TE AWAROA: RESTORING NEW ZEALAND RIVERS

RESEARCH REPORT 3: WAIMATA RIVER

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THE WAIMATA RIVER: SETTLER HISTORY POST 1880

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Te Whare Wānanga o Tāmaki Makaurau

The Waimata River – Settler History post 1880

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Land within the Waimata River catchment, comprising about 220 square kilometres[1], began to be available for purchase after the passing of the Native Lands Act 1865 and subsequent land surveys and issuing of legal Crown title.

The lower reaches of the Waimata River – including parts of the Kaiti, Whataupoko and Pouawa blocks – were the first to go into European ownership from around 1880, when John and Thomas Holden bought the 7000 acre Rimuroa block; the Hansen brothers bought about 8000 acres comprising Horoeka, Maka and Weka; Bennet bought the 1100 acre Kanuka block; and Charles Gray, the Waiohika block. The next year, in 1881, the Kenway brothers bought the 3000-acre Te Pahi further upriver. The Kenways gave the property the name Te Pahi, meaning The End, because at the time it was at the end of the road with nothing beyond.[2] This soon changed with further purchases of Maori land beyond Te Pahi continuing through to the late 1890s.

Further land became available in the south, east and north Waimata with the New Zealand Native Land Settlement Company offering about 20,000 acres for sale in late 1882. The blocks "conveyed to the company" were approved by the Trust Commissioner and titles were to be registered under the Land Transfer Act.[3] The areas involved were Waimata South, 9,555; Waimata East, 4,966; Waimata North, 4,828. These comprised the balances of the Waimata blocks not previously sold to the Government, and were described as suitable for mixed farms, in sizes and upon terms to suit bona fide settlers. Leasehold portions were also put up for auction.

The Waimata blocks, divided from Pouawa land by the Waimata River and situated from five to twelve miles from the town of Gisborne, were expected to find a ready sale.

The Poverty Bay Herald 1882 advertisement read:

The whole of this is first class undulating country, well watered, with a plentiful supply of bush and the company would direct special attention to it as affording a good opening to small capitalists; it has rich soil and easy access to town by either road or water, rendering the whole very desirable for agricultural or pastoral pursuits.[4]

Although Europeans owned many large land blocks by 1890s, many were against the compulsory taking of land for settlement as espoused by the Liberal Government's "bursting up" policy in which larger estates were subdivided for closer settlement by small farmers. Two-term Gisborne mayor Cecil de Lautour was against the scheme, particularly as there remained "such large areas of Maori land totally unoccupied, which the Government should bring into profitable occupation".[5]

With land purchased, new owners set about clearing the heavy bush to create pasture for sheep, cattle and much-needed horses. Bush-clearing provided a wealth of work for bush fellers over the next two decades. Thomas Partridge bought the 700 acre Kahui in 1884[6] and the following July called for contractors to fell 100 acres of bush on his property.[7] The Kenway brothers called for tenders to fell 300 acres of their Waimata bush in 1886[8] and 200 acres of light bush at Te Pahi in 1887[9]. E F Harris of Mangamutu, near the Hole in the Wall, Gowerville, the Darwin Road side of the river, wanted 80 acres of bush at Te Rimuroa felled in 1887.[10]

Writing in 1930, Philip Kenway recalled how Hawke's Bay friends did not give any encouraging reports of Poverty Bay.

The land was good enough, they told us, but the titles were mostly bad.

The place being difficult of access was fifty years behind the rest of the country in civilisation, and was the refuge of all the off-scourings of the colony, who sought to practise there, without social restraint, every kind of irregularity and even vice; the resort of bankrupts, drunkards and every kind of loose liver, and of lawyers of the very worst description, who preyed alike on the ignorance of the native and the innocence of the newcomer; in fact a little hell on earth, and no place at all for decent people.

As it turned out, we had a government title to our land, so that was all right. Nor did we find the people worse than elsewhere, though they certainly did drink. There were only enough queer and free characters to make things amusing, and though rascally lawyers were not scarce, decently honest ones were to be found. We certainly never regretted having adventured to the place, in the face of warnings given.[11]

Bush felling

In 1887, John (Jack) Tennant Dunlop (1864-1943[12]) bought the 3330 acre Waikereru block at the top end of Riverside Road from Maori owners and by June the following year confirmed Goldsmith's bush felling tender for 105 acres and Hansen's tender for 140 acres.[13]

And so it continued – 380 acres at Holden's Rimuroa in 1887-93[14]; 200 acres at Tomblesons in 1888[15], 500 acres at Bransons in 1890[16], 80 acres of Kenways in 1890-91.[17]

In April 1892, Jack Dunlop – on behalf of P W Donner – invited tenders for felling 1000 acres of light bush in 100 acre lots at Waimata, and the Barkers of Whataupoko wanted their remaining 1400 acres of Waimata bush cleared.[18]

At least 16,000 acres of bush, including about 3000 acres in the Waimata catchment, were felled for settlement in the district in the 1901 season alone.[19]

Philip Kenway described the process of bush felling and subsequent burning in *Pioneering in Poverty Bay*:

[The fellers] first have to go through the section started on with slash hooks, cutting the smaller growths and especially all vines and creepers. When this work has been inspected and passed, axe work begins. The ground being always aslope, and often very steeply so, your bushman will start at the lowest point, and selecting a certain group of trees he will "belly-scarf" and "back-scarf" the lot, that is to say, he will cut about one-third through on both the lower and high sides. That done, he will set to work on a tree he has had his eye on as being suitably placed, and bigger than the others, and perhaps tied to them with vines. He will cut this tree carefully so that it will fall on some, at least, of the others. If this "drive," as it is termed, has been well managed, all the whole lot will come down together, the half-cut trunks loudly cracking as they give, and the great mass of branches all breaking up with immense fracas, the long-drawn crash being audible for miles.[20]

In inspecting this clearing work the main thing is to be sure that all vines and undergrowth are properly cut, and, secondly, that all trees are felled "clear of stumps". At what height the axe is used does not matter at all, the timber being of no value; waist—or even breast-high is usual—but sometimes when a big tree has outstanding buttresses, the axeman will, in a very few moments, cut

two small deep holes in it about shoulder high. He will then fix horizontally into these holes a couple of short poles, trimmed to fit, and lay a cross-pole or so between them. On this very doubtful-looking platform he will stand quite securely and cut the tree high up where the bole is of a more reasonable size. Trees, however, above a certain girth, which varies in different contracts according to the circumstances, are often left uncut, to rot standing after being killed by the fire.

…a man must be in his prime and keep pretty fit to "stick it" for long, and he must be well fed. A good contractor will stoke up his men, every two hours or so, with as much bread and potatoes, fresh mutton and beef as they will hold, with jam, butter and tea ad lib.

Fire

Felling was followed by fires, the ash providing quick fertility to new pastures. In April 1894, Fred Lysnar called for tenders to fell 1000 acres of bush in lots of 150 and 200 acres at his and Dr Alfred Lawson Heale's Wakaroa (also Whakaroa) block. The subsequent burning-off phase resulted in Dr Heale's death the following year.[21]

A Gisborne resident of three years, Dr Heale wanted to "witness a good bush fire". The plan was to light the felled bush on 18 December 1895, several miles from the homestead. Lysnar went to start the burn but a knee injury prevented him from doing so. Akroyd went to his aid, leaving Dr Heale in a safe ridgeline position within standing bush. Others in the party had separated to start the fire in different directions. On Akroyd and Lysnar's return to the ridgeline, Dr Heale could not be found. His charred body was found the next day, about a chain into the burned bush and 15 chains from where he had been left.[22]

On the day of Dr Heale's death, The Poverty Bay Herald, unaware of the drama unfolding in the Waimata at the time, reported:

The burning of bush, fern, and grass is now being carried out in various parts of the district, and the consequence is that the air around the town is charged with smoke. This, coupled with the exceptional power of the sun's rays during the last two days, has made the atmosphere very sultry. Some four thousand acres of bush country were cleared by fire in the Waimata district yesterday, a good burn being obtained.[23]

Felling was expected to be finished by the end of spring, and the impenetrable chaos of leafy branches and trunks left alone until all was thoroughly dried by the hot summer sun. An anxious time followed for the owner or manager.

Philip Kenway:

For there is a vast difference between a good clean burn, clearing nearly everything but the stumps and a few big logs, and a fiasco, with the fire wandering about, burning leaves and twigs only, in which case it will be years before the ground comes into proper grass. How we watched the weather! Was this breeze going to develop into a big parching Wester, or would it die down entirely after we were lit up and leave us wretchedly in the soup, a misery to ourselves and a laughingstock to our neighbours? Dare we risk it?[24]

In lighting bush, you have to be very careful. You must never in any case go more than a few yards in, and you must always be very sure to leave open a good line of retreat, clear away to safety, for if a sudden change of wind comes, it is not only the speed of the pursuing flame and its suffocating breath that you have to reckon with, but the fact that lighted leaves and twigs will be dropped far

ahead of you. No one who has not had considerable experience should be allowed anywhere near the job.

He recalled the time of Dr Heale's death:

I once spent a whole day on foot in the hot sun burning off bush patches, with an eye now and then on some big distant smokes. I had climbed slowly home in the gathering dusk, tired with my long day's scramble, and nearly kippered with the smoke, when there came a ring on the telephone. A doctor I knew well had been helping at one of those still gleaming distant fires, had been caught by a change of wind, and was certainly burnt to death. To me, tired out and somewhat upset by the news, and vividly picturing to myself the horror of such a fate, there came out of the darkness the uncanny, long-drawn howl of a dog. For the one and only time in my life my mind was no more than that of a primeval man, and for one moment this howl was for me the hair-raising cry of a disembodied spirit. You can read of, or imagine such a thing, but actually to feel it is at once a shocking and enlightening experience.[25]

The sight and smell of great volumes of smoke rising and clouding the sky was part of life and symbolised progress for the entire district.

Calling to mind one of the last pieces of bush I had to do with, I remember, after two doubtful and anxious weeks of watching, a dry Wester seemed to be starting. "Now or never" was the decision, and my men raced off to start a line of fire from the windward side, a couple of miles away. The breeze held and increased, and climbing the ridge, I saw the first smoke rise and grow, and soon blot out all that side of the sky. This was a first-class fire; some four square miles of felled bush were cleared off in about three hours. I did not calculate the number of cubic miles of smoke sent into the air, but a ship coming down the coast reported, where it next put in, that there had been another volcanic eruption inland. And the sea was twenty-five miles from the run![26]

In December 1906, the arrival of the steamer *Zealandia* from the north was delayed owing to smoke from bush fires obscuring the coastline.[27] And in 1908, the view of a ministerial party returning from Tolaga Bay via Arakihi and Waimata was obscured by the heavy smoke blowing off from the bush and scrub fires.[28] Gisborne businesspeople had to resort to artificial light at 4.30 in the afternoon in February 1913 as a dense cloud of pungent smoke enveloped the town.

The Poverty Bay Herald reported:

Looking up Gladstone Road, it was difficult to see much more than two or three blocks, and it almost appeared to indicate that the grass upon the country m the immediate neighborhood was afire. Townspeople were complaining freely of the smoke, and many suffered with their eyes. The entire country towards Waimata was obscured by smoke, but the atmosphere was comparatively clear, across the bay towards Muriwai.[29]

Roads and bridges

The main access to the early Waimata blocks was possibly via Fitzherbert, Clifford and Stafford streets and Riverside Road, on the river's left bank. The short, steep Waimata Road at the end of Russell Street could have been an access from Russell Street to Hauroa and Riverside roads. A paper road remains from the top of Waimata Road to Hauroa Road. The popular Hole-in-the-Wall picnic and swimming place could be accessed by boat or by Darwin Road, on the river's right bank.

Early roads grew out of constantly used tracks. Only four feet wide, they were used by riders and packhorses not wheeled vehicles.[30]

Writing in the Poverty Bay Herald, "Viator" described his visit by horse to the Waimata in February 1882, one of several blocks of Crown Lands being opened up for settlement. He travelled the road under construction initially via Charles Gray's paddocks at Waiohika and the ranges of the Whataupoko Block.[31] The road, bridges and culverts under construction were expected to be completed by the end of March.

He said that once on the Waimata block, the stream was about the average width of a chain, and at this season of the year is very shallow. There is no very great extent of flat land in the valley but what there is appears to be very rich, being alluvial deposit washed down during periods of freshes. *There were indications of some very high freshes, the boughs of the trees which overhang the stream to a height of fifteen feet being laden with drift. An old Maori hut was also noticed on the flat near one of the crossings. It is perched up about ten feet from the ground, it is presumed for the reason that the river here sometimes overflows its banks, ln the whole of the valley it would be hardly possible to obtain a 100-acre block' of flat land, and altogether the extent of this description of land would not exceed 2000 acres. Fringing the flats, the hills rise on either hand, all of them being densely covered with forest, principally manuka, tawa, and New Zealand cedar. Except a few totara trees, there is no kind of building timber to be had.*

Information from men on the survey party made him conclude that a settler would require to do a considerable amount of clearing and put in four or five years labour before he could realize any profit from it.

It could no doubt be converted into a good grazing country, but is unfit for small farm settlement. It is the intention of the Government I understand to cut it up into large blocks up to 1000 acres, giving as much of the river frontage as possible to each. Mr. Balneavis is now engaged in the work of the survey of the block, and as soon as the road is finished the land will be offered for sale.

His journey ended at the survey camp of Mr Krippner, with damper, tea and a little bush pork and where *the Maoris gave a haka entertainment…, the scene being lit up with the blazing of huge logs.*

The Waimata Road Board, which covered a substantial area including Mangapapa, Whataupoko, Pouawa, Hexton and Waimata, met for the first time in November 1884.[32] An early agenda item was the request for Cook County to "proclaim" a road to the Waimata.[33]

The Poverty Bay Herald in 1886:

Passing the palatial residence of Mr Percival Barker we come to the main road leading to the Waimata blocks, upon which about twenty settlers are located in true pioneer fashion. The road is some 18 miles in length and has been constructed by the County Council out of grants by the Government, but after expending about £2000 and supplementing it by £200 of County funds the road is only suitable for summer traffic. About 11,000 acres of the Waimata block are now taken up

and partly fenced, and the whares of three years ago are rapidly giving place to substantial farm houses.[34]

The Company has also constructed a fairly good road at the back of Whataupoko (7) block, by means of which road the Company will be able to offer for sale during the coming summer some choice homestead sites within easy distance of town.[35]

The board agreed to Messrs Ollivier and Kiely offer to clear all the bush from Riverside Road, for the sum of £10 and the firewood in 1887[36] and, in January 1888, the board agreed to build a bridle track on Riverside Road, and extend the track fit for buggies from the Waimata Road to Hansen's, Block 4, Whataupoko – about the area known as Cabstand, 10 miles from Gisborne.[37] (This could be about the Cabstand, corner of Mander Road as Hansen brothers later sold to Mander. Cabs brought passengers to this point from town and waited several hours for return fares.)

Philip Donner of Waikereru – at the top of the Riverside Road – and three other settlers borrowed £2000 from the Government to make their own road in 1892. Once completed, the road was to belong to the Waimata Road Board.[38]

The road past Waikereru was used for some years as the main access to the Waimata Valley, a route presumably only available to horses from Waikereru, initially beside and across the Waimata River, through to Weka and Maka, then on to Mander Road and to the Cabstand. Remains of the road can still be seen below Creswell's Motukeo property and further on past Waikereru and to the left of the road leading into what is now part of Hikurangi Forest Farms' Waimanu Forest.

A 1917 map shows the road continuing past Waikereru at the end of "the Riverside road" and on through Mander's property to the Cabstand. Bill King, who with his family bought the LongBush property from John Hegarty in 1990, believed early Riverside Road property owners could access the land from town via the Matokotoki Valley road and Cave Road.

From the late 1960s, John Hegarty – whose grandfather Henry and father William had bought Waikereru from Ellen Donner in 1924 – gradually created a two-wheel brick road to his new home past the Waikereru homestead. Using 22,000 bricks from the Gisborne Post Office and various chimneys affected by the 1966 earthquake, he laid two bricks end-to-end lengthwise for each wheel track. Although the district was short of good roading metal, good quarries were available in Goodwin and Cave roads, the same metal seam that runs through to the Matokitoki Valley.[39]

In the early 1890s, a road was built to the Waimata through land gifted by Charles Gray of Waiohika.[40]

The road up and down the Waimata was the preferred route from Tolaga Bay until a new inland route was built, away from the old coach route along the coastline. An 1889 map and 1892 map describe the road as the Gisborne-Waiapu Road, another calls it Tauwhareparae (with which it eventually links). In 2014, the road is called the Waimata-Hokoroa Road and is used only by forestry vehicles. The main road from Tolaga Bay to Gisborne was not completely metalled until about 1925 and up until that time, still involved driving on the beaches in some places.[41] For many decades, stock was driven from north of Tolaga Bay to Gisborne via the Mangatokerau (now Paroa) Road to Mangaheia, inland towards Arakihi then through the old dray road to the Waimata valley and further on towards Gisborne.[42]

The Waimata Road across Gray's Hill was certainly in use by 18 and 19 June 1894 when a flood caused previously unseen destruction.[43] A substantial slip on Linburn temporarily blocked the river, causing it to back up to beyond the store. When it gave way, the water descended like a tidal wave

on the low-lying portion of Partridge's property flooding two houses. The road between Partridge's Kahui and Te Pahi was completely blocked by slips and approaches to two river crossings silted up level with the top of the river banks. The owners of a Maori whare, carried away from the high ground near No. 8 crossing, got out just in time but were holed up for more than two days without food in an old shed they took refuge in.

Driftwood and logs were piled above the big bridge between Kenway Bros and Howard Kenway's.

Slips of considerable extent bear witness to the enormous quantity of water which poured down the hill sides. Messrs Richardson Bros' swing bridge, which was several feet above the last big flood, was swept away.[44]

Several days later, four weather-bound "Waimata-ites encountered a dangerous-to-negotiate slip on Gray's Hill as they journeyed home by horse.

We turned back and got on to the hill tops. As we had provided ourselves with a hammer, we managed to get through the wire fence (which was carefully stapled up again), and followed the range, which runs through Mr Gray's property. We could see from the hill tops that all the bridges had been carried away, and that there were several large slips on the road between the foot of the hill and the cabstand.

Coming on to the road, again by the cabstand, we had not gone far before another large slip barred the way, so we took to the hills again for some distance. On reaching the waterfall crossing we found both approaches silted up, but with a little trouble got through, from there to the Natives land slips occur every chain or two. By a round-about route we got to the creek which was difficult to get at, however, we got through without further trouble than bogging one horse and getting our feet wet. from thence to Messrs Kenway's the track was fairly good. By scrambling through the scrub and bogging another horse we reached Mr Dods' homestead. From there to Mr McPhail's hill climbing and scrambling through fences kept us alive. Leggett Bros' store was at length reached, the journey occupying just 7 hours.

Philip Kenway recalled in his *Pioneering in Poverty Bay* how the district was roadless when he and his brothers arrived, much of it quite impenetrable by horsemen, and extremely arduous for foot travel. *The pioneer surveyors had a very hard time of it. They generally had to "hump" everything on their backs, including the heavy theodolites, across all sorts of frightful gullies and jungle tangles, and to depend on wild pork and an occasional pigeon to keep them alive. In the high poor country, pigs were often scarce, in which case the party had a very thin time.*[45]

In hill country completely bush-covered, it was no easy thing to find a good road line, even though a one-in-twelve grade was allowed, and steeper ones sometimes winked at. You had to get a sight, if you could, at the next saddle in the ridge, approximate height and distance, and then with axe and slasher, cut trial grades to it along the gully-broken face of the range. And if you had not very thoroughly explored the district ahead, difficulties were very likely to arise I knew one bright genius, who, after laying off some fifteen miles of road, found himself up against a perfectly hopeless precipice. Report says that he sat down and cried, but I know that he gave up "field" work there and then, made a bee-line for home, and confined himself to office work for the rest of his life.

Gradually a few roads were made in our part of the back country, so that we could get our wool out on wheels instead of on packhorse, but most of them even yet are summer roads only, metal being almost unobtainable.

Bridges – an essential part of any roading system – were also added and improved upon.

John Hegarty:

You could drive a Model T to Waikereru but in the winter it was a boghole with open water courses. In town, we always kept an eye on the hills and if it looked like rain, we were off, the water came up so fast. It was one and a half miles from the river crossing to Waikereru homestead..

You didn't have to steer the Model T. It could plough through mud, the ruts were so deep, it steered itself.

We got stores in big lumps. We bought sugar and flour by the half tonne in the summertime when you could get across the river easily. It was all kept in the pantry.[46]

He recalled there were always good roads to Rimuroa where his maternal grandfather and Cook County Council chair Thomas Holden lived but the road to Waikereru was always a boghole in winter.

The road could become impassable with the slightest rain. Mother often stayed at Rimuroa – her old home – on the way back to Waikereru from town.

Gisborne District Council bridge engineer Denis Malone says bridges crossing the Waimata River evolved from low level crossings for light vehicles. Most are second or third builds, brought up to a higher class to allow heavy vehicle access. But despite bridge strengthening, he fears the loss of a city bridge because of the marked increase in the volume and size of driftwood coming down the Waimata River.

If we have a Bola-type event, there's a good chance we will lose one of our city bridges – the William Pettie [1968], the Gladstone Road [1925] or the railway bridge – because of their short span and the driftwood blockages that occur during floods. It's tricky pulling out driftwood from them, and unsafe to operate a crane off the bridge. We are looking to put access for standing a crane or winch to pull off driftwood from the William Pettie bridge. All these town bridges have other services – water, wastewater and power attached to them. About 90 percent of bridge failures are to do with flooding and aggradation.[47]

Council may build a debris rack higher up the river, possibly between The Island and Goodwins Bridge, to stop the debris going through all these bridges and ending up on the beach. These debris racks could be cleared of willows, poplars and pine slash before, during and after flood events as insurance for the city, particularly Kaiti.

Willows and poplars are choking the river. They form a canopy across the river then slump into it and act as groynes, pushing the river over. They need to be cut and managed.

I don't think the erosion value has been achieved by poplars and willows, and pines get too big.

Willows have no cover in the winter – where do the leaves go?

Besides strengthening bridges, rock protection was installed at Goodwins and Macdonalds to prevent further bank slumping.

Greta Watson describes access issues at Linburn from the time her husband Gerard's grandparents Archie and Alma bought the property in 1907, when the only access was by fording the Waimata River.

Having lived there myself with the irascible river, I can imagine how difficult this must have been and what planning with stores and farm equipment it must have entailed. A good vegetable garden, a house cow and home-killed meat would have been essential for survival.[48]

In the mid to late 1920s, a pedestrian swing bridge was built 60 feet above the river with materials from a Dunedin cable car.

There was a garage on the town side of the river and a Model T Ford on the farm side so that if the river was in flood, goods could be carried across the swing bridge and taxied home in the car/truck. This second means of access must have been a great improvement.

Visitors regularly demolished the woolshed gates after fording the river, driving up the winding hill past the woolshed, then discovering their brakes were wet on the descent.

During World War 2, Archie's son Robert and his wife Amy milked a few cows and sent the cream to the local dairy factory.

This meant often lugging cans across the swing bridge, an awkward and difficult manoeuvre. I think they eventually decided it was more trouble that it was worth.

A low-level bridge was built further up the valley in the 1950s and this – as well as the swing bridge – became the access to Linburn for the next 26 years. Greta and Gerard Watson moved there in 1962.

Though an improvement on fording the river, the new bridge had its faults, the main one being that it was beneath the river almost as often as it was above

I recall a winter when we were flooded in 13 times. The other major drawback was that after flooding, a deep layer of silt would be left on the bridge approaches.

The then Cook County Council was supposed to remove it but I can only remember them doing this a very few times. Usually Gerard cleared it with the tractor blade, and there was a great knack of skidding up and down through this remaining silt, often quite exciting and sometimes needing several attempts.

I recall several times coming home and finding the bridge under water. Gerard maintained that if the low guard rails were visible, it was safe to drive over and we often did. But in retrospect, I wonder whether that was foolhardy.

In 1986, a new high-level bridge – built by Bill Ireland and co, courtesy of Cook County – replaced the low-level and swing bridges.

This made a tremendous change to our lives. Heavy rain no longer alarmed us. We could forget about leaving a car on the town side of the river in the middle of the night. Cook County provided an opening ceremony with a lavish afternoon tea and we were at last in the 20th century.

The council demolished the old bridge and the swing bridge. We were sorry to see them go for sentimental reasons – such as our son Tim and his friend riding a Shetland pony over it and my continual shouts at kids who crossed it twice daily to catch the school bus – don't run on the swing bridge – which they loved doing because it bounced scarily and made it harder for those behind to walk.

I remember many times waiting in the rain and dark in the shelter shed on the town side of the swing bridge for the kids to be taxied home, then crossing the bridge by torchlight and driving home in the trusty Landrover.

Major floods and slips, and siltation

It didn't take long from the time bush began to be cleared in the Waimata Valley until problems increased downstream – flooded land and homes, slumped riverbanks, damaged or destroyed bridges, harbour siltation and driftwood clogging the river, bridges and beaches.

Although this was occurring before most of the bush was cleared in the Waimata catchment, as attested by the significant January 1876 flood, the problems worsened from the 1880s. The clearing of hills would certainly have reduced the stability of the land and led to greater sedimentation of the river and streams leading into it.

Much research has gone into looking at sediment volumes generated and transported from the Waipaoa, Waiapu and Waimata rivers into the East Coast waters since the Last Glacial Maximum which ended about 18, 000 years ago. While there is good understanding of the timing and rate at which the Waipaoa River lowered (incised), in response to tectonic uplift since the Last Glacial Maximum, and of the sediment volumes discharged during each of 6 periods of river incision, this has not been completed for the Waimata River. As a first step in this process scientist Mike Marden had begun to reconstruct longitudinal profiles of the Waimata River based on the elevation of remnants of alluvial terrace that represent levels the river used to be at back in time but more funding was needed to complete the project. The profiles start at Bailies' Hiwiroa Station and come down to the coast.

Mike Marden says slope stability and high sediment generation rates are essentially a function of weak geology, steep slopes, high rainfall and the paucity of woody vegetation cover – all of which facilitate erosion in the Waimata valley, especially the development of earth flows and shallow landslides.

Uttings' Kowhai Station is earth flow country but these are not as common in the Waimata catchment as they are in the Waipaoa catchment. Earthflows are more widespread in the Waipaoa catchment, particularly in the vicinity of Mangatu Forest because the underlying geology consists of weak lithologies that have been severely tectonically sheared and are prone to weathering processes that weaken the bedrock. In addition, groundwater is able to make its way through the shattered rock to emerge as springs. Most earthflows characteristically have a spring at the top end of the flow which helps speed up the weathering process and promote downslope displacement of earthflow material.[49]

In contrast, for much of the Waimata catchment, the lithologies are younger, less deformed and stronger but in places have been rendered weaker by faulting and this is where earthflows are found.

Tectonic uplift and corresponding river incision also play their part in destabilising hillslopes. As the land is pushed up by tectonic processes, the rivers respond by downcutting (incising). Slopes adjacent to rivers become oversteepened as the river level lowers and in areas where hillslopes comprise lithologies that have no internal strength, they just fell apart. Slumps and earth flows are the most common forms of slope collapse as they constantly have to adjust to an ever-changing river level. That happens even under forest.

When Europeans settled the land, one of the first things they did was to clear the native forest. Today you can still see stumps of native trees that were cut some two metres above ground level. This was to avoid the fluted and often hockey-stick shape at their base. The deformed bases were a result of trees growing on slopes that during the early stages of tree growth were gradually moving

downslope. Eventually, as the trees matured, they were able to stabilise the slope and thereafter the trees were able to grow straight.

There is conclusive evidence to show that forests slow down the rate of earth flow displacement. However, when there has been rainfall over a long period and the soils become very wet, a forest cover is not always able to prevent slopes from failing. A mature forest cover can at best slow the rate and amount of downslope displacement, particularly of earthflows, and thus reduce the amount of sediment delivered to river channels. These forms of slope adjustment have gone on under an indigenous forest cover for tens of thousands of years. But ever since Europeans cleared this forest, the rate and extent of earthflow displacement has accelerated, as has the amount of sediment delivered to river channels.

An enormous rush of water down the Taruheru and Waimata in January 1876, deposited large quantities of silt along either bank, under Captain Read's new wharf, the ferry jetty, and for some distance along the shore, and caused landslips along the edge of the footpath. The outer piles of Captain Read's new wharf, a great part of the jetty on the town side of the river, and the whole of the jetty on the opposite side were carried away. Masses of debris played against the side of the recently erected footbridge across the Waikanae Stream, carrying away about half the structure, and damaging the remaining.[50]

Average annual rainfall varies from the bottom to the top of the catchment, with mean value being about 1500mm.[51]

The 11 March 1880 flood in the Waimata River rose within a foot of the even heavier flood of the previous winter, bringing down great quantities of driftwood and some heavy logs of totara and other woods. The Poverty Bay Herald newspaper reported:

Owing to the southerly wind blowing, the timber set towards the opposite bank of the river, the natives were busily engaged catching as much of the wood as they could manage, and must have caught enough to last them through the winter. [52]

The beach from the eastern bank of the river towards Tuamotu was strewn with hundreds of tons of wood while little, if any, was left on the Waikanae side. Slips were frequent, the Waimata riverside road “again being blocked by slips” in 1885.[53]

Writing to the Poverty Bay Herald in 1892, engineer and surveyor Alfred Forde Matthews said:

In traversing some 16 miles of the Waimata River, and in the subdivision survey of a large portion of the river watershed, carried out in both storm and sunshine, my observations of the river and its tributaries, have confirmed me in the opinion formed when the harbor works were first undertaken, that the amount of silt brought down by the river is insignificant and harmless. The water-shed formation being papa with clay subsoil ridicules the sand theory. The yellow discoloration of the water in floods is in a great part due to denuding the hills of bush, which action along the steep sides of some of the tributary streams causes slips, these slips consisting of stiff yellow clay, remain at the sides of the stream beds for years, the flood waters carrying off a sufficient quantity of clay atoms held in suspension to give the discoloration. [54]

A week later, Henry Dods of Linburn Station took issue with the engineer’s claims, saying the amount of silt brought down by flood water of the Waimata River was not insignificant.

This shows how worthless professional opinion often is, for no one with his eyes open can fail to see that the denudation of the hills is enormous. They are scarred with thousands of slips, and although most of these do not descend directly into the river, they are left as masses of loose soil on

the hill sides, and every flood carries a portion of them down to the. stream. Mr Matthews' experience of slips falling into streams and remaining at the side for years does not agree with my observation. I have seen slips of 6000 and 9000 cubic feet slide from level ground into the river, and three-fourths pass down the stream before the flood which caused them abated, I have also seen 6000 cubic feet slip into a small creek, and every vestige of it disappear in 24 hours. I could not attempt to verify Mr Ross' figures, but it is safe to assert that the quantity of silt carried down by every big flood is enormous. If anyone takes sufficient interest in the subject to wish to see for himself, I shall be glad to give him ocular demonstration any day.[55]

In 1892, engineer Napier Bell advised Gisborne Harbour Board to separate the harbour from the river. Others subsequently continued the message. Bell estimated 2.47 million cubic metres of silt came down the Waimata in 24 hours of flood. Although there was an outcry of disbelief about these figures at the time, East Cape Catchment Board officials in 1984 thought them to be within reasonable bounds.[56]

The Editor of the Poverty Bay Herald wrote in 1892:

With such an overwhelming enemy in the rear, no one should dream of harbour building anywhere near the mouth of the river.[57]

The hubbub died down as the pragmatists pointed out that whatever the quantity of silt, the dredging had to be done.

The flood of 18 and 19 June 1894 caused "previously unseen destruction" in the Waimata.[58] Water descended like a tidal wave on the low-lying portion of Partridge's Kahui property and flooded two houses after a substantial slip on Linburn gave way, having earlier temporarily blocked the river and causing it to back up to beyond the store. The road between Kahui and Te Pahi was completely blocked by slips and approaches to two river crossings were silted up level with the top of the river banks. The owners of a Maori whare, carried away from the high ground near No. 8 crossing, got out just in time but were holed up for more than two days without food in an old shed they took refuge in.

Driftwood and logs were piled above the big bridge between Kenway Bros and Howard Kenway's.

Slips of considerable extent bear witness to the enormous quantity of water which poured down the hill sides. Messrs Richardson Bros' swing bridge, which was several feet above the last big flood, was swept away.[59]

In early April 1902, the river rose suddenly and the floodwaters descended in "a great bank of boiling, bubbling turmoil, five feet high".[60]

Returning from his honeymoon trip, William Young must have wondered whether the gods were against the union when a wall of water and a jibbing horse forced him and his wife to jump clear from their buggy, borrowed from Howard Kenway. The water in the river had suddenly begun to rise. Young got out to release the horse's traces when he observed a wall of water coming down upon him. The flood waters engulfed the horses and vehicle, which disappeared and were never recovered. While there had been no rain to speak of in the locality, the Barkers' Glenroy Station experienced a phenomenal downpour, possibly the result of a water-spout.

Running parallel with the many adverse effects of flooding was the associated problem of large quantities of silt being brought down the Waimata River with every fresh or flood, an all-consuming concern for the Gisborne Harbour Board over several decades. Erosion had increased as back country was broken in and denuded of stabilising ground cover. Much of the extra soil getting into

the river and streams ended up on the floor of the harbour and at sea. The harbour board was forced to spend a lot of money on dredging.[61]

Growing trees and driftwood were causing problems too. In late 1905, the Waimata from the bend below the island to the Hole-in-the-Wall had become, dangerously blocked with snags. Except on exceptionally big tides, pleasure boats found it almost impossible to navigate the river.[62]

While the port struggled with a downturn in trade at the onset of war in 1914, a series of floods in May 1916 proved of far greater consequence. These floods – on 1, 12, 13 May and 16, 17, 18 May 1916 – filled the harbour with silt and brought the river harbour to an end. The May 1916 floods and others later in the year reduced the channel depth from 4.9 metres to 1.2 metres.

The port was closed for lengthy periods as dredges *Maui* and *John Townley* emptied the harbour of tonnes of silt only to see it again silt up with the next flood.

Engineer William Ferguson reported on large slips in the Waimata in 1916:

In some places, the slips have been so large as to choke for a time the tributaries or even the main stream.[63]

He described the area up the river past Waikereru as part of his report into silting in the Turanganui River.

The Waimata River has a length of some 32 miles to the headwaters of the northern Makahakaha tributary, though in a direct line the distance is only some 16 miles. It drains an area of some 110 square miles and the hilltops in the watershed boundary rise to, in places, from 1000 to 1600 feet.

The surface of the country consists of little valley flats and the long and tortuous course of the river is due to the natural spurs of the hilly country. There is no hard rock visible and there is a remarkable absence of any extent of shingle or gravel in the river bed. The whole country is formed of what is known as 'papa' and unfortunately the papa is of an extremely soft and easily degraded variety. It is readily cut and moved by water and is composed of very fine particles.

The natural bush which covered a large portion of the land has been removed and the stumps of the trees have rotted away, leaving crevices into which the surface water easily penetrates. The soil being very fine and adhesive holds the water for a certain time and then breaks away on the hill sides, forming slips or slumps.

These slips vary from a few square feet to areas containing many acres, such as the slip that was pointed out to me on the Whataupoko roads as having been the largest that had occurred in the district. These slips though varying in extent are general throughout the area drained by the Waimata River and are each followed by a discharge of fine silt into the streams and the surface being broken the soil is easily moved by successive falls of rain.[64]

The rate at which sediment was deposited in the Turanganui soon began to outpace its removal by periodic floods.

Ferguson:

The grasses that have replaced the scrub and the native bush have not the same power to retain and utilise the moisture that the forest and its undergrowth had. It is generally accepted that the grass lands do not absorb and transform into vegetable growth as much of the rain as was utilised by the bush life. The trees and undergrowth (as well as the scrub where there was no bush) offered considerable obstruction to the flow off the country side of the rain that had fallen on it, so that the water that did flow off did so over a longer period and in a gentler manner with a much less erosive

action than at present. The water being retained in the forest vegetation there was a considerably larger portion evaporated than is the case at present. There is therefore not only a greater quantity of water to be moved off a given area than there used to be but it moves off much more quickly and has a corresponding increased cutting and transporting action.

The water not only holds large quantities of material in suspension but by its quick motion moves and rolls forward the larger particles until by attrition and through softening by water they become broken down to a state so fine as to be carried forward in suspension.[65]

The Waimata flood of early May 1916 saw the river rise to a higher extent than previously recorded.[66] The river rose 18 inches above the deck level of the Monowai Bridge, south of Waimata store and school. This bridge, later called Macdonalds Bridge, was also known as Savages Bridge.

Several previously unaffected paddocks were inundated and left with heavy deposits of silt once the floodwaters receded. Various small slips came down, and the approach to the bridge near Martin's on Uttings Road carried away. An exceptionally heavy quantity of driftwood and timber accompanying the flood was swept to the sea.

In November 1917, the harbour was silted up to a degree completely beyond previous records after heavy rain resulted in a fresh in the Waimata River. All the recent work undertaken at the entrance was filled up. The Maui has been engaged for a week shifting a shallow patch of two feet extending right across the river at the foot of the groyne.[67]

As well as listening to the advice of various engineers including William Ferguson and John McDonald, Gisborne Harbour Board invited ideas from the public to help resolve the harbour problem. One forwarded by Vincent Blake in 1917 was seriously considered. Blake suggested diverting the Waimata River – and its silt – from above the Hole-in-the-Wall at Gowerville, accessed by Darwin Road, into a canal, which would carry it across Kaiti to Wainui beach via the Wainui Stream.[68] This was not as unusual as it may first have appeared as, according to scientist Mike Marden, this was the path of the Waimata River tens of thousands of years ago.[69]

However, the idea was canned because of the prohibitive cost involved in acquiring land, wiping out the residential part of the valley and compensating owners of the 27 homes affected. [70] The adverse effect involved in transferring the silt problem to the pristine Wainui Beach did not seem to arise.

In 1920, a similar idea surfaced. Before the Waimata broke through the cliff at Gowerville, hence the naming of the Hole-in-the-wall, the old course of the Waimata had formerly traversed a long elbow through Mr McLean's property. The 1920 scheme was to divert the Waimata at the Hole-in-the-Wall, along the old riverbed – by then silted up to about 15 feet – through a short tunnel or cut through the neighbouring watershed, and then to the coast via the Hamanatua Stream at Okitu.[71] This never went ahead either.

Instead, the harbour board began work to separate the river from the harbour, diverting the Turanganui River to the west along Waikanae Beach by means of a diversion wall and creating a new mouth for the river.[72] An outer harbour then provided berthage for overseas ships

In May 1923, the harbour board reported enormous quantities of silt brought down into the Turanganui River after extremely heavy rains throughout the Gisborne district caused a strong fresh in the Waimata.

Large quantities of driftwood were carried down by the river, and some of this was deposited against the bridge and along the groynes. Soundings taken by the harbourmaster revealed the fact

that heavy shoaling had taken place in the river, the heaviest deposits being at the entrance to the harbour. Here, it was found that silt to a depth of from 2ft 6in to 3ft had been deposited, leaving only a depth of 2ft 6in of water on the bar at low water. It is essential that the channel be dredged out as soon as possible, and it is the intention of the Harbour Board authorities to put the John Townley *to this work as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, so shallow is the river, that for a start at any rate, the dredge can only work for a few hours near the top of the tide. Nevertheless, the opinion was expressed by the harbourmaster that they should have the channel back to something like normal in about three or four days' time.*[73]

Dredging for the harbour began in 1925 and with two vessels working, real progress was made in 1926. Land was acquired for the development including, by early 1928, the site of Te Poho o Rawiri Marae, a sale the marae resisted in the Native Land Court. A new marae was established on the corner of Ranfurly Street and Queens Drive in 1929 with the dining hall and meeting house built the following year. The new harbour was completed by the end of 1931.[74]

Taking bush off the catchment made floods higher with the same rainfall. Separating the harbour and river had the same effect. The diversion cut controls the volume of water going up and down, currents are weaker.

River engineer Dave Peacock says the 1997 tidal prism – the amount of water stored between the mean low and mean high tide – was half that of 1912.

The cut controls the volume of water going up the river and therefore controls flood levels. It probably controls the river up to about Anzac Park.

The cut is confining. The Turanganui used to flow through the harbour with a bigger cross-section but now it's more constrained at the mouth.[75]

Meanwhile, extreme rainfall and flooding continued to cause problems in the 1910s. A raging storm in March 1918 led to the Waimata overflowing its banks in parts and increasing in velocity, bringing down a great deal of driftwood. Men were employed on the Kaiti bridge to remove the debris.[76]

Two years later, in March 1920, the Waimata ran heavily silt-laden and carrying a quantity of driftwood after another fresh.[77]

The year 1924 (or possibly 1926) brought a big drought. The river stopped flowing leaving only a series of big pools.[78]

Two bridges and a wool shed were carried away in July 1927 after a cloudburst in the valley that saw the river rise 35 feet at Savage's, 20 miles from Gisborne.[79] Drover Jack Robb's house was washed from its foundations and wrecked; stock were lost. The bridge below the store (Savages, Macdonalds or Monowai) was washed away and rebuilt as a suspension bridge. A composite girder bridge was built in its place in 1959.[80]

In the 1927 flood, the steel superstructure of Kenway's Bridge – the largest bridge on the Gisborne-Waimata Road – was swept off its piles.[81] Water lapped the bridge deck in the September 1930 flood and the bridge was raised five and a half feet. The current bridge was built in 1969.

Farmers who have spent many years in the district declare the flood to be the highest within memory. Land was submerged that had not previously been covered by water. At Thomas Holden's property, the river rose to 30 feet above normal and fences and other structures were damaged. The suspension bridge crossing the river was completely covered and the decking washed away, the

bridge being badly twisted and severely damaged. The occupants of a small whare on the bank of the river escaped shortly before water washed the edge of the roof. [82]

The following March, a fresh in the upper reaches of the Waimata submerged the low-level bridge on the Waimata Valley Road, built as a temporary substitute for the steel bridge swept away in July 1927, to a depth of several feet.

The New Zealand Herald reported:

Residents on the far side of the bridge suffered a mild shortage of perishable provisions until a native, stripping to the buff, waded through the river with a package of bread balanced on his head. The force of the water, pouring across the sunken bridge, made the Maori's voluntary task difficult and slightly dangerous. [83]

In May 1929, a huge slip completely blocked the river near Thomas Holden's Rimuroa homestead on the Riverside Road and carried away about six chains of the road and seven acres of land.[84]

The flooded stream rose over the debris brought down into its bed and carried away by degrees until the whole course was clear again. The clearing of the course occupied only a little time. The road between Rimuroa and the town has disappeared for a distance of some chains.

It wasn't all bad news. The September 1930 flood was described as beneficial as it substantially increased the depth of the harbour diversion channel and width. At no point was it less than three feet at low tide.

If the conditions continue … it will be possible for not only the small fishing boats and punts, but also for the meat barges to negotiate the channel in the cut, and so avoid the necessity of using the barge gate route through the main shipping channel. The fresh on Saturday was the first, of any great volume recorded since the sealing of the gap in the training wall.

Depths ranged up to nine near the old slip location, and 15 feet at the bend of the cut opposite the Gisborne Sheepfarmers' wool store. The banks that formerly confined the channel on the eastern side had been swept away.

The new development is regarded as highly beneficial, as, apart from the possibility of using the diversion channel for craft of light draught, the increase in depth there will facilitate the discharge of any subsequent flood waters which may come down the Waimata River.[85]

But the harbour development did not solve the problem of soil being washed into the river upstream during regular floods, or damage to bridges and their approaches.[86] Martins Bridge on Moncks corner on Uttings was washed away in 1938 and later replaced with a concrete bridge.[87]

In March 1944, flood waters covering thousands of acres of flat land in the worst flood since 1916 left a trail of damage including loss of production because of deep silting and destruction of farm crops.

The Auckland Star reported:

Running a "banker" in its higher reaches, the Waimata River stripped many trees from points along its course, where erosion occurred. A large number of these trees have been carried down to Turanganui and a proportion of them became jammed in the piers of the William Pettie Bridge. This bridge, which links Rutene Road with the lower Ormond Road, is a wooden structure about 27 years old, and is mounted on piers comprising groups of wooden piles. One of these piers has been pushed out of alignment by the flood waters, and the fast increasing blockage of trees and smaller debris.[88]

Waikereru and Mangatuna owner John Hegarty said the 1948 flood which inundated the Poverty Bay Flats and led to loss of life was one of the worst in his memory for Waimata River, “a real humdinger”.

We didn’t know about all the damage on the flats because there was no power. We couldn’t get out for a month.

After a wet spell in mid-1955, big slips – some involving millions of cubic yards of earth – cut road and rail communications. One of the biggest was three miles from Gisborne on Riverside Road, where over a quarter-mile of roadway giving access to a dozen families was completely destroyed.

A small lake was formed after tons of earth left the cliff at the top of the hillside and formed a dam in the river. The river backed up and flooded the flats but the weight of water soon cut a new channel. Acres of country near this point were riven by deep crevasses.

D Sargent and his new Studebaker taxi had a narrow escape when in the dark he drove on to the affected portion of road as it was slipping downhill. He had to back hurriedly uphill to safety. A section of the Esplanade in the city also began moving into the river.[89]

Terry Creswell recalled that his father Bob, of Motukea[90], had to ride his horse up and down to the farm for several weeks after the slip.

John Hegarty was waiting for the joinery to finish their house at Waikereru.

The council planned to open up Cave Road through to Matokitoki to enable residents north of the slip to get out to Gisborne. But his uncle Ronald Holden used his bulldozer to push through the slip and then laid coke or coal waste to form the road.

The slip was planted with silver poplars and other trees to stabilise the land.

It wasn’t the first or the last time the road would be blocked. It had been blocked in 1948, when the flood was contained within the river bed and didn’t spill over the paddocks, and again after Cyclone Bola in 1988, when the water came right over the banks.

In October 1958, just months after the Poverty Bay Catchment Board approved a subsidy for erosion control on the Waimata River at the upriver end of the Esplanade[91], the collapse of a hillside endangered former All Black Richard (Tiny) White’s Waimiro Station and neighbouring properties with flooding.[92]

The hillside, which had been suspect for some years, “collapsed with an ominous roar” into the bed of the Waimata at about 7.30am, entirely blocking the upper reaches of the river. The river backed up to some 25 feet above normal level, while the lower river bed was virtually dry. Voluntary workers and contractors cleared a temporary relief channel to carry the banked-up water away.

A decade later it was déjà vu on a large scale at Mr Monck's property when on 31 July 1968 one of the largest slips in the region blocked the Mangaorangi Stream, a tributary of the Waimata River, 26 miles north of Gisborne and north of Waimiro.[93]

The slip was nearly 2000 feet long, 600 feet high and covered 22 acres, with an estimated three million cubic yards of material. It completely blocked the stream bed for about 10 chains to a height of 67 feet. Behind the slip, a lake of three and a half miles formed, the amount of water in it estimated to have exceeded that in the City Council waterworks Mangapoike reservoir. The banked-up water was expected to release slowly as it overflowed and cuts a channel through the debris.

Hugh Barton, who lived near the store from about 1948, remembered 1948 and 1977 floods as the largest. He recalled annual occurrence of "bankfull" floods. He said 125mm in 24 hours was regular rainfall in the area.[94]

Poverty Bay Catchment Board chief engineer Duff Jones described the May 1971 flood levels in the upper reaches as only three to four feet lower than May 1948 levels.

The flood water picked up cut trees from one or more properties and these need not have been near a river bank. The sources of the trees which jammed against the Gladstone Road bridge is not known.[95]

The Waimata River rose to unprecedented levels after thunderstorms hit the coastline on 21 June 1977.[96] Living at Goodwins Road at the time, Terry Creswell recalled the incredibly huge raindrops.

I went down to the river mid-afternoon and the rails of Goodwins Bridge were just a hump in the water.[97]

In Cyclone Bola, March 1988, the river went over the deck. (Bruce Holden has photos of this)

Creswell took over Motukeo, further upstream, about a week later. Fences were broken and not one paddock was stock-proof.

Residents in Marian Drive and Graham Road were hard hit, with a one-storeyed Graham Road house flooded up past its windowsills and others' basements flooded. Grant Road was isolated by a slip. Flood damage put five pump stations out of action, which in turn led to sewage overflows on to properties and into the Waimata River.[98]

John Hegarty said he and his family were living at Mangatuna, at the top end of Cave Road, in 1977.

We had a limited cloudburst. I took the kids to school but, realising that was stupid, brought them home again. It was raining like hell – we had 15 inches in eight hours and was very localised. The nearby Mander estate only got three inches. The bridge to our house went and instead of a 30 feet gap, we had a 50 feet gap.

The river came up sky high. We had to buy a landrover. We had problems but nothing like the Mangatu. My grandfather's brother Andrew had taken up the Dome Station in 1901 and had two 21 year leases. They had to shift the woolshed and house a few times.

Hegarty used old cars as fill before building another bridge across.[99]

Waikereru's annual rainfall was about 65 inches compared to 28 inches in town, yet the two were only seven miles apart in a plane.

Considering the steepness of the country and compared to the Mangatu, there was very little erosion except after the 1977 flood. There were a lot of slips then. They grassed it over and it all patched up after 12 months and less than a quarter of the damage was visible. We never had any of those great big slumps.

Phil and Lee Creswell lived at Te Matai on the junction to Uttings Road in the 1960s.

We created a lot of debris dams, which worked, and catchment board open planting of poplars and willows. There were slips and slumps along the river. We took precautions, planting on hills and down by the river and a lot of streams coming into the river. Willows grow quickly so there was a noticeable change. We planted a lot of willows, which we could chop and feed to cattle.

I think it made quite a difference.

He didn't think the property had got any worse over the years. They still visit their friends, the Uttings who continue planting regimes.

We could see something needed to be done before it got any worse. Farmers do look after their land and there are so many good varieties of willows now. [100]

Lee Creswell remembered the river being stony up to Uttings, always fairly clean, never silty. The river would come up quickly and go down quickly. It was easy to drive back and forwards across the river in certain places.

River changes affected river traditional crossings. Bill King recalled crossing the river by horse just below Tim Hegartys's woolshed at Pittars in 1974.

In the last eight to 10 years, the river has changed so much that you cannot ride across anywhere.

It's all silted up. They sprayed the willows about 1994-95 and it let all the silt go, something changed. With floods, edges are sloughed out and the river made deeper. You can't ride across as much as used to be able to.

But Terry Creswell said that while some crossings had become impassable, others had become available.

The 26 July 1985 Ngatapa flood, as it was dubbed, also hit the Waimata hard. In the city, water two metres deep flowed through suburbs after the Waimata and the Taruheru rivers overflowed. Then for three days from 7 March 1988, Cyclone Bola dumped unrelenting rain on the region.

Penny and Peter Hoogerbrug had only been living at Rimunui for about 18 months.

The river came right up. Our house was almost on an island although we still had access up the driveway to Riverside Road. We had just planted new apple trees and kiwifruit. Metres-high drifts of silt were left behind. Peter pushed them out to form a stopbank to protect the orchard. The river came on to the terrace of the Girls Brigade hut but has never come that high again.[101]

She says the river is slowly getting wider.

With heavy rain, the farm bridge down from the Girls Brigade hut goes under water probably six times a year. Water comes to the bottom of the terrace where it went over in Bola.

The July 2009 flood also brought enormous volumes of water down the river.

The river used to be choked up with trees but after Bola, the council realised the trees were hindering the flow. They sprayed and the river is now devoid of vegetation down to the edge. It's a lot clearer and floods don't come up so high. Although during the September 2015 rain, when we had 300 millimetres in 24 hours, the river came up the closest, though not as high, it's been since Bola.

Bruce Holden believes this spraying may have caused banks to cave in.

There used to be a lot of willows. Now there is a lot of bank erosion. We had a big fresh about three years ago and the bank collapsed. I think they should have left the willows on the sharp corners. There's no trees to hold the banks up now.[102]

Penny's father Colin Williams, after selling Pakihiroa near Ruatoria, had bought the 3000-acre Rimunui from Tom Holden's son Brian in 1985. This was part of the original 7000 acre Rimuroa, which was in heavy bush when Thomas Holden bought the property in 1880. Rimuroa stretched from the Waimata River to within a few miles of the Pouawa and Okitu coast, and south to Shelley and Darwin roads.

Thomas Holden was one of eight children to Lancashire emigrants Jonathan and Ann Holden who settled at Tikokino in the 1850s. The family gradually developed extensive land-holdings in Hawke's

Bay, Dannevirke and the Manawatu Gorge. A further 500 acres was bought in Gisborne at Gray's Bush.

While one brother Jonathan stayed on the family's Springvale Station, Tikokino, Thomas Holden moved to Gisborne. His Rimuroa homestead was on Riverside Road, between Goodwin and Cave roads, near what was called Monkey Town. The homestead remains.

Thomas and his wife Lizzie, who he married in 1895, had six children including Pat, Lorna, Ronald and Tom. In 1958, the 7000 acre Rimuroa property was split with 1000 acres (the Christopher Road, Whangara end of the property) going to Pat; and 3000 acres each to Tom and Ronald.

Eldest son Dolby had earlier been shown the door after getting together with "the wrong woman". He shifted to around Dannevirke and ended up gaining the Holdens' Springvale property.

Tom's son Brian sold his 3000 acre Rimunui property to Angus breeder Colin Williams in 1985.

Ronald's four sons Richard, Roger, Bruce and Jim bought him out of his 3000 acres in 1974 and split the farm between them. Bruce then bought some of his uncle's and brothers' properties to build his Ngahiwi farm from 700 to 2000 acres.

Sited at the top of the ridge between the Waimata and Pouawa catchments, Ngahiwi is the halfway point of the original Rimuroa property. All of Ngahiwi is in the Pouawa catchment; Rimunui in the Waimata.

I'm the only Holden left here now.[103]

Richard and Pam Utting, of Kowhai Station in the upper Waimata Valley, said that in the Ngatapa flood, a number of six-year-old pine trees on Mangarara at the top of the catchment were washed down river, blocking their gates and flooding their property.

Richard Utting:

We learned our lesson. Now we open up the cattle yards and let any floodwaters through. Floodwaters went under our cottage, closer than our house to the river, three times – the Ngatapa flood of 1985, Bola and September 2015. It also went through in about 1930s – before my time. [104]

Only gates, no bridges or cattle stops, were in place in 1954 when George and Nancy Utting and children Richard – then at intermediate school – Mervyn and Janice moved to Kowhai from Teesdale Station on the West Ho Road, Tolaga Bay.

George's father Thomas Utting had bought the front of two blocks comprising Kowhai Station in 1923, the four blocks of Kowhai Estate having been broken up in October 1920, and the back block in 1928. Managers ran the property from the time of purchase until George took over in 1954. In time, Richard and Merv managed the farm for their parents until they took over as a partnership in 1979.

Original owners Victor Lardelli and Malcolm Strachan bought the land comprising Kowhai Estate from the NZ Native Land Settlement Company Ltd on 17 September 1884. Strachan bought out Lardelli, and Section 20 from Robert Edgar Stevens, in 1906.

Richard Utting:

In the 1950s, children rode to Waimata School. There were three river crossings and no bridges within the last mile coming into Kowhai. Most times after flooding, there was a job clearing the silt with shovels. In the winter, the cars were kept in a shed on the town side of the river crossings where it still stands today by Pat Watson's stock yards. People either rode a horse or walked around the hill on Otonga Station to and from the car. The next improvement was a TEA Ferguson tractor and trailer, then the land rover.

The Cook County Council's first attempt at access over the first river crossing from town was six by six foot culverts concreted together. After a while, floods rolled them over. Then they put a low level bridge on piles. In 1977 a concrete bridge was built. The stream coming out of Glenora had a second hand steel bridge first then in 1978 it was replaced by a concrete bridge.

The hill on the homeward side was badly eroding in 1954. There was one Lombardy poplar on a sharp knob which remains. The Poverty Bay Catchment Board put rock groynes and cables at the base in the river and tied trees to them, and planted the eroded hill in willows and poplars. After some years it had settled down and a road was put around it, providing an all-weather access. The Waimata road has deteriorated. We didn't have floods like we do now. We didn't get the build-up of debris.

In 2016, with the Uttings' woolshed across the river, the weather still had to be suitable for a truck to get in to pick up the wool.

The height of the river comes and goes. There's a lot of sediment. After Bola we had a big slip that dammed up the Makahakaha Stream. It took two years to get back to normal. The silt went to sea. We were blocked in for about a fortnight after Bola.

The slip put a stop to the long-held practice of cattle mobs being driven from the east coast through Uttings' Kowhai property to the Matawhero saleyards. A paper road with old timber culverts goes from Kowhai Station to Wharekiri Road, then Waiomoko or Panikau Road.

After the sale, some came this way with Waikato buyers putting them on the road after the sale and grazing them around the coast on different blocks.

Further up the river, Mat Bailie said a third of Hiwiroa went into the river with Cyclone Bola.

I came back two years afterwards and the land was seriously scarred. Every track, every fence went, gullies were going out. One paddock – with all our ewes – went in the river. It was horrific.[105]

Apparently the 1938 flood was horrific here, worse than Bola. Dad said it cut through the Uttings' shepherd's house and drowned the dogs.

We have significant rainfall here. In April 2014, we had 255mm in one morning. I had a big bluff come down and block the river. It cost $5000 to get it fixed.

The river is evolving all the time. It's unstable country but the willows hold it up. We have had major rain but haven't lost the land.

There haven't been dramatic changes with the river. Banks cut through different areas but the river hasn't changed a lot. The water is drinkable and pretty clean. After rain it turns to soup. It's violent when in flood. It comes up very quick, can be devastating. All the flood gates, cable wires are smashed. Animals drown. In the last major flood [September 2015] *we had two cattle hanging in the trees, numerous sheep dead.*

We get a lot of cattle dying, reaching over the riverbanks to eat trees and falling down a bluff – probably about five a year. In places we have 70-100 feet bluffs and a 200-foot canyon.

Mat was a third generation Bailie to run the farm. His grandfather Thomas and maternal uncle Hugh Hamilton started their Waimata experience at Maka Station in Mander Road, having come from the South Island's west coast. His father John was born on Maka.

Mat Bailie:

Thomas moved here to Hiwiroa in 1936 when Dad was seven. When Uncle Hugh left, my grandfather Thomas took over the farm. Dad was just 10 when he began to run the woolshed.

He told me a story about preparing a totara for fence posts. After months of work splitting the tree into battens and posts, a fire to boil the billy accidentally caught and the whole pile went up in smoke. The big stump is still there.

This farm changed dramatically when dad bought a D2 caterpillar crawler in 1958 and put tracks in on the farm. This made life so much easier. He could tow a trailer, fencing gear, build dams. The machine is still used. Before that there were no tracks, fencelines were crazy.

Dad was very bright. He learned to blow rock up and engineered a rock drill but didn't patent it. It drives water through the centre and blows sediment out. Council has one. He had a bigger bulldozer which he contracted out. That made more money for the farm than farming sometimes.

Bruce Holden said that he undertook a major planting programme on him Ngahiwi farm in 1977 and when Bola came along, he and other "conservationists" lost very little land.

Some farmers, who had done nothing about planting trees like we had, lost a heap of land and gained big payouts.

I could see a lot of gullies were starting to erode, scour out, and the Poverty Bay Catchment Board provided subsidies for us to plant – mainly Matsudana willows. It has helped the land. We plant poplars more now but there is not so much planting to do now.[106]

In 1980, he planted pines on some bad, northern faces – two 20 acre blocks. They were put back into pines after being harvested in about 2013.

Tsunami

Scientist Mike Marden watched with interest how the clarity of the Waimata River changed as a tsunami bore came up the river in February 2010, more than 12 hours after an earthquake in South America. Locally generated earthquakes and those generated by earthquakes in South America are known to affect the lowest reaches of the Waimata.

I watched a half-metre initial wave travelling at quite a pace, faster than walking, probably running pace, then the water level rose two metres, subsided, rose two metres, subsided and rose again. It was probably less than half an hour between the rise and fall and rise again.

Before the initial bore passed the water was clear but when it passed you could see the water churning as it brought up sediment from the bottom and the water turned quite turbid. You'd have been in trouble if you were in the river at the time.[107]

Fencing and riparian planting

Terry Creswell says the river certainly can look like liquid mud after storms but fencing off the riparian edges and planting suitable species was not simple, particularly "if you have to make a living out of your land".

It's difficult to fence off because of the terrain. You would have to carve off a lot of land and fence off what is a permanent water supply for the animals. [108]

Bill King, whose family sold 300 acres of their LongBush property to Jeremy and Dame Anne Salmond in the 1990s, concurred.

I fenced the riverbank to make it a secure boundary – stock was wandering – but it all slumped out. It's difficult to fence parallel to the river because it's not as stable. With the general move to riparian fencing, losing fences will be a common problem. In some places, you would have to

surrender tens to hundreds of acres. Any fence will be high maintenance because you are opposing the lay of the land. And if you have small amount of land, you are wary about giving it away.

Cutting bush would have altered the river but you still get massive slips in the bush too.[109]

Hiwiroa's Mat Bailie concurs.

There are 12 miles of river on our property. It's impossible to fence. We would walk away from the farm if we had to do that. The land is so unstable, especially around the river. How can we plant it when we have forestry smashing everything along the way down?[110]

For the past 20 years, Mat has planted between 400 to 1500 willows annually and three varieties of poplar at his own cost. He gained some from neighbour Richard Utting then grew his own nursery.

It's mainly willows. They are magic holders of the soil, and easy to plant. Silver poplars are meant to fall over and bind up the soil. I don't cut them back but will have to poison some trees because they are too close.

Richard Utting said many plantings were made at the end of the 1950s "because people couldn't walk around in the wintertime". His son Roger now manages the property and continues to plant annually. Gullies and slips are all planted. A hybrid poplar – half Lombardy half Crow's nest – is preferred.

Richard is not convinced about riparian plantings being of value.

If you get too much planting beside the river, it can hold the water back. With the flooding up here, if you had to fence it, and get it close, it would get wrecked every time it rained. It would be impossible to fence here. Debris gets caught and creates a log jam, then water comes further up the bank. [111]

In the September 2015 flood, Hikurangi forestry slash came down. It was surprising how big some of the logs they left. They are not harvesting at the moment but more is due to come later.

Gisborne-East Coast QEII representative Meg Gaddum believed fencing off the river from animals was pointless because of the weed problem that would escalate.

Fencing would just create a strip of weeds that animals like sheep and cattle could not access to keep down. We don't want to be spraying right next to the river. Sheep and cattle are doing a good job. We need to sort out our roads before we fence the rivers. Roads are full of weeds and will infect the river. The Waimata has shocking weeds such as Himalayan and Japanese honeysuckle, old man's beard, pampas, ivy and hypericum.[112]

John Hegarty said the riverbanks were all fenced off on his property but because there were so many good crossing places, they could wander anywhere.

Then tall fescue would grow up to four foot high. It carried a disease which rotted the feet of cattle – Fescue Foot – bullet was the only cure – the feet would literally rot off.

Terry Creswell says the river is always changing. An island below his Motukeo property, where the river ran on both sides, eventually filled up with silt and can now be driven across.

On average floodwaters go across the road in several places once a year.

There are a lot of dropouts into the river, some are silt slumpages. People feared the road was going to go between here and the Pittars at Waikereru. They do slump but then the silt builds up again. I've seen them come and go. Bitter willow poles have been planted. The area affected is already building up.

John Hegarty:

The river at Waikereru, the banks were silty but you never got dirty going in for a swim. You could walk on the papa stones. It was always pretty clear. We had a couple of good swimming places in Sawpit Flat. We had silt when there was a flush of the river.

The Waimata River was wide in all places, then the willow trees started to grow. When it floods, the banks would fill up with another half inch of silt and with trees. They cut down a lot of the willows and poplars and the banks and river are getting back to their original shape.

Penny Hoogerbrug of Rimunui Station, once part of the original Rimuroa block, said that in good weather the water was clear with silt and stone at the base. Smooth rocks and rock shelf lie beneath the rapids below their Girls Brigade Hut. The river water was successfully used for irrigating their Karakaroa orchard.

In late 2014, Gill Pittar of Waikereru and others in the vicinity said they had never seen the water so clear.

In 2016, Mat Bailie of Hiwiroa described the river in the upper reaches as having a stony bottom. He believed the name Waimata meant obsidian. This is reflected in Rongowhakaata's September 1991 deed of settlement which says the meaning relates to obsidian coloured waters, darkish in nature and colour.[113] Interestingly, only the section of Waimata from its confluence with Taruheru up to "the ranges of the sacred maunga Motukeo" are noted in the settlement as significant.

Mat has found fossils – including a shark's tooth, carbon dated as billions of years old – lime deposits, lime stalagnites and obsidian.

Gisborne District Council district conservator Trevor Freeman doubted the Waimata River's water was ever crystal clear.

There will always be a high sediment loading with soft rock. The Waimata's banks – once U-shaped – are now V-shaped. The sides are continually receiving sediment and periodically fall in. That's the nature of the riparians.

Planting in natives just won't work. Along the side of Cave and Goodwin roads, there is very little manuka, it can't grow long enough before it falls in, grows and falls in.

Mostly willows and poplars are planted, but then they get too big and fall in and we end up with all this wood falling in and coming down river and arriving on Waikanae and Midway beaches. It's largely poplar and willow. It's not radiata pine, not forestry slash. [114]

Fencing the riparians is a problem because the hills are falling in all the time, unless you have river flats, you can't go across hill country because fences don't last.

In the urban environment (where a lot of property is fenced off – such as Grant Road, Owen Road – banks are highly vegetated but the river still comes up, drops silt and gets too heavy and then falls in. It's an intermittent phenomenon.

Traditionally, the catchment board and councils didn't do much work in the Waimata for erosion control.

Erosion-prone patches are in the upper reaches of the river at Uttings and Bailies but nothing like in the same league as Mangatu or Waipaoa.

Greta Watson, who lived at Linburn for 40 years, said someone had the idea in the 1990s that willows and silver poplars planted and nurtured for years to hold the riverbanks were impeding the flow and should be removed.

This did not seem like a good idea to us and, in the event, we lost a chunk of land and fencing including our summer "spud patch". This left the potatoes hanging like bunches of grapes where the bank had washed away. They were easy to harvest but we were not altogether pleased.[115]

Willows and poplars along the river system were generally planted for erosion control.

The council sees man-made and natural debris-catchers, and setback requirements, as part of the long-term solution for preventing and reducing deposits in the river. Alternative species plantings at the bottom of pine-planted valleys would remain unharvested to act as debris-catchers.

Pine forests were originally planted on what had been farmland and trees were planted everywhere.

A lot of land has reverted to become bush again. Farmers have done it because they realise it's not great farming land.

Planting manuka is gaining increasing favour because of its potential for top-shelf honey production, the East Coast Forestry Project having already received applications for planting the crop. Beekeepers are also interested managing manuka cover so it remains in manuka, and doesn't revert to kanuka and bush. This also removes the need to clear fell.

Trevor Freeman:

Forestry has cut down the erosion in the area. It has been effective. Steep country was prone to slips in major storms but there is still a lot of sediment on river banks. Sediment is in the bottom of the valleys, ready to move.

I think the Waimata is gradually improving. Pine planting has helped. People are more aware.

The facts that the use of the catchment for farming has declined, pines have been established and areas have been allowed to revert to bush have all positively affected the river. It might be too slow for people, but it's happening. But the base-level sediment issue – it's hard to see that going completely.

People still swim in it, jump off the bridge into it and if we didn't have the rivers feeding into the bay, we wouldn't have the sandy beaches we have.

After rain, Waimata's swimming water quality is not great. But as a district river, the Waimata is neither very bad [like the Mangatu or Waipaoa] nor very good [like the Motu].

Scientist Mike Marden said riparian planting where fencing is a prerequisite was difficult and simply not feasible in deeply dissected hillcountry where there were many stream channels in close proximity. With river sections being quite diverse in their steepness, soil cover and type of substrate, different riverbank management strategies would be needed for different reaches.

No one rule fits every stream. It's pointless putting an expensive fence to protect riparian plantings where it is likely that the plantings will be lost and the fence destroyed during floods so one needs to have local knowledge on the maximum flood height of past events. You could put a hot wire perhaps but it's little point planting there.[116] *Not every reach of a river requires fencing and planting nor is a fixed setback distance for fencing appropriate.*

He said one of the problems with poplars and willows planted in the 1960s for stream and river bank protection was that they were planted with good intent but were never managed, and hence became too big and unwieldy. They were a major component of the woody debris deposited on the local beaches in the 2015 storm/flood event.

They may have done the job initially but have subsequently become a problem. An alternative solution is to let the river do what it will or look at indigenous species such as manuka to provide bank stabilisation.

It's a species that grows in that environment. It doesn't grow big and it doesn't matter as much if it falls over. It might regenerate or act as a nurse crop encouraging other indigenous species to establish. I don't know if you would plant it in an area you know would flood. But above the flood level with a rising bank, manuka has potential. You'd have to find a logical fence line to keep stock out.

Waimata riverbanks are a problem, he said.

During a flood event when the water level remains high for long periods, the alluvial material in banks becomes saturated. The pores between the soil particles fill up with water. When the water recedes, you get drawdown that is the bank material becomes so heavy, laden with water, it collapses in the form of a rotational failure. Most failures of this type are quite deep and quite often are deeper than the roots of the covering vegetation so these bank collapses taking the vegetation with it.

If there are trees on the banks, they may topple or lean. Some will end up in the river. You can see that just about everywhere in the Waimata except in the lower reaches where there are engineered protection works.

You can see recently failed drawdown bank collapsed structures from the second bridge on Manders Road. This process can introduce a lot of sediment into the river system.

Another process capable of supplying large amounts of sediment to the Waimata River can be seen in the sharp river bends upstream of Goodwins Bridge. Here, the river has undercut the hillside causing it to collapse with much of the sediment entering the Waimata River.

Clearing trees from river

Willows, poplars and alders growing beside the river brought problems including restricting the channel, raising flood levels, blocking bridges with broken branches and trees, and affecting road communications.

By 1952, when willows were established throughout the length of the Waimata, river channel restriction was not too serious from the Waimata Valley Road Bridge down to the Hole-in-the-Wall. But restriction was a problem from the bridge upstream to the suspension bridge near Savages, with flooding affecting limited areas of the flats and short sections of the road.

Alders were scattered from the Hole-in-the-Wall to Utting's property in the upper reaches where parent trees grew on the riverbank and shed seed into the water to land at other riverbank sites. [117]

Most of the alder seed-producing trees were growing on the river section between Otonga Station to the Utting homestead, an area the Poverty Bay Catchment Board spent money on clearing the following year.[118]

The problem continued, the board's soil conservator commenting in 1972 that "the removal of willows would no doubt increase the velocity of the river during high flows, enabling faster passage of flood waters and reduce the length of time during which road could be under water. A cleared channel would reduce flood heights".[119]

In 1974, after lengthy correspondence on the same issue, Monowai Station's Victor Savage wrote to the catchment board drawing attention to residents' mounting concern at the increase in willow and poplar growth over three miles upstream of Kenway's Bridge.

This choking of the waterway causes severe flooding several times each year, isolating the only practical access to some 64 square miles of productive hillcountry farmland.[120]

Settlers requested an early inspection and said they were prepared to have the affected area by the river formed into a special rating area and to have the area classified for the purpose of assessing their respective contributions towards local share of the costs.

Bill King:

Apparently the Waimata has the highest rate in the area of high and low. It has a big drainage and comes up very high and very quickly.

I believe the river was more U-shaped back in 1928, rather than the V-shape it is now. The sides banked in with sediment from erosion I guess. That's probably what's washing out now. It filled up with silt in Bola and now is washing out again.

The willows died and that's when you could see the banks started to let go.

If water goes quickly, the area doesn't flood but if trees are holding it up, it does flood.

River engineer Dave Peacock agrees. Willows have a good root structure but tend to choke small streams.

When willows are cleared, banks fall down and the river widens substantially. It's good having willows on sharp bends, and managing them well, not allowing them to get too big where they would encroach too much. If they get too big, they can fall over and block the river.

Willow obstructions and the huge amount of trees that come down has always been a problem. We can't do much on private properties. It costs a lot of money for catchment board or council to do much.[121]

While working at Gisborne District Council, Peacock initiated a slope stability zone in the Tukura Road to Owen Road area of the Waimata troubled by slumps in the 1990s.

A big slump came down in 1991. It was a wet winter with consistent rainfall and the banks caved in and slipped away.

We decided to put in a slope stability zone and put all sorts of restrictions on it to warn people away from getting too close. You couldn't build on it.

Remaining bush

Many properties within the Waimata catchment intentionally retained small areas of bush, some of which were covenanted under the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust. Yet some remnant bush stands are merely the result of farmers not clearing their properties' southern side, which never saw the sun. In 2014, covenanted blocks totalled 165 hectares (about 400 acres) within 1 km of the river and 187ha (462 acres) within the whole catchment.[122]

Former Waikereru owner John Hegarty:

When bush was felled, every paddock was left with four to five acres of bush [probably out of 200-300 acres], especially the steeper bits.

On the property behind what in 2014 was the Pittars stands one of the biggest kahikatea in the country, at one time described as reaching 49 metres, being over 1000 years old with its base covering half a tennis court.[123]

The riverside Donners Bush, south of what is known as LongBush, came under the control of a Cook County Council domain board in August 1939. Later, Donners Bush came under the control of the Waihirere and Gray's Bush Domain Board.

In about 1970, the board reported that Donners Bush was subject to frequent flooding and, due to the steep gradient in that river section, to floodwaters travelling with considerable velocity. Stock had access from the road and from across the river. A fenceline along the river was flattened after each minor flood. Despite being managed by the domain board, Donners Bush was "not particularly attractive", and – apart from a few old willows and poplars, and some tall fescue – was bare. [124]

People had free access to Donners and the privately owned Long Bush, provided plants were not taken. Long Bush was also unfenced with practically the whole area covered in native bush. But little regeneration was taking place because of its accessibility to cattle.

At that time, Cook County was keen to dispose of Donners Bush and instead acquire Long Bush (16 acres?) as a recreational reserve.

Owner John Hegarty was happy for people to use the reserve but did not want it going into council or domain board control.

Long Bush was always exceptional. It was reported to be the best example of coastal trees – two miles long and 50-60 yards wide on one side of the road.

I did my best to maintain it but neighbours were always putting their cattle in. It wasn't fenced because it was used by city folk who were under the impression it was a public property.

There could be twenty to thirty cars there at one time with people having picnics. If people camped there, I always made sure they had a dunny.

In the 1930s, not many people had cars. They ran buses there, particularly if it was windy at the beach. I was only too pleased to let them go. Council wanted me to give it to them, I said no way, if I owned it, I could be the policeman.

In 1999, Jeremy and Anne Salmond bought 300 acres including Long Bush. The bush was fenced off and public access maintained.

Outdoorsman Dave Hughes, who had an intimate knowledge of the river and Long Bush, was saddened by the way patches of bush diminished because of stock then slowly died.

It's a fault of New Zealand. We have to make money available for farmers to fence it off. The QEII fund has a lot of restrictions. Some farmers keep patches of bush but then use it for summer foraging for their animals.[125]

He was thrilled to see supplejack growing again at Long Bush.

We used to cut supplejack there and make good bows. But it disappeared when the stock grazed there.

In 2010, the Hoogerbrugs put 30ha of Rimunui – across the river from the Salmonds – into QE2 covenant, fencing the cattle out. Steve Sawyer described it as one of the best examples of coastal hardwood trees he had seen – tawa, kohekohe, puriri, titoki, cabbage trees and kahikatea.[126] They fenced off a similar-sized block near the boundary with Bruce Holden's Ngahiwi.

Bruce Holden said his grandfather Thomas Holden left a lot of patches of bush on Rimuroa during its clearance. Today, Ngahiwi has about 80 acres of original bush, predominantly kohekohe, rimu, rewarewa and puriri. None is under a QE2 convenant.

They learned their lesson from farming in Hawke's Bay, where the family cut just about every tree off the land.

The trees are not fenced off. They are very good for sheltering stock and I have found the trees are not suffering.

The way we farm here, with the steepness of the country, you can't farm that intensively, it's not like dairying.

I believe you have to safeguard the land for future generations. I like to think we can leave it in a better state than when we started.[127]

About three quarters of Richard and Pam Utting's 40 acres of Kowhai Station bush is fenced off but not under a QE2 covenant. The bush was there well before his grandfather Thomas Utting bought the property.

It's all regenerated, containing puriri, kohekohe, totara, white pine, supplejack, rewarewa, tawa, rimu.

Mat Bailie wasn't interested in putting any of his Hiwiroa bush with the QE2 trust.

I cannot fence it. It's too rugged. It would cost a fortune.

Of his total 960ha, about 500ha is regenerating scrub and bush.

It has been left because we are not allowed to cut it. It's over 70 years old and we can't touch it. It was clear in the 1930s but has regenerated and now we don't want to cut it. In the bush are species like the New Zealand native bat and New Zealand falcon. Whitehead live in there by the hundreds. It's a haven for birds.

Forestry

The mere mention of forestry to people living alongside the Waimata River is enough to arouse a barrage of negative comments about the industry's effects.

Citing social, environmental and economic effects, their opposition ranges from slash coming down the river in times of heavy rain to battered banks, fences, flood gates, trees and wildlife. They also talk of the proliferation of wilding pines, the decline of community; ruined, dangerous roads; the influx of wild pigs and deer, and health problems.

While it has been close to a decade since Hikurangi Forest Farms (HFF) harvested a top-of-the-catchment block at Mangarara above Bailies' Hiwiroa Station and built roads, farmer Mat Bailie says there are still log jams and pine logs coming down the river, and sediment build-up in 2016.

Now we get logs come down that ring-bark the willows I am trying to grow on the rivers. They have taken out the flood gates, which are 10-12 metres long. This is not slash; it's cut-off pieces. Trees broken in half, the ends left behind. It happens every time there's a good flood. The pinecones end up on the beach. You couldn't walk a metre without tripping over something that's pine. [128]

When they took the trees out, the river turned to soup when it rained. It was no different in height but you couldn't swim in it. All the roading was bashed about.

A lot of eels are being squashed by logs. They're beaten to death.

Forestry companies have 16ft roads, dragging trees, causing big lines in the dirt. That's meant to be illegal.

About two years ago, logs went down the Hokoroa Road – at a rate of about 60 trucks a day. The road turned to soup.

Forestry has also seen the number of pest species – deer, pig, possum, goat and stoats – escalate, the animals attracted by under-storey vegetation growing there.

You're not allowed to shoot in there. Some people release animals there.

I've been shooting 40 pigs a year that have come out of forestry. They rip up the paddocks like you wouldn't believe.

Pine pollen is at its worst in August and September. Our family is all on sinus sprays. The pollen wafts through the sky.

Hikurangi states that if forest neighbours are troubled by wild pigs damaging their pasture or predating on lambs, the company will help with control. [129]

The social and economic cost has been enormous, Mat says, with a massive reduction from 42 farms in the valley in 1981, when he was 10, to just eight or nine. And that's not counting the section from the city to the end of Riverside Road.

Now there's no school, no community. Some houses have been moved off the farms and some of those that remain have bums, no-gooders living in them.

Waimata Valley School closed in January 2010 after 113 years serving the community. By then, just six pupils remained.

We don't do anything communally any more – horse sports finished about 15 years ago and dog trials about five. Some of the farms had eight or nine shepherds but now they are in pines.

Makiri Station, probably the oldest in Gisborne, is now just about all pine trees.

The thousands of wilding pines growing in his 500ha of bush are a massive problem.

I spent three days ring-barking and poisoning pines in one gully and hardly scratched the surface. Council won't help me get rid of them. It wants the area to regenerate with bush but is hamstrung for funds. I could spend $10,000 for five years, but that's too much.

Some questions being asked are whether forest companies should be responsible for the spread of wilding pines and should they help pay the cost of their removal.

Mat says HFF are good, approachable neighbours. He grazed 1000 acres of their land for 20 years before they milled it.

Forest companies say the wildings are not necessarily from their pines. They have got rid of them around the boundaries but could do far more. If there are any problems, they will help. I can't prove the trees are theirs.

Through its regular newsletters, Hikurangi reminds its stakeholders of its commitment to monitor the spread of wildling pines outside its estate. The company states that if the progeny can be proven to be from the Hikurangi estate, the company has a policy to liaise with the landowner to have the wildlings destroyed. [130]

Both former Waimata farmer Phil Creswell and scientist Mike Marden have watched the effects of forestry on the lower reaches of the river over decades.

Creswell has lived beside the river opposite Anzac Park for the past 25 years after many years in the upper Waimata. He believed there was more debris and silt coming down in the 2000s as a result of forestry, and more damage.

If there is heavy rain up the top, the river gets muddy very quickly. We see a lot of silt and mud coming down.

They [forestry] get away with murder but no one criticises them. Stock have full rights to clean drinking water. Without agriculture, what have we got?

I know a lot of money is coming out of forestry but do they pay their fair share? I don't know.

Marden witnessed the 2005 and 2015 floods from his Haronga Road property adjacent to Waimata River.

In 2005, I was appalled at the amount of forestry slash. It was like a solid carpet, probably not long after Hikurangi started harvesting at the top of Bailies. It went on and on for days. It stuck in my mind. I thought they were getting away with murder. It's very steep topography there. Whether they didn't clean the creeks of slash sufficiently, I don't know, but it was astounding to see that amount of slash in the river.

In 2015, the river came up and over the Queen's chain to a level similar to that in 2005.

This time the slash comprised more poplar and willow than logging slash and much more sediment was left behind. I suspect a large proportion of the sediment transported downstream was derived from bank collapse in the middle to upper catchment reach. Flood levels during these events were considerably less than that during Cyclone Bola.[131]

In light of storm-related damage to forested areas, particularly after harvesting, he believes forest companies should evaluate which areas to replant. In their planning for the next rotation, they should allow for planting exclusion zones such as in and around stream channels or swampy areas that could be developed as sediment traps.

Council needs to ask what a sensible setback is. I don't know if they have a fixed setback distance in mind, or adopt a more flexible approach by taking into account slope length and steepness or are indeed discussing these things with the forestry sector.

I've seen areas harvested and replanted back to their original planting boundaries when setback options should have been discussed and agreed prior to replanting. They have repeated the same mistakes for another 30 years.

But not all is doom and gloom. Some forest companies that have experienced severe on-site storm-related damage have voluntarily retired areas recognised as having a high risk of further damage during future storm events. Such areas will instead be allowed to revert.

These decisions are usually made on economic rather than environmental grounds especially if the returns from subsequent rotations are likely to be less than the cost of harvesting.

One of the problems of getting change in the establishment of riparian plantings in some forests is that those under government lease require the replanting of the total harvested area, which at the time of their establishment was down to streams' edge. For those with existing long term leases that span several rotations, any change to allow for the establishment of riparian plantings would mean a loss in net-stocked area, and thus future revenue.

While environmentally it makes sense to endeavour to protect the waterways by establishing riparian plantings, for most forest areas under an existing lease agreement, and unless compensation is considered, change during the term of the lease is unlikely.

There is still considerable debate on the success or otherwise of riparian plantings, particularly in steep forested hill country, and particularly with regard to their effectiveness in trapping/reducing the amount of sediment and slash from entering streams such as during major storm events.

Gisborne District Council senior land management officer Nicki Davies says council is talking more with forest companies about these issues. The use of catchment management plans in sensitive catchments as part of the consenting process is expected to reduce some of the negative impacts of the past.

When the National Environmental Standard for Plantation Forestry (NES-PF) comes in, forests will be assessed using a nationally consistent approach which introduces technical standards for plantation forestry activities including riparian disturbance, working in riparian areas and replanting setbacks. It will stipulate what's required and the council can add more stringent requirements to this when resource consents are required.

The draft NES sets out zones for when resource consents are required and when they are not. In the draft the orange zones – which included many of Gisborne's steep land forest areas – did not require consents.

Council lobbied for a change to this draft such that the council will still have consenting requirements for orange and red zones. The submission stated concerns that the Plantation Forestry NES, as drafted, would remove the ability for Council to ensure forestry harvesting was managed in a robust way that reflected the challenging terrain and climate unique to the Gisborne area.

Where the Ministry for the Environment once held responsibility for such an NES, now responsibility lies with the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI), whose role it is to promote sustainable forestry.

NES-PF will set certain standards but Council is hopeful the majority of forests will still have to go through a consenting process.

Nicki Davies says under a consent process council can be more stringent in factors such as the harvesting method, the size of material that must be removed from the streams and tributaries, significant habitats and waterways, and water quality limits.

As we assess harvesting and roading plans for forests, we see that the permitted activity standards of the NES by themselves would not be enough, for instance setbacks for replanting, and the size of debris allowed in a stream.[132]

Once the NES is in place, there will be a teething period because the majority of consents are for bigger forestry consents. I expect council will have a say on how harvesting is completed.

Gisborne is different in its geology, it's more erosion-prone, and a lot of plantings were done as a result of trying to control or mitigate the effects of erosion. The intention was not for production forestry. When harvesting, we have to make sure we don't worsen the effect.

She says the importance of the Waimata River relates to its proximity to the city, effect on town beaches, recreational use and ecological values. That's the reason why the proximity of Hikurangi's Waimanu forest to the river and its tributary Makahakaha Stream demands special treatment.

The Waimanu forest is to the north of Waikereru Station at the top of Riverside Road.

The slopes are steep. There's the potential for debris to come down. That's why we have incorporated mitigation measures into Hikurangi's consent.

Two consents for Waimanu forests, planted in 1983 and 1986, have been issued to date. The first for the northern side of the Makahakaha Stream – including the Pouawa catchment – was granted in July 2014. Less than half of this harvest area has been completed, the trees going out mainly on Mander Road. The second consent granted early 2016 was for the southern side of the stream.

An application for a third consent for the forest planted in 1998 will be lodged once trees come to harvest age.

Nicki Davies:

For the southern side of Makahakaha Stream, they started road lining at the end of 2015, opening up the areas where they will install a road, removing trees around 20 metres on each side and form landings. This happens before they go on to full-scale harvesting.

Wood will go out via Mander Road. We have been told nothing will be coming down Riverside Road. The bridges are not up to it for one thing.

As part of the consents, Hikurangi had to provide a catchment management plan, which for the southern side involved looking at the catchment as a whole. Its proximity to Waimata River meant there were high risks.

The management plan sets out how they will harvest "settings", different marked areas, and how particular settings will be left to last, these usually being at the bottom of a catchment with standing trees and associated with a landing, to help hold up any wood that will come down.

If log debris comes down, it gets caught in the trees. So far, that has been the successful debris catcher. Man-made debris catchers can blow out.

Hikurangi also has four man-made slash catchers on the tributaries of the Makahakaha Stream and an area where they want to trial new slash catcher materials.

Slash management was the initial focus for the Forestry Environmental Focus Group, being a joint initiative between the Eastland Wood Council and the Gisborne District Council, formed as a result of woody debris issues in 2012. The group tackles issues arising from harvesting on steeper land and frequent high intensity rain fall events, and the downstream effects on other land users.

Comprising forest managers, council Land and Soil Resources team, Transit NZ and MAF, the group shares experiences and information to reduce environmental impacts of forestry operations; design and trial new ideas; and modify or add to existing industry Best Practice Guidelines for reducing environmental impacts.

Hikurangi has undertaken much work into the design and construction of slash catchers. Its primary management strategy is to minimise slash getting into streams. Slash catchers provide a secondary back-stop by catching slash that has entered a waterway and prevent it from migrating further downstream into neighbouring land.

Slash catchers have been constructed from railway irons placed like a picket fence across a stream and strengthened with wire rope. But these are expensive to build and maintain and suitable sites are not always available. They must be cleaned out after each big rain event or when full of debris.

The focus group also worked with council on the best tree species and plant spacing to create permanent, living slash catchers. These natural tree slash catchers need a number of years' growth before becoming effective. [133]

Nicki Davies explained some of the measures Hikurangi included in its catchment management plan to protect the catchment and the downstream part of the Waimata River catchment from woody forestry debris.

The plan includes staggering the clearfell harvesting to create a mosaic of harvested areas, building four wire-rope slash catchers in tributaries of the Makahakaha Stream to intercept slash before it migrates to the main waterway, and ongoing management of slash entering the stream catchments during harvesting.

It also plans to undertake slash catcher trials using a variety of materials and construction downstream of the last "setting" to be harvested in the catchment.

A new low level crossing Hikurangi helped design is providing a cost effective way to cross streams and helping to minimise sediment entering the waterways.

Past the boundary and the 1998 forest there is indigenous riparian vegetation that could act to hold the stream banks and potentially stop debris coming down.

The September 2015 rain event hit Wakaroa forest hard. Large sections of about four-year-old trees slipped down and went into tributaries towards Waipaoa. Hikurangi said little or no slash made it into the Makahakaha Stream or beyond to the Waimata River despite the harvest of two settings near tributaries to the stream.

This was due to the slash catcher installed before harvest started, as well as a debris dam that formed in the stream.

The Waimanu harvest area is located on very steep to moderately steep slopes. Erosion is evident along the Makahakaha Stream and tributaries in the harvest area. The Hikurangi proposes replanting the harvest area in plantation forest species where it is effectively preventing erosion. Riparian areas demand different species.

Gisborne District Council does not have specific requirements about harvesting setbacks adjacent to a stream.

They can harvest to the stump line. Leaving trees can lead to toppling and the problem of debris dams if they fall over. It's better to get them all out and then have bigger setbacks for replanting. There will be less disturbance in streams next rotation to help with sediment and ecological values including providing habitat.

In the consent for the southern Makahakaha Stream, we have been more descriptive of setback requirements.

Only material resulting from harvesting is to be removed from the stream.

The catchment is already vulnerable, with a lot of erosion, toppled trees and sediment coming down, The stream is already unstable.

Once the area is harvested, the consent holder is encouraged to have a joint site visit with council to assess the suitability of setbacks recommended in HFF riparian survey, consider areas that need an extended riparian setback from exotic tree planting and consider alternative species for riparian plantings. Riparian margin areas of toppled plantation forest trees and wet areas where plantation forests have failed must be replanted in suitable tree species suitable to the site condition.[134]

Hikurangi is willing to do that. They too want to ensure there is nothing coming down the stream and river.

Keeping vegetation intact, being aware of indigenous species and putting in measures to limit adverse impact is part of the Forestry Stewardship Council's ethos.

In areas where pines have toppled and steep slopes rise from streams, she said getting indigenous species establishing – ground covers with sub-canopy manuka, then kawakawa and so on – would be ideal.

Hikurangi's management plan identifies a stream, which flows through four settings, as a place that could have forestry debris migrate into the Waimata River. It planned to leave between 25 and 50 trees in setting 13008, where the stream leaves Hikurangi land, to help stop any material that could become mobile and migrate into the neighbours' land or to the Waimata River.[135]

The lack of setbacks in forests being harvested is historical. In the 1980s, Hikurangi planted blocks like Waimanu and Wakaroa as production forestry, as encouraged by the government, with the intention of harvesting.

She says council will be monitoring the Waimanu harvesting through regular site visits.

It's a high-risk forest. If they don't comply, there will be infringement fines and abatement notices. If they are not complying, they will need to stop work until they follow through with actions, such as immediately removing debris from a watercourse before work resumes.

Fines may be small compared to the potential for significant effects – the RMA setting out fines of between $150 and $750 – but forest companies do care about their reputation.

Breaches of harvesting, road construction and waste management conditions in the Waimanu Forest, which resulted in sediment reaching the Pouawa Stream and subsequently the Pouawa marine reserve in 2012, led to council lodging prosecution proceedings against Hikurangi Forest Farms under the Resource Management Act. This was settled out of court for $70,000.

The idea is to be proactive. Resource consents allow this. Then we check conditions are being complied with and if something isn't working, we can get the company to remedy it so the problem doesn't get worse.

For this consent, there has been a lot of discussion with Hikurangi's team to come up with a plan and avoid any major environmental impact. Environmental impacts will occur as a result of harvesting – debris, sediment in stream, it's about trying to reduce that impact as much as possible.

They want the best outcome – as can be seen with their trialling of slash catchers and inviting other companies to be part of that. They want to see that there isn't any impact into the Waimata River and I think they have learned. The company and the supervisor all seem to be on the same page but we need to supervise the contractors to ensure they are doing what they should be.

The way we approach harvesting in significant catchments now is with catchment management plans. Mangarara and other forests wouldn't have had that level of assessment. We're trying to avoid debris. That's the area people seem to have most concern with – even more than the sediment.

Riparian planting setbacks will provide the foundation for tributaries not to be disturbed in future.

River as drinking water

As civic rulers discussed potential localities for a Gisborne water supply scheme from 1886 onwards, the Waimata River was often raised as an alternative.

In 1879, engineer Mr Black and others said it was impractical to obtain a good supply from the Waimata river and the quality of the water was inferior to Waihirere's. If the water were adopted for a water supply, it would need to be filtered "to render it at all fit for domestic uses".

Like the Waipaoa river, the Waimata water was impregnated with organic matter of animal origin, *which contamination is sure to become acute as settlement increases over its watershed.*[136]

In 1903, Gisborne Borough Council considered obtaining water from the Waimata, a short distance above the Hole-in-the-Wall where the river was not affected by salt water, to supply water for all times and in all seasons to Kaiti and Whataupoko suburbs, the freezing works and town.

The council claimed that once any impurities were reliably and effectively removed through filtration, the quality would leave nothing to be desired.

For many miles above this part of the river (above Hole-in-the-Wall), the water passes over open shingle beds, which in itself would assist to purify the water, and any fear of it being contaminated or charged with mud in times of flood would be obviated … [by the use of a reservoir, so pumping could be stopped when the water was heavily affected by mud].[137]

The proposed scheme, expected to cost about £15,000, involved placing one or more wells or cisterns on the riverbank and from there pumping water into a steel reservoir on the top of one of the most suitable hills. Three years later, in 1906, ratepayers instead approved the contract for a water supply from the Te Arai River.

Salty river water was used for some years, at least until the late 1930s, as the water source for the borough council's Macrae Baths beside the confluence of the Waimata, Taruheru and Turanganui rivers.[138]

In the late 1970s, Cook County Council investigated using the Waimata River as a source of water for the growing Wainui-Okitu suburbs and as a supplementary supply for the city.[139]

Then In 1982, the East Cape Catchment Board, reviewed the Waimata's potential as an urban water supply source for a communal water supply for Wainui Beach, and to supplement supply already drawn from Mangapoike and Te Arai Catchment for the city's use.[140]

The report concluded that Waimata River had the capability as a supply source, with substantial volumes still available for about 100 days without rain. However, suspended sediment loads were considered a limiting factor. Wainui remained unreticulated in 2014.

The landfill debate

In August 2000, Gisborne District Council announced that a forest block on Mander Road was its preferred site for a district landfill. Mander Road residents and affected residents downstream opposed the plan, objectors presenting a strong case about potential pollution in the river.[141]

Penny Hoogerbrug, of Rimunui and Karakaroa, had young children at the time and the family often used the river for picnics and swimming. She was concerned about the impact on her family and livelihood. Water from the Waimata was used to irrigate their apple and kiwifruit orchard.

Penny Hoogerbrug, of Rimunui and Karakaroa, had young children at the time and the family used the river often for picnics and swimming. She

They were looking to put a landfill in the older river bed, where it was silty and very wet. We thought the area was unstable and that leachate would get into the river and affect all downstream water users.[142]

Although commissioners gave the go-ahead in February 2003, on the proviso council had the first peg in the ground by the end of 2007, councillors were apprehensive. A majority of one voted in September 2003 to buy the site but the sale and purchase dragged on for another four years until council reversed its position and called a halt to the landfill scheme.[143]

Sidebar on Waikereru Bridge and school

The 180 feet Waikereru Bridge suspension bridge, built for pedestrians in about 1935, replaced one of the few remaining suspension cages across streams in the Gisborne district.[144] The bridge was rebuilt in 1971 to take vehicles.

John Hegarty of Waikereru remembers crossing the Waimata in the suspension cage.

I was scared stiff. The road was not metalled on the north side of the river. We took the town car as far as the bridge then dad took all the stores in the cage, with me looking after my brother, and we were pulled across to the other side. Then we took a horse and buggy to Waikereru.

The suspension cage was a box about the size of a good table. A single, twisted steel wire rope like a flying fox went from one side of the river to the other. Supporting ropes connected a wheel to the cage and the wire cable.

It was fine going down but then you had to haul yourself up the other side, and at times the river was in flood. [145]

When the two-foot wide pedestrian suspension bridge was built, stores could be taken across the river on a buggy.

The council replaced the pedestrian bridge with a one-car suspension bridge during the early years of World War 2. We heard they were building it to help evacuate Gisborne in case of an invasion. What they would do with a whole lot of people at Waikereru, I couldn't imagine.

Phil Creswell lived at Motukeo briefly in the early 1950s.

The swing bridge took a light car but not a truck . All the boards went clunk, clunk, clunk as you went across. There was only just enough width for a car. It served two properties – the Hegartys and the Creswells (Waikereru and Motukeo) and on the town side of this bridge was the little one-roomed, gable-roofed school, Waikereru.[146]

John Hegarty of Waikereru was among the last to attend the school, attending from 1940 through to 1942.

We had correspondence school before attending Waikereru School. Dad donated an acre of land for the school and at one time there were 21 kids – the kids from the Matokitoki rode to Caves Road. The schoolteacher lived at Mangatuna [Cave Road] was provided with a big car – he picked up the Caves, the Woodwards, the Holdens, Stan Smith's two kids, David Graham and the Hollamby boys came from Horoeka.

The school closed through lack of kids. My mother took in boarders for a time just to keep the school numbers up.

After the school closed, the one-roomed wooden building with great native timber became a prey for vandals. John Hegarty bought the building from the education department for storage, moved it to his own property and used it as a saddle shed for a time.

The Riverside Road section of the Waimata River has often felt a bit like a no-man's land, an area that is neither Gisborne, Whangara nor the Waimata Valley, its own little world.

Times have changed.

Bill King:

Since 1990, there have probably been 30 new titles in the area, subdivisions. A car used to be a once a month occurrence. Now people go into town every day to jobs. Most are lifestyle blocks.

Fish and animal life

Fish life in the river over the years has ranged from eels, kahawai, galaxiids (whitebait), mullet, trout and kakahi (freshwater mussels) to larger specimens like shark, seal and a notorious dolphin.

In March 1880, bathers in the lower reaches of the Waimata river were warned about a six feet shark , the second seen in that river within the previous two months.[147] Sammy the seal spent a few days in the river in 1957 before seeking shelter in a Reads Quay warehouse and being released to the sea. His sojourn attracted dozens of people to the riverbank and Gladstone Road bridge.[148]

Moko the dolphin enthralled hundreds with his antics, attracting national and international attention during his four-month stay in Gisborne from September 2009.[149] The solitary bottlenose was a frequent visitor to the river near Anzac Park, venturing no further upstream than the rowing club corner.[150]

In 2014, kahawai, mullet and eels were the main species talked about in the lower reaches of the river with mullet, eels and whitebait seen upstream as far as Waikereru. Eels were seen in the 2000s in the Makahakaha Stream that feeds into the Waimata north of Waikereru.[151] Freshwater mussels were observed in the vicinity of the orchard near Gowerville in the 1960s?[152] and in 2014, children living near Waikereru found freshwater pipi.[153] Gisborne Regional Freshwater Plan states red fin bully, longfin eel, inanga and common Bully are found in the Waimata River.

In 1884, the Poverty Bay Herald reported on an ingenious but simple contrivance being used to catch fish in the Waimata River at the Hole-in-the-wall.

Below the deep hole where the water is compressed into a narrow channel, a slanting ti-tree fence has been erected, closing in on either side to an aperture of about four feet. As the tide recedes a cone-shaped basket is fixed in position, the haul depending on how plentiful the fish may be. The same method is also practised higher up the river.[154]

Further up the Waimata River in the late 1880s, Philip Kenway reported the streams were fishless, except for eels.[155]

We went eeling in the rapid, bush-edged river, and he taught me to cook the big white-bellied river eels so that they became the most delicate fish I have ever tasted. He split and salted them, smoked them in an old tar drum, cut them in lengths, and grilled them in their skins.[156]

Eels appear to be relatively unaffected by logging and are tolerant of silty substrates, which can result from the destabilisation of ground during felling. However, sedimentation may reduce their availability of food by clogging up instream substrates where organisms such as invertebrates and koura live. [157]

A Waimata School eeling expedition in 1961 saw 13 eels caught and eaten – an adventure "in the interest of language stimulation".[158]

Greta Watson, who lived at Linburn from 1962 to 2003, recalled eeling with her family.

We would walk down in the dark through bush and over fences to pools in the river followed by our loyal cats and fox terriers, and throw ground bait to attract eels, which it did to a frightening extent sometimes.

I prayed that we wouldn't hook some of the monsters we saw writhing in there – not conducive to swimming in the daytime. Once the eels were landed, with much screaming and shrieking by the kids and me, the cats would begin to chew them, dead or alive.[159]

Eel numbers dwindled over the years, the decline blamed by some on commercial eel fishers

In 2014, eels are still seen in the river. Terry Creswell, of Motukeo, saw a good specimen near his boundary with Rimunui. He spent a lot of time on the property from the 1950s and has lived there permanently since the early 1980s.

Aquaculture has improved over the years – there is more whitebait, more freshwater mussels and a lot of eels.[160]

He attributes the healthy river state to the lack of sheep dip going directly into the river as it had done for decades, and to forestry.

Sheep dip is no longer going into the river and that has made a big difference. Most people use pour-on fly repellent instead of dipping. And there are fewer sheep.

As a child, we went swimming and eeling in the river. One summer we saw dead whitebait in the river – that's the time people were generally dipping sheep.

He recalled seeing kahawai at the Hole-in-the-Wall in 1960s, and mullet further downstream.

Bill King, whose remaining 480 acres of Longbush he named Ngahereroa (Long Bush), said:

The riverbank is a geologist's dream – sticks, old trees sticking out. If you looked around, you wouldn't be surprised at anything – bones, human and animal, old logs. [161]

John Hegarty recalled mullet and eels at Waikereru from earliest recollections in the 1930s onwards and "any amount of mullet" in the Waimata near Tukura Road, where they shifted in 1990.

Whitebaiters have found the Waimata River near Goodwins Road bridge to be a successful haunt.

Whitebait are the juveniles of five species of Galaxiidae – notably inanga, koaro, banded, giant and shortjaw kokopu.

Hazel Griffin has since about 2005 whitebaited around the Goodwin's Road area of the Waimata River and up near Waikereru during the season from 15 August until the end of November.

A fine-weather fisher, she had not noticed a discernible change in the amount of whitebait collected but had noticed the "good thrashing" riverbanks received every time there was a flood. Flood debris reached far higher up the banks than she thought possible. Catches are limited to around the cupful.[162]

She uses a scoop net rather than a set net because she enjoys watching the whitebait and then scooping them up, and lowers a white plastic pipe into the water to more clearly see the whitebait.

"I like watching the water. The more you sit there, the more you hear and see in the water and it's peaceful. Whitebait come in on the incoming tide. But I haven't worked out how long it takes for them to reach Goodwin's Road area. I'm not very scientific."

Whitebait do not live in the Taruheru River. Industrial pollution by the Taruheru freezing works and Gisborne gasworks adversely affected the whitebait population and, river engineer Dave Peacock says, young whitebait eventually lost the memory of going there.

He believes a study of macrobenthos species, which all have specific needs and are sensitive to silt, would provide a valuable baseline for the state of the river's water quality.

In 2014, scientist Dr Chris Ward said that while it was good to see freshwater mussels inhabiting sections of the Waimata River, their occurrence was unlikely to be a reliable indicator of ecosystem health or water quality. The kakahi are pipi-like in that they live unattached at shallow depths within the bottom sediment, and are similar in size and shape. He expected them to live mainly in scattered patches where irregular bedrock shelters pockets of stable sediment.[163]

While eels can successfully live in silty water, trout require pristine waters. This didn't stop various acclimatisation societies from attempting to stock district rivers with the introduced species. Thousands of ova were imported and liberated but the fish did not readily acclimatise, and very few came to maturity. Trout were at times seen in the Waikohu River near the Dome, and in the Uawa River, but they did not multiply greatly.[164] Attempts to raise the fish in the Waimata River were believed to have been a complete failure despite the high hopes of various settlers including Howard Kenway of Te Pahi and Mr W Dods who in 1889 alone had taken charge of 1600 young trout which they turned out in various places along the river.[165] Thousands more followed in successive years.

Five years later, in 1894, Mr W Dods of Waimata reported he had seen several fish since his 1893 supply of 5000 ova and their subsequent liberation.[166]

Reports came from Mangatu in 1896 of "Natives" catching strange fish, later thought to be trout, seen in their hundreds.[167] Some good sized trout were reportedly seen in the Waimata near Mr Richardson's in 1900.[168] And the following year, a local fisherman pulled up a 4 pound rainbow trout out of the Turanganui, into which the Waimata flows. Not knowing its genus, he sold it for a shilling.[169]

Piscatorial expert Ernest De Lautour was in 1903 engaged by the Acclimatisation Society to establish a hatchery – at the Barkers, Whataupoko – and superintend the hatching of trout ova and the distribution of young fish. He believed Gisborne's rivers including the Waimata to be "eminently suitable" for the propagation of trout. Over 30,000 young fish were liberated including 5000 taken by Mr Branson to Waimata. The cause of past failures to stock local rivers had been a great mystery to him until he was told about the number of sheep dips on the banks of rivers, the chemical contents of which were drained into the river water. This, he said, would account for the disappearance of the fish. Dipping took place at a time river waters were low and when young fish were just getting a foothold in the water.[170]

Philip Kenway said their beautiful mountain streams looked the very thing for trout, but at that stage none had yet been turned into them.

So when an offer of Government trout ova was made to us, it was accepted with enthusiasm. A pack-horse was sent down to the coast to meet the boat, and in due course the eggs arrived, about the size of peas, in well-packed, ice-cooled boxes. In the meantime we had knocked together a twelve-foot shallow trough a foot wide, dividing it into half a dozen sections, and having made a small dam in the creek we led a pipe therefrom to it so that a constant stream should flow right through. The eggs were then spread out on a layer of finely broken stone at the bottom of the trough, and carefully examined every day. A dead egg, turning as it does a dull white, becomes at once conspicuous among its almost transparent fellows, and must be immediately taken out. A small glass tube is used with the thumb kept tight on one end until the other is near the dead egg, which,

on lifting the thumb, rushes up the tube without disturbing the others, and is safely removed when the thumb is replaced on the tube top.[171]

The young troutlings were fed boiled liver mashed with water and when about an inch and a half long, put into two deep trenches, supplied with water from the same stream.

Their growth was then rapid but very uneven. A bold fish who rushed his food without hesitation would soon be three or four times as big as the more timid; therefore we had to keep the big ones by themselves to give the others a chance. Then came the day when, lifting the fish with a hand net into kerosene tins filled with weed and water, we carried them down to the river. Without weed to hide in, the trout would damage themselves in their fright, by butting their heads against the tin.

But all this trouble was in vain, for though one or two grown trout were very occasionally seen for some years, they never increased, and have now entirely disappeared. It is believed that in our soft rock formation, either the rivers get too hopelessly thick in the winter floods, and the trout die, or their non-increase is accounted for by the fact that the thinnest coating of mud or silt kills the ova at once. They need a clear winter stream and clean shingle to rest on, and with us there was seldom either. [172]

Richard Utting at Kowhai Station reported in 2016 that good stocks of long-finned eels, and a few whitebait and wild crayfish – koura – were found further up the river a few years beforehand.

When they clean out the dams in the summer time, there are a lot of eels but they perish because they can't get back into the streams.[173]

Mat Bailie said many eels were squashed, beaten to death, by logs coming down the river.

Eel numbers are good. I rescue eels when we have a bad drought. When the Makahakahaka Stream dries out, I rescue the eels and walk them down to the Waimata. There's hundreds of them. I put 50 eels back in the river. It's a healthy stream. There's also inanga, cockabullies. It's always been good. It maybe took a back step when they were milling further up.[174]

Artist John Walsh, who lived beside the river opposite Marian Drive from the mid 1980s until 1993, regularly netted mullet to feed his family and "waifs" at The Boathouse arts training centre where he taught.

I'd always get at least six and sometimes up to 30. I'd come home from work, take the net in a fishing bin on my kayak and feed out the net across two thirds of the river. In the morning, I'd be up early to haul it in then smoke the fish. At times, I even caught stoats in the net. [175]

But my then neighbour, Tom Webster – the last drover on the coast – told me that probably in about the 1970s, the mullet were so thick you could almost walk across them to get over the other side. He said that every month with an R in it – that's when they came up the river.

Grant Bramwell said the river's lower reaches were still home to a variety of fish life, similar to that of the 1970s.

I don't think there are fewer fish but then there are not more either.

As a child, in the 1960s and 70s, he used to spear flounder on the flat rocks near Thomas Corsons' place, where the river bends sharply away from Riverside Road.

We used to pack the dinghy – the eels would also bask in the sun along the edges or in among the sticks. We'd spear them off the surface with a three-pronged spear then chuck them into fresh water for 24 hours before smoking them. These ones are more silty tasting but still edible. The fresh water helps get rid of the silt.

They tried kahawai too but didn't taste so good – a view possibly affected by kahawai's earlier reputation as a rubbish fish.

Some days now, we'll paddle to the Cut and there'll be a real abundance of fish life – sprats being chased by bigger fish, fish jumping in front of you. That's always in reasonably clear water. We don't really go when it's bad weather or silty. Some days are really alive with fish – it's very cool – but other days, we don't see a thing.[176]

There's plenty of kahawai and, at the right time of year, mullet.

That's more in the heat of the summer. Whether they bask in the sun, I don't know, but there are hundreds of mullet rising and falling. The kids still go eeling from our place in Marian Drive and there are plenty of them from three to six centimetres diameter.

His son Max used to fish quite a bit, always kahawai and also herrings and trevally, and some big fish, possibly a bream. His wife Sharon caught a snapper on a line just out the front of their place in the early 2000s. And in 2015, with overseas visitors staying, a girl hooked the biggest eel grant had seen.

The way we did it was to get a hunk of gravy beef, tie it onto a rope and biff it out into the river. Once the eels start grabbing the meat, you bring them closer then flip them on to the riverbank.

BIRDS

One can only surmise that little more than a century ago, the now-extinct huia was still to be found in the area and pigeons were still plentiful. A public notice in the Poverty Bay Herald declared 23 March 1894 as the opening day for shooting native game, with the exception of tui, huia, heron and crested grebe. [177] [This may have been a formality. The huia and crested grebe may not have populated this area].

Endemic to the North Island, the huia became extinct in the early 20th century primarily through overhunting and widespread deforestation of lowland forests, most of which were ancient, ecologically complex primary forests. Huia were unable to survive in regenerating secondary forests. The last confirmed sighting of a huia was in 1907 in the Tararua Ranges with further credible sightings reported in the 1920s, and in Te Urewera National Park in the early 1960s.[178]

Crested grebe had once occupied the North Island. By 2012, its population had increased to 600 – all in the South Island – after a 1980s-low of 200. [179]

These restrictions continued.

A decline in pigeon numbers in the late 1890s resulted in a new law dictating a closed season in 1896 and every sixth year thereafter – the aim being "conserving our splendid native game and

preventing its ultimate extinction". Any person breaking the law was liable to a fine of £1. Pigeons were once plentiful on the East Coast but those remaining had been driven far inland. [180]

Writing about the 1880s onwards, Philip Kenway said the bush pigeon was *a most excellent bird to eat, too, whether roast, stewed, or in a pie, and spitch-cocked, a first-class breakfast for a hungry man.*[181]

What delight, I say, to wander for miles in the trackless bush, keen for a shot at the big pigeon, or a rush after pig; to spend the day all chums together, Maori, who could scent and find the most distant pig; old Charlie, who would hold anything; Jake, who would sometimes spot a high-up sitting pigeon, and all the rest, all set on the same job, and all the lot of us understanding, helping, and appreciating each other; and, as the sun got low, to return, filthy and glorious, with a load of good pork, or a few brace of the very edible pearl grey birds.[182]

Kenway's bird chorus comprised the kaka, tui and occasionally "the long-drawn note of the kokako".

He [the kokako] goes in pairs and seems to slide rather than hop through the thick-set branches. His call in the silent woods had an enchantment all its own, though the only simile I can give is that of the slow swing of a highly melodious gate.[183]

In mid-1902, the acclimatisation society expected a consignment of Virginian quail to arrive and proposed ordering 50,000 brown trout with rainbows to fill any shortfall. Thirty hares shipped from Canterbury were to be turned out on Mr Sherratt's and Mr Mander's Waimata properties; the Virginian quail, at Te Arai, Waimata and other sites.[184]

A flight of 20 godwits arrived near a home on the banks of the Waimata River in 1930[185] and three years later 11-year-old Pearl Hunt described going up the Waimata for an Easter ramble in the bush.

We just love the bush and the birds. We really do believe the fairies came to meet us… you can hear them here and there like the sunbeams that glint down among the trees. We saw a tiny little Piwakawaka fly to us, then others came all around us; also the green little Miromiros; they came and peeped at us and they flew off. We tried to catch one, but he only smiied at our efforts and we only played with them. I love our native birds. [186]

Weka by the hundred were a feature of life at Waikereru for John and Maggie Hegarty.

There were hundreds of Hegarty's Hens as they called them. Maggie had to learn quickly to keep the kitchen door closed to keep them out.

Kayaker Alan Thompson recalled weka up around the island until 1988, and shags too. Both seemed to go after Bola.

There used to be flocks of ten to thirty shags – white breasted and black. They have only just started coming back in the past two years. [187]

In the Marian Drive area, Grant Bramwell thought the bird life had increased with significantly more kereru in 2016 than than in 2000.

Tui, fantails, kingfishers, bellbird and moreporks are plentiful but we never see waxeyes.

He thought more pest control – especially for rats – would help.[188]

Phil Creswell, who lived at Motukeo for a few years in the early 1950s, remembers abundant birdlife at Longbush with tui, kingfisher, bellbird and pigeons.[189] Now living beside the lower reaches

of the Waimata River, he says the bird life has tripled in 25 years with abundant tui, kingfisher and pigeon – presumably because people have planted more trees and flaxes that have food for them, and not spraying.

At Motukeo, Terry Creswell reports seeing tui, pigeons, bellbirds, falcon, harrier hawks, fantails, grey warblers, waxeye, black and white tomtit, shining cuckoo, black and pied shags and nesting in his open paddock in 2014, spur winged plover.

His neighbour Bill King decries the decline of lizards over the years and what he sees as the detrimental effects of 1080 poison.

Maybe we haven't lived long enough to see the benefits. I used to see a lot of skinks and geckos but I haven't seen one for eight years now. I used to see them living in plies of fenceposts.[190]

In 2016, Mat Bailie said his Hiwiroa bush, in the upper reaches of the river, contains beautiful bird life – tomtits and robins, kereru, tui, bellbirds, falcons, whitehead, yellow head, morepork, grey warblers.

Harrier hawks breed like flies in the forestry. Numbers of New Zealand falcon have increased but they eat the pigeons, I've seen them kill them, and there has been a dramatic decrease in these. We have had weka in the past. They used to raid the chook houses.

In the lower reaches of the Waimata, scientist Mike Marden has noticed a decline in waxeye, kingfisher and ducks yet an abundance of tui, kereru and even cormorants feeding on mullet and kahawai.

Richard Utting:

The bird life in our bush is fantastic with tui, pigeons, bellbirds. We don't have as many pigeons as we used to. Mat Bailie reckons the sparrow hawks are getting them.

One year, I counted 27 pigeons sitting around eating leaves in nearby trees. They eat the catkins of silver poplars. There's lots of kingfishers.

Remnants of some of New Zealand's oldest and largest birds were found in the upper reaches of the Waimata Valley at John (now his son Mat) Bailie's Hiwiroa property.

Dave Hughes recalled accompanying Kaharoa's Stan Jones (and others) in about 1973 to help excavate moa skeletons from a Hiwiroa stream.

We tramped from Makiri to Hiwiroa as a day tramp. Waimata has a deep papa gorge. Stan saw a cleft in the gorge with a waterfall above and a waterfall below. The creek was in the last flat paddock of Bailies.[191]

Stan was interested in having a look. We did a bit of caving. We took the ropes to help get down there. There, embedded in the mud that had eroded out of the papa, in the cleft of hill, were the remains of probably three moa skeletons and other birds too. Over time, we excavated them. This was about 40 years ago.

Tairawhiti Museum (then Gisborne Art Gallery and Museum) used some of these bones donated in 1976 and others in 1982 to form a half-skeleton. It remains as a permanent education display in the Discovery Centre.

The men believed the moa could have been browsing above the top waterfall before falling and becoming bogged in the mud only to die of exhaustion trying to get out. The leg bones were found buried in the mud which helped preserve them.

In 1980, Auckland University's Dr Phil Millener – an avian palaeontologist – identified the bones as belonging to *Anomalopteryx didformis* in 1980. This is the little bush moa, which grew up to 1.3m, the smallest and most widespread moa species, occurring in closed-canopy lowland forest throughout the North and South islands.[192]

POSSUMS

The Gisborne Acclimatisation Society introduced 12 black Tasmanian opossums to the head of the Waimata River valley in 1891, the earliest in the district and the beginning of the peak introductory phase of importation into New Zealand.[193]

In 1898, a group of Tasmanian opossums was liberated on the north side of Lake Waikaremoana in a piece of heavy bush. The opossums could not negotiate the loose bark of the giant rimu selected, so instead climbed a nearby vine in true possum style and were soon quite at home in the top of the rimu. It was thought they would thrive very well in the district.[194]

An opossum seen on Riverside Road in 1906 was thought to be one of those liberated in 1891, or their progeny. The report claimed a dozen had been obtained from Invercargill with some placed at the Dome Station, Whatatutu and the remainder at Mr McPhail's Waimata Valley property. [195]

On his return from the south in 1913, Andrew Hegarty – the brother of Henry Hegarty who bought Waikereru in 1924 – brought six opossums and liberated them in the Mangatu district. They were soon thriving well.[196]

The first large-scale attempt to control possums began 30 years later. From 1951 to 1961, eight million bounties of two shillings and sixpence were paid out for 'possum tokens' – the ears and a strip of fur.[197]

By the late 1940s, possums had become a major problem, with numbers reaching astronomical levels, according to Gisborne builder and outdoor enthusiast Dave Hughes:

We had pushbikes and went regularly to LongBush – it was a patch of bush on the side of the river. It took about an hour to bike there. We went possum hunting in the 1940s as teenagers – we would chase and kill possums. We ran them down and clubbed them to death. We'd climb the trees.

The old trees were full of epiphytes and the possums nested in them. They dug their way through the dirt at the base of the epiphytes and tunnelled into them until the epiphytes fell to pieces.

They also nested in under the roots of trees hanging over the river. You could see where they had run to.

In the 1950s, the catchment board put a bounty of 2/6 per pair of hind feet (1 possum). Me and a cobber, Jim Siriett, biked to Rimunui and camped there for the weekend – probably just had a tent fly, a 22 rifle and a club each, pair of sandshoes and food. We were reasonable seasoned campers in our late teens. [198]

We killed 119 possums in the weekend—our biggest tally. We could earn as much if not more possum hunting at the weekend than we could working all week as apprentices.

It made us tough, climbing trees, chasing possums. The possum numbers were so bad in some places, the mature kohekohe wouldn't have a leaf on them, then they slowly died. Now at LongBush, there's titoki and tawa. The old trees have gone. The old ones had a lot of holes for the possums to nest, the same that the owls (morepork) used.

Mat Bailie has waged a constant, costly war against possums, poison feeders along his boundary being the only way for his willows to survive.

They run a mile for it and strip off young shoots. They would kill the trees in a few years if you didn't control them. They weren't allowed to shoot them when my Dad was young. They hadn't really got going in the same way.[199]

Now he plucks their fur for a bit of extra income.

I've noticed a big increase in young native seeds germinating and growing since I have had the poison bait station. It's costly -- $70 a bag, it's like rat poison, and about two to three thousand dollars a year. I provide one station every 10 kilometres and you'll clean them up 90 percent, I'm against 1080. Tallon bait poison is a bit residual but I've never lost dogs.

A fun river

For more than 135 years, the waters of the Waimata River have provided a cool, dynamic playground for young and old – a place for people to picnic and swim; ply up and down on canoes, kayaks, waka, yachts, rafts and stand-up paddle boards; or play in the slippery mud at water's edge. It has spawned Olympic, international and New Zealand champion kayakers and canoeists.

In its lower reaches, the river has been home to Sea Scouts, Scouts, canoeists, Boys' and Girls' Brigades, Air Training Corp, sailors, raft racers, surf lifesavers, kayakers, waka ama paddlers and swimmers. Cyclists, trampers and runners have plied its edges.

The river's popularity as a haven of numerous picnic and swimming places led to a small public reserve being declared near the Hole-in-the-Wall, and the development of the far-larger Anzac Park.

Successive landowners generously provided public access to the private Longbush reserve.

Anzac Park was originally part of the Kaiti 228 Block given to Eruera Harete by the Crown in 1888. The area is marked on old maps as Te Warau.[200] Before becoming a park, the area's name was also known as Harris's Bend, The Point and Score's Point after land owner John Score, who had subdivided the land for housing development before his death in 1913.[201] Subsequent owners Douglas Blair and Gilbert Thomas Bull sold the main part to Gisborne Borough Council in 1916 for recreation purposes. Martin Bertram Mander later gifted the southern riverbank parcels for the purposes of public gardens, bowls or tennis. G Walter Palairet sold the last sections to council in 1920.[202]

Score's Point Recreation Ground was renamed Anzac Park after councillor Lawless's proposal on 26 April 1916 was adopted.[203] The name commemorates the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, which served in World War 1 in Europe and the Middle East.

Local Maori, and later early settlers, grew crops on the point's rich alluvial soils. In 1932, the park was again used for growing vegetables under Scheme 5 for unemployment relief.[204]

Bridging the Waimata from Whataupoko, via either McLean or Whitaker Street, to Anzac Park was suggested on various occasions but never went ahead.

The Anzac Park Sports Club and Improvements Society was founded in 1949 and two years later had raised funds to erect play equipment. Its fundraising rodeo caused much damage to the grounds. On disbanding in 1966, the society presented its final cheque to council for £366 and requested this be spent on seating, tables and a barbecue facility.

Various activities took place since the 1950s including hockey, rugby league, football, archery, rowing, power boat racing, highland fling gatherings, rodeos and camping and cook-outs.[205] In the 2000s, it remains popular with families for its open space, and playground and picnicking facilities; and football, rowing, kayaking and waka ama clubs, some of which have clubrooms or storage facilities.

In January 1954, the park was home to more than 500 Sea Scouts on their biennial national camp.[206] Various troops used the river to compete in yachting, rowing and other competitions.

Gisborne's Takitimu Sea Scouts used the river as a regular training run[207] and Tainui Sea Scouts in 1960 opened its own boatshed on the riverbank at the bottom of Vogel Street.[208] Two years later, the Tainui troop launched its new boat, Tuahine, putting the Nelson-built kauri and rimu vessel through its paces on the river.[209]

The Gisborne Yacht Club used Anzac Park for its annual picnic day in 1964, and used the river to further their river-sailing knowledge.[210] And Scouts troops held regular camps along the river, including the Wai Te Ata troop in 1970. [211]

The Boys' Brigade opened its new hut on its camp site at Rimunui in 1958[212] and Girls' Brigade later used it as their base.

Rowing was a popular spectator sport. Various races were held from Harris's Bend to the breakwater in 1891 as part of a regatta that included sailing courses off the breakwater.[213] In November 1920, a river regatta marked the official opening of the rowing season.[214]

Most of the large attendance of spectators centred around the Trafalgar Rotunda, from where the major portion of events passed during the afternoon. The regatta was accompanied on shore by marquees and tents erected to sell tea, light sandwiches, pikelets, scones and sweets, organised and conducted by the Waikanae Beach Society and the Surf and Swimming Club.

Boat races were all rowed on the Waimata River course, from Adair's bend to the Rotunda. The Harbour Board's and Nelson Bros' launches proved of great service, both launches taking part in the procession and transporting river officials and the City Band.

The Waimata was the venue for swimming races for many years, the third annual event being held by the Gisborne Swimming Club in 1892.[215] Contests included the quarter-mile handicap, 150 yards handicap, the greasy boom and obstacle race events.

Despite its proximity to Gisborne's public MacRae Bath, which opened on the banks of the Taruheru and Waimata rivers in 1931, the river continued to provide the venue for multiple swimming races. In summer 1961, Gisborne Club swimmers churned up the waters of the Waimata, Taruheru, and Turanganui, during a short (200yds) river race held from the William Pettie bridge to the Gladstone Road bridge.[216]

The river remained a popular and free option, particularly for Kaiti and Whataupoko children, when the Olympic Pool opened in Salisbury Road in 1974 and the MacRae Bath closed.[217]

There was little left of the so-called Island in January 1967 when the first Lions Club-sponsored River Swim was held. The event, running over two and a half miles from the Island down to Waikanae Cut, replaced the annual Bay Swim. Remarkably, it was noted, five girls were among the 27 of 30 entrants to complete the distance. Glen Sutton's winning time was 45m 16s.[218]

Wainui Beach surf lifesavers gained a training boost from about 1989 after building canoe and surfski storage beside the Waimata River. This facility provided members with an alternative training

base for river or sea practice any time, but particularly when rough weather made training at Wainui difficult.

Raft races were for many years a highlight of the Gisborne calendar. Fifty-two entries in the 1964 Gisborne Industries Fair raft race wallowed their way over the one-and-a-half mile course from the Botanical Gardens bridge down Taruheru River and up the Waimata to Anzac Park.[219] More than 8000 spectators lined the riverbanks and bridges. Made from oil drums, rubber tubes, water tanks, crayfish floats and bathtubs, the rafts varied from 20-man vessels to two-man gadgets. Some were propelled by ingenious devices, with revolving paddles and bicycle parts, but hard work proved key to the finishing line. Many were equipped with armaments of varying descriptions, including water-pumps, catapults, skyrockets, and flour-bombs.

Among the obstacles to confront the competitors were a continuous jet of water supplied by the Fire Brigade, and mud balls thrown from the bridges. The eventual winners were two boys, Ian Croker and Tony Adeane – later a district court judge – in a small sleekly-shaped vessel.

By the 1970s, the course was shorter. The Youth For Christ Campus Life raft race started in the Taruheru River, opposite Lowe Street, and finished at Anzac Park. [220]

The Gisborne Canoe and Tramping Club used the river as the focus for many of its activities. In 1959, singles and doubles canoe races were held down the eight miles from near Holden's Hill, finishing at the Cenotaph, just past the confluence of the three rivers.[221] And in 1963, Wairoa canoe club members joined their Gisborne counterparts to compete in a race down the river for the inter-club trophy, the Bill O'Connell Cup. The canoeists started at Holden's ford, having several tricky rapids to shoot before entering the quieter waters of the lower Waimata.[222]

Even Father Christmas used the river, arriving by boat in 1973 to be part of a family day at Anzac Park following the Christmas Parade. [223]

Apart from picnics and swimming, Longbush was often used for various clubs' activities. Volunteer territorials of the 4th Company (Gisborne) RNZ Army Service Corps used its bush for a mock jungle and camp training exercise in 1959.[224] And Gisborne's Air Training Corps held instruction camp weekends there in the 1960s focusing on bushcraft skills, rifle shooting, cooking, bridge building, map reading and safe river crossing. Thirty-five member of ATC's 14th Squadron spent a weekend there in 1965.[225] In 1968, before undergoing their regular annual two weeks' training at Waiouru, 85 men of A Company of the 7th RNZ Infantry Regiment, from Gisborne and surrounding districts camped for four days at Longbush, their undertakings being field manoeuvres using live ammunition.[226]

Longbush was also the setting for various inter-club bushcraft competitions.[227]

In 1964, 42 Boys' Brigade members competed in a cycle rally held over the 14 miles from the Army Hall, along Riverside Road to Longbush, and back to town via the Matokitoki Valley Road. [228] The rally was the first to be held for five years.

But one of the most popular and enduring races focused around the river near Longbush was the gruelling Creswell Cup, which ran from 1960 until 1977.

Starting and finishing on the road at the swing-bridge at Longbush, the race followed a course up Motukeo, back down again, across the bridge, up Pukeaikuri, and back to the road. Each hill is about 1400 feet and the horizontal distance run, about two and a half miles. Harrier Dave Hughes was the inaugural winner of the October 1960 race, completing the race in 53 min 15sec.[229] He was first man home again in 1961 when the event attracted 16 entries[230], and again in the following three years.

He kept the cup, as tradition dictated, and another cup was made.

Dave Hughes, who joined the club in about 1962, recalled:

The canoe and tramping club had two real go-gettters – Bill Bishop and Bill Peach – who were proactive in getting things going. They instigated the Creswell Cup which Bob Creswell donated the cup for as it was on his land, Motukeo.[231]

He won again in 1966, 1967, 1969, 1970 and, with Ray Hamilton, in 1972 in 77 minutes.

Ray was the only one to tackle the second hill with me so we stuck together.

Hughes was second twice and third once. He made his fastest time on his third attempt with 49 minutes 43 seconds. The fastest recorded was Ian Soloman with 47 min 57 sec. Keith Scholes had the second fastest time with 49 min 15 sec.

You were crawling up the hill in parts. It was tough but fun. This is extreme trail running. Now they have good trail running shoes, designed for running on tough ground. Back then, we had Para rubber sandshoes. I glued cleats on my shoes to get up the hill, but they would come off.

The race grew out of a traditional race run by the Tararua Tramping Club in which they carried a pack, wore boots and ran up a mountain. It was recognised as very tough. The two Bills thought we will run it but won't insist on the boots or the pack. They advertised it, we went out and had a run. They didn't expect it in under one hour. It kept going until 1977. I had a great innings.

Marvellous athletes have won the race and gone on to national honours including the Healey boys.

We would get 20 to 30 people but by the late 1970s, people were losing interest and gave it away.

Bill's son Geoff Peach was 12 when he ran the first race. Mrs Creswell presented a junior cup. Later the Harriers took it over.

The canoe and tramping club ran a series of canoe races in the late 1950s early 60s from Goodwins Road to town.

It was a bit shallow at times and there was the risk of willows – the most dangerous things you can have as people get swept underneath and branches can hold you under the water.

Hughes recalled rowing a boat from town to picnic on the Island.

The Island has gone from being quite a big island to nothing. It was at least 40-50 metres long and 20 metres wide and a couple of metres high and covered in grass and trees. It has slowly eroded.

My son still goes to Hole-in-the-Wall up to the first papa rapid.

The river continues to be the place for recreation and fun. In December 2014, high school students built a 15m water slide with black polythene on the steep bank below the town end of Whitaker Street. Detergent made for a faster descent into the river.

Greta Watson, who lived at Linburn for 40 years from 1962, said the river was a source of much activity and entertainment.

There were some great swimming pools which we often used, and the same pools were good for eeling.

One time when the river was in half-flood in the late 1970s, my daughter Julie as a teenager launched an aluminium dinghy from the low bridge, and with friend Grant Bramwell – later an Olympic gold medal-winning kayaker – navigated down river to Grant's house on the riverbank in Kaiti. It took most of the day and was quite an adventure.[232]

Grant Bramwell:

The river wasn't in flood but had been a few days beforehand. We figured we wouldn't have to do too much work.

I remember the old dinghy crashing and bashing over logs. The river was discoloured. We had to pull in the oars a lot of the time, bashing our way through the willows that crossed over the river. I remember pulling the dinghy over logs that were right across the river.

We ran into some surf club mates above the second island, they got a surprise to see us. It took us less time than expected to reach our place in Marian Drive – probably about five hours.[233]

Archie and Elma Watson bought Linburn in 1907. Their son Robert married Amy Gray (of Gray's Bush and Gray's Hill) in the mid-1920s. Greta married their son Gerard.

Greta Watson:

After our five children were grown up, in the 1990s, city friends with two small children stayed with us on a regular summer holiday basis. They were used to home swimming pools and being clean and tidy. They loved the freedom and challenge of the river. They made dams and mud slides and spent hours getting slathered in mud. Their parents were at first appalled but soon realised what fun they were having and became less fastidious.

It was a great experience for all of my family and the earlier Watsons living in such close contact with the river, studying its moods and having to rely on its cooperation for access to our home and livelihood. It gave us a permanent respect for nature and its power, which is a valuable lesson to learn.

An outstanding rock pool and rock slide on the Uttings property on the Waimata's upper reaches attracted busloads of people every weekend for some years in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Roger Utting and neighbour Mat Bailie often went there together. Mat remembers the piles of old jeans and clothes left behind, and how the public stopped coming after a man was badly injured.

Spawning place of gold medal Olympians

When Olympic gold medal kayakers Grant Bramwell and Alan Thompson flew into Gisborne in 1984, the pilot diverted his flight for a victory swoop over the stretch of water credited with giving the heroes an edge on the world stage.

Thompson won the K1 1000m final at the Los Angeles Olympics, then, 90 minutes later, joined Bramwell, Ian Ferguson and Paul MacDonald to complete a double in the K4 1000.

In 2016, the men continued to pay homage to their training ground on the lower five kilometres of the Waimata River and 1200m Turanganui River. It was here, for about 10 years, they slogged for at least two hours, twice a day, every day.

Grant Bramwell:

We were on the water every morning before the day's work started and back out there again in the evening.

They got to know the stretch intimately, observing every bend, every straight, every bank, every overhanging tree and every permanent and potentially kayak-battering submarine log.

Both were Waikanae surf lifesaving members, prolific national title winners and New Zealand representatives.

Their experience of the river dates back more than 40 years. Grant grew up beside the Waimata in Marian Drive, only a handful of houses away from the home he bought in 2000. He and a couple of mates spent all their youth mucking around in dinghies and canoes on the river, exploring, eeling, fishing. His children have since done the same. He started paddling on surf skis in 1980 as part of his surf lifesaving training with the Waikanae club, and took up kayaking in 1981.

Thompson was a promising Gisborne Boys' High rugby player and swimmer who took up surf lifesaving and paddling in his last year of school, 1977 or 1978? (had both dates) to supplement his swimming fitness. He has been paddling and coaching in the river ever since, his biggest gap being a 18 week? stint in the Czech Republic in 2016, helping son Quaid and Gisborne team mates Zach Ferkins and Britney Ford prepare for the junior world champs in Belarus.

The formidable pair hail the Gisborne environment as great for river training, despite having to trudge through mud every day.

Grant recalled that the Waimata never froze over like many European training rivers.

There were always large areas of water protected from the wind that we could use. So we virtually never had to have a day off because of weather conditions. The wind can whip up the waves below the kayak club but above there the Waimata is sheltered.[234]

Their training route had several sections – from the Cut (Waikanae Beach) to Anzac Park; the park to the first island; first to second island; and occasionally a bit further.

We'd go from the kayak club in Anzac Park to the second island and down to the Cut and back up to the island. We'd do that twice. It took about an hour. We rarely used the Taruheru as it was too shallow.

Alan Thompson:

We could go another one and a half to two kilometres past where Riverside Road leaves the river, where the second island was. At low tide, you couldn't get past because of the papa rock shelf. About two kilometres past the Hole in the Wall, you hit papa rock again, and could smash your rudder off.[235]

The length of the river between the island and the confluence with the Taruheru River is noted as a significant recreation area in the Proposed Gisborne Regional Freshwater Plan October 2015.

Grant credits their success, and that of New Zealand paddlers of the era, to Alan Thompson, who with his coach adapted the Arthur Lydiard training method to the needs of a kayaker.

We used the river to train in different techniques – fast, slow, 200m on and off. We followed the Lydiard programme that involved up to three hours of continuous paddling to strengthen the cardiovascular. The downside was your bum got so sore after two hours.

The disappearance of the two islands was the most noticeable change they had seen.

Alan Thompson:

The second island (below the Hole in the Wall) *was only about 20m by 10m (Grant says 3m by 2m), probably where the river cut out in the corner. It has been gone for at least 10 years (Grant says since late 1980s).*

They think the second island disappeared first, possibly after the 1985 flood. Then Bola probably contributed to taking the first island in the late 1980s. Grant said the water up to the second island was reasonably clear but upstream from there were permanent, hidden logs just below the surface, which made venturing further difficult and dangerous.

There are hard papa shelves around that area. That second island was right in a corner and became a deep bit – off the corner and big flat hard papa shelves. This is usually visible at a good low tide on a clear day.

Above the Hole in the Wall, the river is quite narrow, less than six to seven metres wide and no real rapids anywhere, no gravel banks. It's more of a defined trench.

Where the river turns a hard corner on the Riverside Road side of the river near the intersection with Grant Road is another flat papa rock shelf.

The first island had two ways around it but only on high to medium tide. Now you can paddle over the island at high tide. At low tide, you can see about a metre of it sticking up.

Alan Thompson:

We notice now, while coaching, how the river has filled up from Anzac Park up to the island. The banks are steeper. Probably a metre of mud has built up on the sides than from before or after Bola. After Bola, a retaining wall was built around the kayak club and there was a four foot drop to the mud. Now it's 1 foot.

From the straight by Anzac Park up to Grant Road, you can now walk across at low tide. It's waist-depth water. You never used to be able to do that. The next parts further up come and go. The 500 metres back from the island has got shallower. You can hit the bottom quite easily with a paddle and the bottom of the boat. It used to be a deep straight.

From the island to the second island, it has stayed the same. It's narrower and may be faster flowing. From the second island to the hole in the wall it's shallower too. You used to be able to paddle up there freely. There are big logs in the bottom.

From Anzac Park to the beach has remained the same. Some parts get shallower and then they get scooped out again. By Leighton House, [near the Rutene Road bridge] *it got a bit shallower for a while but then gets dug out. Quick downpours, where the water stayed quite clean afterwards, can actually work to scour out the river. But that just usually drops the silt out somewhere else.*

Grant said the drop off their Marian Drive lawn to the river is one and a half metres lower than when they first went there in 2000.

We used to jump straight into the river.

The permanent macrocarpa picnic table and seating, which once had a few metres of grass between it and the river, is now precariously close to the bank edge. He fears another big flood may take away the land and the table.

When there's been a lot of rain, the wide grassy area below the tennis court becomes totally saturated. Some parts get undermined and whole areas just drop off.

In September 2015, the water rose quickly and the river scoured out, much deeper than before. Afterwards (was it after this flood?), Grant convinced his upstream neighbour, a view-lover and reluctant tree planter, to plant trees to help hold the land at the bottom of their gardens. The neighbour's property has dropped away significantly, possibly up to six metres over the years, which has affected the upstream corner of the Bramwells' property. This is where Grant planted more willows.

Some willows were there when we came. In the past five years, we planted more young willows. They need about four years before the roots are significant. The retaining wall opposite is always slipping and having to be fixed up. Subsidence after a big rainfall is so much greater in areas where there's no planting.

The council reserve across the river, below Grant Road, is showing the benefit of mature council plantings after a big slip almost took the road out.

The bottom is constantly changing. The depth changes every time the river gets scoured out. Some areas are always deep and some are always shallow. But in some places that were shallow, now you can't touch the bottom.

He said the left bank of a stretch above Anzac Park had always been deep. But the right bank, closest to his property, was consistently deeper with a lot of bottom gone.

My gut feeling is that this is not a good thing but I don't know. It's not good for my section.

Alan said more logs, rubbish, trees and greenery came down in the early days but erosion has always been there.

Bola in 1988 and the 1985 flood cleaned out the logs a lot and the river stays clear for a while.

From what I have seen, all the erosion control is a complete failure. Everything they put in – willows, poplars etc – has ended up in the river. You get a flood, as the trees get bigger, the soil doesn't hold itself together. The trees lean into the river and fall over. If they are poplars and willows, they tip over and get ripped out.

He suggests the river could be improved by getting rid of a lot of material before it gets into the river, keeping riverbanks clear and planting a mix of flaxes and small shrubs a chain or two back from the water.

If they want to avoid another Bola, they'll have to do something. If they want to keep the river level down in town, they have to make sure the Cut is open and bridges are not clogged up.

It's not just pine coming down the river – it's grass clippings and all.

While some retaining walls had been built to last, he said many collapse and end up in the river including one opposite Grant Road and another opposite Anzac Park, which tipped over within a year or so of being built in the last 1980s.

The September 2015 flood saw about 20 metres slump into the river near Steele Road, a whole bank come down about 500 m from the first island, and 20 to 30m of a paddock collapse up from the second island. Grant noted more subsidence, particularly at the ends of Owen Road and Hinaki Street.

Alan Thompson:

The fenceline keeps moving back. At the end of Island Road, the fence is slowly moving back.

Once you get a log stuck in there, they stay. One log we know of has been there for 30 to 40 years.

In floods, a lot of mud comes down. Six inches of soft mud will reduce to about a centimetre of hardish mud in time. It gets baked on the sides of the river. The bottom settles down and gets firmer. It takes a couple of months, but the river gets shallower each time.

When you consider what happened with Bola – if we got that amount of rain now, having lost a foot in the depth of the river, what happens next time? It has to go somewhere.

In the 2015 flood, the water rose quickly and kept coming even when the weather had cleared up.

We don't have big banks anymore.

If we go to Anzac Park, there used to be a gentle slope down on each side. Then Bola came and they put in a retaining wall and a grassed area but now everything has built up to it. The river has got narrower and shallower.

The council plants trees down Riverside Road and then they fall in. The riverbanks are steeper and the level has built up. At the rowing club, two or three of the steps are under mud. It used to be clear for three feet below that at one time.

Alan said the river got dirty quickly with rain if it had already been wet, and could take four to eight days to clear. But although it looks bad, neither he, nor Grant, nor the people they coach had ever been sick.

The kids in the kayak club swim in it. We usually get sewage warnings – a day late – but they never get sick. We had a couple of boys about three years ago who swam in it every day for the whole year. It's super cold. They never got sick.

If there's a plan to fix the system so we don't get sewage overflows, even if that takes 10 years, that's good. But also there's a lot of overreaction. One overflow at Stafford Street, there was 1000 litres or something. That's not really that much (and it dilutes when it hits the river). The chances of it causing a problem are low although you wouldn't want to swim right next to it. It's probably more cow and animal runoff than anything else.

About 15 years ago, we'd get notices – about four days later – about not swimming at the beach.

Grant Bramwell:

The river always goes silty with rain. We get a bit of algal bloom in the summer – always when it is very hot. We've swum in the river all our lives, play in it all summer. The kids spend more time in the river than they do in our pool. I don't think anyone has ever got crook from it.

I (and others) spent hours training on the river. We always got water in the mouth. The taste and smell is not appealing. You could believe there were high coliform counts but I think that's just the way it is. It's not necessarily bad. No one has got sick. I was down there in it twice a day when training.

Both men believed the health of the river was much the same and had not deteriorated over the past 40 years.

Alan Thompson:

It's better than when Wattie's turned the Turanganui River red with tomato waste.

I guess the river will slowly get worse. They could stall it. From Riverside Road to the Island, there could be a couple of deep patches but the rest could go shallower.

Recreation in the valley

Sporting rivalry between Waimata North and South was fierce for decades with dog trials, horse sports and cricket the main pursuits. Everyone took part.

Tennis was a social gathering. People would often ride up to 35km to get to these events. Ted Tombleson and the Grahams on Mander Road had courts. If it started to rain, those who travelled by car would sprint to their vehicles to make sure they could get home across the creeks.[236]

Dog trials were held on Glenora and Otonga stations, the all-important cook house comprising a tent for many years. Later, locals built a cookhouse on the Glenora flat out of timber from an old house pulled down on Linburn Station. But river crossings – and the unpowered site – became an issue.

The trials moved in 1979, Waimata Hall providing the base with courses on Te Matai and Waimiro (Neil Fraser's). The Waimata club bought a shed used at the 1985 New Zealand champs at Whangara

and reassembled it at the Waimata Hall ready for the 1986 trials. It was used for bar facilities and storage for the year.

As land use changed, with big farms going into forestry, there was no longer the number of people around to help run and take part in the trials.

Richard Utting:

We used to have big farms and employed lots of shepherds. When they were gone, there was no one to run the dog trials.

We also had horse sports about April of each year, which the locals organised.

Horse sports finished in about 2000 and dog trials in about 2010, Mat Bailie said.

We don't do anything communally now. I was in charge of the people who released the sheep. You needed 12 people for every half day. Some of the farms had eight or nine shepherds but now they are in pines.

Deaths on the river

Numerous adults and children drowned in the Waimata River over the years, notably because of their desire to bathe but inability to swim. In rare cases, alcohol was involved. In others, the river was a means to ending a life.

John Sinclair drowned in December 1884[237]; **Samuel Goodall** drowned in a waterhole in 1891[238]; seven-year-old **Charles George Wood** in 1891 at Harris's Bend[239]; 21-year-old Waimata sheepfarmer **A J Jopp** in July 1893, near the river crossing to McPhail's station; and **Alfred Weston**, who was believed to be under the influence of alcohol at the time, near the confluence of the three rivers in 1897.[240]

After about a fortnight of extensive searching, Mr Jopp's body was found close to where it was thought he had entered the river and 10 chains above where his horse had drowned. Mr Jopp was drowned while heading home to the Waimata from Gisborne where he had been warned not to travel because of the heightened river level.[241]

Two sisters drowned while swimming at the Island in February 1906. **Vernon and Dulce Currie**, 15 and 10, had been given their mother's permission to bathe at the popular swimming place as they had bathed there for the previous few years. Several members of the inquest suggested a heaving line be put in place at this and other swimming sites and that warning signs be erected for children at dangerous parts of the river.[242]

Further downstream the following January, nine-year-old **Graham Higgins** drowned while trying to rescue his elder brother Allan Mark Higgins, aged 11. Rescuers succeeded in resuscitating Allan.[243]

The death of five-year-old **Gladys Brown** in January 1908[244] occurred at the "apple tree bend" of the river opposite Mr F Tansley's orchard. Two months later, 18-year-old **Henry Tobee** was accidentally drowned at Harris's bend – a well-known bathing spot (probably Anzac Park) where a deep hole extended for a couple of hundred yards, the bank suddenly shelving into about 14ft of water. The young man had plunged into the water from the mud at its side and landed awkwardly before paddling about and heading down stream, out of view of the dressing place beside the bathing jetty. The Poverty Bay Herald reporter cautioned, "The spot is one which should only be frequented by expert bathers".[245] At Henry's inquest the jury recommended the authorities place life-saving appliances at all recognised bathing places.

In February 1910, young Harold **Septumus Gibbins** accidentally drowned while on holiday from Hobart,[246] and the following February, John and Agnes **Christie's three-year-old son** fell into the river at Waimata Valley and drowned while playing with his brother.[247] Tragically, the boy's mother took her own life six months later by drinking the antiseptic lysol.[248]

Eleven-year-old **Edward Trumper** drowned in April 1911 while bathing with two smaller brothers close to Colonel Porter's property and past the Island.[249] Edward decided to swim the width of the river but was hampered by a strong current which swept him off course. He turned back but became too tired to continue. The two younger boys raised an alarm and a resident and two police constables arrived by 3pm. Recovering the body was difficult due to large quantities of logs and debris and the 17-feet deep, high-tide channel. The body was recovered at 12pm the next day.[250] Calls were later made for authorities to obtain grappling irons, as the absence of these had hampered the recovery of the body.[251]

Ship officer **Karl Gustafsen**, 25, was drowned in May 1916 after attempting to retrieve a goose he had shot. He could not swim but had left his clothes and gun on the river bank. [252]

Railway clerk Bertram **Robert Watkins**, aged 23, drowned while bathing at the popular Hole-in-the-Wall in January 1917. The pool where the body was said to have sunk was 28 feet deep in parts, with a strong current running through it. The man had attempted to swim across a width of 18 feet.[253]

Draper **Arthur Gordon Gunn** drowned in August 1920.[254] His wife had separated from him a fortnight beforehand because of his intemperate alcohol habits and conduct towards her. Bank of Australasia manager **Samuel Jarvis McCormick** drowned in November 1921 after suffering self-inflicted injuries.[255]

The coroner stressed the necessity of learning to swim at the inquest into 10-year-old **Arthur Malcon's** death by drowning after capsizing from his canoe in May 1924.[256]

A young boy, **George Spill**, drowned in February 1927[257] and in December Cook County engineer of 20 years **John James Keane**, 51, drowned in the line of duty after falling from his car into the river. His car was found still running, balanced on a bridge with the left side wheels over the edge and the door open. It appeared he had taken the corner sharply turning on to the bridge and, having just avoided running over one side of the bridge, swerved to the other and apparently fell or was jolted through the door into the river**.** [258]

The previous July, a cloudburst enveloped the Waimata Valley, 14 miles from Gisborne, and washed away a bridge. This bridge was replaced in late 1927 by a temporary low level structure which Mr Keane had to cross in the course of his road inspection work. His body was recovered lying in four feet of water. Mr Keane had been in ill-health and suffered from seizures. [259]

Boilermaker's apprentice **Douglas Marsh**, 21, was drowned while bathing in a deep hole in the Waimata River in December 1931**.**[260]

Eight-year-old **Douglas James Brown** drowned while visiting the Hole-in-the-Wall with his family in December 1939. The boy, who could not swim, went missing and his body was recovered late the following morning.[261]

The river undoubtedly claimed more lives during this these years and in ensuing decades.

More recently, the nation poured its heart out to the family of four-year-old Lucas Callum Ward who went missing in August 2010 and was found nine days later, having drowned in the river.[262]. The young boy wandered off from his grandparents' Kaiti home on the Waimata riverbank while his

grandmother unpacked her grocery shopping and answered the telephone.[263] His bike was later discovered on a trail that led to the jetty. A team of 50 including diving and boating teams searched extensively for the boy.[264] Nine days after he went missing, a waterskier found his body 400 metres upstream of his grandparent's house.[265]

More recently, in February 2011, young kayakers found the body of 26-year-old **Jonathan George Hunter** beneath the William Pettie Bridge. He had been missing for four days and took his own life after heavy marijuana use caused drug-induced psychosis, and depression.[266]

The Waimata River has also been used as a memorial site for deaths occurring elsewhere. A commemoration service was held on the river in January 2015 for ex-Gisborne man **Ben Sargent** who tragically died on New Year's Eve when he unsuccessfully attempted to jump off a 10 metre high pole into a Gisborne swimming pool.[267]

Addition 15 June 2016

John Hegarty said:

During WW2, everybody went mad with the war effort and some bright spark thought that growing vegetables was a good idea. So they prevailed upon the council to fence off a couple of acres between the road and the river about two miles upstream from the Rimunui turnoff and plant spuds.

They didn't get the silt tested and didn't know that Waimata silt is nearly straight lime, with the result that the spud planting resulted in complete failure.

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