Gorge Road, Karangahake

Rahu Crossing

The earliest mention of Rahu Crossing 13 May 1884, but the road may have been established earlier?

Karangahake Roads and Bridges

> The original road through Mackaytown from Paeroa to Waitekauri went through the Rahu Valley and over the saddle north of the White Rocks. On reaching the saddle the road continued and bypassed Waikino through the hills to the north, ultimately reaching the Waitekauri mines. Later (1880s), it descended near Owharoa to join the main Paeroa-Waihi Road. A branch track led to the Old Tauranga Road, and to Katikati.[1]

Old Timer [JB Morris?] suggests Butler's went in first:-

> "That road right up there? That's Butler's Track," he said, in answer to my question. "It was the first road put through here, and only one coach ever went along it. A man called Butler was in charge of the gang that put it through. It's blasted from solid rock all the way, and when it rains it's as slippery as—er — as ice. One driver took a coach round, but no passenger would go, and the driver wouldn't go again, so they put through the Rahu Road, round the other side of the hills. After that came the present main road, running round the foot of the range below Butler's Track." [2]

13 May 1884

> Tenders. THAMES COUNTY COUNCIL.
> for— Cutting and Forming Portion of Thames-Tauranga Road, between Mackaytown and Rahu Crossing by Ohinemuri Gorge…[3]

Butler's Track

June 1885

Butler's track completed[4]

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[1] https://www.ohinemuri.org.nz/journals/journal-44-september-2000/karangahake-roads-and-bridges
Karangahake Roads and Bridges. Ohinemuri Regional History Journal 44, September 2000

[2] https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19360919.2.226.5
New Zealand Herald, Volume LXXIII, Issue 22528, 19 September 1936, Page 1 (Supplement)

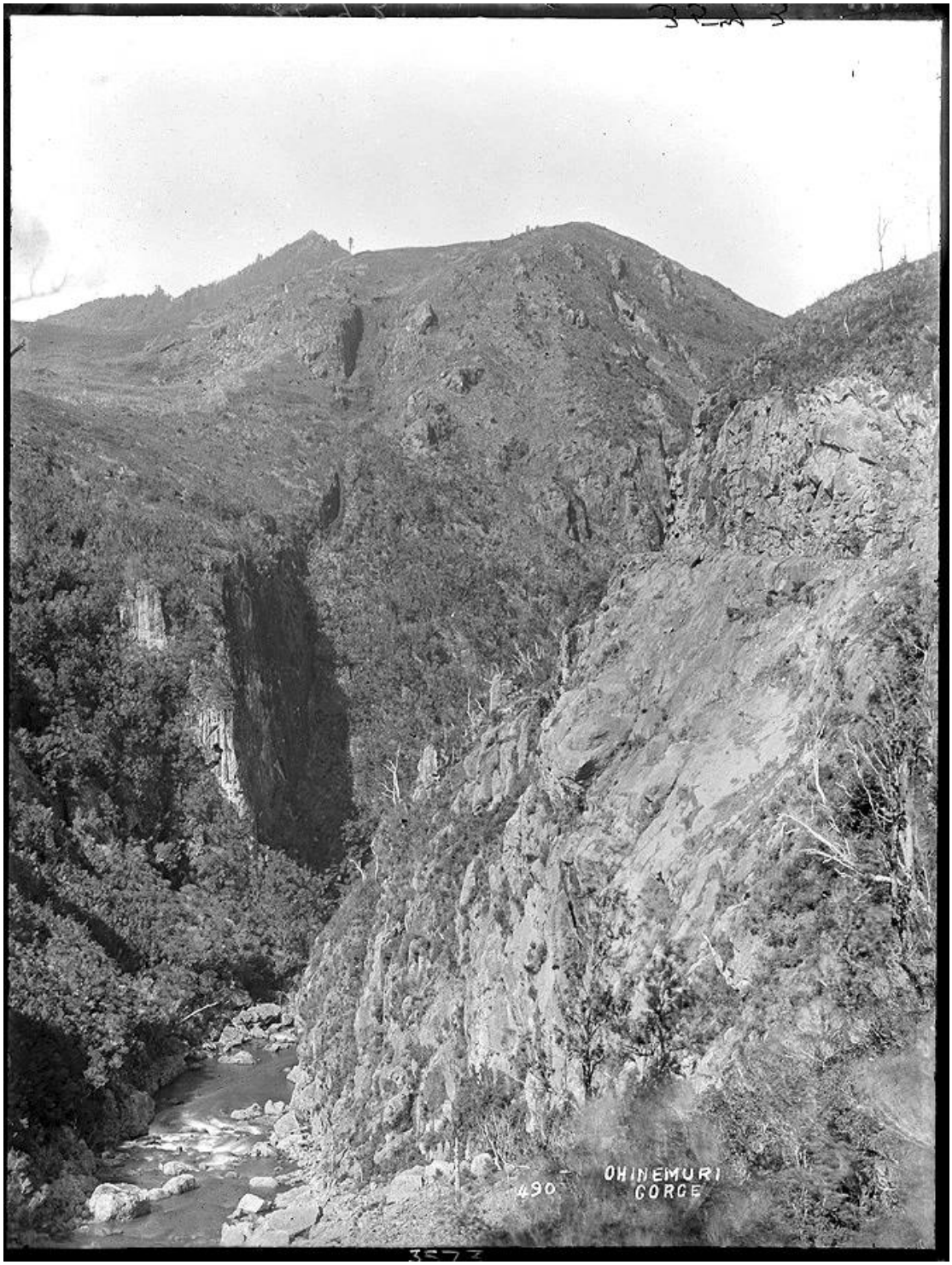
[3] https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/THA18840513.2.4.4
Thames Advertiser, Volume XV, Issue 4861, 13 May 1884, Page 2

[4] https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/THA18850604.2.10
Thames Advertiser, Volume XVI, Issue 5185, 4 June 1885, Page 3

"Cutting on the Gorge Road, Ohinemuri." Auckland Library, JD Richardson.

This is most likely **Butler's Track**.

One rider, two? horses. This would be exciting with a horse and cart. Travelling from foreground to background we are travelling towards Waikino. Ohinemuri River below to right. After 1885.



Ohinemuri Gorge 490 Auckland Library, JD Richardson.

A view from Butler's Track, Ohinemuri River below, flowing away from us. The track is near the top of the cliff to the right. Note the abundance of trees. ☺

Date? Before the gorge road (1890), which would be visible beside the river.

This image and the one above may have been made on the same day. There is another image, from a similar vantage point: Ohinemuri Gorge 489. AkLib JD Richardson.

First Gorge Road, opened November 1890

13 November, 1890

Road Works.—The new road to Owharoa from Karangahake is now fit for horse traffic, and is an excellent job. It is on the river level, and has cost about £1200. Messrs Kelly and Co. have just taken a contract for £83 to cut off certain sharp corners. When this is done and the culverts have been perfected, this road will be fit for any sort of wheeled or other traffic. [5]

Gorge Road Widened, opened late December 1936

30 October 1935

Mr. L. Oldham has been transferred from Colville-Port Jackson road formation job to take charge of the widening of the Karangahake gorge. He arrived in Paeroa last week. The 40 relief workers are due to arrive shortly, and it is expected that the work will take six months, for the keeping of the road open for traffic as much as possible will hamper the progress. In quite a number of places the road is to be built out on what is now river bed. When the gorge road is closed, traffic will be deviated to the Rahu Road.[6]

13 January 1936

Notice is given by the No. 2 Main Highways Board that the Karangahake gorge section of the Waihi-Paeroa road will be closed to all traffic from January 15th during the carrying out of reconstruction work and it will be necessary for all vehicles to use the Rahu road deviation.[7]

14 February 1936

COUNTY WORKS

THE OHINEMURI AREA ENGINEER'S REPORT.

The engineer to the Ohinemuri County Council reported as follows to the monthly meeting of the council on Thursday:— Main Highways…

Pokeno-Waihi. —Soon after the holidays the Karangahake Gorge was closed and the Rahu Road detour opened for traffic. To make this route fit to take heavy traffic a lot of reconditioning was necessary, and a gang of men and several trucks were constantly employed and at the time of opening was in very fair order, the heavier traffic not experiencing much difficulty other than having to wait at passing places. On the day of opening a traffic tally was taken and between the hours of 8.30 a.m. and 4.30 p.m. a total of 139 vehicles passed over without mishap.

So as to take advantage of the reduced traffic a start was made with the alteration of the alignment and the lowering of the grade at the Railway Bridge

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[5] https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/WT18901113.2.19

Waikato Times, Volume XXXV, Issue 2861, 13 November 1890, Page 2

[6] https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/HPGAZ19351030.2.13

Hauraki Plains Gazette, Volume VLI, Issue 3401, 30 October 1935, Page 4

[7] https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/HPGAZ19360113.2.17

Hauraki Plains Gazette, Volume 46, Issue 3430, 13 January 1936, Page 4

at Karangahake, this work was proceeding when the storm and flood of Sunday, February 2 was experienced, the damage to this particular highway is considerable and all other works were suspended so as to make all available labour free to clear slips; a concentrated effort was made and the road was open for traffic by mid-day on Monday, and owing to slips on the Rahu detour the Public Works Department cleared the gorge sufficiently to take the traffic. The detour is now clear and is again taking traffic.[8]

27 June 1936

NEW GORGE ROAD. KARANGAHAKE LINK

RECONSTRUCTION PROGRESS. REOPENING IN SPRING

…The section of road which is receiving attention extends over a length of three-quarters of a mile and the work entails the cutting of over 10,000 yards of spoil, most of which is hard rock that necessitates constant blasting. The worst corner on the old alignment, a narrow bluff where the bend was more acute than a right-angle, will be eased to a curvature of three and two-thirds chains. At this point the side of the gorge rises above the road on a sheer rock face, and a cutting 80ft. high and 40ft. in width is in hand.

Road Out Over River Bed

To obtain the width and alignment stipulated for modern highways, the building of the new road out on to the river bed in places has been found preferable to cutting into the precipitous rock walls of the gorge. Protection against erosion in flood periods will be a necessary safeguard, and the construction of rock faces is in hand. At the Paeroa end a long length of stone pitching above a concrete toe, with fillings completed to road level, gives a good indication of the finished appearance of the new highway. At one point the road alignment will run right out on to the river bed for approximately two chains.

The extremely low level of the river during the last few months has enabled the work to be expedited and has obviated delay in completing the foundations of the protective works, which are now well in hand and up to schedule. The exceptional flood last February, when the river rose 3ft. 6in. above the level of the previous record of 1910, proved a valuable experience for the engineers in providing against any possible eventualities.

First-Class Highway

First-class highway specifications have been laid down for the construction of this section, which will include a running surface with a minimum width of 24ft., with an extra allowance on corners. As a safety measure a kerbing approximately 18in. high will be constructed along the outside edge of the gorge, it being the intention to finish the kerb in white to ensure good visibility for night driving. The gorge at present is completely blocked on account of the heaps of rock brought down by frequent blasting, and traffic during operations would be quite impossible.

The work will continue throughout the winter, although the heaviest portion of the cutting has already been completed. During the next three months progress

[8] https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/HPGAZ19360214.2.43

Hauraki Plains Gazette, Volume 46, Issue 3443, 14 February 1936, Page 8

should be much more rapid and the fillings inside the protective walls and other features of construction should be in an advanced stage. Later, and as soon as is consistent with safety, it is hoped that the gorge will be reopened for traffic pending the completion of the finishing touches.[9]

31 July 1936

THE WAIHI ROAD. WORK IN THE GORGE. HUGE UNDERTAKING 9000 YARDS OF ROCK REMOVED. SOLID MASONRY WALL BUILT.

A scene of strenuous activity is presented in the Karangahake Gorge, where a gang of public works men is engaged in removing a projecting rock face, building a retaining wall and raising and widening the roadway to a level and even width of 24 feet, instead of the undulating, narrow road hitherto used by traffic. Although operations have been in progress for over half a year a casual glance would reveal that little work had been done. Closer observation, however, would show definitely that considerable progress had been made and that a wonderful improvement to the road will be effected when the undertaking is complete.

A representative of the Gazette was conducted over the job on Wednesday by the engineer in charge of the work, Mr L. Oldham. An impression of the magnitude of the operations follows, although a true grasp of the situation cannot be adequately obtained unless the work is closely inspected.

Height of 132 Feet.

The point which is to be removed has a maximum height of 132 feet from the present road level. Already approximately 9000 cubic yards of rock have been removed, and a large quantity still remains. In order to facilitate operations the point has been removed in shelves. The work is necessarily performed at a comparatively slow rate because the rock is used in building the wall which will abut on the river and will form the foundation and outer edge of the new highway.

The wall itself is a large undertaking. It will reach a height of 30 feet above the river, and the foundations have been sunk to an average depth of six feet. When solid bottom was obtained the water which seeped in was pumped away and solid concrete foundations laid. The wall itself is built of solid masonry, rock set in concrete, built to withstand the erosion of the river at highest flood and the strain of heavy traffic on the road surface.

In this connection Mr Oldham mentioned that the flood in February had provided him with most useful data regarding quantity and rate of flow of the water which passed the point, with the result that the structure would be built so as to withstand the heaviest volume that might pass and still be safe for traffic.

Wall Construction.

This portion of wall will be 110 feet in length when completed and will have a batter of ¼ in 1. As it is being built up of the material taken off the point and set in concrete, the progress of the whole job is governed by the speed in which the wall can be built.

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[9] https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19360627.2.20

New Zealand Herald, Volume LXXIII, Issue 22456, 27 June 1936, Page 10

A short distance further on another wall is being constructed for a length of about six chains [this is downstream from the sharp bend, and can be clearly seen from the walkway across the river]. This is known as a dry stone wall, being made of heavy pieces of rock with a slope of 1 to 1.

A similar structure about six chains long has been constructed about a hundred yards on the Paeroa side of the point.

Several small cuttings have been necessitated, but the amount taken from these has been comparatively small, ranging from 100 to 2000 cubic yards. The last shelf in the main point has now been reached, and the wall is also beginning to rear itself up an appreciable distance from the river level.

When the cutting back of the point has been completed, and the wall fully constructed, the road will be levelled and filled up so as to provide an even running surface no less than 24 feet wide, compared with the previous width which ranged from eight feet upwards.

Quantity of Explosives.

Some idea of the magnitude of the task which confronted the engineers can be conveyed by the fact that a gang averaging 70 men has been employed for over eight months. Explosives alone were used at the rate of about a hundredweight a week when blasting operations were performed. The holes were drilled by compressed air plants.

About 4 p.m. on Wednesday the men drew back from where one worker was perched precariously above the road. He stooped, rose, took a step, stooped again. Then he seized a rope suspended from an outcrop of rock far above, slid down and sped to safety. The loud voice of the current of the Ohinemuri River filled the gorge until suddenly debris and pieces of rock burst out from the face and fell to the ground, while smaller pieces hurtled across the stream or fell to be engulfed in its depths. A dull roar reverberated in the hills, and more rock shot out of the face, and another report momentarily drowned the noise of the river.

When the dust cleared away there was another pile of rock ready to be hauled away and set in the retaining wall or dumped behind it to fill in the space. So the work goes on, until man has carved his way round nature's obstacle and provided a safe path for his vehicles.

Finish Before Christmas?

No accurate estimate embracing the length of time required to finish the job could be given by Mr Oldham, who stated, however, that it was hoped to complete the undertaking before Christmas. The Ohinemuri County Council had made overtures regarding the possibility of allowing one-way traffic to use the gorge, but at present that was out of the question. Apart from the danger due to blasting, and consequent blockages of the road through falls of rock, operations would be seriously hampered if vehicles were allowed to use the route.

Mr Oldham ventured the opinion, however, that as soon as the main point had been cut back he expected that one-way traffic could be permitted.

Motorists who use the Paeroa-Waihi road, and have perforce to traverse the Rahu deviation, are becoming restive as to when the gorge road will be opened, according to recent inquiries made by a Gazette representative. However, the Rahu road, although it is exceedingly rough and uncomfortable

to journey over compared with the other main roads in the district, is in quite good order as a temporary route.

Heavy cars, buses and motor lorries find the greatest inconvenience on the trip, but this will no doubt be amply compensated for when the gorge road is opened and the great improvements are noted. In the meantime though, regular and intermittent travellers are required to possess their souls in patience and look forward to the opening of the Karangahake gorge road—wide, level and as safe as man can make it.[10]

20 August 1936

Waihi Telegraph

Two men were injured when a shot miss-fired in the course of road works in the Karangahake gorge yesterday afternoon. They were Messrs Leslie O'Brien, who had his leg broken near the ankle, and Jack Gilmour, who was bruised and suffered injury to his back. Other men who were with them when the charge unexpectedly exploded suffered from shock…[11]

25 November

FALL OF ROCK

WORK IN GORGE ROAD. DAMAGE TO NEW HIGHWAY. OPENING WILL BE POSTPONED.

Considerable damage was caused by a slip which occurred in the Karangahake gorge on Monday afternoon, a fall of rock roughly estimated to contain about 300 cubic yards breaking away at the scene of the Public Works Department's operations of widening the main road.

The most serious aspect of the fall, from the point of view of the motoring public, is that the gorge road will probably not be opened for the holiday traffic, although by employing extra labour the department is making every effort to clear the slip as soon as possible.

The work has been constantly inspected by departmental officials as the operations are being conducted in faulty country. Besides the amount of rock which has to be removed it is probable that some damage has been sustained by the wall built up from the bed of the river.

When the matter was referred to the assistant public works engineer, Mr A. P. Grant, by a Gazette representative yesterday he stated that although he did not wish to belittle the damage done the department always anticipated such eventualities and would take the work in its stride.[12]

22 December 1936

PAEROA-WAIHI ROUTE

OPENING GORGE ROAD READY BEFORE CHRISTMAS

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[10] https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/HPGAZ19360731.2.24

Hauraki Plains Gazette, Volume 46, Issue 3513, 31 July 1936, Page 5

[11] https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/WHDT19360820.2.4

Waihi Daily Telegraph, Volume XXXV, Issue 8960, 20 August 1936, Page 2

[12] https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/HPGAZ19361125.2.13

Hauraki Plains Gazette, Volume 46, Issue 2559, 25 November 1936, Page 4

(BY .TELEGRAPH OWN CORRESPONDENT) PAEROA, Monday

Advice that the road through the Karangahake Gorge, on the Paeroa-Waihi main highway, will be opened for traffic before Christmas, has been given by Mr. A. P. Grant, district engineer of the Public Works Department. The road has been closed for traffic for the past 10 months while widening and grading work have been done.

Many thousands of yards of solid rock have been blasted from the cliff face. Three dangerous bends have been widened and the river-bank has been faced with rock, and for some distance with a concrete wall.

Men have been working three shifts daily for the past week to have the road open for Christmas traffic. When the road was closed traffic was diverted over the old Rahu road, over the Karangahake hills. The main road will be closed again after the holidays for a few weeks to enable the work to be finished.[13]

19 February 1937

CLOSED AGAIN

KARANGAHAKE GORGE CONSTRUCTION OF BRIDGE.

Paeroa-Waihi road traffic will for the next three weeks again have to use the Rahu road. The Karangahake Gorge road was closed again on Wednesday, and will not re-open for at least three weeks.

The closing of the road is necessitated by the construction of a new bridge over the tunnel portal on the top side of the road. Advantage will also be taken of the closing to break down a point of rock above the road near the Waihi end of the gorge.

The amount of work entailed in the improvement and reconstruction of the load is emphasised by the fact that over 100 public works employees are at present employed within the gorge limits.[14]

2 April 1938

Better Paeroa Roads.

Steady improvement is being made in the surface of the roads in the Paeroa district, writes the "Star's" local correspondent. Tenders have been called by the Public Works Department for the sealing of a big section of the Paeroa-Waihi road, including the Karangahake gorge, where some thousands of pounds have been spent on widening and straightening the route…[15]

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[13] https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19361222.2.182

New Zealand Herald, Volume LXXIII, Issue 22608, 22 December 1936, Page 14

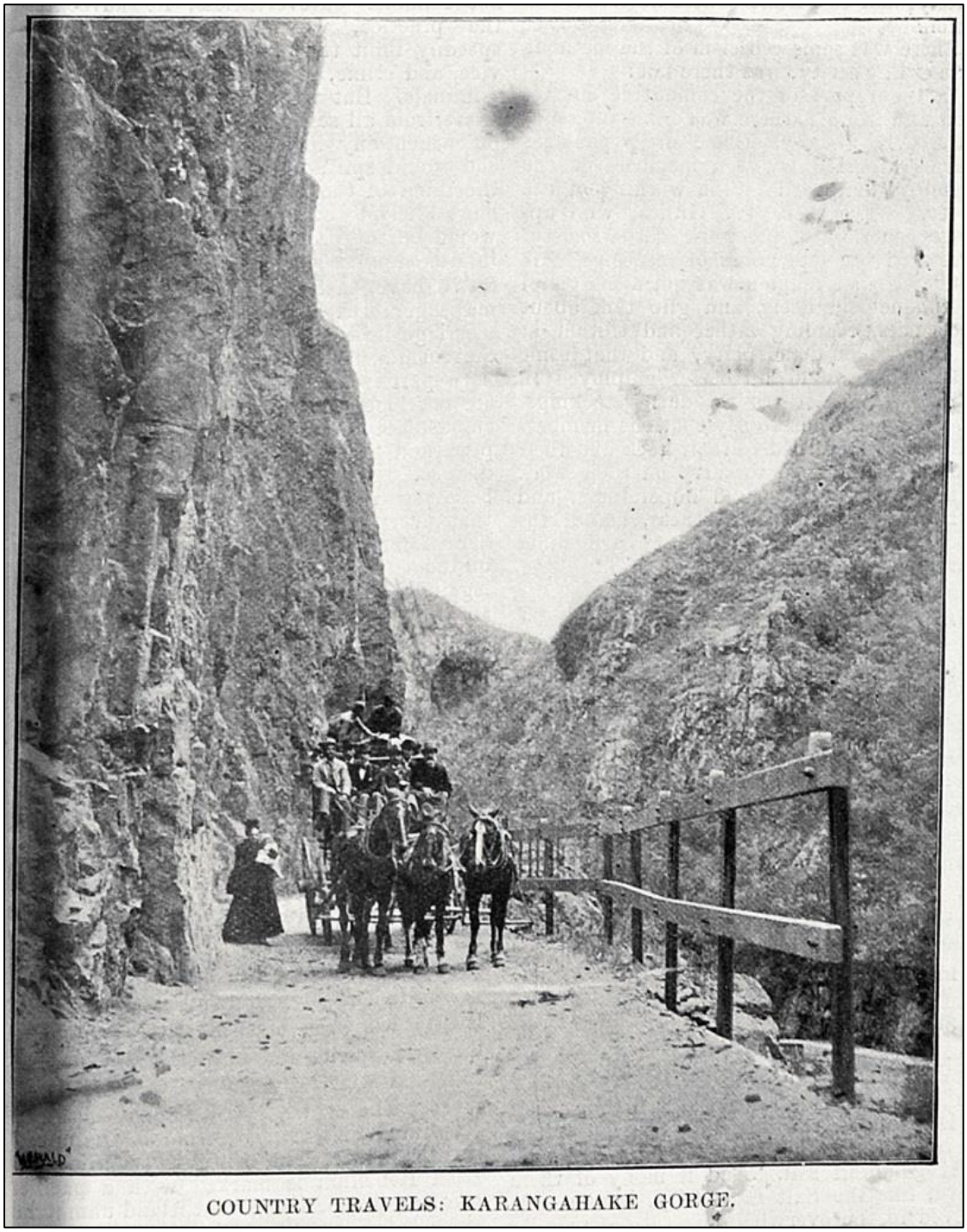
[14] https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/HPGAZ19370219.2.21

Hauraki Plains Gazette, Volume 47, Issue 2587, 19 February 1937, Page 4

[15] https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19380402.2.33

Auckland Star, Volume LXIX, Issue 78, 2 April 1938, Page 8

Images



An Auckland Weekly News image, published 10 March 1899.
Ten passengers, including a baby?
The safety railing appears to be supported by railway irons
Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections AWNS-1899 03 10-05-02

1901. Staples Collection. Photograph taken from the road.

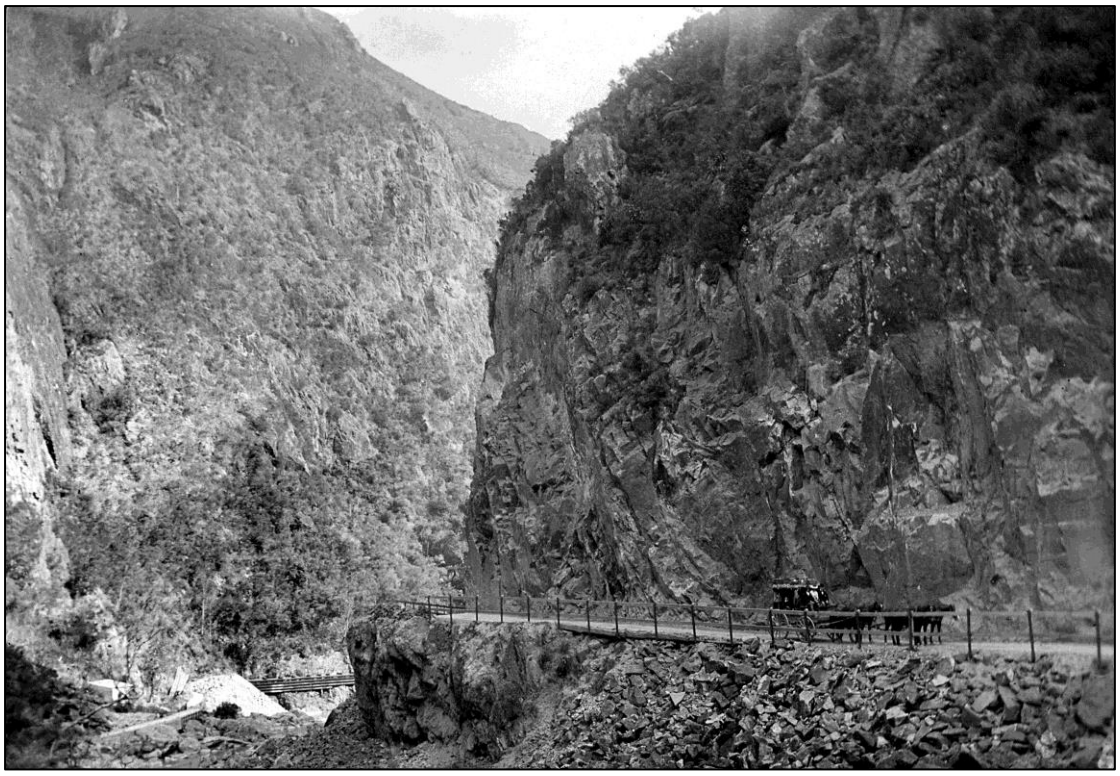
Pre railway tunnel (started c. late 1901), pre Woodstock water race pipe (the dam was constructed early 1900[16], the pipeline late in the year). Image date may therefore be mid 1900.

If the Staples date is close, then roughly ten years after construction. No telegraph poles yet, and the fence/handrail gets extended later.

A rugged bit of country.

[16] https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19000316.2.73.4

New Zealand Herald, Volume XXXVII, Issue 11321, 16 March 1900, Page 1 (Supplement)



1901 (1900?). Staples Collection. Photograph taken from the road.

The sharpest corner, and highest cliff is shown here. A stage coach with a three horse team is posing for the photographer. Three people sit across the front seat.

The Crown company's water race flume is bottom left. The pile of mullock is from the adit in the cliff above the flume. The flume must have been well protected for this to be possible. There is a shed to the left.

The water race is well armoured with heavy timbers as it disappears behind the bluff; protection against flood debris damage. Some of the footing timbers can be seen. The notches cut into the rock are visible from the present walkway, which makes use of the bench cut for this water race flume.

There appears to be no large water race pipe on the riverbank below the road. The Woodstock dam and pipe constructed 1900 1901.

TYPICAL NEW ZEALAND GOLDMINING COUNTRY: THE KARANGAHAKE GORGE.

Auckland Weekly News photo, 1901.

To the left is the Woodstock water race pipe from their new dam. It was completed May 1901. [17] The Warren Truss[18] bridge takes the pipe across the river. The Crown Company's water race flume is to the right (true left bank). Note how it weaves between the boulders in the middle distance. Further upstream it sits on an excavated rock bench, still clearly visible today.

The photograph was taken from the stoney bluff above the present walkway (the bench cut for the Crown flume).

[17] https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19010510.2.80.4

New Zealand Herald, Volume XXXVIII, Issue 11649, 10 May 1901, Page 1 (Supplement)

[18] https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/parliamentary/AJHR1901-I.2.2.2.3

MINES STATEMENT. BY THE HON. JAMES McGOWAN, MINISTER OF MINES., Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives, 1901 Session I, C-02

This is Winkelmann photograph 983, 1906. Staples Collection. Photograph taken from well above the road.

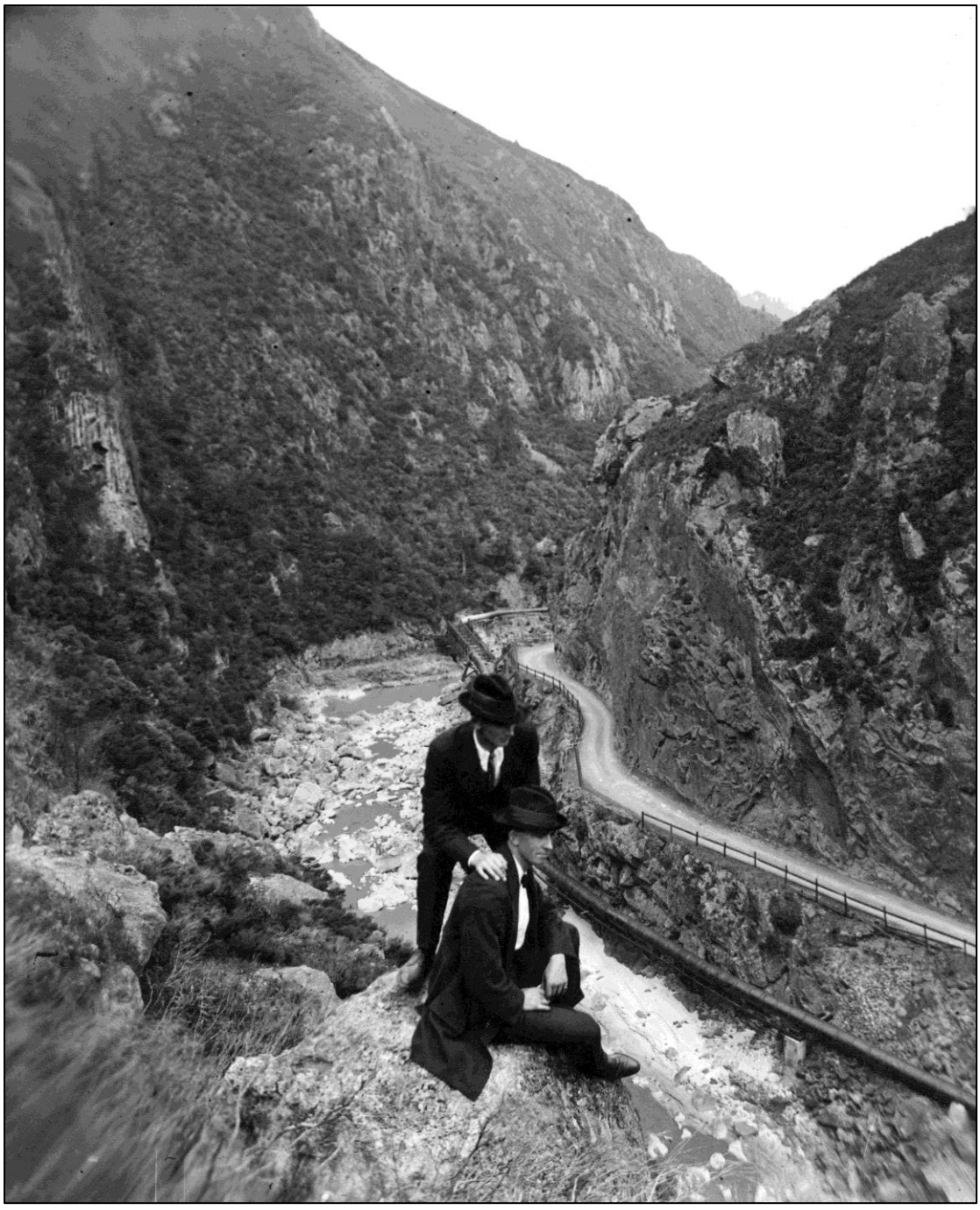
The road over the tunnel mouth was completed circa end 1905. It was achieved by cutting back the cliff. The road was widened during 1936 by extending the tunnel entrance with concrete. The fence asked for in 1905 can be seen. Also a fence alongside the road above the river.

Two people in a horse and trap are making their way to Karangahake.

The river level is low; the Woodstock (now Talisman since mid 1904) dam a little further upstream is sending much of the flow to the battery via the large pipe. The water is dirty from the discharge of Victoria, and other upstream batteries.

The Crown battery wooden flume is visible on the river bank in the distance, with the extra wooden baulk “armour” at the bend of the river. The current walkway makes use of this bench.

Butler’s Track can be seen at top right of image, complete with telegraph pole (which still exists?).



Photograph taken from high above the railway bridge, true left bank of the Ohinemuri. Staples Collection.

There are several photographs of these well-dressed gentlemen in the Staples Collection, and also the Chappell collections. One image identifies a Billy Davidson, draper. One of these gents may be Billy. Photographer uncertain; may be George Chappell.

Notice the bend in the roadway (to the right of the head of the upper figure). This is the section that is widened (1936) by building out into the river, as reported in the articles above. This wiggle in the road is not there today.

The road is clearly unsealed, and one way, with little opportunity for passing. Imagine that today :).

The Talisman water race pipe is prominent, with the Warren Truss[19] bridge which took it across the river. Bolts, cables and footings of this bridge remains today.

[19] https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/parliamentary/AJHR1901-I.2.2.2.3

The river level is low, suggesting the Talisman dam and water race are still capturing water. Note the white, silty tailings in the river bed.

The Crown water race flume has gone. The bench it occupied is clearly visible to the left of the bridge. We walk on this bench today. When was the flume removed?

The Crown battery stopped work in mid 1914 [20]. It may have been several years before the flume was removed. If the Talisman is still using water, this would suggest a date of before end 1920, when the battery ceased operation.[21]

There is evidence that the 1909 upgrade of the water race for the new Crown powerhouse was never completed, so the flume may have been removed shortly after that date. In any event, the Crown dam, below the two figures, would only be capturing the water not taken by the Talisman dam upstream. This image shows that that would be very little.

MINES STATEMENT. BY THE HON. JAMES McGOWAN, MINISTER OF MINES., Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives, 1901 Session I, C-02

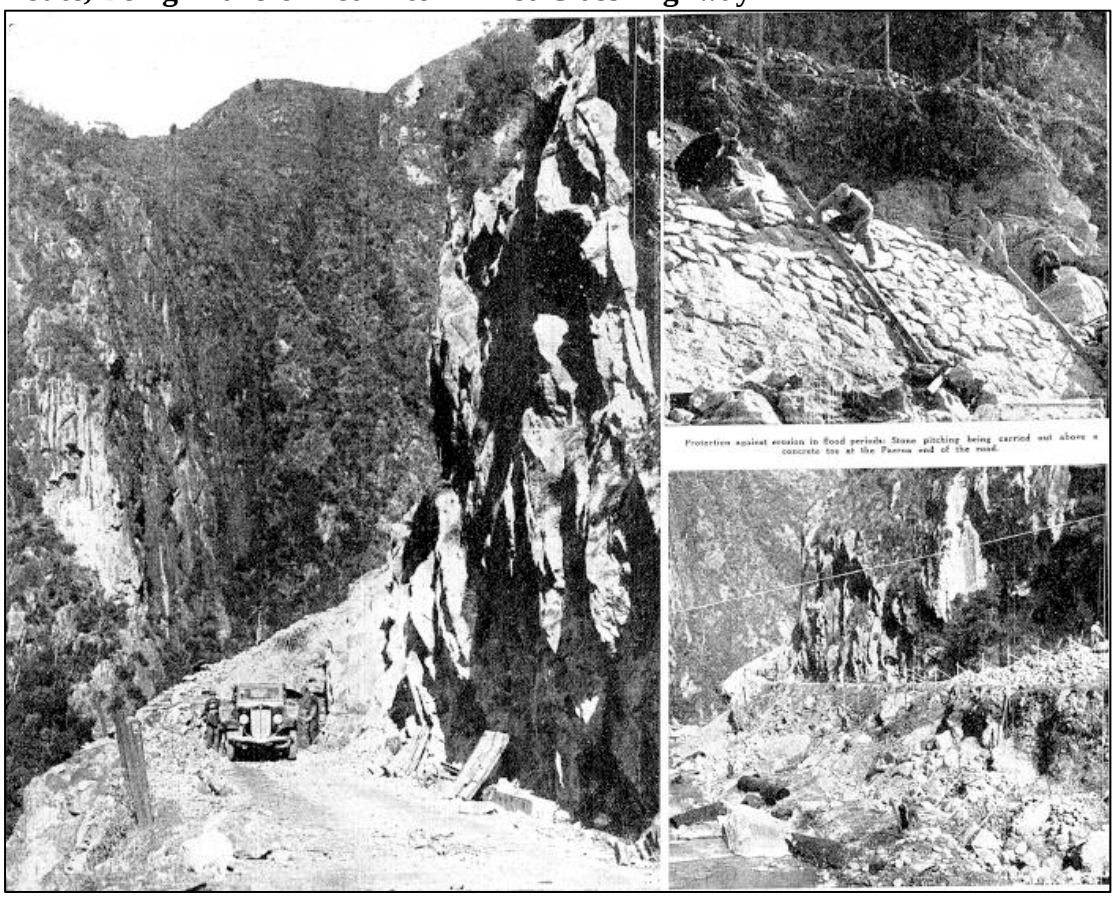
[20] https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19150810.2.29

New Zealand Herald, Volume LII, Issue 15992, 10 August 1915, Page 5

[21] https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19201216.2.63

Auckland Star, Volume LI, Issue 300, 16 December 1920, Page 5

Old Narrow Road Through The Karangahake Gorge, On The Paeroa – Waihi Route, Being Transformed Into A First-Class Highway



1936, New Zealand Herald.

The caption under left image: Where a bad bend in the gorge road is being eased and widened. The road alignment will encroach into the river-bed at this point and will be protected by a grouted rock wall built on a solid concrete base. This method is preferred to cutting into the precipitous rock walls of the gorge.

Top right: Protection against erosion in flood periods. Stone pitching being carried out above a concrete toe at the Paeroa end of the road.

Bottom right: This view shows the proximity of the road to the river and the need for protective rock facings below the widened highway. [22]

[22] Images at: https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19360627.2.24.1

New Zealand Herald, Volume LXXIII, Issue 22456, 27 June 1936, Page 10