which it claimed supported its opinion that there seemed to be auriferous reefs which would 'give employment to a small number of men' and probably expedite 'agricultural settlement' by ten years.¹⁷³

TESTING

Kenrick arranged that samples were treated at the Herald battery under the supervision of two Te Aroha prospectors with no connection with any claims 'in order that no suspicion of collusion might be possible'.¹⁷⁴ 'A large return' was not expected 'as none of the stone crushed showed gold'.¹⁷⁵ The result varied from report to newspaper report. The *Thames Star* first announced that 93lb had produced 2dwt and added that it was 'a notorious fact that but little dependence can be placed on a trial of a small parcel of stone ... in a battery in which auriferous quartz has been crushed previously'.¹⁷⁶ This implied that some of the return was from a previous crushing. On the following day, its figures were 1dwt 3gr from 95lb crushed;

¹⁷¹ Editorial, *Thames Advertiser*, 27 October 1880, p. 2.

¹⁷² *Auckland Weekly News*, 30 October 1880, p. 17.

¹⁷³ *New Zealand Herald*, 27 October 1880, p. 4.

¹⁷⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 27 October 1880, p. 3, 28 October 1880, p. 3.

¹⁷⁵ *Thames Star*, 27 October 1880, p. 2.

¹⁷⁶ *Thames Star*, 28 October 1880, p. 2.

the amount of gold was 0.6979, silver 0.2920, and base metal 0.0101, the value of the gold per ounce being £2 16s 11d.¹⁷⁷ The *Thames Advertiser* reported that exactly 100 pounds had produced exactly 1dwt of pure metal, equal to 1oz 3dwt per ton, which was ‘very satisfactory’.¹⁷⁸

Despite this test, there was no universal agreement that the value was proven, as indicated by one reporter:

Of the value of that test I must leave your readers to judge. I myself do not believe in it, as gold is always to be got from the single stamper, specimen battery. I do not say that I am sceptical as to the existence of gold in it, far from that. But I do say that the value of the stone cannot be decided by a small crushing in the specimen battery.¹⁷⁹

A Thames correspondent concurred: ‘Although the utmost care was observed in testing the stone, still there will be some doubt about the test’, as the single stamper was ‘usually used for crushing specimen stone’,¹⁸⁰ meaning that any remaining traces of high-grade ore would artificially increase the result of the test. Kenrick, in contrast, reported that ‘payable stone has been found’.¹⁸¹

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

Specimens continued to be collected by several people. The *Thames Star* reported that Porter had ‘the best stone’ it had seen so far, ‘one or two of the specimens showing very large patches of gold’. The stones had ‘evidently been on the surface of the ground for years’ and were like those that ‘might be picked in any’ Thames creek.¹⁸² Was this a hint that the provenance of these specimens could be suspect? ‘XYZ’ of Paeroa noted that nobody had found a gold-bearing reef, and ‘indeed the only place where

¹⁷⁷ *Thames Star*, 29 October 1880, p. 2.

¹⁷⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 28 October 1880, p. 3; these figures also in *Thames Directory for 1881* (Thames, 1881), p. 96, entry for 27 October 1880.

¹⁷⁹ Special Reporter, ‘Te Aroha’, *Waikato Times*, 4 November 1880, p. 2.

¹⁸⁰ Thames Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 29 October 1880, p. 6.

¹⁸¹ Harry Kenrick to Oliver Wakefield, 28 October 1880, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/353, ANZ-W.

¹⁸² *Thames Star*, 27 October 1880, p. 2.

surface specimens have been found' was 'a patch about 50 yards square' within the prospectors' claim.¹⁸³

At the end of October, Kenrick went to Auckland to discuss the opening of the field with Whitaker. During his absence, Te Aroha continued 'to be the all-absorbing topic in mining circles'. Some felt that the prospectors were hiding information about the value of their find, but the *Thames Star* disagreed because the surface had been 'thoroughly prospected for years' and any reefs would have been found. Recent prospecting was 'only the scraping out of a few paltry holes', and the only way to find the reef was to form a company with the financial resources to drive a cross-cut through the base of the spur.¹⁸⁴

On 30 October, a *Thames Advertiser* reporter joined a special excursion with about 20 others. That more did not accompany them was, he thought, because they were awaiting further developments. He gave a detailed description of the prospectors' ground,¹⁸⁵ and of the mood of those who had arrived at Te Aroha:

We did not visit any of the other claims, as we were informed that little or no work has been done on them since they were pegged off. Vigorous prospecting is going on in the vicinity of the spur, but, so far as I could learn, nothing of importance has resulted from the search for the precious metal. Several new reefs, one of them of large size, have been discovered lately, but the prospects obtained from them up to the present have not been encouraging. The finders do not, however, intend to call them "duffers" until they are thoroughly satisfied that they are so, and work on them will be continued for a short time. One or two of the prospecting parties to whom I spoke on the subject are well pleased with the class of country at the Aroha, believing it to be highly auriferous, and they are determined to try their luck in it for a couple of months to come....

WHAT THE MINERS SAY: CONFLICTING OPINIONS

The indications on the ground are not entirely satisfactory, for although several places have been opened gold is only showing in one, and that a small lode which may hereafter turn out something, but which at present is not encouraging to an extent desirable. It is quite true that good golden stone has been picked out of a jumble of quartz; but there is still wanting the defined lode which is the surest indication of a permanent gold discovery.

¹⁸³ Letter from 'XYZ', *Thames Star*, 27 October 1880, p. 3.

¹⁸⁴ *Thames Star*, 30 October 1880, p. 2.

¹⁸⁵ See paper on the Prospectors' Claim at Te Aroha.

Ferguson and McIntyre, who are close on the heels of the prospectors, have what may ultimately prove the mother lode of the district in hand, but, unfortunately for them, they cannot put gold into it, however desirous they may be. It is believed to have had a fair but unsuccessful test, so far, although all hope is not yet abandoned, and, as we have said, these old stagers mean to give it every chance before “duffering it.”

He interviewed Hone Werahiko, and refuted the rumour that Obadiah Daniel Grant had found quartz hidden by Werahiko.¹⁸⁶ Grant was a Thames baker who had invested in mining there.¹⁸⁷ He was reportedly breaking out stone from his find. At the end of October he had taken up provisions for his party and was quoted as being ‘quite ready’ when the field was opened ‘and some protection offered to make known the whereabouts of his discovery’. In the meantime he refrained ‘from anything more than a mere assertion of the value and importance of the find’.¹⁸⁸ The specimens he displayed at the Stock Exchange in Auckland ‘were eagerly examined by brokers and others’.¹⁸⁹ Having found nothing of value, he did not take out a miner’s right until two days after the opening and was a shareholder in only one claim, which was not registered until 6 December; he was a director of the company formed to work it.¹⁹⁰

A party being organized to prospect for Colonel Chesney’s find¹⁹¹ had ‘other information’ that would assist their search. The latest and, so far, richest specimen stone had just been brought down by Rewi Mokena:

¹⁸⁶ Special Reporter, ‘A Visit to the Prospectors’ Ground at Te Aroha’, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 November 1880, p. 3.

¹⁸⁷ See *Thames Advertiser*, Magistrate’s Court, 21 August 1875, p. 3, 20 June 1877, p. 2, 14 August 1879, p. 3; *Thames Star*, 24 August 1880, p. 2; for his investments, see *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 5 August 1869, p. 663; *New Zealand Gazette*, 9 April 1880, p. 474, 22 July 1880, p. 1065.

¹⁸⁸ Special Reporter, ‘A Visit to the Prospectors’ Ground at Te Aroha’, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 November 1880, p. 3.

¹⁸⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, 30 October 1880, p. 5.

¹⁹⁰ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Miner’s Right no. 548, Miners’ Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1d; Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 173, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Star*, 13 December 1880, p. 2.

¹⁹¹ See paper on rumours of gold at Te Aroha.

It is certainly enough to establish the reputation of the district for reef gold, but nothing more can be said, as the golden vein is not to hand. The stone is rich in minerals and in gold, one large slab having a nice compact vein running along its outer edge, and the other containing blotches of rich gold when broken. Several pounds weight of golden stone are got daily by one or other of the genuine prospectors, who prefer to work rather than loiter their time away near the flats, as some of those on the spot do.

After detailing the plans for a township and the prospects for agriculture and the hot springs, the reporter wrote that there were ‘about twenty men engaged in waiting on Providence in connection with the recent finds, for only a few of them seem to indulge in prospecting. When remonstrated with they coolly reply, “What’s the good, until the field is open; some fellow would only jump your claim”’. He felt they should be out prospecting, for whilst it was ‘true many quartz specimens have come ready to their hands’, only ‘persistent efforts’ would uncover reefs.¹⁹²

ISSUES CONCERNING PROCLAIMING A GOLDFIELD

This reporter wanted the district opened under the Mines Act, not the Goldmining Districts Act.

The difference is that the former is based upon the old Goldfields Act, which only admits of working claims and manning ground, whilst the latter is the latest invention of providing mining sheep-runs for capitalists, to the exclusion of the miner’s right men. Now, to give the prospectors twice such an area as that provided for under the leasing regulations may mean to exclude all others from the auriferous area as far as the latter is known at present, and it would therefore be madness to proclaim the prospectors the only persons entitled to so large an area.¹⁹³

A *Waikato Times* editorial also tried to discourage the ‘evident disposition just now to give the fullest credence to the seeming good tidings’, and criticised the ‘stupid, sensational reports’ appearing in other newspapers that ‘induced many unthinking people to congregate’ at Te

¹⁹² Special Reporter, ‘A Visit to the Prospectors’ Ground at Te Aroha’, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 November 1880, p. 3.

¹⁹³ Special Reporter, ‘A Visit to the Prospectors’ Ground at Te Aroha’, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 November 1880, p. 3.

Aroha. While admitting that Waikato would benefit from the market that a goldfield township would provide, it warned that, should the field turn out to be a duffer, the result would be disastrous, and deprecated an early opening:

The hurried proclamation of the district as a goldfield would be followed immediately by a rush of men, the majority of whom are not over-burdened with money, but who at the present time are in all probability in the receipt of wages sufficient to maintain them in comfort. When their cash is spent and there remains no prospects of riches, their numbers largely augmented by others in a similar condition who have been attracted from other parts of the colony, employment will be much more difficult to obtain than now. Nor will the employers of labor, the farmers in this district, derive any benefit, because the withdrawal of labor may seriously affect the extent of the operations during the season. Of course, we do not presume to say whether the Aroha is a good or a bad field, but we have little hesitation in stating that up to the present nothing has occurred to warrant the indulgence of any very sanguine hopes. Some of the specimens which have been shown are by no means extraordinary, and would scarcely have passed muster in the old Thames days. We may be content to work for less now, but no one can work long for nothing. Until, therefore, some intelligence more reassuring than anything which has previously reached us comes to hand it would be an act of folly to waste time and money at the Aroha.... Nothing of importance that transpires is likely long to remain secret, and the class to which we directly refer will probably learn as much by staying at home as they would be making a rush to the goldfield. At any rate they will be in a much safer position.¹⁹⁴

The *New Zealand Herald* pointed out the problems facing the government. Whitaker must have shown it Kenrick's letter, and the concerns expressed may well have been Whitaker's. To proclaim a goldfield was not 'plain and easy'.

If it were simply a range of barren hills, the thing might be done, and no harm result if it were found there there was not gold enough to keep fifty men at work. There are 50,000 acres in the Te Aroha block, and much of this is land which might be sold for agricultural purposes.... If the land were proclaimed a goldfield, and the precious metal found in quantities in different places, everything would be well. But if payable gold were not found, a

¹⁹⁴ Editorial, *Waikato Times*, 30 October 1880, p. 2.

considerable hindrance to settlement would be created. Rights would be acquired in different places under goldfield laws, which would be very embarrassing. The Government could not sell the land, and altogether the proclamation would operate as an evil and a hindrance to the district. When a Government proclaims a field it does not guarantee that every party will find a payable claim, but it is generally understood that a Government, before issuing a proclamation, has in its possession some evidence that there is profitable employment for some men at least on the ground. As regards Te Aroha this evidence has not yet been brought forward, and therefore, it is we presume, that the Government hesitate.¹⁹⁵

CONCLUSION

Despite the hopes (and dreams) of wealth contained in the mountain, many urged caution and warned about a rush to an untried area where the prospectors of success were very uncertain. What little opening up of the prospectors' discoveries had been done did not prove the prospects were encouraging, nor did the first, and only, test of the ore answer this burning question. Officials were reluctant to open the field on this basis, but in response to pressure and the complications created by the find being on Maori land decided to proclaim a new goldfield with new regulations and tried to ensure that the disreputable aspects of previous rushes were avoided.

¹⁹⁵ *New Zealand Herald*, 30 October 1880, p. 5.