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KAUAERANGA KAURI LOGGING: A FEW INTERESTING SITES RECENTLY RECORDED

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Introduction

The author has been tramping in the Kauaeranga Valley area since the 1960s and has observed a large portion of the kauri logging infrastructure still existing at, and after, that time; which was only about 30 years after logging ceased in the valley. Over the past 5-7 years, the author has conducted a "rolling" program of archaeological site recording in the valley, including the complete Kauaeranga tramway system (T12/1303, 1304 and 1305) and the Thames water race (T12/643). This article describes three newly identified and recorded sites.

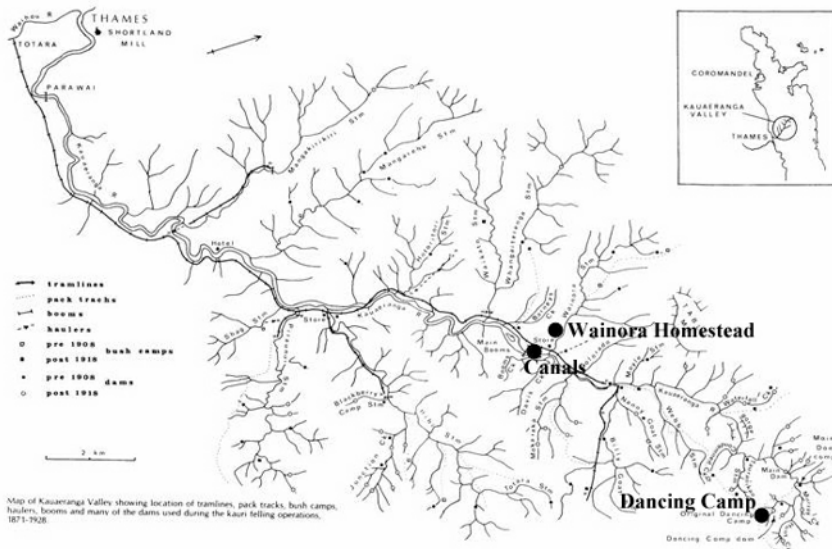


Figure 1: Kauaeranga Valley area, showing sites described in this article

Two of the three sites were reported to the author by members of the public - Wainora Homestead by Ron Standfield and Dancing Camp by former Pinnacles Hut warden Charles Little. At the time of writing this article (January 2014) Ron Standfield is conducting a detailed search of the Booms Flat - Wainora area and has shown the author many archaeological features he has located - to be recorded and reported on separately.

A Brief History of Kauaeranga Kauri Logging

Logging of kauri timber from the northern regions of New Zealand in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries played a major part in the development of the colony, and, later, fledgling nation. Kauri timber also provided a very early source of export income. Mature kauri trees were of massive size, and their growing locations, in remote, rugged, bush-covered terrain, meant that innovative transportation methods had to be adopted to harvest them. There were two main methods of transporting logs over long distances: flotation, by means of natural waterways, assisted by water stored in dams; and tramways. Both methods were used in the Kauaeranga Valley.

The Thames goldfield was proclaimed open on 1 August 1867 and there was an immediate demand for timber. Initially, this could be satisfied by felling trees around the town and along the coast, but these sources soon dried up. The first major contract to mill kauri in the Thames area was let to C.J. Stone, the so-called “Auckland millionaire”, in 1871. Stone and his brother Robert had a 99-year lease and access to vast tracts of the Kauaeranga Valley area. The Stone brothers built a saw mill at Shortland, near the Thames Wharf, and a huge set of chain booms across the river at the tidal limit of the Kauaeranga, near what is now the Thames racecourse. Both these projects took place in 1871 (Hayward 1978). The cost of building the Parawai booms was “... £3,000, a huge sum then ...” (Isdale 1977 p.3).

The principal means of getting the huge kauri logs out of the bush was to fell them into, or close to, a stream or river, and float or “drive” them out using water stored in dams. Booms were basically a giant screen across the river that halted the logs but let the water pass through. On high tide, logs were towed from the Parawai booms to the Shortland Mill for cutting, or to the Shortland wharf, where they were joined together into rafts and towed to Auckland.

In 1885, C.J. Stone died and the enterprise began to slump. The cutting rights were purchased by the Kauri Timber Company (KTC) – established by a consortium of Melbourne-based businessmen. In 1888, the KTC took over the cutting rights to the Kauaeranga area, and the Shortland mill.

According to Hayward (1978 p.6) the KTC drove logs down the Kauaeranga River to the Parawai Booms until 1908. By then, farming was well established in the lower Kauaeranga Valley and farmers were understandably irate about their land and facilities being affected by log drives. Also, continual battering by logs had weakened the road bridge over the Kauaeranga, originally built near the racecourse. 1908 additionally saw a sharp decline in demand for kauri timber, and the KTC sold the Shortland mill, but retained the cutting rights to the Kauaeranga area.

To get the remaining kauri out of the Kauaeranga area, the KTC constructed a tramway from the Billygoat Stream junction with the main river, down to Thames, which made the Parawai Booms redundant. Part of the scheme involved the construction of a new “main boom” between the Wainora and Whangaiterenga streams, to collect logs driven from the main Kauaeranga dam, and dams on the numerous upstream tributaries. Work on the tramway commenced in 1913; however, it wasn't completed until 1920, due to the intervention of World War One.

From 1920 until 1922, the main tramway terminated just downstream from the old Parawai booms, from where logs were towed by launch down the Kauaeranga River to the Shortland Wharf. However, it was difficult to get logs under the road and railway bridges, and the tramway was extended through Totara to the Waihou River. This new terminus was near the junction of the Waipapa Creek and the Waihou (Isdale 1977 p.47).

The tramway system was operated under contract by brothers Bill and Les Nankivell, with a staff of up to 15 men, who lived in a camp at the junction of Barney's Creek (Hayward 1978 pp.42-43). They used two ex-NZ Railways “D” class steam locomotives (Mahoney 1998 p.69). These completed two round trips daily, uplifting logs from booms and branch lines en route. There were also two jiggers, used by the maintenance crew and by prime contractor Bert Collins.

The tramway was used until 1928, when the Kauaeranga area had effectively been logged out, and logging operations ceased. An attempt was made by residents of the Kauaeranga Valley to keep the tramway open for other purposes - this was referred to the Minister of Public Works, who agreed to investigate the matter, but did not intervene (Isdale 1977 pp.51-52). The tracks were removed shortly afterwards.

Wainora Homestead

The Wainora camp was the headquarters for the KTC prime contractor, Bert Collins, and he lived there with his wife Edie. The camp store was the source of supplies sent to remote bush camps higher up the valley by packhorse

train. Remains of the tramway bridge over the Wainora (consisting of the remains of two wooden piles embedded in the stream bed) still exist, approximately 50m downstream of the existing vehicle ford. However, remains of the camp have not been located to date.

There are extensive thickets of wild roses (both white and pink flowers) growing close to the road, west of the Wainora campground. A possible source of these is the homestead of George and Jessie Hawkins, which was located close to the Wainora stream in the 1920s (but apparently separate from the Collins headquarters camp). George was a sub-contractor for KTC and Jessie (nee Adams) was the sole charge teacher at Kauaeranga School from 1916 until she was married in 1920 (Berry 2007 pp.96-97). A photo provided by Allan Berry shows that the Wainora homestead was more substantial than the normal temporary logging camp buildings, and had an extensive garden.



Figure 2: Wainora Homestead (20th January 1923) showing Jessie Hawkins (nee Adams) with eldest son Logan (photo provided by Allan Berry and reproduced with permission)



Figure 3 Wild roses near Wainora campground Nov 2012 (looking south along the existing road)

In February 2013, the probable site of the Wainora Homestead rubbish tip was reported to the Coromandel Heritage Trust by Ron Standfield, a resident of Tauranga and long-term camper and explorer in the Kauaeranga Valley. This information was communicated to the author, who visited the site with Ron. The rubbish tip is on the eastern side of the existing road, opposite a large exotic tree (species unknown) which probably dates from about the 1970s. This is in the area of wild roses, which bloom extensively in November each year, but generally don't last after Christmas.

The site was able to be dated by the presence of two beer bottles dated "1921" and one dated "1925". Numerous items were found, including bottles, broken crockery and glass, a section of rail, cooking utensils (including a camp oven, which looks to be intact, but buckled) and sundry other household rubbish. It is considered likely that the rubbish tip was associated with the homestead, rather than the Collins camp complex, as the tip is north of the line of the tramway, and is consistent with the photo in Berry's book (taken looking towards the ridge leading to Table Mountain). In contrast, the Collins camp is shown in photos to be south of the tramway (Hayward 1978). However, the buildings were possibly close enough for the rubbish tip to be shared. Apparently the KTC bush camps were "dry" (with respect to alcohol) but it is not clear whether this extended to the headquarters camp, nor the homesteads of married men!



Figure 4: Remains of cooking pot, crockery and bricks, probable site of the Wainora Homestead rubbish tip

Ron Standfield assessed the likely site of the homestead building as being on the existing road, in the vicinity of the large exotic tree. The author agrees with this, as it fits the photo in Berry (2007), which appears to be taken from about the tram lines looking north towards the ridge running west from Table Mountain.

Log-Hauling Canals, Main Booms Area

Photos taken in the Booms Flat area (e.g. Hayward 1978 p. 15, Orwin 2004 p. 158) show a canal being used as a haul path from the main booms to the loading skids. A survey was carried out in April 2012 to locate this canal, and to attempt to clarify the layout of the tramway infrastructure in the Booms Flat area.

A search was commenced at the Main Booms waypoint (from T12/1303), approx 50m south of the road, as it was considered that this would have been near the middle of the booms structure. Sections of canal were soon located, and the canal route was able to be followed, in many places, to Catleys campground, where it petered out, due to extensive modification (ground infilling and levelling). It was not possible to find any sign of the canal on the



Figure 5: Logs being hauled in a canal, from the Main Booms to the main Kaueranga tramway. Tudor Collins photograph [Archives Reference AAQA 6395 Box 6 M12396] Archives New Zealand The Department of Internal Affairs Te Tari Taiwhenua



Figure 6: Remains of canal near Catleys campground. There is an old log running parallel with the channel at the top right, partly concealed by fern

north side of the road, as the area is well overgrown by scrub and is very swampy in places. According to Dr Neville Ritchie, this is only the second industrial canal recorded in New Zealand; the other being at Kopuku open-cast coal mine (S12/323). Ron Standfield has since located several more sections of canal in the area.

"Dancing Camp" - Gum-diggers' Camp, near Pinnacles Hut

In late 2013, a survey was conducted of what is probably the gum-diggers camp, near the Pinnacles, which was occupied, possibly intermittently, between about 1900 and at least 1931. This acquired the nick-name *Dancing Camp*, as the diggers were reputed to conduct men-only dances there. This aspect was featured by Scottish comedian Billy Connolly, in his *World Tour of New Zealand* series, recorded in 2004. Connolly visited the Pinnacles Hut by helicopter to film the story, and his commentary used the term *buck-dancing*:

"Buck dancing is a folk dance that originated among African-Americans during the era of slavery. ... The original buck dance, or "buck and wing," referred to a specific step performed by solo dancers, usually men ..."
(<http://ncpedia.org/buck-dancing>)

It is important to differentiate between the gum-diggers camp at the Dancing Camp site, and a later KTC logging camp, established in the 1920s. According to Hayward (1978), the former was " ... adjacent to the Pinnacles Track junction..." whereas the KTC camp was in the gorge further downstream from the Dancing Camp dam, and has yet to be located and surveyed.

Kauri gum was regarded as a valuable by-product of the massive kauri forests of the northern North Island and gum-digging became a popular occupation for unskilled and semi-skilled men, who could embark upon it with little capital investment. According to an article in the *Thames Star* of 28th January 1881:

"The bushmen and the gum-diggers have now been more than twelve years at work in the Upper Kauaeranga Valley."

This indicates a start date in the Kauaeranga of around 1869, only two years after the Thames goldfield opened. However, it is worth noting that the difficulty in transporting huge kauri logs meant that harvesting (of logs) commenced around the lower reaches of the valley, and logging of the Dancing Camp area didn't commence in earnest until the Kauri Timber Company's last big effort in the Kauaeranga, in the 1920s. On the other hand, kauri gum was relatively easy to transport (by back-pack or by horse) and so gum-diggers tended to range much more widely (i.e. wherever gum was likely to be found).

The Dancing Camp gum-diggers camp is thought to have been established some time around 1900. Hayward (1978 p.18) states:

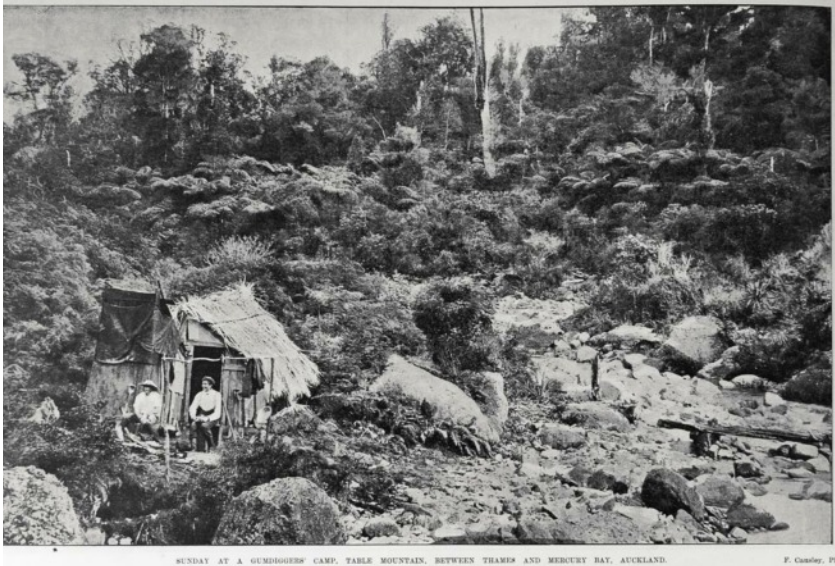


Figure 7: Typical gum-diggers whare. Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, AWNS-19050928-2-1.

"...the original Dancing Camp ... got its name when gumdiggers held buck dances (no women) there around 1900."

However, it is possibly older than that; in view of the 1860s commencement of gum-digging in the Kauaeranga Valley.

An Evening Post article of 22 July 1931 describes the accidental death of a young man working in the area:

"... a Dalmatian gum digger, who left his father's whare at Dancing Camp at 11 a.m. on Saturday in search for gum, and as he did not return a search party was organised. The body was found at the foot of a cliff about 200 ft high."

This indicates that gum-digging was still carried out in the area until at least 1931, which is interesting, as the price of kauri gum had dropped to £25 per ton, from £40 per ton in the late 1800s (McLintock 1966), indicating it was diminishing in value as a commercial product. It is likely that men were seeking what little money they could, at a time of high unemployment during the 1930s depression, in the same way that many were still fossicking for gold around Thames at that time.

The Dancing Camp site can be reached by following the track from the modern (1995) Pinnacles Hut, towards the water supply tanks, which are located in a saddle about 15 minutes walk, to the east of the hut. This is effectively a trail for staff use and is not formally marked, well-cleared nor signposted. From

the main track, the trail should be followed to the second creek-crossing, where there is a pump with a dome-shaped housing. On a small rise about 25m to the south, there is a small clearing, used to winch in helicopter loads. This is the general area of what is probably the Dancing Camp gum-diggers camp.

Within about a 25m radius from the helicopter winch-point, were found at least two rubbish pits (not excavated), observed to contain bottles, crockery, old boots and a variety of modern rubbish, such as plastics. Two wooden posts with nails were found, indicating the camp was more than just a transient trampers' or hunters' fly camp, although the purpose of the posts was not readily apparent. There are several level sites suitable for whare or buildings, but no evidence of building structures was found. A deeply-rutted track (consistent with a horse pack-track), leads to the area of the posts from the general area of the Pinnacles track. A piece of crockery with a manufacturer's emblem was found - this was dated by a Google search to the period 1906-1912. The location, which is consistent with Hayward's description, the presence of the wooden posts, and the dated crockery, indicate that the site is probably that of the Dancing Camp gum-diggers camp.



Figure 8: Aluminium billy, two enamel mugs and boot sole, on top of one rubbish pit. The billy had a manufacturer's emblem (symbol only) but wasn't able to be dated. Aluminium cookware was available from the late 1800s



Figure 9: Bottle fragments on top of second rubbish pit. "S and S" apparently refers to Seppelt and Sons, an Australian-based wine and port maker



Figure 10: Post with nails. A second, similar, post was found approximately 5m away, to the right of this picture (on the far side of the log)

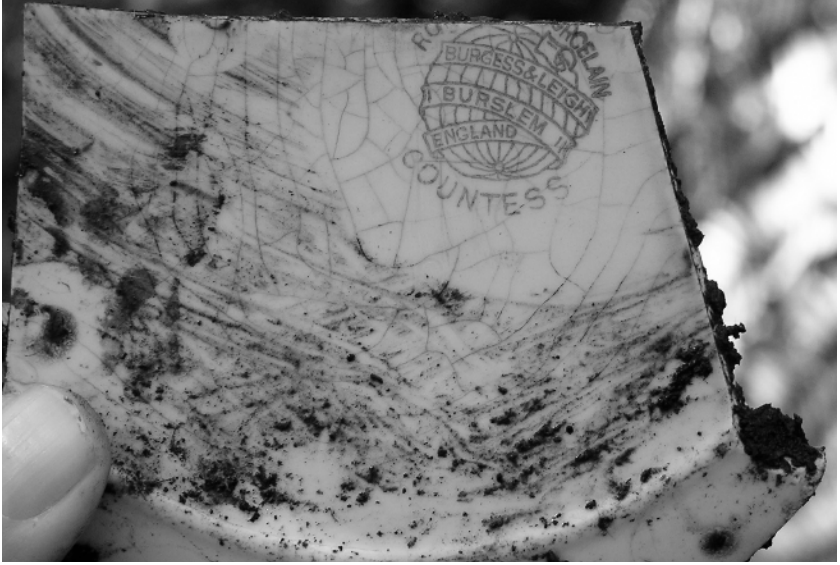


Figure 11: Broken plate, showing manufacturer's logo



Figure 12: "Printed globe mark used 1906-12. Note the inclusion of the place 'BURSLEM', sometimes 'ENGLAND' appears under the globe and sometimes the pattern name." (<http://www.thepotteries.org/mark/b/burgess.html>) NB: '[S]' has been added for editorial accuracy

Summary

The history and archaeology of the Kauaeranga Valley have been extensively surveyed and recorded (e.g. Berry 2007 , Hayward 1978 , Isdale 1977 and Wilkes 1997). This work has included considerable input from members of the public, e.g. long-term Kauaeranga resident and trampler Neil Campbell, who was cited by Wilkes (1997). However, there is still a rich variety of logging sites (and other site types) that remains unrecorded. The author has found input from members of the public, such as trampers, hunters and farmers, invaluable. *Archsite* has a form available for public notification of sites; however, this may be difficult for members of the public to find. The author would be interested to learn more about its current utilisation by the public.

Acknowledgements

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