

**Akatarawa and Pakuratahi Forests
History**

Drafted by Tony Walzl

B. HISTORICAL

As noted in the landscape assessment, the Akatarawa Forest Block consists of hilly and isolated land lying between the Kapiti Coast and the Hutt Valley. As such there is comparatively little evidence regarding the use of the land by Maori or Europeans. Considering the position of the Block, it is likely that following the conquest of the Wellington region in the late 1820s by Taranaki and Kawhia iwi, the land presumably lay within the rohe of the Ngati Toa groups.

After 1840, the Block lay outside of the area of land claimed by the New Zealand Company. Although research on the subject has not been completed, the Akatarawa Forest Block was presumably included either as part of the 1848 Kapiti land transaction between Ngati Toa and the Crown or as part of sales that took place along the Kapiti Coast before 1860. The exact process of what became of the land after it became Crown land has not been fully researched but it appears that at some time part of the land passed into private hands whilst part remained Crown land.

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(a) Initial Use of Land and Resources

Research conducted to date records little evidence that the land within the Akatarawa Forest Block was considered for use or exploitation at an early date. Although containing reserves of native timber, there were other stands of trees closer to settlement which fulfilled the needs of the developing township at Wellington. The first reference to the land and resources in the Block uncovered by research so far came in 1863 when the possibility of putting a railway through the Rimutaka hills to the Wairarapa was being considered. At this time, Government Geologist James Crawford envisaged that the only feasible way of building such a railway would be through the use of a long tunnel. To do this, Crawford believed that it would be necessary to find a strong mode of power to propel the tunneling equipment. He proposed the application of the vertical pressure that would come from establishing a column of water to compress air and power the earth tunneling equipment. For this Crawford found examples used in Europe and looked to the waters of the Akatarawa River which is located within the Forest Block.

By means of this power we may be enabled to tunnel the Rimutaka at a comparatively low cost, to work our projected railway or railways at a low expenditure, and to apply the surplus power to the working of mills or of such other branches of industry as may seem likely to prove remunerative.¹

Needless to say, Crawford's ambitious scheme was not proceeded with.

By the 1880s, the perpetual need for timber resources led to sawmillers beginning to push up into the hills of the Akatarawa Forest Block and behind them came hopeful landbuyers. A.H. Gibson lived in the Akatarawa Valley in 1885 trying to eke out a living on a small block of land there. He noted that he was one of the few permanent settlers there, that otherwise other neighbouring whares were occupied for only a few weeks of the year during what was regarded as the bush felling season. Gibson loved living in the isolation of the Akatarawa Valley and described the dawning of a new day in the valley.

A note from a distant tui on some branch in the forest, quickly answered by another close by. A kaka's shrill cry from the big rata on the opposite hill. Then a whole chorus in which tuis, kakas, and bellbirds join, mingled with the first morning breath of the breeze from up the river. And now a shaft of sunlight strikes over the hill to the East and lights on the tasseled tops of the rimu where pigeons are wheeling, their white and bronze breasts gleaming against the blue sky.²

Other settlers soon joined Gibson. It is considered that McGhie's Road, which is within the Akatarawa Forest Block, dates back to the 1890s and was a route established by farmers on the original Valley View property to transport their cream to the dairy factory at Mangaroa Valley.³

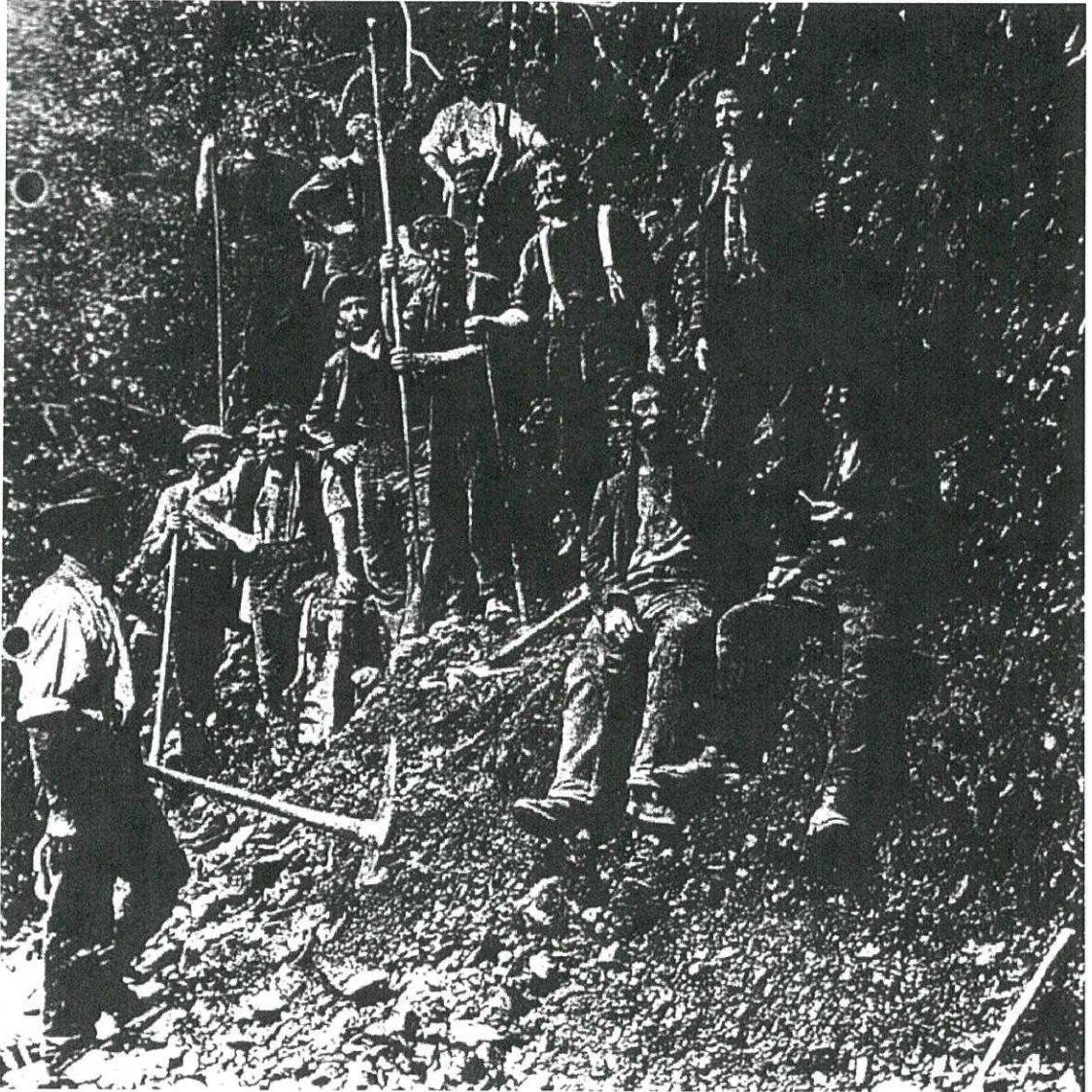
Timber felling and sawmilling also really got underway within the Akatarawa valley during the 1890s. The Whiteman's Family had a mill at the Karapoti Road area of the Little Akatarawa Block near the Old Trestle Bridge. Before 1910, they pushed a tram up the gorge to Hukinga. This bush tram was used to cart logs drawn by bullocks. When constructing the tram, explosives were used to

¹ Act and Proceedings, Wgtn Province, 1864 Session XI

² A.H. Gibson "Autobiography", qMS 0835, ATL Wgtn

³ WRC File 108/11 Pt.1

loosen large sections of the greywacke rock, but the tramway still required teams of men using hand drills, sledge hammers, picks and timber jacks. Some time later, another tramway was established along McGhie's Road.⁴



Building the Karapoti Tramway:
Wellington Regional Council

⁴ "Karapoti Road", WRC File, R2/3/1 vol.2

Initially a bridge linked the bush tram with the main Akatarawa Road but this was washed away. It was replaced in 1910 with a second bridge built of Australian hardwood and logging access into the Block was again ensured. Despite floods which saw water levels rise above the bridge's handrails, the structure stayed in place until a particularly strong flood in 1972 washed it away.

At a later date, a sawmiller named Price widened the Karapoti tramway into a narrow road and established a mill on flats where exotic forest now stands. Price eventually sold to the Campbell family who continued logging operations. In addition they farmed the cleared valley flats. In 1918 Whiteman had also sold to Campbell his "Brick Mill" at Karapoti. Thereafter, for many years, Karapoti Road was also known as Campbell's Mill Road.⁵

At some time around 1911, W.J. Strand purchased a large timber block in the Akatarawa area. In 1919, a total of 2,228 acres was acquired from Strand by the State Forest Service and established as Akatarawa State Forest No.26.⁶ A state forest (No.33) was also established in the Wainui area.

(b) Water Conservation Purposes

In 1927, amidst discussions over ensuring a permanent water supply for Wellington, the Wellington City and Suburban Water Supply Board was established. The State Forest Service vested the Wainui State Forest No.33 in the Board with the intention that the land could provide an income from log sales to contribute towards water supply purposes. The land vested included the catchments of the Akatarawa, Akatarawa West and Whakaitikei rivers. An area of 3,970 acres of the State Forest was left out of the vestment. This included the catchment of the Wainui river including a significant area around the Maungakotukutuku stream.⁷ By 1933, Akatarawa State Forest No.26 was also transferred to the Water Board.⁸

⁵ Ibid

⁶ AANI 6905, box5, 6/2/26, Arch NZ, Wgtn

⁷ AANI 6905, box6, 6/2/33, Arch NZ, Wgtn

⁸ AANI 6905, box5, 6/2/26, Arch NZ, Wgtn

Soon after the land within the Akatarawa Forest Block was vested in the Water Board, consideration was given on how the waterways within the Block could be harnessed for water supply. The Whakatikei watershed was been estimated at the time as being 15-17 square miles in area and was generally bush-clad. Within this area, the changes of altitude ranged between 380ft and 2,000 ft. Summer explorations in 1928 for water supply purposes found that the minimum flow was 3.9 million gallons per day. The quality of the water had been analysed by the Department of Health and certified as good for public purposes. The plans at the time were to build a dam just below the site where the Wainui Stream joined the Whakatikei River. The dam would have been 135ft high and had a width of 250 ft at its crest. This would cost £105,000 to build. A total of 1,650 million gallons of water would have been held. Therefore, it would equate with one third of the cost for the works at Wainuiomata and hold twice the amount of water.⁹

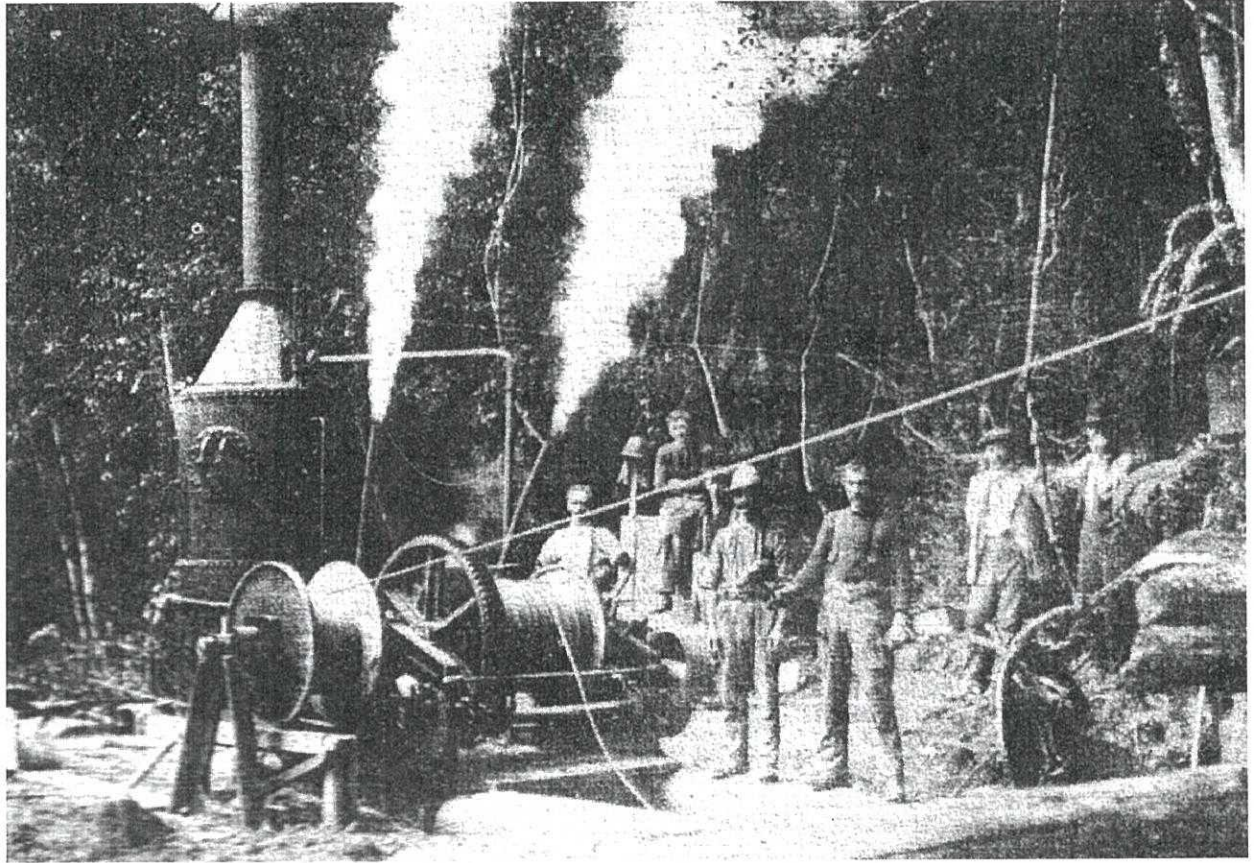
The Akatarawa watershed was also considered at the same time with the plan being to locate a low dam on that waterway as well as at Whakatikei. The size of the Akatarawa watershed was judged in 1929 to be 13.5 square miles in size. Within this area, the changes of altitude ranged between 650ft and 2,000 ft. Measurements of water capacity showed 3.3 million gallons per day. As with Whakatikei, a site had been identified where a dam could be built of similar dimensions.¹⁰ Plans for these construction works fell through, however, when the various Wellington and Hutt local authorities considered that it would be cheaper to further develop their artesian water supplies.

When, in the late 1930s, the Hutt Valley was chosen as a major site for state housing development, survey camps returned to the Whakatikei and Akatarawa watersheds to further explore the possibility of reviving the 1929 plans. A scheme that would be gradually established was envisaged beginning with the originally contemplated low dam in the Whakatikei catchment, followed by bringing the Akatarawa River's waters into the system by tunnel, and then the construction of a high dam on the Akatarawa River. The advent of the war, however, brought development to a halt.¹¹ In the post-war years, when the matter of water supply was again looked at, a major scheme focused on the Hutt River was gone ahead with instead. [See Kaitoke entry]

⁹ 24 July 1929, Hart, G.A. "Report of the City Engineer", pp.17-8

¹⁰ Ibid, pp.20

¹¹ Carmichael, JS. "Wellington Water Supply: The Hutt River Scheme", *Journal of the New Zealand Branch of the Royal Sanitary Institute*, No.36 (Vol.VIII No.4), March 1948, p.259



Whiteman's Mill at Hukinga, c.1911
Braddock Album as found in Kenneally, op cit, p.14

(c) Continued Forestry

Despite the land within the Akatarawa Forest Block being vested in the Water Board for the preserving of the bush for catchment purposes, the possibility of allowing forestry to continue was still considered. This came about due to a debate occurring at the time on whether forestry really did do damage to indigenous forests. This debate is reflected in an article written about the imminent vesting of the catchment land.

There are few subjects more arguable, in the present state of knowledge, than the regeneration of the indigenous bush. The advocates of carefully regulated milling in “protection forest” areas contend, however, that a regeneration sufficient for safeguarding waterflow is much more easily obtained than a regeneration of milling timber. The essence of their case seems to be that, if the timber-cutter provides safeguards against fire, the gaps that he makes are soon filled up with a vegetation sufficient to regulate waterflow and that if it takes many years to reproduce milling timber this circumstance does not detract from a water conservation proposition. In other words, a cut-over forest (if the work is done under safeguarding regulations) is no detriment to water conservation and has merely done something towards redeeming, through timber royalties, its capital cost.¹²

Therefore, by the 1930s trucks were still taking the timber out of the Hukinga area. The road remained narrow and with such a heavy load the trip remained dangerous especially in poor weather. On one occasion a timber truck went off the side of the road. Two of the three men escaped the cab by jumping out of passenger’s window. The driver, who was injured, was brought back up to the road in a sugar bag.¹³

Aside from the forestry, the Akatarawa Block has long had a shared used with outdoor recreation. This is illustrated by the logging access route along McGhie’s Road also being viewed by trampers as early as 1948 as a popular route that provided views of the forest-clad West Akatarawa River valley.¹⁴

In the early 1960s, the Forestry Service began to consider the wisdom of holding onto the remains of the Wainui State Forest which had been left out of the 1927 vestings. Despite the vesting having been made, the boundaries between Water Board’s land and state forest had never been surveyed. However, with increased exotic planting in the area as well as the spread of indigenous milling boundaries needed to be ascertained to clearly define property rights. The Forest Service, however, no longer saw any merit in retaining those sections it had held onto in 1927, and therefore in 1963,

¹² 3 Sept 1927, *Evening Post*

¹³ “Karapoti Road”, WRC File, R2/3/1 vol.2

¹⁴ WRC File 108/11 Pt.1

the Akatarawa Forest Block area was added to by the inclusion of the catchment of the Wainui river including a significant area around the Maungakotukutuku stream.¹⁵

One area worked by the sawmillers was the Deadwood Block (1,776 acres). Before 1950, both the Odlins and Strand Timber Companies had worked the Deadwood Block. In 1956, as part of an arrangement to transfer land into the Hutt Water Collection Area, the Water Board reached an agreement with the Akatarawa Sawmilling Company to grant cutting rights in the Deadwood block. At that time it was estimated that only 500 acres of timber remained. Over the next four years 3.5 million feet of timber were extracted from the area.¹⁶ By 1962, the Deadwood Block has been cut out, and the only millable timber left was located in very inaccessible places. Cutting ended in the Deadwood area in 1963 although the Akatarawa Sawmilling Company still held cutting rights.¹⁷

In the early 1960s, the competing management between indigenous milling and exotic forest planting could sometimes be difficult for the Water Board to manage. Millers, seeking to find best ways to reach the native timber, could put down roads and other works that destroyed parts of exotic plantations. In addition, it was often difficult to keep a trace of where milling companies were cutting and whether this was in areas covered by cutting rights.¹⁸ By the mid-1960s, the Water Board had its own sawmill in the 450-acre Hukinga plantation and was cutting exotic timber, 80% of which was Douglas fir and 20% radiata pine.¹⁹

From the date when the lands within the Akatarawa Road were vested in the Wellington City and Suburban Water Supply Board, the responsibility for the maintenance of the five kilometre Karapoti logging road also passed to the Board at great cost. When the Karapoti log bridge was washed away, however, the decision was made to not replace it. Instead McGhie's was improved and became the main accessway.²⁰

¹⁵ AANI 6905, box6, 6/2/33, Arch NZ, Wgtn

¹⁶ WCC File 00001:1751:52/6 pt.2

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ F1, w3129, 19/3/353, box 158, Arch NZ, Wgtn

²⁰ "Karapoti Road", WRC File, R2/3/1 vol.2

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B. HISTORICAL

There is comparatively little evidence regarding the specific use of the land within the Pakuratahi Block. However, in pre-European times the Whakataka Pa belonging to the Ngati Ira people was located at Te Marua just south of the Park's boundaries on a hill overlooking where the Mangaroa Stream joins the Heretaunga (Hutt) River.¹ It is also said that in pre-European times, the Hutt River was navigable as far as Pakuratahi and that Maori used it frequently to travel up and down by canoe.² Furthermore, Maori tracks from Wairarapa into Heretaunga crossed through the Pakuratahi Flats.

Early in the nineteenth century, the occupation of Te Whanganui a Tara was to change dramatically. Following military excursions in 1819 and 1821, during which the Whakataka Pa was sacked, a series of migrations to Te Whanganui a Tara came from Kawhia and Taranaki. These began in the early 1820s and continued for a number of years bringing groups such as Ngati Toa, Ngati Mutunga, Ngati Tama, Te Atiawa, Ngati Raukawa and several others to different places around the Wellington district. During the nineteenth century, a pa was maintained at Maoribank and so nearby Maori occupation persisted generally in the area.

(a) The Transfer from Maori Ownership

Entries for other Regional Parks have fully described the processes through which Wellington and Hutt Valley land was transferred from local Maori to the ownership of the New Zealand Company and then the Crown. This involved a long complex process that extended from 1839 to 1850. A brief summary of that process will be given below to show where the land which is included in the Pakuratahi Forest Block fits into this history.

In 1839, the New Zealand Company arrived in Wellington with plans of establishing a colony. A scheme to establish the town of Port Nicholson had been set out in a prospectus launched on 2

¹ Kelleher, John Arnold. *Upper Hutt: the history*, Picton, Cape Catley, c.1991, p.16

² Brown, James. "Reminiscences of a Pioneer Settler", *Journal of Early Settlers & Historical Association of Wellington*, No.3 Feb

May 1839. Amid rumours that the British Government would soon intervene in New Zealand to seek sovereignty over the islands, the Company fitted out a ship named the *Tory* and their officials voyaged to New Zealand to buy land for their colonisation scheme. On 20 September 1839, the *Tory* sailed into Te Whanganui a Tara.³

The arrival at Te Whanganui a Tara of New Zealand Company officials on the *Tory* was soon followed by negotiations with local Maori to acquire land for settlement. On 27 September 1839, the Port Nicholson Deed was signed with Te Puni and others from Pito-one being involved in this land transaction. At this time, the Pakuratahi Forest Block was within the boundaries identified by the purchase deed. There were numerous difficulties with this attempt to purchase land, however. The deed was in English, the interpreter had only a basic grasp of te reo, the boundaries were so poorly recorded that they remain difficult to map, no plan of the land transaction was available during the negotiations and certain key groups of Wellington Maori did not sign. Later deeds signed with Ngati Toa chiefs on 25 October and with Te Atiawa at Queen Charlotte Sounds on 8 November had the same problems.⁴

Soon after the Company's arrival, Crown officials landed in New Zealand and, on 6 February 1840, the Treaty of Waitangi was signed. One of the first actions of the new Government was to set up a Commission of Inquiry to generally inquire into all the many hundreds of land transactions between Europeans and Maori that had allegedly occurred prior to 1840. If these were found to be valid, then they would be ratified by the Crown and a title awarded. During the hearings into the New Zealand Company's transactions for the Wellington district, the problems with the Company's purchase emerged. The Commissioner, William Spain, having heard this testimony, expressed his view in a preliminary report of 12 September 1843, that there were serious difficulties in the way of seeing the New Zealand Company's 1839 land transactions as being valid. Despite these findings, a major difficulty existed. On 21 January 1840, the first ships carrying the first Company migrants had arrived in Wellington and since then hundreds of

1923, p.14

³ Ibid, pp.45-8

⁴ Information on which this subsection is based has come from Waitangi Tribunal *Te Whanganui a Tara me ona takiwa*. Wellington:Waitangi Tribunal, 2003, pp.52-59

colonists had settled in the town and countryside on the harbour's southern shores. Any finding that the Company's claims had no validity would have major ramifications for these settlers.⁵

With Commissioner Spain reaching a view that this purchase did indeed have problems a compromise was sought which entailed getting the various groups of Port Nicholson Maori to sign 'deed of release' giving up all their interests in Wellington, for a further payment and the granting of reserves. Recent evaluations of this arbitration process, which took place in February and March 1844, have found that it proceeded in a coercive manner.⁶ However, following the completion of the arbitration process, Commissioner Spain issued his final report for the Port Nicholson claim in March 1845 recommending that the Company receive a Crown Grant for 71,900 acres of land which effectively equated with the sections that had been surveyed for settlement up to that time. This Grant was issued by Governor FitzRoy in July 1845. It appears that at this time there were no surveyed sections within the area of land now known as the Pakuratahi Forest Block, therefore this land was not initially considered as included in the Grant to the New Zealand Company.

Before FitzRoy's Grant could be accepted as having validity, further concessions of land had to be awarded to various groups of Wellington Maori who were losing important cultivation lands as a result of the Grant having been made. By 1847 a series of land exchanges were made following which a new Crown Grant was drawn up by Governor Grey and awarded to the New Zealand Company. However, rather than being based on the Company's surveyed land, as recommended by William Spain in 1844, Grey's grant covered the whole of the original block claimed by the New Zealand Company. Therefore, instead of receiving almost 70,000 acres as Spain had recommended after investigating the Company's claim and determining that this was the extent of land that had been paid for, the Company was granted all 209,247 acres of their original claim. This extended Grant included much of the hill lands around Wellington and the Hutt. When the New Zealand Company collapsed from financial ruin in 1850, that land became Crown land.⁷

⁵ Waitangi Tribunal, *op cit*, pp.60-65 and 199

⁶ *Ibid*, pp.145-179

Within the Pakuratahi area, no sections had been surveyed in the initial layout of the settlement. By the issuing of the 1847 Grant, however, a few sections had been surveyed in the immediate area although it appears that only one section, which extends a little way from Kaitoke and up along the Pakuratahi River had been laid out that was actually located within the Forest Block. Therefore, most of the lands currently in the Pakuratahi Forest Block went into Company and then Crown ownership through the extended award given by the 1847 Grant. The exact process of what became of the land within Pakuratahi land after it became Crown land has not been fully researched. If it passed into private hands, there has been little record of how the land was used.

(b) Early European Explorations

Although land within the Pakuratahi Forest Block may not have been intensively settled during the nineteenth century, it was the focus of much exploration for finding a route from the Hutt Valley through to the Wairarapa.

In 1840, the New Zealand Company naturalist Ernest Dieffenbach, seeking to cross the Tararua Mountains and find a way back into the Manawatu Valley, decided to follow the course of the Heretaunga (Hutt) River. By 4 August the party reached what is thought to be the Pakuratahi Forks. After several days delay, they traveled up the Pakuratahi River and entered what is now the Pakuratahi Forest Block on 8 August. Dieffenbach described the plateau flats surrounding the river as being covered in tawai and rimu.

We walked for nearly four miles on the flat which is about a mile in breadth, but were stopped by a sudden curve of the river to the westward. On its right shore the hills were again precipitous to the height of several hundred feet; the force of the current in its winding course had undermined them occasioning frequent slips. The left shore is low, and bears sufficient marks of its being very often overflowed.⁸

⁷ Ibid, pp.227-278

⁸ Dieffenbach, Ernest *Travels in New Zealand*, London, John Murray, 1843, pp.84-5

As Dieffenbach and his party continued in their search for a route across the Tararuas, they encountered signs that others had frequented this area before them: “On our route this day, we had seen traces of natives: - a footpath coming from the eastward, although marked only by the half-broken branches of shrubs.” Following this, Dieffenbach reached the Tararua Rangess but ran out of food supplies to make an attempt to reach Wairarapa and so turned back.

The following year, on 25 November 1841, Robert Stokes, surveyor of the New Zealand Company, set off to again attempt to find the passage through to the Wairarapa. Unlike Dieffenbach, he took Maori guides, and was rewarded by success. Stokes also followed the Hutt River but unlike Dieffenbach, he left the banks of the Hutt River at an earlier point and was guided across the Pakuratahi Flats to the Pakuratahi River where the group camped. The next day they were led over the hills and down into the Wairarapa.⁹

The following year, in June 1842, another New Zealand Company surveyor, Charles Kettle, sought to retrace Stokes’ steps but from the other side – hoping to enter into the Hutt Valley from the Wairarapa. With the assistance of Maori guides, they climbed the hills to a point named “Te Hau”. After crossing several hills, they saw the Pakuratahu River and reached it in half an hour.

We then crossed and endeavoured to follow its course, walking through the bush, but were soon obliged to wade owing to the steepness of the hills, which on both sides of the river here approach quite close to the water’s edge. We continued travelling on in this way till 3 o’clock, when we were obliged to stop, being dreadfully wet, having waded the river eleven times and been exposed to the rain which has poured in torrents all day. Several of us ill today...¹⁰

The following day, the weather was so bad that Kettle noted that had they not the fear of running out of supplies and facing starvation they would not have gone. The party made six miles pushing through the bush on the riverbanks as the riverbed itself was flooded. The land in this area was hilly and covered with high bush. Kettle recorded in his diary: “Nearly all the men are in very bad

⁹ 6 Aug 1842, *New Zealand Journal*, Vol.3 No.67, p.183

¹⁰ Kettle, Charles. “Exploration of the Manawatu and Wai-rarapa Districts in 1842”, *Journal of Early Settlers & Historical Association of Wellington*, Vol.1 (various pages)

spirits today and seem quite worn out from constant exposure to this dreadful weather." The next day did not begin any better.

Rose this morning soaked through and through our huts having been completely deluged by the rain which fell during the night with greater force than ever. Obligated, however, to start after a breakfast of a mouthful of pork and some cold water and followed the Pakuratahi for a mile and a half.

The party came across level land and eventually found a track that led them from the Pakuratahi flats across to the Hutt River which they then followed home.

The efforts of these explorers were soon followed by roadbuilding activity. By 1847, a road through to Mangaroa was completed and a clearing cut through the bush across the Pakuratahi flats that was two chains wide.¹¹ Roadbuilding activity continued although the route was different than that used by the Stokes and Kettle following instead the path of the current Rimutaka Hill road. Initially only a bridle track was available but in 1856 a dray road was completed.¹²

(c) Crossing the Rimutakas by Rail

Although the area within the Pakuratahi Forest Block was not longer the route for road transport, at a later date it became the route for the rail connection between the Hutt Valley and Wairarapa.

By 1858, the same Robert Stokes who had explored the Pakuratahi area 17 years earlier, had become a Member of the Legislative Council and editor of the *New Zealand Spectator*. Stokes proposed the building of a railway over the Rimutaka Ranges. At this time the task was thought of as being too astronomical to consider.

As the need increased for Wairarapa settlers to have a cheap mode of transport to get their goods to Wellington market and ports, the matter of putting a railway through was again reconsidered. In

¹¹ Wakefield, Edward Jerminham, *The Handbook for New Zealand*, London, John W. Parker, 1848, pp.105-6

¹² Brown, op cit, p.18

1863, the Government Geologist James Crawford envisaged that the only possible way this could be achieved was by use of a tunnel under the hills:

Incidentally I may state that in the construction of the railway I do not think a tunnel through the Rimutaka can be avoided. Weighing the various disadvantages of a line surmounting the ridges of that range at any one point, the steep inclination, the increased distance, the numerous and sharp curves, I feel convinced that, although the first cost of a tunnel may be great, its expense would be amply repaid by decreased working expenses and increased safety.¹³

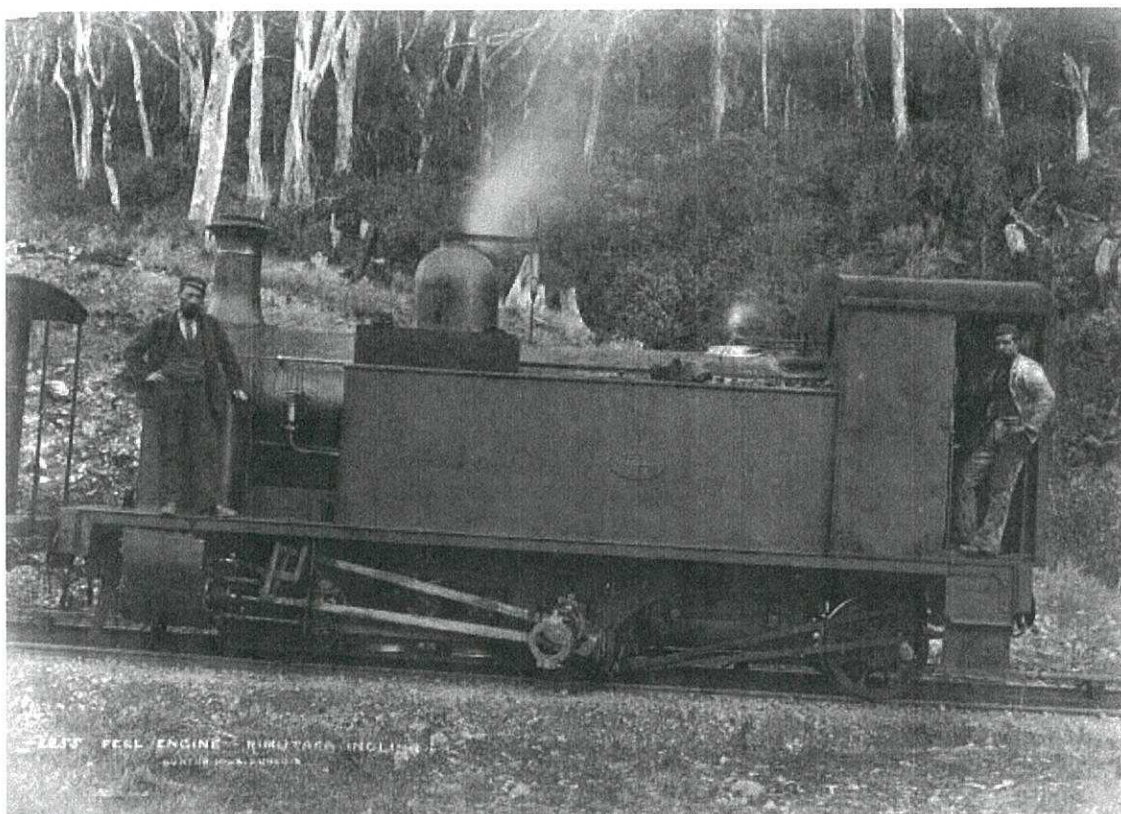
In 1867, a public meeting led to the formation of a committee to ascertain the feasibility of the project. Although this committee reported favourably on the proposal, matters such as the disturbed state of race relations in the colony and the lack of funding caused delays. By 1870, however, the plan to build a Rimutaka railway formed a key intended project as part of Sir Julius Vogel's policy which envisaged the use of overseas borrowing to fund essential public works.

Despite funding being available, the project was held to stringent financial requirements. The expensive possibility of a tunnel under the Ranges was no longer considered. Furthermore, to establish a route around the Rimutaka hills using conventional methods of railway construction would have involved massive earthworks and the engineers were told that the funding did not stretch this far. It was therefore decided that whilst a gentle approach using conventional methods was possible on the western side of the hills, (the area within the Pakuratahi Forest Block), a steep gradient would be adopted for the descent to the Wairarapa.

In making the line, the engineers constructed a centre rail that rose 18 inches higher than the other two rails. The wheels of the engines were made so that they pressed on either side of the centre rail to act as a brake during descent whilst they gave additional grip during ascent. In addition, the guards vans were especially equipped with braking equipment and a runaway siding was built in case the engine got out of control on the descent. The Fell engines were specially constructed in England as a cost of £19,000. The whole system was designed by English engineer John Barraclough Fell. Only two other railway lines in the world - the Mount Cenis Pass between

¹³ Act and Proceedings, Wgtn Province, 1864 Session XI

France and Italy and the Cantagallo line in Brazil - used the same system but both were temporary and were closed by 1883. The Rimutaka line would be used through to the 1950s.¹⁴



Fell engine on Rimutaka incline, c.1890

Burton Brothers (Dunedin), 1868-1898: Alexander Turnbull Library, 1/4-002573

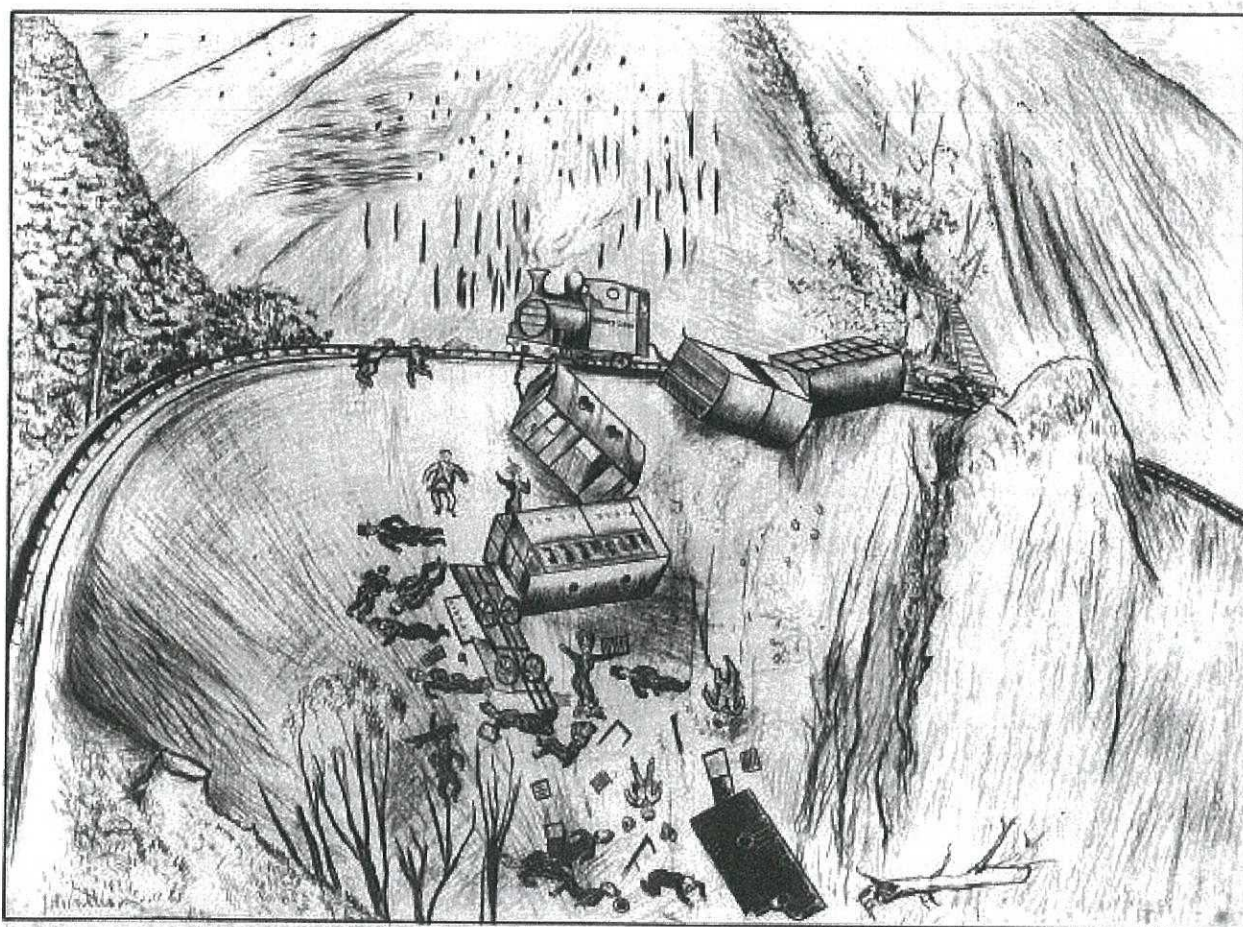
The contract was awarded in 1872 and the line had reached Upper Hutt by 1874. It was completed through to Kaitoke in 1878 and fully completed the following year.¹⁵ On the route over the Rimutaka Ranges the lines passed through four tunnels. Those who worked on the engines recalled that it would take a half hour trip to reach the summit from the eastern side and that the cabin would experience intense heat due to the required energy input.¹⁶

¹⁴ WRC File 2/5/1 Vol.2

¹⁵ Kelleher, John Arnold. [draft of] "Upper Hutt: the history" National Library 993.14 KEL 1971, pp.25

¹⁶ 11 Nov. 1986, *Kapi Mana News* WRC File 2/5/1 Vol.2

At one place between two tunnels is a place that became named “Siberia” on account of the furious winds that blew there. On 11 September 1880, these winds blew with such force that the morning train from Wairarapa to Wellington lost several passenger carriages over the edge of the gully killing four passengers and injuring many others. After this accident, two Fell locomotives were always used in front and behind of the train.¹⁷



Scene of the late railway catastrophe on the Rimutaka line, 1880

Wallis, J. H. : Supplement to the New Zealand Mail. Alexander Turnbull Library, B-034-004

¹⁷ Bishop, Walter K. *Guide to Wellington and District*, Wgtn: Robert Burrett, 1882, pp45-7

Despite this tragedy, passengers such as Walter Bishop, who wrote the line in 1882, found the journey thrilling.

At times the traveler is borne past wild and barren-looking hills and in a few moments is looking on the luxuriant foliage of the New Zealand forest, while from the slopes are to be seen naturally formed cascades whose overflowed waters rush on to swell the rivulets running clear and beautiful hundreds of feet below...

Bishop noted that soon after completion, the line had remained controversial with at least two alternate routes being identified as offering easier grades and being more suitable. Bishop was having none of this argument:

All I can say is that for the tourist, the Rimutaka line offers attractions which are positively enthralling. The curves are very abrupt. The pace is rapid enough to make standing on the platform dangerous as the oscillation is extreme; but the scenery is thrillingly grand.¹⁸

By the turn of the century, the Rimutaka Railway remained as much a tourist trek as a means of linking Wellington with the Wairarapa:

This is indeed a remarkable and most expensive piece of railway engineering and not a few are of opinion that a more useful, if less picturesque, route might have been selected. The scenery through which this part of the line runs should be seen by every visitor to Wellington who can possibly spare the short time needed for the trip. It is wildly beautiful. Though 1144 feet above sea level at what is called "The summit" the hills all round stand up like walls and average nearly three times this altitude.¹⁹

¹⁸ Inglis, James. *Our New Zealand Cousins*, London, Macmillan and Co., 1887, p.131

¹⁹ The Cyclopaedia of New Zealand, 1897, pp.226-7

(d) Twentieth Century Developments

As noted, little evidence of nineteenth century land use has been found. In 1874, a local directory recorded that C. Harris was operating a sawmill in the Pakuratahi area. Although the exact location is not stated, there is evidence of bush clearance having occurred on the flats in the northern portion of the block.²⁰

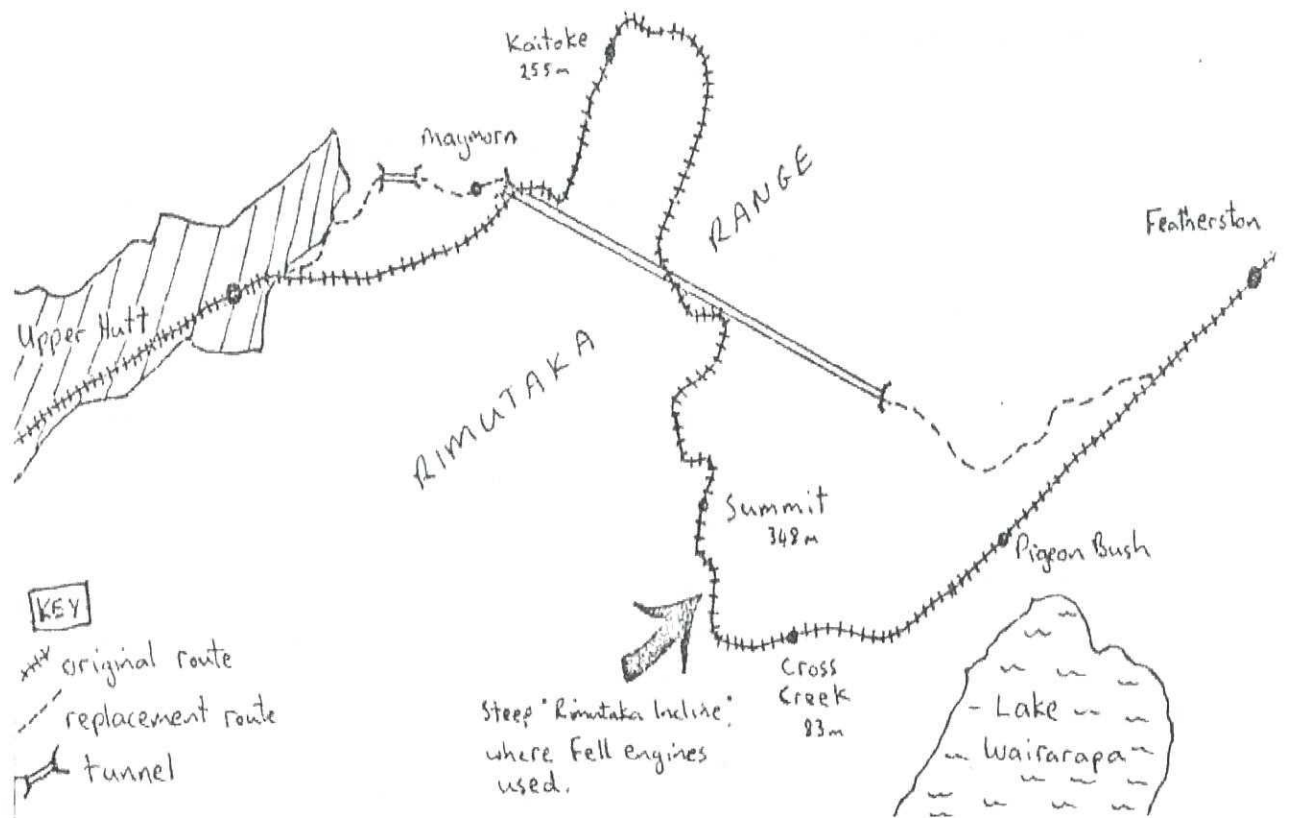
Nothing further has been found. In 1927, on the establishment of the Wellington City and Suburban Water Supply Board, 7,920 acres of the Pakuratahi Catchment land – with the exception of 409 acres that remained land belonging to the New Zealand Railways – was transferred to the Water Board from the New Zealand Forest Service. Soon after, between the years 1927 and 1930, a series of major bush fires occurred across the Rimutakas including the Pakuratahi block, the scars of which can still be seen today as regrowth has been slow.²¹

When the Fell locomotives on the Rimutaka line neared the time when they needed to be replaced, alternatives were sought as it was considered too expensive to continue to run the line. In addition, the slow speeds and length of the journey were increasingly viewed as being unsuitable. Instead, it was decided to put a tunnel under the hills. A small tunnel was built that gave access from Upper Hutt to the Mangaroa Valley. From there, a large tunnel was put through under the Rimutaka ranges. The Rimutaka tunnel was 5 miles 815 yards long making it the tenth longest in the world at the time. The first train traveled through on 3 November 1955.²²

²⁰ 26 Aug 1911, *Hutt Valley Independent*,

²¹ WRC File 2/5/1 Vol.1

²² Kelleher draft., op cit, pp.25



Rough Sketch showing the old and new route of the Rimutaka railway:

Wellington Regional Council

On the closure of the hill track, the sleepers were lifted and two bridges in the Maymorn to Kaitoke section of the line were removed. Bridges in the Kaitoke to Summit area were also to be removed but the Forestry Branch of the Water Board requested they be left. The bridges were purchased and, from 1958, the Board began an exotic afforestation programme in the northern part of the Pakuratahi Block. As the soils were particularly poor, topdressing was required to get the trees started.²³ Planting continued through to 1971.²⁴

²³ WRC File 2/5/1 Vol.1

²⁴ WRC File 2/3/1 Vol.3

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