

The ballot for the Waioeka section took place in 1908, when there was only a bridle track, with rough unga culverts over the many small streams which the path must cross. A dray road reached only as far as Matahanea, then twelve miles from Ootiki. After the Waioeka straight, on a rough potholed road, winding in and out of the curves, to get the easiest path, without side or block cuttings; as one relation from Christchurch remarked, when driven in a gig, drawn by a fast pony, whizzing round the bends her feel quite dizzy. From Matahanea to Oponae (then Karaitai) it was not possible to canter, so horses developed as, ^{or at} between an amble and a jog, known as the Waioeka; taking two or more hours for the distance, about 13 miles. It was not possible to pass easily on the track, so if one saw a pack train in the distance, one found a slightly widened spot and hoped for the best. Charlie Pipe and a partner, Bill Dickie had the mail contract, driving a buggy and pair to the Matahanea store, then mail and goods had to go with the pack horse train, the horses carrying most surprising loads. One settler about 1903, having ordered a full sized bath, it had to wait its turn, and was left on the verandah of the store until it could be dealt with. An enterprising man saw a chance of a hot bath, and boiled up several tins of water, carried them out and got in the bath for a good soak. Suddenly a settler and his newly arrived sisters rode round the bend, and Bill Dickie, always resourceful, threw a horse cover over the bath. The settler, noting the steam from the usually empty bath, relaxed in the saddle, engaging in a lengthy gossip with Bill, while poor bather sweated; when at last the travellers relented, and rode on to Ootiki, an almost cooked man rose thankfully from his improptu Turkish bath.

Among the first settlers were the McLean brothers, Reuben Watson, both near Oponae Steve Patrie, beside the road to Gisborne, The Greenwood brothers, from Nelson, J. McAulay Redpath brothers and C.J. Wood on the Wairata, Geo Comer, or Jockey George, well known, Three from Waimata Valley, W. Young, J. Richards, & Texas Richardson, always quoting his experiences on a cattle boat, and with Texas Cowboys. He was an outstanding man, who figures in a book recently republished "Doctor in the Snow". Texas, as he was generally known, was very good company, but apt to laugh very heartily at the wrong moments. Riding into town with Richards, who was wearing very natty new plum coloured riding pants, they paused at the Tauranga Creek to give the horses a drink. Richards was sitting lazily, with loose reins, when the horse flung up his head, then jerked sideways, and poor Richards

Richards flew over the horses neck into the flooded creek. The disgusted look on his face was too much for Texas. They remounted, and rode on into town, where they were supposed to have lunch with us, but only Texas came in, still laughing at the thought of that nasty tumble, and said they had not exchanged one word on the long ride.

Oponae, or Maraetai, was almost on the site of an engagement with the Maoris in the early days. There was a public Works camp near, when the road was being formed, and one of the storekeepers was named Eaton, the family lived in Opotiki for some years- they had a daughter named Nonica. Another storeman named Creugnet was also well known in the district, as he was at Kutarere Store for some years. He married, while he was at Oponae a Teacher of French, whose name I forget, and the district was greatly ^{amused} at his preparations for the coming of his bride. He sported a black curly beard, and had decided to get rid of it, so as there was no barber and he had not ^{time} ~~name~~ to be shorn in Opotiki before leaving for Auckland, tried to do the trick himself, one of their neighbours called in to see him, and found him with tears of anguish in his eyes, trying to shave the thick growth with a safety razor. So a good Samaritan officiated with sharp scissors, and used lather and an ordinary razor with effect.

George Comer had a farm on the opposite side of the Waioeka, near the Tauranga creek - he had a suspension bridge, and a small whare and stockyards, keeping house for himself, He was quite a good cook, and bottled his own fruit, made jam etc. He used the method of putting the fruit in the jars raw, covering it with syrup, then cooking and sterilising in a camp oven, the jars packin^{ed} round with small items of clothing vests socks etc, so doing two jobs at once. He had a long job getting sheep over the suspension bridge, as they bunched together, so close that there was no room for a man to get over, and the dogs could not move them, at last one man crawled over the backs of the tightly packed animals, and managed to pull one old ewe out of the mob and onto firm land, they had been frightened of the loose boards, well apart.

George Comer died at

He took the mail and cartage contract (pack horse

water flowing beneath. Another story of Bill McLennan's was of Two packhorse teams, stopping for refreshment at Mutahanea, one loaded with pipes for a water supply, the other having among other things a smallish tin bath, The ~~wagon~~ ^{team} delayed rather long, and the horses strolled round, picking at the grass and thistles. There was a clang, and the men hurried out to find that the pipes had become threaded through the handles of the bath the horses plunged and struggled, the bath slipped round under one horse's tummy, and he commenced to kick, with loud clangs on the bath by the time the four horses were disentangled, the pipes were bent almost in loops and the bath practically worthless.

Hells Gates was wonderful sight, as the swift water foamed and bubbled between the huge rocks, very striking when viewed from the steep hillsides above. There was a scheme to make a dam and a small power station there, an easy dam, as they had at Okere falls Rotorua, and one at Tauranga, but the scheme fell through, and ^{Opotiki} we joined the Arapuni scheme.

One settler brought his father out from Scotland, and when one of the vicar's paid a pastoral visit, the old man was sitting on the verandah, rather gloomily surveying the prospect, The vicar admired the lovely bush, and river scene, the old man saying ^{gruffly} ^{looks} "I looks at the river and says It's all right, if it wasn't for the hills, and then I looks at the hills and sez to my self, Oh! It's all right, if it wasn't for the oles."

About 1912, a lawyer from Auckland on temporary duty here, decided to cycle up to visit Texas Richardson, whom he had met and liked. We tried to warn him that it would be a slow and difficult trip, but he said "30 miles, I can do that easily in the afternoon." He left Opotiki about 2 o'clock, and by six he had reached McLean's wool shed, with another three miles to go, and one river crossing, he found the smell of raw wool over powering, and decided to return down the track, and seek better shelter, He missed any shacks there may have been, as it was misty and dim early, so at last he camped for the night at a sheltered corner, where there was a tiny creek and water fall, collecting rather damp ferns and leaves he spent an uncomfortable night

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arriving at Richardson about mid day, so weary and stiff that he welcomed the offer of a bed and slept for hours, so his host missed the good talk they had looked forward too. The loneliness in those early days was a hardship, especially for the women, One woman we knew had anervous breakdown, she had been a typist in London, and came direct to the bush farm, The doctor said all she needed was a week at the Waverly hotel in Auckland. The same lawyer had a project, to make himself a canoe and come down the river to the Opotiki wharf, without mishap or landing - he reached the Waioeka bridge, then holed the canoe on a hidden log, and had to swim ashore.

A great many of the original settlers enlisted at the outbreak of war, and did not return, George Comer, Jack Carlisle, both the Greenclades, Texas Richardson were all killed in action.

From fairly early days, casualties have been common, in the Waioeka, One man went out shooting one morning, and was never seen again. It was easy to lose the way in thick trackless bush - in fact, in fairly recent days men have been known to go pig hunting, in the Waiotahi, and after their families have grown frantic at their non appearance they turn up in the Waioeka Gorge.

Peter Tapsell was a very popular identity in the upper Waioeka in He was a stockman for the McLean brothers for years, till he enlisted in the first World War, and was one of those who returned safely. A big handsome man, he had a fine singing voice. One of the Tapsell's of Matata -grandson of the first settler there

Riding through to Gisborne, and catching the steamer there was the quickest way to Wellington, and Lyttelton, before the Main Trunk train began.

The doctors sometimes had a long ride, one young woman we knew, expecting her first baby, and staying for a change with her mother in Opotiki, was advised not to return to the Waioeka, but was anxious to get home for a little while, so risked the ride, and the baby put in an appearance, as the doctor said it would if she took ^{such} ~~side~~ a long ride, so the poor doctor had to leave all his patients, ride nearly thirty miles, and officiate as doctor and nurse, bathing the baby himself as one told doctor said "I wouldn't know what to do, you put a towel on your knee don't you?"

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In 1913, when I last rode up the Waiioeka, the road round Maori Bluff, was still not made, and a gang was clearing the rubble from the last rock blast; the horses had to pick their way on loose shale, over an 18" track, and even when the road was supposed to be finished, constant slips occurred.

Most of the early settlers took their turn in road gangs, to help pay for felling bush, fencing and stocking. It would have been better if a lot of the land had not been surveyed and cut up, as it has caused erosion, and with lack of capital to stock fully and fence much fern and scrub has grown instead of grass. The log covered paddocks made difficult mustering. Texas enjoyed another laugh at a mishap of his partner, when mustering, going cautiously down a steep hill side, he stumbled and fell, slipping down some distance till his pants caught on stump, and stopped his progress, tearing most of the seat from his pants. He was like Queen Victoria not amused, and the hearty laugh caused more annoyance, but, as Texas said, "Better your pants than your neck, as could easily have happened."

Another stockman was very lucky, riding on a steep bluff, above the river, and taking out his sheaf knife to cut away a branch of tutu the horse slipped, going straight down into a deep pool - they parted company in the water, the man swimming out on one side the horse, on the other, and rejoining his master as soon as they found a shallow ford

A man called Garney had a shack and a small piece of land just at the end of the Waiioeka straight, and was roadman for a stretch of several miles. He came into the office several times on business, and one day, when the boss was busy sat waiting in the office where I was typing Suddenly he said "the King is dead", I thought it was just a way of opening a conversation like saying Queen Anne's dead, and went on typing till the slow chimes of St Stephen, marking the King's passing, played in slow time. It seemed an age between the peals, and we realised the passing of a great man, even though overshadowed by a dominant mother for far too long.

Garney was a man you would not want to meet if you were early morning, he was a good but his business was to work his clock had stopped when the mail man came to the Gorge he found Garney at the end of a long stretch of cleared water table placed a stone for a mark. He was a maggot to find it was only half past seven, and he had done a good job of his work.

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Corney was misled by a brilliant ^{moon}. Thinking it was early morning, he swallowed his tea took his lunch and went to work. His clock had stopped and when the mailman came to the Gorge he found Corney at the end of a long stretch of cleared water table placidly eating his lunch. He was amazed to find, it was only half past seven, as he had done a good four hours work.