

APPENDIX D.

BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE WANGANUI RIVER AND PROPOSED RESERVATIONS.

IN 1904 the Scenery Preservation Commissioners thoroughly inspected this beautiful river, and the gist of their recommendations, as subsequently revised by their successors, the Scenery Preservation Board, and the Under-Secretary of Lands, is embodied in the accompanying schedule, and illustrated upon the detailed plans bound with this report. Photographic views of several parts of the river are also given.

Rising amidst the slopes of the Tongariro range of mountains, the river soon becomes large in volume, but it is not until the settlement of Taumarunui is reached, 143 miles from its mouth, that its picturesqueness becomes so noted. Steamers ply regularly from here down to Wanganui, usually stopping at Pipiriki (fifty-five miles from the sea) for the night.

The river has been so often described that it is needless to give a long account of its varied scenery, but the following description by a visitor conveys some faint idea of its charm:—

“The wild and romantic beauty of the Wanganui River must soon take a leading place among the scenic attractions of New Zealand. The broad river, always interesting and beautiful both in its rapids and in the long reaches of still water; the steep rocky banks; the lofty trees, with white cliff-faces peeping out, tier above tier, from the varied foliage and blossoms of the trees; the graceful palms and the beautiful ferns rising as thick as they can stand (acres of them) from the water's edge right up to the top of some of the mountains; the Natives in their long canoes and picturesque costume, all combine to make up a scene of the most enchanting loveliness. The caves near Pipiriki are very extensive, and rich in stalactites. The view of the entrance is like a fairy scene—the ferns and lichens hanging round form a fitting frame, and from the ceiling hangs by a slender cord a mass of living creepers like a great chandelier. From the caves for some ten or twelve miles the river flows between perpendicular walls of rock, all festooned with a hanging drapery of ferns and lichens, whilst higher still rise lofty hills covered with luxuriant bush. Over these cliffs fall numerous streams, making a succession of waterfalls, all different and all beautiful—now a thin, gauze-like sheet of water falling from a projecting cliff high above our heads; then a roaring cascade of sparkling water; again, hidden back in a deep ravine almost covered with ferns and creepers. In several places two or three cascades are visible at the same time, and some of them are double falls. Thus the visitor is led on from one fine sight to another, his admiration growing at every turn; again and again he is ready to declare the view inimitable, until the next turn of the river reveals fresh beauties, and calls forth new praises, when at last the interest culminates at the Manganui-a-te-Ao, where an immense cliff rises like a mighty pillar on the right, and the rivers meet like two lanes in a great city walled in by many massive piles of masonry.”

The principal places of interest on the Wanganui River are the following:—

Seven Miles from Wanganui.—The Kaimatira hill and cliff, on which may be seen the earth-works of two old pas.

Eleven Miles.—Kaiwhaiki on the left bank, on which still stands the old “aukati” pole which marked the danger-line at the time of the Maori wars. Beyond this line no pakeha was allowed to go by the Maoris except at his own peril.

Fifteen Miles.—Here stands the Maori settlement of Raorikia (Laodicea) on the right bank and Kuamoia on the left bank.

Twenty-two Miles.—Parikino (the bad cliff) on a long reach of winding river.

Thirty Miles.—Atene (Athens), a kainga at a pretty bend in the river.

Thirty-seven Miles.—Koriniti (Corinth), a kainga on the left bank, with a Maori meeting-house worthy of inspection.

Forty-one Miles.—Karatia (Galatea), a Maori settlement on the right bank.

Forty-five Miles.—Ranana (London), a kainga on the left bank fairly well inhabited. Formerly a mission station.

Forty-six Miles.—The island of Moutoa, the scene of the famous battle of that name in May, 1864, when 800 friendly Wanganui Natives, led by Haimona Hiroti, Hemi Nape, Kereti te Hiwitihi, and Mete Kingi, met and defeated with great slaughter the rebel Hauhau Natives under a chief called Matene and a prophet named Te Ua, after a fight in which both sides fled in turn. This prevented the intention of the rebels to raid Wanganui and drive the pakehas into the sea.

Forty-nine Miles.—Hiruharama (Jerusalem), to which place the Roman Catholic Mission has been transferred. A large kainga and well cultivated.

Fifty Miles.—Ohoutahi, the scene of another fight where the rebel Maoris were again defeated by the Wanganuis after the battle of Moutoa. Hoani Hipango, a loyal chief, was killed here.

Fifty-five Miles.—Pipiriki, a European village, with two large accommodation houses. The site also of a military camp after Moutoa battle. Steamers stop here for the night, whilst the coach road to Raetihi branches off at this place. A mineral spring exists about a mile along the bank to the north, and a good drinking fountain has now been erected around it.

Fifty-six Miles.—The Paparoa Rapids (upper and lower).

Fifty-eight Miles.—The Autapu Rapid.

Sixty-one Miles.—The Ngaporo Rapids.

Sixty-three Miles.—The junction of the Manganui-a-te-ao River on the left bank. This is a fine rushing stream which has its source among the snows of Ruapehu.