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## CAN YOU HELP?

## Photo No 1

Quite often photographs come with little or no information but this one did come with a clue: It simply said, "New School Raurimu" but there were no names of the nine people pictured—perhaps readers can match faces with the names of the following speakers. Fortunately a *Taumarunui Press* report of the official opening gave a date of Thursday 27 April 1950 and the names of some who gave speeches: Mr H Dodds, chairman of the school committee welcomed visitors and parents; Paddy Kearins, MP for Waimarino said the Government did not allow cost (£28,600) to stand in the way of providing a suitable building; Mr A J Duxfield spoke on behalf of the Kaitieke County Council; the headmaster John Orgias said it was a red-letter day for Raurimu; the architect Mr L Barsanti said the job kept 24 men busy for 12 months and the deputy chairman of the Wanganui Education Board, Mr Bromiley gave some interesting figures: "In 12 years the roll at Raurimu had risen from 93 primary and 11 secondary pupils to 150 primary and 53 secondary pupils."

*- photo courtesy Taranaki Daily News collection (ref: 13000).*



## **A SHOCK INTRODUCTION TO RAURIMU**

*To arrive in Raurimu in the middle of winter was a bitter experience for many of the navvies who built the Raurimu Spiral. From their arrival in 1905 they encountered dense bush, extremities of weather and appalling living conditions. Henry F Hurndell wrote in 1984 that his earliest memory of Raurimu was rain and mud. "The main street was a sea of mud, constantly ploughed up by wagons, drays and occasionally a team of bullocks." He continued by saying that in order to walk along the sidewalk, boards had been laid to prevent pedestrians from sinking ankle deep in the mud. His mother had no stove and used to cook in a camp oven on an open fire. "I used to wonder why my mother was so often in tears, but later when I grew a little older, I ceased to wonder . . ."*

- photo courtesy Tomlinson collection (ref: 12779).



*The headmaster, Mr Con Rogers, poses with 24 pupils outside their "Canvas School" at Whakapapa in the 1904 to 1905 period. The chimneys indicate a degree of comfort although it would be interesting to speculate on the standard of the interior. This wooden floored marquee seems rather large for 24 pupils but could have doubled as living quarters for the headmaster.*

*- photo courtesy Brock collection (ref: 10954).*

## **School in the early days**

*The author of the accompanying article, Mr E C (Ernest) BROCK of Papatoetoe was formerly a well-known postal official at Taumarunui where he spent almost 21 years before being transferred to Maungaturoto in 1945. His memories of early life in the rugged central King Country is vivid . . .*

**H**earing that work was readily available in New Zealand constructing the Main Trunk Railway in the heart of the King Country, and that accommodation in the form of tents was available, my father James came on ahead to New Zealand from Australia where he had been employed in an open cast mine.

My mother, my elder brother Roy and myself followed at the beginning of 1903 to join my father at Piriaka, travelling by train from Auckland to Taumarunui.

The Whanganui River at Matapuna had not then been bridged.

With the friendly help of Mr A J Langmuir, storekeeper, mother and her two young sons were given a ride across the river in his delivery cart. Menfolk had to fend for themselves.

The Public Works Camp was then located just south of what later became the

site of the electric power station at Piriaka.

The family lived in a tent at this camp and it was here that my brother Les was born in December 1903. A Mrs Sheehan was the recognised midwife in attendance.

Early in 1904 we moved with the camp to Owhango where again we lived in a tent.

At Owhango my father worked in the lengthy cutting near the Owhango Cemetery. Spoil had to be removed to the cutting face at the rate of 3d per cubic yard. Wet weather would hinder working conditions, and would result in smaller returns in the wage packet.

### **WHAKAPAPA SCHOOL**

A school in a marquee was opened near the cutting site and was known as the Whakapapa school (its location was on the former farm of Andy Hill). My elder brother attended this school.

The works camp was located in the area

now the site of the present township of Owhango.

A move with the railhead to Raurimu took place in 1905 where my father took up the position of striker to the blacksmith Paddy Burke.

My father had preceded this move by visiting Raurimu, and with the help of a friend had constructed a slab cottage approximately 20 ft x 10 ft. The slabs were cut from a fallen rimu tree, and were let into the pumice base in a vertical position.

With a galvanised iron roof, we considered we had made definite progress in accommodation.

At one end of the dwelling was a corrugated iron fireplace, with a cross bar for mounting camp ovens, and a cooking extension with a hob on each side to hold items simmering or ready for the evening meal.

The cabin was divided into two rooms by means of a curtain, and was made

## An engineering masterpiece

New Zealand Railway publicity brochures invariably describe the famed Raurimu Spiral as “an engineering masterpiece” and a “masterly example of railway engineering”...

**O**thers have described it as an engineering miracle or one of the wonders of the New Zealand railway world.

Some of the writers were concerned that this wonderful engineering feat is taken for granted, yet its conception by Mr R W Holmes was a stroke of genius.

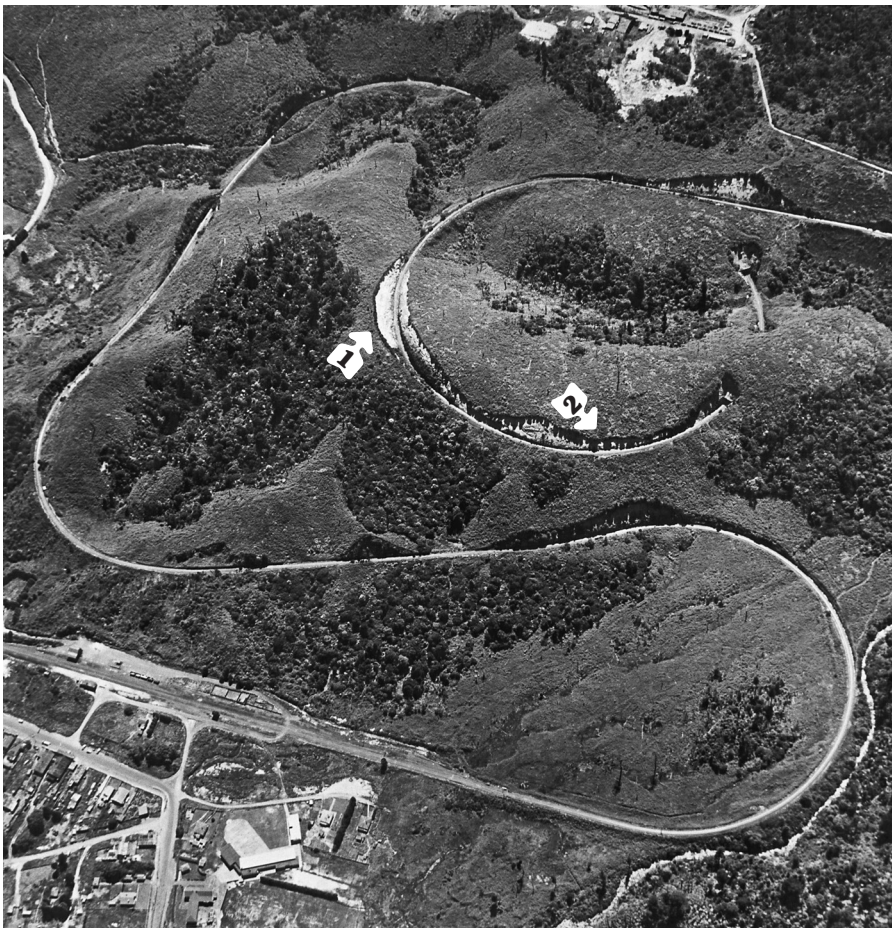
A souvenir booklet published by the Railway Enthusiasts Society in 1958 to commemorate the 50th Jubilee of the Main Trunk, reminded its readers that the conception of the Spiral provided the key to the whole of the central route through the North Island.

The article continues by stating that if John Rochfort in his early surveys had a weakness it was his optimism as to what the engineers could accomplish.

The most embarrassing problem he left behind him was the 1744 foot ascent from Kakahi to National Park. He rather rashly stated in fact that a grade of 1 in 80 could be achieved throughout but this proved to be quite impracticable.

Numerous routes were tried but not until the Raurimu Spiral was evolved was a satisfactory one found. Even this involved grades of 1 in 50 with no compensation for curvature.

The article concludes with a reminder that New Zealand has been well served by its engineers. “It should be realised,” they



*This 1957 Whites Aviation photo was published in the book *Single Track and the author's caption sums up the situation very well. He said: "The Raurimu Spiral, a striking memorial to the genius of R W Holmes who located this section of the Main Trunk through dense forest with which it was covered in 1898." Aeroplanes would have helped immensely in finding a satisfactory route but the Wright Brothers did not make their first successful flight until 17 December 1903. In the bottom left of the photo can be seen the Raurimu School and part of the township while at the top is the Raurimu Sawmilling Co or "Top Mill" as it was commonly known. It was previously built by Manson & Clark then around 1946 it was owned by AWA Housing Ltd and when it closed in 1963 was being operated by Cubit & Wells. The Piopotea Stream is shown beside the first horseshoe curve of the Spiral.**

- photo courtesy Weller collection (ref: 13123).



*A Public Works train on the biggest embankment on the Raurimu Spiral. In the foreground can be seen part of a deep cutting while the background shows signs of logging operations. The direction of view is arrowed "1" in the top photo.*

- photo courtesy New Zealand Railways Publicity Dept (ref: 14025).

# FLASHBACK

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## Shops burnt to ground

A disaster from which Raurimu never fully recovered, struck the township on Monday, 14 December 1925 when an uncontrollable fire wiped out most of the business area.

The fire started in the Spiral Hotel which was owned at the time by Geoff Martin who fortunately was the only occupant of the building.

Eleven businesses were completely destroyed with damage estimated at £20,000.

Houses and shops were rebuilt but Raurimu never fully recovered. The slump came, then the sawmills started to close one by one.

The writing was on the wall—the lone chair on the main street is a sad reminder of a bygone era.

FOOTNOTE: A full account with dramatic fire photos appears on pages 8 to 10.



*Prominent in this photo, taken the following day, are the three chimneys of the Railway Hotel along with masses of twisted corrugated iron and brick chimneys of the other businesses. All the chimneys were immediately ordered to be demolished for safety sake but the Spiral Hotel chimney apparently fell whilst the fire was raging out of control.*

*photo courtesy Brosnan collection (ref: 13976).*



*A dramatic moment in history is caught in this snapshot. The fire already has a good hold when the unknown photographer stops to record his first view of the disaster which wiped out the main street of Raurimu. The Spiral is in the right background.*

*photo courtesy Brosnan collection (ref: 13977).*



The first "proper" school at Raurimu was sited in a picturesque setting with native bush in the background. This photograph of the Raurimu Public School was taken during the first term of 1919 when 74 pupils and three teachers, Mr Harre, Miss Beard, and Miss Kennedy, were present. The photo above appeared in the 8 May 1919, issue of the Auckland Weekly News.

- photo courtesy Brosnan collection (ref: 13134).

## Raurimu public school sited in a picturesque spot

Mr C B LEWIS, a former head teacher at Raurimu from 1932 to 1937, records some memories of his early days in the township . . .

**M**r Lewis says he was partly instrumental in having the school shifted from its old swampy site on the banks of the river to its present position. By the end of the first winter he realised why the school committee wanted a change of site.

"It became almost impossible to teach above the coughing of the children and it became a real work of art to reach the school with dry feet," he wrote.

He had visited the school when he first heard of his appointment in the summer of 1932 and took up duties in May of that year.

A winter's day in 1933 was well

remembered when Mr Lewis saw a strange man stepping from rush top to rush top across the field in front of the school. It was the Senior Inspector who, as soon as he reached the school, said, "Leave the pupils and show me where you want to shift the school to."

On their return to the school he said he had been instructed by the Education Department "not to recommend any expenditure over a shilling (10 cents) but you are going to get your school shifted!"

And in February 1934 the school was established on the new site where Knight's sawmill had previously been.

He said the children were marvellous and spent many, many hours laying down turf

for new lawns and planning new gardens and generally turning an old sawmill site into something pleasing to see.

"When I took up duties in 1932 I was single but engaged to be married in August 1932. Thus my wife Kit, a city born and bred girl, came to Raurimu as a bride just in time to experience in September, her first snow storm. At least the snow hid the hundreds upon hundreds of tree stumps."

The couple lived in the school house on the then main road just short of the Kaitieke/Retaruke turn-off.

### CONTRAST TO CITY LIFE

The only sources of hot water were from a tiny boiler on the side of the coal range and a chip heated califont over the bath.

Lighting was by means of a kerosene or benzine lamp and candles—a stark contrast to city life.

"Being intensely interested in sport I became the first president of the Kaitieke Rugby Sub Union which was affiliated to the King Country Rugby Union. I also played cricket and tennis for Raurimu. The



**Raurimu schoolchildren with their snowman, about 1953 or 1954. BACK ROW (from left):** not known, Beverley Fowler (rear), Gay Witika, Alison Smith, Christine McKee, Joyce Saies, Ellen McKee, Nan Witika, Pauline Sapsford, Alex Woolston (rear), Allan Wheeler, Peter Hart, Narshi Gosha (partly obscured), Ray Cotter, Bobby Hemmingson, Terrence Weller. **IN FRONT:** Maureen McKee, Shirley Rukuwai, Dolly Cassidy, Margaret Henry, Reggie Reynolds, Frank McCarthy.

- photo courtesy Alison Cooke, Taumarunui (ref: 13980).



**RAURIMU HIGH SCHOOL Form III to VI 1949: BACK ROW (from left):** Brian Bagge, Jim Lockyer, Graham Jones, Harry Newman, Joe Robinson, Ted Warren. **THIRD ROW:** John Sivyer, Norman Bennett, Peter Dench, Rex Donald, Kerry Smith, Keith Barnett, Peter Lacy, Henry Davis, Graham Johansen. **SECOND ROW:** Judy McLay, Shirley Cavanagh, Beth Cochrane, Peggy Summers, Margaret McCallian, Hilda Henry, Thelma Hynes, Mina Pratt, Audrey Kendall. **FRONT ROW:** Heather Taylor, Joyce Young, Dorothy Millynn, Margaret Sivyer, Shirley Murcott, Emma Lovett, Colleen McKenzie, Betty Barnett, Ruth Somerville, Doris Barber, Thelma Street.

- photo courtesy Doris Porteous collection (ref: 19286).