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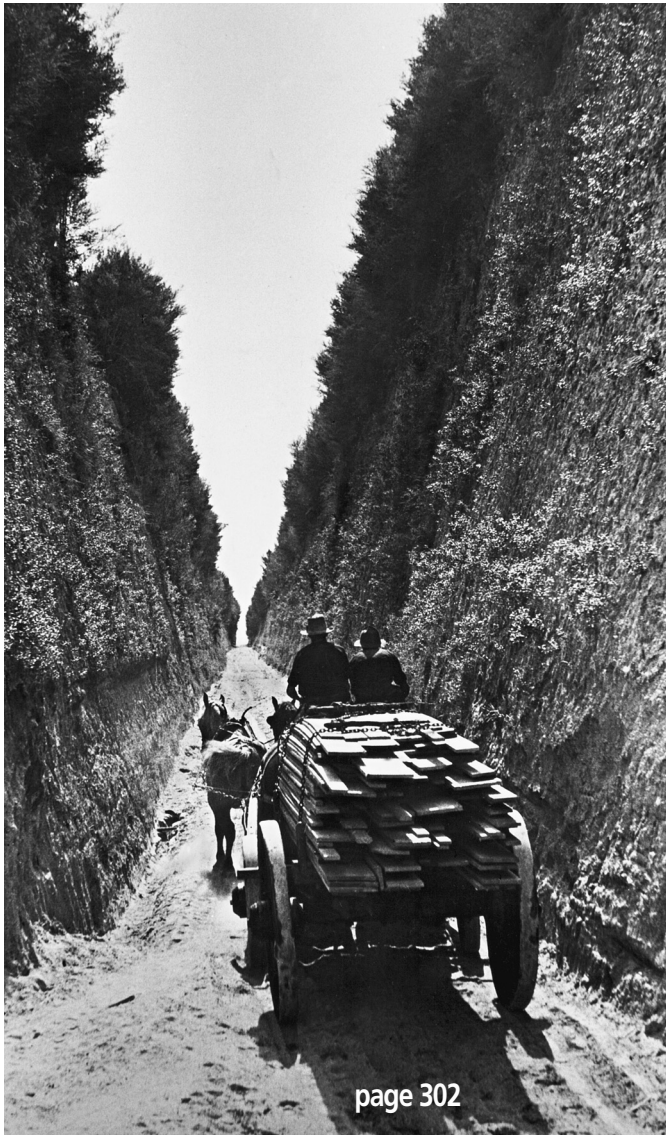
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- photo by Ron Cooke, Taumarunui (ref. 12654).

A wild mystical unknown region

The area known as the King Country was first decided when the Maori King Tawhiao was said to have thrown his "Royal" hat on a map of the North Island to emphasise the land reserved for the King Movement . . .

This unusual action arose after the Maoris were forced to leave their Waikato land through the war with British troops.

In history this was known as the Waikato War of 1863-64 with the Maoris' last stand being at Orakau Pa near Kihikihi. It was after they fled across the Puniu River in April 1864 that the hat was thrown on the map—to become known as "Rohe Potae" or "the Boundary of the Hat".

According to Maori elders the borders were then defined by the natural landmarks Mt Pirongia, Waipa and Puniu Rivers, Waikato River, Lake Taupo, Whangaehu River, Whanganui River and the West Coast. In the north was the confiscated land of Waikato and in the west the confiscated land of Taranaki.

However, the actual area of "Rohe Potae" and the King Country had always been vague until the Government did their survey in 1884, which was then gazetted in 1889 and 1894.

The general impression has always been that the "Rohe Potae" and the King Country were one and the same. Officials dealing with native affairs were of the same opinion but it seems not to be correct.

The King Country was a large territory over which the "mana" or authority of the Maori King was being claimed. Its boundaries coincided in the north with those of "Rohe Potae", but in the south extended far beyond them.

The name "King Country" by all accounts is an English term which came into common use in the early 1880s but James Cowan, writing in 1901, states that "the territory of the Ngati Maniapoto and allied tribes became generally known as the 'King' Country after the Waikato War" (1863-64).

Nat Winter, an early newspaper editor and Taumarunui historian, wrote the following during the 1920s:

"Of all the districts of New Zealand there is none which has so much romance woven into its story as the King Country. The

very name has an arresting sound; 'The Country of the King'; a kingdom within a colony; the last attempt of the Maori race to preserve some portion of their national independence from the ever encroaching pakeha . . ."

This was one of the few statements found during research that described the King Country in its truest sense "The Country of the King".

James Cowan came close also with "King" Country in relation to the King Movement. This may sound a logical or an obvious answer to readers, but historians for some reason seem to have avoided explaining it in this way.

Therefore, the term King Country can be easily understood and "Rohe Potae" as the Maori equivalent equally, but the boundaries have always been doubted. The north boundary or "aukati" line has never been questioned, but how far south did the area extend?

James Cowan said in 1901 that "Rohe Potae" stretched south to the Upper Whanganui River, covering about two million acres; a figure endorsed perhaps by the Native Land Court in dividing up 1,636,000 acres in 1886.

According to *An Encyclopaedia of NZ* the area proclaimed as the King Country in 1889 and 1894 was about 7000 square miles, which converts to nearly four and a half million acres.

This, then, would show that "Rohe Potae" and the King Country did have different boundaries.



The old way of topdressing with manure bags slung across the saddle. Rowley Hill is preparing his horses for a long day on A H Barker's farm "Hunua Hills" at Hikumutu in January 1940.

- photo courtesy Ruth Hill, Taumarunui (ref: 12293).

The hill country revolution

RICHARD SOAR writes that aerial topdressing in the central King Country become a highly organised business with only three of the four original companies being based permanently at Piriaka and Taumarunui in 1981 . . .

The original companies were Aerial Fertiliser Co Ltd, (later James Aviation), Wanganui Aero Work Ltd, Aviation Enterprises (Taum) Ltd, (later Robertson Air Service Ltd) and Rural Aviation Ltd, who have since 1982 pulled out of the area.

Outside operators, who at different times, operated in the area included Adastra Ltd, Aerial Applicators Ltd, James Aviation and Northern Air Services.

For the following articles the Central King Country is defined as the Taumarunui County boundary which covers an area of

1,825,000 acres. This is the area of the old Ohura, Kaitieke and Taumarunui counties which amalgamated in 1956.

The land ranges from undulating country to steep hills varying in height from 500ft to 2500ft above sea level. The rainfall is fairly high, approx 60 inches annually, so growth from October to April is prolific.

With these conditions, second growth such as konini and wineberry in the gullies, and manuka, thrive.

Before the advent of aerial topdressing, the hills where the bush was felled, were soon sown in good English grasses. But after a few years they became covered again in second growth with the ultimate outcome of the grassland reverting to poor types of grasses.

Over the years this changed. Once cleared the country was improved with fertiliser by topdressing, thus leading to higher stocking rates, better wool weight and healthier stock results.

This improved the income of the hill farmer and made his farming methods easier.

It has been a good many years since the hill farmer, with horse and sledge or packhorse, has had to spread a ton or two of fertiliser on the easier hills, which usually took days for a small tonnage.

Topdressing has certainly been one of the most outstanding revolutions in farming and has been the biggest factor in bringing about the transformation of this area into highly productive land.



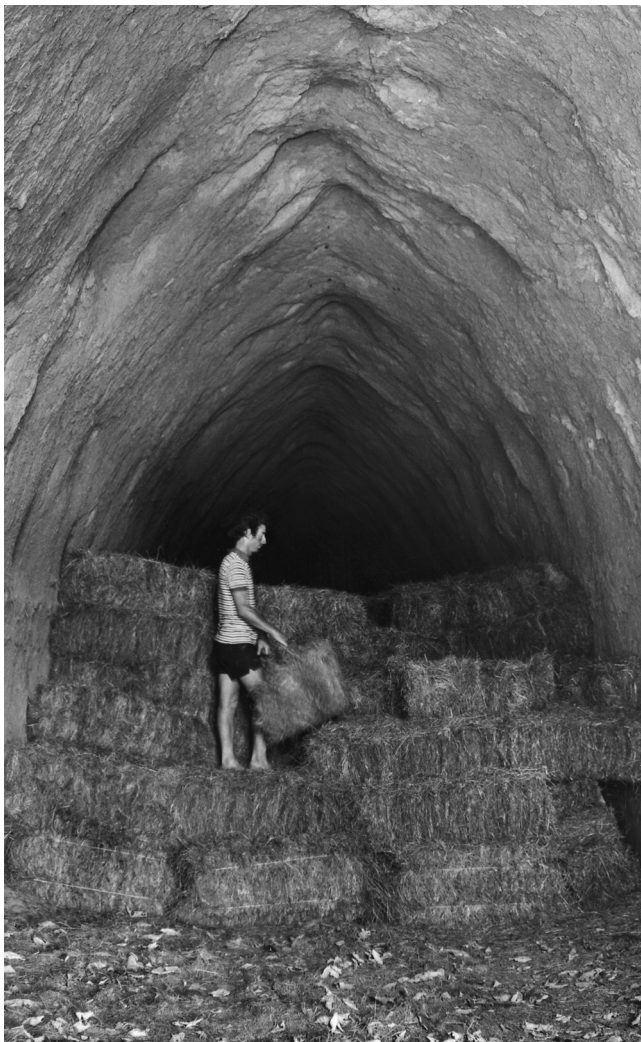
Taumarunui photographer, Colin Seccombe was on hand to record for prosperity the changing world of aviation. This early 1950s action photo of an unidentified Tiger Moth releasing its load of fertiliser, an act that was to completely change the life of farming.

- photo by Colin Seccombe, Taumarunui (ref: 10150).



Ambrose Old (right) with his wife Freda are pictured with Mr Old's service car at the mouth of the Aukopae Tunnel. Two of the three passengers are unknown with Fred Jenks recognising the centre man as Major Arthur Stuart-Moray, a PWD fitter who was stationed at Ohura between 1930 and 1933.

- photo courtesy Gordon Old (ref: 12603).



Murray Craig stacks hay inside the old disused Aukopae road tunnel in 1982.

- photo by Ron Cooke, Taumarunui (ref: 12572).

Tunnels were part of Tokirima life

In the old days it was said that, apart from journeying up the Ohura River, the only way into Tokirima was through a hole. RON COOKE explains . . .

On the Okahukura/Stratford branch railway there are six tunnels on the Tokirima section; the road from Taumarunui passed through a tunnel between Aukopae and Koiro Road, and once there was a tunnel on the road from Ohura, at Martin's Hill.

The Aukopae tunnel, on the section known as "Tunnel Hill" was still in use in 1982—but not for road traffic. A local farmer, Murray Craig, used it as a haybarn for a time and during really hot weather his cows found it a place to cool off—a refreshing draught was created when the hay was not stacked inside.

The tunnel was "officially" closed in the mid-1960s when the Taumarunui County Council put in a new deviation, bypassing the steep and winding tunnel section.

The idea of a tunnel was first mooted prior to the 1st World War when it was found that the newfangled motorcar couldn't always manage the last steep section over the ridge. It was common for the old Model T Ford to back up this portion because, if its gravity feed petrol tank was less than half full, the fuel could not get to the carburettor.

The early settlers with motor cars had to put up with these conditions until about 1923 or 1924 when the tunnel was finally opened for traffic. The tunnel, as seen in the photo on the left, was hewn from solid papa rock which created many difficulties for the workmen contracted to dig it. Apparently work commenced on the Aukopae side before the 1st World War, but had to be abandoned when the hard papa was struck. In the early 1920s two new gangs, one each side, finished the job.

Rita Newman, of Matapuna, recalled that when her parents, Mr & Mrs J P Uden, arrived in 1916, the tunnel had been started but abandoned. She said there was quite a length of railway line laid out for trucks to run the spoil out on. She remembers seeing a tree growing out of one of the derelict wagons, and that the tunnel was dug in about 20 feet or so.

Later on, in the early 1920s, work commenced again. She recalled that while riding on horseback with her brother Tom Uden to Don Craig's farm to pick up their weekly supply of meat, they stopped at the tunnel site to leave a billy of butter-milk (from homemade butter) for the gang's afternoon tea, to find that the tunnel had been blasted through that morning.

Rita Uden then had the honour of being the first woman through the tunnel. She recalled that there was a jagged hole just big enough for a 16 or 17 year old girl to get through. "I can't remember the exact year, but it would have been about 1923."

Don Craig and Bayard Old remember as schoolboys hearing blasting during the early 1920s, as does Doug Bleasel, who lived and later farmed on the Aukopae side. He recalled that his father, Charlie Bleasel, sledged the railway irons to the site from the Aukopae boat landing. His horse teams were also called out many times to pull an "unwilling" car the last few chains over the top, before the tunnel was finished.

Doug Grant, a long term County Councillor for the area, recalled that the tunnel was originally closed because the stock trucks, with their sheep crates, were getting too big. Two or three ton trucks were all that could get through the tunnel.

When the Taumarunui County amalgamated with the Kaitieke and Ohura County Councils on 8 August 1956, one of the first tasks set was the upgrading of River Road.

Work on the Herlihy's and Te Maire Bluffs came first and in June 1967, the council gave its approval for the Tunnel Hill deviation. Work commenced in October 1967 and was finished in March 1968.

A snapshot of Taumarunui

It is always interesting to look back on what a town was like during a particular decade to find what the thoughts were at the time and what everyone thought the future would hold. The following pages are a snapshot of 1982 and it was during this period that the town's catch-phrase of "a good place to live work and play" was being promoted . . .



Tourism and the era of steam were making a great comeback with locals desperately wanting tourism to succeed as a means of drawing crowds and increasing local income. The nostalgia of yesterday had the ability to draw huge crowds as thousands of people were being attracted back to learn more about history of rail and its importance to the development of New Zealand, particularly to the central King Country. This is only part of the story as there is more to Taumarunui than its railway so turn the next 25 pages to see what else was on offer . . .

- photo by Ron Cooke, Taumarunui (ref: 12715).



- photo courtesy Athol Thomas collection (ref: 12676).

Bridging the Whakapapa

The concrete bridge piles remaining in the Whakapapa River at the end of the big pumice cutting at Kakahi have in the past, been wrongly associated with the original formation work for the Kakahi-Lake Taupo railway . . .

The last sawmiller's bridge to be built across the Whakapapa was constructed early in 1956 by P D (Rex) Smith soon after he had built his sawmill, Kakahi Timber Co, on the site occupied in the very early days by State Sawmill No 1.

The photograph above shows that Rex Smith's bridge consisted of concrete

abutments with a similar centre pier and was connected by two 55 foot spans. The pole pointing skywards from the centre pier was used to lower the spans in position. The pumice cutting can be seen in the background.

A similar bridge with concrete piles was also built across the second leg of the Whakapapa River a short way up the island from the first bridge. The bridge ran uphill

from the Whakapapa Island to a road cut in the side of the pumice bank opposite.

The bridges were hardly in place when severe damage was caused by the big 1958 flood. The first bridge was wiped out while the second was later repaired and used.

Rex Smith also built another "decked log" bridge across the Whanganui River not far from the site of the old Egmont Box Co sawmill at Te Rena. This high level bridge has since been rebuilt and is maintained by the Taumarunui County Council.

While the bridges were down from the 1958 flood the logs were bought from the Whangaiepeke Block to the Kakahi Timber Co by trucks up the present Hohotaka Road, down the "Punga" via Manunui to Kakahi.

This turned out to be a very costly procedure as the distance travelled was 30 miles as compared with the eight to 10 miles by the old Te Rena route.

To shorten the route, and to combat the flood problem, a low level "loggers bridge" was built slightly downstream from the site of the first concrete pile bridge. The idea was that floods would flow over the structure without causing too much damage.

However, the bridge was washed out several times but because it was anchored with wire ropes to the adjacent concrete abutments, the bed logs would hang downstream to be hauled back in place afterwards.

The "loggers bridge" remained for many years after the mill was closed in 1966 but later became unsafe for vehicles to cross. It was finally washed away, it was thought, in the early 1970s.

There were also a series of swingbridges in the early days crossing the various legs of the Whakapapa River but that is another story.

CAN YOU HELP?

Photo No 10



Readers may be able to identify the owner (a builder who could also be the driver) of this K model Bedford crossing one of the first bridges constructed over the Whakapapa River.

- photo courtesy Peterson collection (ref: 11235).