

Background: South Taranaki between 1870 and 1880

At this point it is worth to step back a little, and take a look at the historical background to the settlement of South Taranaki.

The third period of fighting in Taranaki, sometimes named “Titokowaru’s war” took place largely in areas south of New Plymouth, as far south in fact as Wanganui.

This phase of the war had finished in the late 1860s with the sudden collapse of Titokowaru’s army of resistance, and extremely large areas of land, in theory, confiscated from its Maori owners, with the understanding that some land would be re-allocated as “native reserves.”

However, many of the Maori people had remained on their tribal land, or moved back to it, as the Government had neither the means nor the manpower to follow up.

For the time being, the land was left un-surveyed. “Native reserve” areas were not clearly defined. Understandings held by the original tribes came, year by year, to be seen by them as nothing but broken promises, as the Government in the 1870s began to survey the land which it had confiscated but which had not subsequently been settled. Some Maori were given various kinds of “compensation” and allowed the surveying to proceed, but in South Taranaki local Maori again resisted, this time, doing so in a way which had never before been seen. As the Government proceeded to survey and offer land up for sale, Maori from the community of Parihaka, began an orchestrated campaign of passive resistance, using tactics which today we would call “civil disobedience”.

A large and generally orderly community had flourished in the Maori village of Parihaka under the leadership of two visionaries, Te Whiti and Tohu, who preached passive resistance. Dispossessed Maori flocked to Parihaka from a wide area, including Titokowaru himself whose homeland was in area of Otakeho, South Taranaki. Settlers, still nervous from their recent experience of fighting in South Taranaki were alarmed at the size of the settlement, the religious and mystical messages from Te Whiti which they could not understand, and the campaign of civil disobedience which took the form of ploughing the land of settlers, erecting fences across roadways etc.

This resulted in a series of arrests, and in many cases lengthy periods of incarceration with no charges being laid and no trials held. Such actions were made “legal” by a series of rapidly drafted repressive “laws”. The Governor of the time, representing the British Crown, may have been a restraining influence, but could not hold back a determined settler government.

Not all Pakeha agreed with the repressive response of the Government, some spoke out strongly, and those in power were well aware that they were, in today’s terms, denying the Maori people their civil rights. Eventually a military assault on Parihaka was planned, and in late October 1880 the government of the day took advantage of the Governor’s temporary absence from the country, and launched the attack. It was led by the Native Minister John Bryce and comprised 1600 troops and armed constabulary, who surrounded and entered Parihaka – to be greeted by children singing and offering them food. The men of the village assembled quietly, under strict instructions from their leader to offer no resistance, and Te Whiti and others allowed themselves to be quietly taken into captivity.

After that the buildings were looted, many of them burned, the inhabitants dispersed, and the community virtually destroyed.

Most settlers at the time would have supported their government in this action, with little thought or understanding. Of those who could think and understand, some spoke out against it, others simply accepted that the “end justified the means.”

Today we see this episode in a rather different light.

The way was now open for the development of South Taranaki. Confiscated land was surveyed and sold.

Of the land reserved for Maori, most was to be leased out to settlers, “on behalf” of its owners, at what today would be referred to as “peppercorn rent”.

From the 1880’s onwards, during the time the Hoopers were presumably living on their block at Elliot Road, (the Frankley Rd farm having been sold in 1879), South Taranaki began to be settled, the open land cultivated, the swamp land drained, and the bush and forest-covered land began to be cleared.

The following is a very complete, contemporary description of the waiting land in South Taranaki in 1881:

A TRIP THROUGH WAIMATE DISTRICT
[CONTRIBUTED.]

AS some of your readers may be intending purchasers in the far-famed Waimate district, a short description of the Plains and back country may be useful to them, and perhaps interesting to others who have never visited Waimate. I may state that my knowledge has been gained whilst going over the country in search of a suitable piece of ground on which to settle down and make a home, and having chosen my own particular piece, I place the information I have gained at your and your readers' service. I travelled not only through the open land from Hawera to Stony River, but also through the bush land on the survey lines, and on the road line from Stratford to Opunake, known as Hursthouse's line. I may, therefore, be able to give your readers such information as will enable them to pick out a good bush farm, should they prefer bush land to open land.

Taranaki Herald 19th November 1880

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The Waimate Plains extend from the Waingongoro River, about four miles west of Hawera, to near Oeo, the settlement of Honi Pihama. a distance of about eighteen miles, the average width from the sea to the bush being about eight miles. This width is to the outer edge of the bush, but clearings of large extent are interspersed with bush for a considerable distance inland, more particularly about Mawhitiwhiti--near the village settlement of Okaiawa, Ngutuo-te-manu — where Von Tempsky and others were killed — and other places further along from Normanby.

It is generally thought that the best land on the Plains is at the Hawera end, but I fancy this is prejudice, as clover or crops grow quite as well about Kaupokonui or Oeo as they do nearer Hawera. A marked change in the nature of the land may, however, be seen about Oeo, and more particularly towards Opunake. The soil becomes more sandy and gravelly, and towards and around Opunake the surface soil rests on a strata of — what is called there — ironstone, a reddish, rusty-looking stone, which turns up in large blocks or lumps.

The Waimate land is generally level, very similar in appearance to the land between Bell Block and Urenui, and is cut up with streams in a similar manner, several of the streams being about the size of the Waiongona or Mangaoraka. The land is covered with fern and tutu, very little flax being observed until we get near Oeo. Towards the bulk of the land reserved for the natives there is a large extent of clean cocksfoot, from which the natives

obtained a considerable amount of seed in past years, the remainder of the open land (near the bush) being covered with fern, koromiko, etc. The plains generally have patches of clover all through the fern, some of the patches being nearly fifty acres in extent.

The land is by no means of an even quality, the part near the beach, or cliffs, and that near the bush being accounted the best, the middle land being considered inferior.

But the portion near the bush, of a width of about two miles, has one great advantage over any of the rest in being fairly well sheltered from the south-east and west winds, which sweeps over the rest of the plains in a pitiless bitter manner. This land is of an undulating description, sufficiently so to provide shelter on the lee sides, but not rough enough to prevent cultivation. Unfortunately the greater portion of it is reserved for the natives, a continuous belt of over three miles in width being reserved the whole length of the plains, about half being bush and half open, cutting off the settlers from the bush, and compelling future settlers on the bush land — which I hear is soon to be sold— to travel through a belt of bush about two miles wide before reaching their land.

The greater portion of the bush land is lightly timbered, so much so that most of the sawn timber and fencing for Waimate must come from the bush along the Mountain Road, and more particularly between Stratford and Inglewood. But for bush settlers who prefer making their living by clearing and cultivating their land, to using the timber upon it, I fancy the bush land behind Waimate will exactly suit them, as the bush generally is very open, the wild cattle and pigs having destroyed a large portion of the undergrowth. The surface is very free from roots, and the trees generally are small, if we except the ratas and mahoes (white-wood). Pines are few and far between, there being little more than enough for the settlers' own wants in the way of building materials and fencing. The ratas are large, but they can be easily burned down and out, and the mahoe stumps are easily extracted after the bush has been felled two or three years. Altogether, I think the man with only a small capital would do much better on the Waimate bush land than on the Waimate open land, as he would easily clear his land, and would have firewood, fencing, and shelter whilst doing so. He could also fill up his spare time (and his larder) by having an occasional hunt after wild cattle and pigs, both of which are in great abundance. The settler on the open land will be compelled to plant trees in order to shelter his cattle and crops, as a "south-easter" in winter or spring would severely damage either.

But to the regular farmer, of course, the open land has its charms. It is easily cleared and cultivated, he can do most of the work by horse power and machinery; he does not have to swing the axe all day for about a third of the year, nor is troubled with unsightly logs and stumps for several years. The Main South Road, the greater part of which is gravelled, runs through the Plains, at a distance of about two miles from the sea; and a road called the Normanby Road, is being cleared from Manaia towards Normanby. This work is being done by what are called the 'unemployed,' and consists of clearing off the fern, tutu, &c. for a width of about thirty feet, levelling the lumps on the road, and making crossings at the creeks. This makes a fair track to travel on, and can be improved easily when the settler gets on the land. From the plan published by the Native Royal Commission it may be seen that four main roads will run inland from the main South Road to the bush road I have before alluded to, running from Stratford to Opunake, and known as Hursthouse line.

These roads will be about four miles apart, and, I suppose, in cutting up the land for settlement branch roads will start from them. As they run between the streams from Mount Egmont, they will be easily made, there being but few streams to cross. But such is not the case with the Stratford to Opunake road. For a distance of about three miles— from Stratford

to the Waingongoro River — this road rises rapidly, and is cut across by a number of small gullies. After crossing the Waingongoro River, the road keeps at about the same altitude for several miles, crossing a number of Mountain streams. This will necessitate a large expenditure in bridges and cuttings, the work on which will have to be first-class, as this will probably be the main inland road for the bush settlers on a large portion of this district.

The work already done on this road is of a very temporary nature, being only sufficient to answer as a pack track to supply survey parties, &c. It is cleared about fifteen feet wide, and winds about in a most perplexing manner, in many cases seemingly without any object. The gullies and streams are crossed by temporary bridges of fern-tree and saplings, the bridges being just wide enough for a pack-horse. These, of course, will become unsafe after a couple of years, but probably the Government will have made a proper road before that time, especially if the land is sold. The land is much the same as that I have already described, fairly level, and of seemingly good quality, rather more heavily timbered than that near the Plains, but not so heavy as along the Mountain Road.

Altogether I believe the bush district behind Waimate will be more valuable in the future than the open part, more particularly if the settlers are careful to leave a fair per centage of the bush unfelled. I think that the Government might, with great advantage assist in this respect by the making of suitable reserves, both for purposes of shelter and climatic influences, and to stop in some measure the great waste of timber that is now going on through felling and clearing. Of course we all know it is necessary and advantageous to the country to make these clearings, but reserves of specially heavily-timbered country should be made and held for a few years, until the timber becomes of more value, when the land could be disposed of by lease or actual sale. I have been informed by persons well qualified to give an opinion, that in the district between Inglewood and Normanby the value of red pine only that is wasted, if allowed for at the rate of threepence per hundred superficial feet, would more than cover the original price paid for the land. This is a very serious matter as it represents the loss of thousands of pounds to the country annually, and attention should be paid to lessening the waste as far as is practicable. As the whole of the land between Oeo and Stony River (with the exception of a block to seaward of Parihaka) belongs to natives, and therefore will not be offered for sale, it will be unnecessary for me to give any description of it. The block I have just mentioned (to seaward of Parihaka) which is now being surveyed, is, I hear, 15,000 acres, all open land, the part near Warea being best. The part between Warea and Cape Egmont, running back as far as Parihaka, is covered with a number of small conical hills, having very much the appearance of a field when manure heaps are scattered over its surface. These hills are no doubt full of stone and gravel, as it crops out in all directions, and towards the beach stones are scattered all over the surface. The land between Cape Egmont and Moutoti (the end of the piece being surveyed) is more of a sandy nature, and a large portion is covered with flax. Altogether this block seems much inferior in quality to Waimate, and will be more suitable for grazing purposes than for cultivation.

Any description of the Waimate District would be incomplete without some mention being made of Opunake, which is considered by many to be the future port for the Waimate District. Persons seeing the Opunake bay for the first time, especially in fine weather, are usually greatly taken up with it. It appears to be well-sheltered by the cliffs on each side, and the bay being of the horse-shoe form has a very pretty appearance. But a visit in bad weather dispels the charm practically, should the wind be from the south-east or south-west. The bay is then one extent of broken water, and utterly unsafe for any vessel to enter or stay there. Reefs run out from both heads right across the entrance of the bay, one overlapping the other, and unless breakwaters were built at these reefs no vessels could stop in the bay in bad

weather. Even in fine weather goods are with difficulty landed, the beach being so flat that boats touch ground some distance out in the surf. On these accounts Opunake cannot become much of a port, unless some considerable amount of money is spent there for harbour works. As but a small amount of the land around the township is in the hands of the Government or settlers (under 1000 acres, I believe), nearly the whole of it having been given back to the natives, there is very little chance of Opunake becoming much of a town for many years to come. It will probably be one more added to the already large number of hamlets in the Taranaki District.

Traveller. Hawera, November 16 1880

This article, written in late 1880 by a perceptive individual calling himself “Traveller”, should be studied carefully, for it paints a vivid picture, and records some forward-thinking insights.

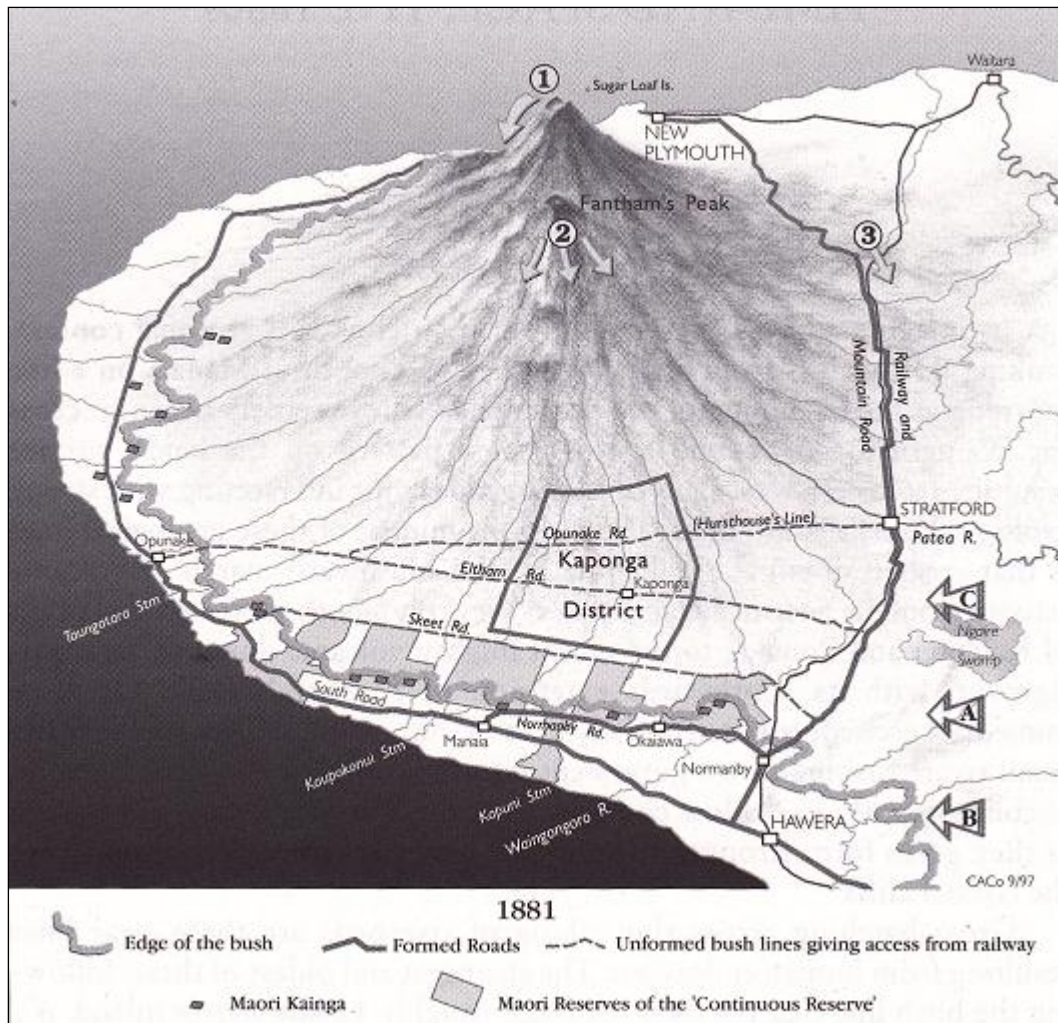
John Hooper and his sons will have read this, and other news items, about the new pioneering opportunity emerging south of New Plymouth.

In 1997 Prof. Rollo Arnold published a book called “Settler Kaponga” which provides an excellent perspective of the early settlement of South Taranaki.

On the next page is an image from this book which captures rather well the situation, at just the time that the “Traveller” article (above) was published in the Taranaki Herald. It shows the formed roads and railway, marks the edge of the bush, and indicates the position of Skeet Rd and Eltham Rd which were still only unformed bush lines.

Rollo Arnold provides a vivid description of the early bush-burning, appalling roads, harvesting of cocksfoot grass and edible fungus, the geography and the settlement of South Taranaki in the 1880s and onwards.

(Further detailed descriptions of this period are also given in the scrapbook on James George Kenyon.)



In this image:

- “A” indicates the “Continuous Reserve”. A mix of Maori villages from the past, settler holdings from 1881 onwards, and “Native reserves” shortly to be leased at cheap rates to settlers.
- “B” indicates the open country of the Waimate Plains, sold 1880-1 and rapidly occupied by more well-to-do settlers.
- “C” indicates the Kaupokonui bush, more slowly occupied by less affluent settlers from 1881 onwards.