

## Karangahake Image



(/images/phocagallery/Karangahake Gold/thumbs/phoca\_thumb\_l\_talisman\_house\_c1900.jpg)  
Talisman House, Mackaytown, 1900.

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## Opening of the Goldfield, 1875

KARANGAHAKE the years of the gold 1875 -1935



In preparation for the opening of the field, James Mackay, Captain Fraser, Mr Allom, Receiver of Gold Revenue, proceeded to Ohinemuri to organise the issue of Miners' Rights.

In the last week of February 1875, the various regulations were drawn up and other documents required, were printed. Notices were placed in the two Thames newspapers, Thames Advertiser and Evening Star, stating that the Ohinemuri Goldfield was to be opened on 3 March 1875, at Te Kahakaha (later called Mackaytown).

Mackay arrived at Ohinemuri on 1 March, and reports:

"Some people had given me money and lists of applications for rights before my arrival at Ohinemuri. I found, on my arrival, that no provision had been made for doing anything, and I managed to get a large tent finished, to carry out the arrangement. Mr McKenzie, the Clerk to the Warden, took upon himself the duty of receiving applications and I was very busy with the road works and the surveys. On the night of 2 March. Mr Allom and Captain Fraser arrived. Mr Allom then took charge of the books of Miners' Rights. They were engaged in making out Miners' Rights till nearly 3 o'clock in the morning of the 3rd of March."

The tent referred to in Mackay's statement was 50 ft in length and 20 ft wide. A long counter to serve as a desk, was along the whole front, with the spaces between the upright poles to regulate numbers. In front of the building, and within 2 ft of the counter, was a strong fence to prevent pressure on the Clerks. About 800 Miners' Rights were issued.

At 10 a.m. Mr Mackay mounted the counter and wished the miners well. He said that he stood there as agent for the Government to hand over to Captain Fraser, the position of Warden and the proclamation of the goldfield and the control of it. Captain Fraser then addressed the assembled miners. He announced that Reserve B, formerly known as Te Kahakaha, was to be known as Mackaytown and was reserved for residence and for business sites. A gun was fired and the race to peg out claims on the Karangahake Mountain was on. The following reports best describe the scene.

#### JOHN McCOMBIE:

"Imagine 600 men starting out together from one place, at a given signal, the track leading down a steep hillside, across a mountain torrent and thence up an abrupt incline, the goal being the prospectors' claim at Karangahake. The distance between the two points is about one and a half miles. In a few minutes the track was lined with a struggling mass of horsemen and footmen. Soon after the breathless diggers reached the ground, a forest of pegs reared their heads around the prospectors' claim which had already been surveyed and the boundaries defined."

#### THAMES ADVERTISER: (Reporter Joshua Jackson)

"To see the best of the fun I started this morning for the Prospectors' Claim, carrying my precious pigeon. He was the only hope of satisfying the burning curiosity of the people of Thames. Along the route I saw familiar faces. Hunt and Copley were there and groups of men were sitting all over the hills with pegs in their hands, waiting for their mates to arrive with the official "Rights". I sat down at one of the pegs of the Prospectors' Claim, where there was a small board labelled "Government Reserve" and here I wrote my pigeongram.

"9.20 a.m.

From this spur the Warden's Marquee can be seen and the crowd around.

"9.50 a.m.

Sergt Elliott and four constables have just arrived. About 200 men are now on the hill.

"10.07a.m.

We can see clouds of dust - horsemen riding here - Edward Howard has just pegged out - horsemen are flying over the ranges - men are running to meet them — Payne and Cashel have pegged out - there is a cloud of dust all the way to the camp - behind the horses are men on foot in relays - a Maori has won the race and is first on the ground with his "Rights"; John Riordan and Pat Donnelly are here.

"10.20 a.m.

Men pegging — a few quarrels - a man arrived naked - Mr Adam Porter was the first man up to where I am."

The whole of the claims marked out on that particular day were located along the foothills of the mountain and here developments soon proved that the rock was disturbed to such an extent as to make mining both difficult and hazardous. (The details of some of the longer established claims are recorded elsewhere).

The goldfield proved a disappointment and by 8 March 1875 over 300 miners had left the district. Two hundred men's ground was registered by 12 March 1875, but only a few parties were at work, notably Dan Leahy and McLiver, whose claims were situated just below the Prospectors' Claim.

Gold was discovered at Tairua in April and this resulted in most miners leaving Karangahake. By 24 April, Mackaytown was nearly deserted and most parts of the mountain had been completely abandoned. It was reported that the shopkeepers and hotel keepers who had gone to the expense of erecting permanent buildings, were "looking blue". In May the reporter for the Thames Advertiser stated:

"The digging at present being done here, is scarcely worthy of the name 'digging', mostly just digging near the surface."

On 9 July 1875 only two or three claims were being worked, and by September, only one. During 1876 various claims were pegged from time to time but little gold was obtained. One newspaper, on 14 September 1876, described the district as "very sick", and in October 1876, almost all the remaining miners moved south to the Kumara field. This was the end of the first goldrush, and some years were to pass before the goldfield became productive.

#### CLAIMS OF 1875—76

All Nations	Adam Porter's Claim
Totara	Treaty O' Waitangi
Scramble	Main Lead
Star of Ohinemuri	No. 1 South
Radical	Mazeppa
Smile of Fortune	Banyan
Pride of Ohinemuri	McGregor's Claim
Golden Spur	Democrat
Cornes and Party	Mormon City
Pride of the Gorge	Barclay and Party
Home Rule	Hatch and Party

#### PROSPECTORS CLAIM

Reserved was a piece of land on the Karangahake Mountain measuring 500 ft x 300 ft. The intention was to award this reserve to the person or party who had originally discovered gold in the district. The Wardens Court sat on 12 March 1875 for the purpose of deciding who should have the right to mine this reserve which was situated on what was thought to be a good mining claim. The following men and parties made claim to be the first discoverers of gold: Thorp and Party 1868; Charles P. O'Neill 1869-70; Thomas Baird 1868; Logan 1865; Smyth and Party 1869. Very lengthy evidence was given by these men, and after hearing the various claimants, the Warden, James Mackay, decided on the following morning, in favour of John Thorp and party. Smyth and Coleman amalgamated with Thorp's party and Corbett was appointed Manager. Shift work began and driving adits and sinking winzes commenced. On 24 March 1875, 80 lb of ore was obtained, which was sent Thames for treatment. By 16 June 1875, the main adit was in 150 ft and this was continued for some time.

ough this claim was the only one to work continuously during 1875-76, it met with little success and work had ceased by 1877.

#### FIRST BATTERY