

WASTELANDS



Ann Shelton *Chemistry, White Island, Whakaari, former sulphur mine, New Zealand, 2008.*

LOCATED in the Bay of Plenty 48 kilometres north of Whakatāne, at the tip of the Taupō volcanic zone, this island volcano remains highly active with steam eruptions, explosions and ashfall. Named White Island by Captain Cook, it is known as Whakaari to Māori for its occasional appearance on the horizon. A significant site for Ngāti Awa and Te Whakatōhea, muttonbirds were caught, cooked and preserved in their own fat. Māori also used sulphur for manure, an extraction Pākehā would pursue.

In European hands from the 1830s, legal ownership was established by the Native Land Court in the 1860s. Mining began with the formation in 1885 of the New Zealand Manure and Chemical Company. Successive companies sought to extract sulphur deposits, and turn the island to profit, for the next 50 years. A significant break in activity occurred in 1914 when the crater wall of one of the island's cavernous fumaroles collapsed. The lahar it released engulfed both mine and mining camp, killing the twelve men of the White Island Sulphur Company. A tabby cat, 'Peter the Great,' survived.

Workers found that the island air burned their eyes and skin, inhibited breathing and induced coughing. Gases combined with water and steam to form acid droplets. Cotton clothes fell apart, teeth went black, machinery corroded. From time to time the island shook. Rocks were blown out of the fumaroles. Liquid sulphur went solid in the air. 'The

worst hell on earth' said Claude Sarich, who laboured on the island in the early 1930s. Apart from the dreadful work of drilling bores and sifting sulphur there was nothing to do apart from birding and fishing. Gelnite was used to kill fish, which drew sharks.

The island remained an outpost of industry, if not civilisation. It had its own post-office before mining ceased in 1933. Work conditions were always prohibitive, and profits could not be sustained. With volcanic ash intermixed, the superphosphate product burnt grass and proved weak fertilizer.

Always attractive to sight-seers, an early visitor was the missionary Henry Williams, who was awed by the steam, smoke and boiling lakes. Since the 1940s it has been a laboratory for earth scientists. It has also been the subject of two films and a book, *Island Volcano* by W.T. Parham. Today four companies deliver 10,000 tourists a year. Remnants of the workers' buildings can still be seen.

*IT REMAINS A
SPECTACULAR IF
UNINHABITABLE
LANDSCAPE.*

*THE PHOTO IS
BOTH AN INDEX AND
ITS OWN REALITY.*

SMOKE indexes fire. Steam indexes heat. The one points to, gestures towards, the other. But neither fire nor heat is the indexical object of the photo. The object of the photo-index is missing. What is pointed to, gestured towards, is human trauma. The photo is the index of a relation, the remnant, or reserve of an historical experience whose reality is nothing other than the photo itself. The volcanic landscape, reduplicated, points to the fact that this is a photo.

There is no simple access to the historical reality of the human inhabitation of White Island. What inheres in the land, in this image of it, is the negative reality of transient and traumatic human experience. Turin shroud-like, the photo is a reality imprint, for nothing remains of that historical reality. There is only its sign without referent, the photo-index as trace, all that is left in the world of buried history. The photo-trace does not reference or represent history. The object it indexes is absent.

Historical trauma is indexed as split landscape, separating the spectator-viewer from the actual island, and from actual history. Monocular vision is cut up, disturbed. On the near side of the image-event is a bleak and uninhabitable landscape. On the far side lies the trauma of its brief human inhabitation. Trauma may be registered but not strictly *known*.

It is a tear, rent or rupture of human sense. The photo registers trauma, not as the physical burning, singeing, inhuman landscape of the island, and the multiple deaths of worker-visitors, but as a non-experience of sight and evacuation of sense. No one has *seen* this split island. The eye can make no sense of it. The photo-coffin leaves history disinterred.

The photo recognises traumatic historical experience by replacing the experience with a fiction of its possible representation. All that remains of the past is the non-thing of the photo. The photo as index of trauma shows nothing. There's nothing to see. As no actual thing, it indexes existential loss. How does history deal with nothingness, evacuation of experience, loss. Conceptual documentary photography is a salvage operation, a paradoxical preservation of loss, and work of artificial memory (the memory function of the camera). What it traces is a reserve reality, one with no presence in the present that isn't the photo's own.

SITUATED south of Haast and north of Milford in deep, wet Westland, Jackson Bay was conceived as a Special Settlement Scheme under the government of Julius Vogel, determined to make colonisation its business. Following an encouraging survey party's report in 1874, the new settlement was promised £20,000. The bay had a harbour, arable land, abundant timber, and was situated near the lowest point at which one might pass through the Southern Alps to Otago. Fishing and sawmilling would ensure the town's prosperity.

Westland superintendent James Bonar imagined 250 families of the best settlers. The first would be experienced settlers already resident in the upper west coast. Volunteers drawn by a pamphlet were offered Government-paid work on roads and the opportunity to buy back the land they cleared. Profits from the sale of land would enable the construction of the harbour, roads, schools, communications.

Before the survey of town, suburban and rural sections were even completed, 81 settlers arrived in 1875. The 16 family groups, not gold-rush sojourners, were Scots, Irish, English,

German, Swedish, Danish and Canadian. They would be joined a year later by further Germans, and Italians and Poles, unemployed assisted migrants held up in Wellington. Writing in 1938, C.H. Gordon partly blamed the settlement's failure on the 'poor stock.'

On arrival the settlers quickly scattered, choosing their own sites, inhibiting more concentrated growth. Mislead by the survey, the Poles relocated to neighbouring Smoothwater. Arawata became the name of the township at Jackson bay. There was soon 20 cottages, a blacksmith shop, carpenters shop, tool store, government store, and resident agent's office (a reporter in 1887 noted the pretentious magistrates building, built for £1,000, and a disused schoolhouse). With five hectares cleared, grass appeared, with crops, fruit trees, vegetable gardens, and flower beds. But the weather was bad (259 rainy days in 1878), there was flooding, the bay was protected from southerlies but not northerlies, the health of the settlers was poor, there was little comfort, the isolation was acute, crops were plagued, potatoes ruined, and there was no way of getting goods to market.

To prosper the would-be town needed a jetty and a tramway so that inland timber could be brought to market. The promised construction led one settler to invest in a local mill. Despite complaints about the resident agent's unsympathetic attitude toward 'lazy' settlers, a petition to the government, and a government commission of inquiry, no wharf was built. Slow communications inhibited development. Reports from settlers to Westland superintendent to Wellington Minister of Immigration could take weeks, and criss-cross. The £2,500 pounds needed for the jetty did not materialise before the rapid decline of the town's population.

Jackson bay is a tribute to Government neglect as much as settler hope. Connection to the outside came too late to save the town, which emptied out in the 1880s (the Italians and Poles left within a year). The wireless and an aeroplane service, newspapers and bread, came to Westland in the 1930s. The vital wharf was not completed until 1939. At the edge of the bush which has retaken Arawata township, thirteen graves remain visible.



Ann Shelton, *Settlement, Arawata, Jackson Bay, New Zealand, 2007.*

What truth does the image speak when what is spoken is quietude.

*SPEAKING IS
HABITUAL, RELATIONAL,
DISCURSIVE, EMBODIED,
COMMUNAL.*

This image shows no habitus and no relation, tells nothing, embodies no one and communes with no one. The land is emptied of any speakers and listeners. It is humanly blank, evacuated of residence. What has been removed, registered by the photo, is all relation to land, home and history.

There exists only the photographer's relation to non-relation. This is the absence of a relation to one's own past, the voiding of narrative, continuity, selfhood, location. Where relation is discontinued, the past is disowned, the place un-owned. The one-time inhabitants of it are displaced and dispersed. The reality of this evacuation is the referent of the photo. It has no real-world correlate. The dispersion has occurred but isn't itself to be seen.

The truth of the experience is more than knowledge of it ('what happened'). It cannot be grasped within the terms of those who have since prospered. Our understanding of settlement telescopes knowledge, extending backwards a present reality we know as our own. To conceive an event from the far side of settlement, as well as the near, is to remove

oneself from a past-for-the-present, and return to the past its present (one that would not have a future, much less our present). What inheres in present settlement is the void of those non-existent once-peopled places.

People, place and history make up an encyclopaedia of local knowledge. While settler-subjects live in terms of the encyclopaedia of this knowledge, the failure of settlement is an inherent, immanent possibility, for some who would have been settlers a grief unto death. This is the far side of what is known, and makes the truth of New Zealand moot, stark, quiet.

The truth of settlers who failed, what it is that they 'know', is the exception to settlement, New Zealand 'except for' settlement. The photo takes exception. Its truth cannot be part of the encyclopaedia of settlement, because it is the very idea of New Zealand not coming to be. It is the truth of the exceptional settlement, the exception of settlement, settlement that fails. The photo is the exception that the photographer takes. For there is nothing of settlement any longer to be seen. Its exception, its current absence, is merely shown. What lies beyond facts is the silence of the photo.

Focus on the exception does not make itself part of the national story (it is an exception to that story). It avoids an institutional, discursive mode of self-address that makes the place intelligible, inhabitable, and the settler-subject its very truth.



James Ring, Jacksons Bay looking North [ca 1900s].
Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, N.Z.
F- 22634-1/2

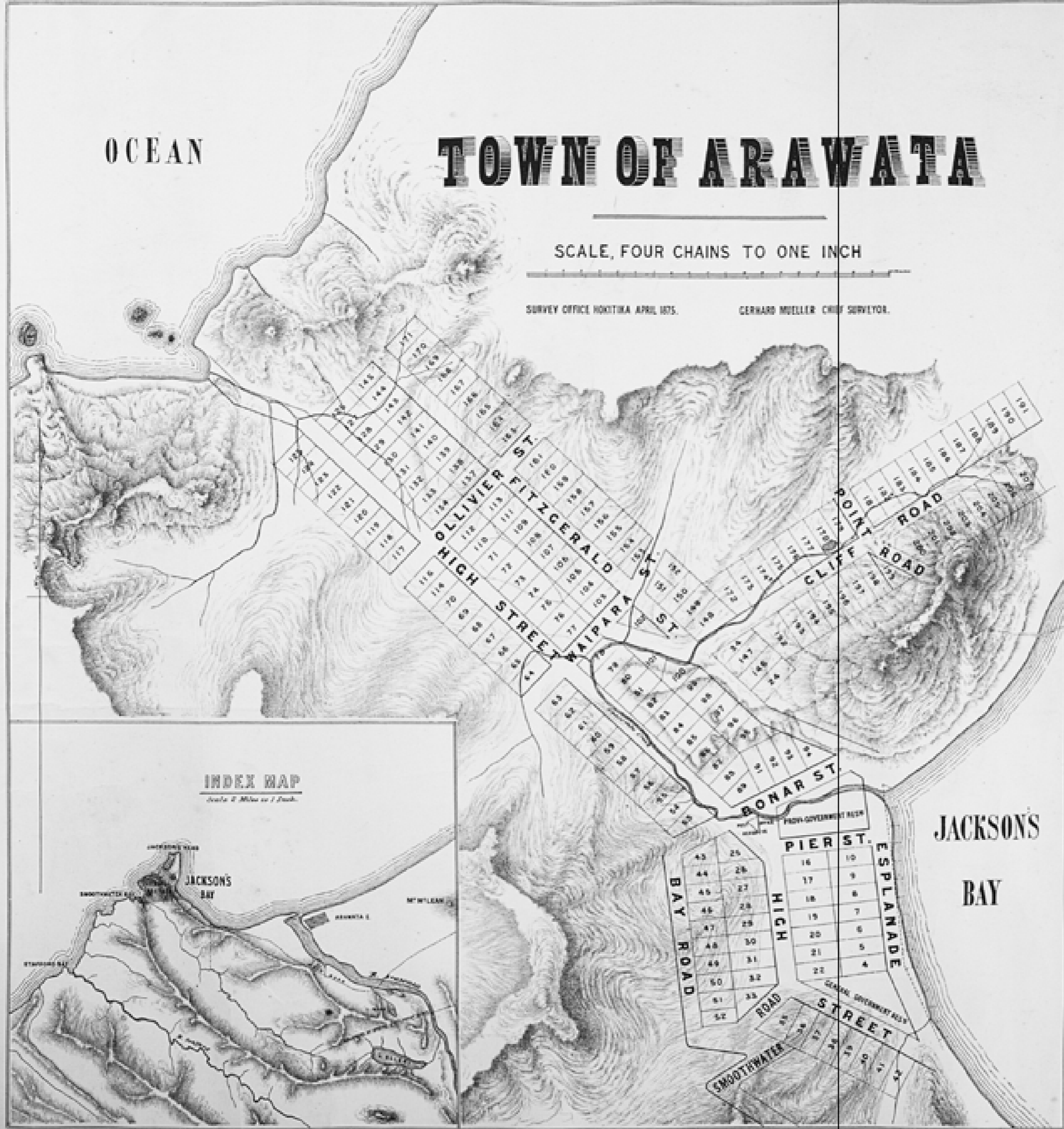
OCEAN

TOWN OF ARAWATA

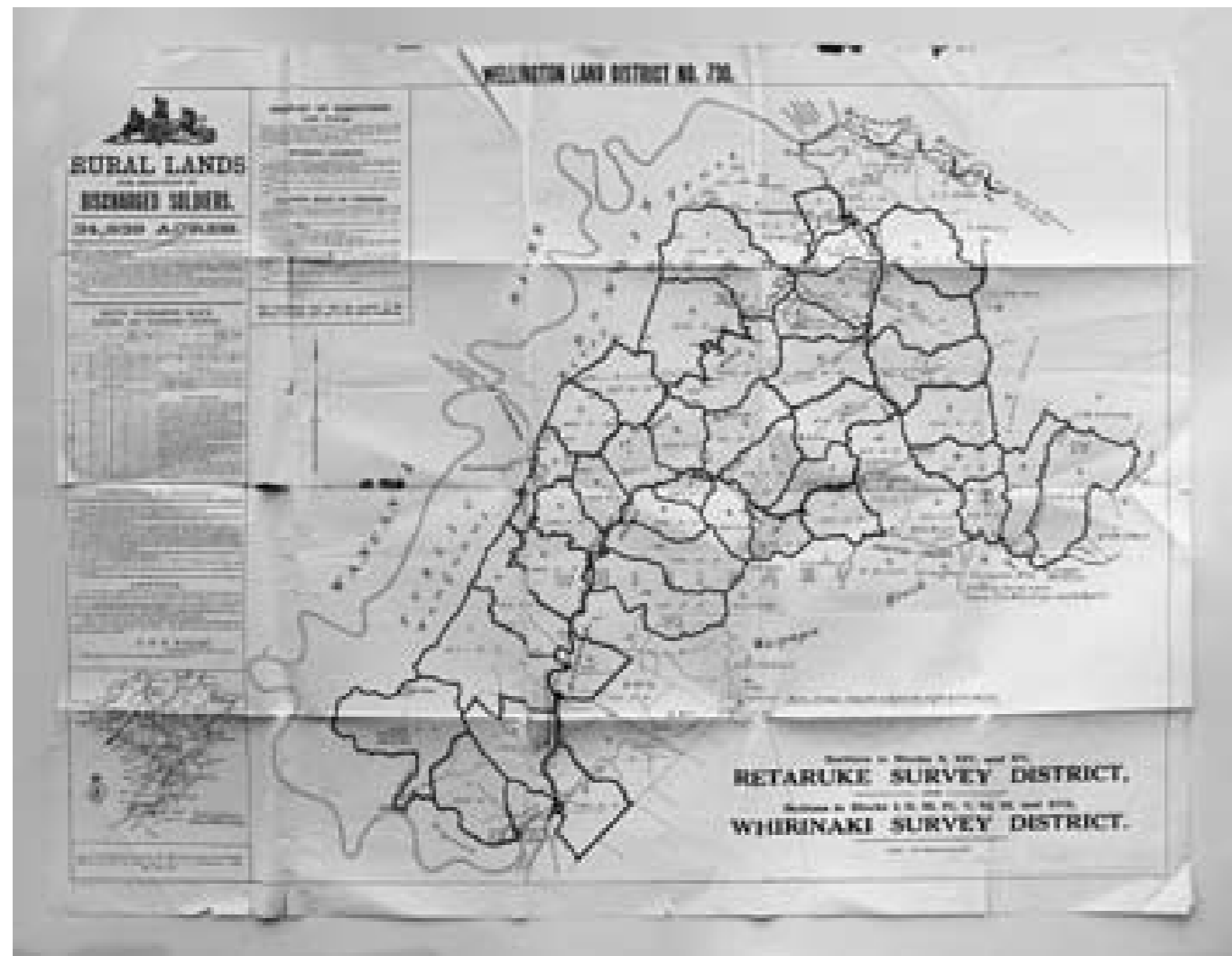
SCALE, FOUR CHAINS TO ONE INCH

SURVEY OFFICE HOKITIKA APRIL 1875.

CERHARD MUELLER, CHIEF SURVEYOR.



Arawata Map - no date.
 Archives New Zealand/
 Te Rua Mahara o te Kāwanatanga
 Christchurch Regional Office
 [Archives Reference: CH528, box 2, 1/105]



[Map] Rural Lands for Selection by Discharged Soldiers, 34,839 acres – Retaruke and Whirinaki Survey Districts, 1916. Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kāwanatanga Wellington Office [Archives Reference: LS 1/1703, 21/296]



Builder, W. H. Sandford on top of the bridge with his apprentice Mr. Jack Lynn. Photo courtesy Wanganui Chronicle.

The Bridge to Nowhere, situated in the Mangapūrua Valley west of Raetihi and spanning the Mangapūrua Gorge, is now encompassed by the Whanganui National Park. A substantial steel-reinforced concrete structure, typical of its time, some 34 metres in length, nearly 40 metres high and 38 metres above the water, the bridge is close cousin to the Bridge to Somewhere in east Taranaki. Both serve as monuments to public confidence and fine engineering in difficult terrain, but also to futile enterprise and abandoned settlement.

The Mangapūrua Valley was 'opened' in 1917 by the government to provide land for returned soldiers under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act (1915). Some 10,000 veterans were served by the scheme, but many thousands were sent to remote areas to clear bush, create industries and new communities. The world war they returned from, for all its horror, cannot have prepared them for the hardship of remote rural settlements.

The Mangapūrua Valley settlement was one of the first of its kind, with forty returned servicemen and their families, cheap land and the promise of a road to Taranaki given by Prime Minister Massey. Holdings were soon cleared in dense bush, a school was opened, the valley prospered. But the settlement suffered from infertile soil, remoteness and difficulty of access. The concrete bridge was the subject of long agitation, and replaced a wooden suspension bridge built in 1919 that was narrow and rotted. Roads to and beyond the bridge did not materialise before the settlement failed. Slow migration out of the area after the

crash in agricultural prices of 1921 drained the life of the settlement. Three families remained in 1942, before a flood the same year, and the government's refusal to fund roads, led to the closing of the valley.

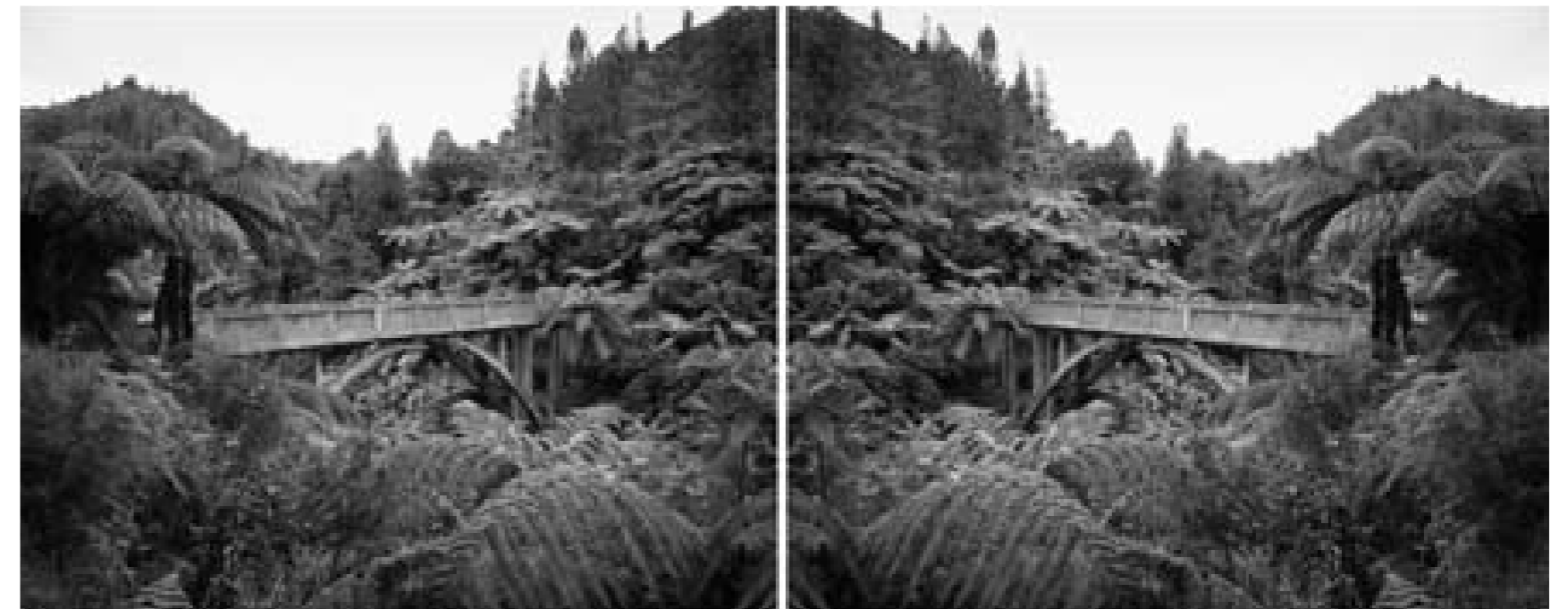
**THE LAST SETTLERS,
AFTER DECADES OF
PERSISTENT LABOUR,
GAVE THE SETTLEMENT
UP TO THE BUSH.**

Amidst disappearing road and fence lines, exotic trees and brick chimneys, the bridge is an out-sized remnant of settlement. A feature of the 1986 film *Bridge to Nowhere*, and the subject of a book by Arthur P. Bates, it is today a popular tourist attraction on the Whanganui river, forming part of the two-day Mangapūrua Walkway. A category one heritage building since 1994, it gets more use from tourists than it ever did from settler-farmers.

HERE is 'nowhere' because something was supposed to happen that did not. Otherwise, it would not be no place. The imprint of settlement is negative, a void. The bridge begs the question of its existence. It is about the non-event of an imagined community, a non-event that inheres, *in-exists*, in settlement today. The bridge is itself an achievement, but serves as evidence of the event of failure. It is negative evidence, signifying something that is not there and never was. The far side of history, the truth of waste, is negative evidence; the near side, our own, is positive, and about us.

The photo reveals the inner dialectic of settlement, an absence internal and unconscious to it. The photo witnesses the future absence of the settler-subject – the very absence of futurity. The immanent possibility of failure is not dramatic, spectacular. It is a falling off, floating away, an edging toward a void. The mood is eerie, dispersed, serene. The bridge to nowhere is absurd, mocking. It continues to nothing, and continues nothing. The futurelessness of failure is not even an event. It is just something that didn't happen, and has no existence. The photo is evidence of something that didn't happen.

The photo documents a real bridge, but registers an inadmissible silence. A settler-subject has not eventuated, so some place has become no place (the failure of the settler has made a particular place 'nowhere'). The reality of failure is the



Ann Shelton, *Landschaft, The Bridge to Nowhere, Mangapūrua Valley, Whanganui*, 2007.

Failure isn't something you see, or even something you know. It inheres in settlement as immanent possibility. The enterprise and industry of settlers, their focus and future, their whole being, is oriented around the success of settlement. They think before the fact in terms of the success of their endeavour. They must do so in order to settle – their thinking so makes them settlers. The fact of failure cannot be registered in terms of the continuous narrative of settlement. Failure is discontinuous, disjunct, merely theoretical. It cannot be integrated with the subject-settler – an idea of who and where 'we' settlers are.

event of the photo itself. Its subject is not the settler, or settlement, but the non-event of futurelessness. The subject is not the new country, the national story, the citizen of the nation-state (the story of 'us', our story). It is the non-person of a non-place. Non-people and non-places have their own history that is not the history of nations.

The national regime classifies, orders, regulates, makes known all aspects and elements of settlement, except being without a future. Once cannot be a settler and exist in place that has no future. Our knowledge of the settler situation is structured by exception.

**WE ARE
INHERENTLY SHAPED
BY IN-EXISTING
FAILURES.**



J A Rutherford, Sketch of Temporary Cage, Mangapūrua Stream, 1917. Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kāwanatanga Wellington Office [Archives Reference: AATC 5114 W3456/72, PW 44/46]

SITUATED 60 kilometres north-east of Stratford in east Taranaki, the Bridge to Somewhere seems to mimic the better-known Bridge to Nowhere in the Mangapūria Valley. Both memorialise misplaced confidence and abandoned settlement. By the time the Bridge to Somewhere was opened in 1937 most settlers had left the area, the hopes of the Aotuhia settlement extinguished by a storm in 1942 that flooded the area, leading to the closure of access. The lack of roading had plagued settlers of the Whangamōmona valley from the start.

For all the settlers' difficulties, 'somewhere' and 'nowhere' do not register Māori land confiscated in Taranaki through Pākehā incursion in the 1860s, and the eventual confiscation, under the 1863 New Zealand Settlements Act, of some two million acres of land, then made available to Pākehā. The later invasion of destruction of Parihaka in 1881 is not the story of Aotuhia, but the idea of 'plentiful' land motivated settler objection to Maori resistance.

Aotuhia was one of the first settlements in the 'valley of plenty'. Settlers arrived in 1896 via the Whanganui River, working with axes and saws amidst steep hills, narrow valleys, deep gorges and thick bush. Constructing dwellings at first out of punga, a clay road was cut with pick and shovel to Whangamōmona village. But it was subject to floods and slips, rutted when dry, and often impassable. Isolated for months at a time, unable to get produce out or supplies in, living on short rations and imprisoned by mud, settlers found subsistence at Aotuhia tenuous. For a time impassable country supported an impossible community. There was a post office, school, sport grounds and regular events.

The Bridge to Somewhere now leads to Aotuhia farming station rather than nowhere, but the settlement did not last. Roads, the settlers' great concern, did not sustain their community. The concern for roading is reflected in the local history of Whangamōmona, Aotuhia and the Okara Valley by Derek Morris, *All for Nought*. The titles of eight of its fourteen chapters concern roads.

Whether sections had been bought by settlers or allocated by government through the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Scheme, the land proved uneconomic, and problems of access crippling. An 'indignation meeting' at nearby Whangamōmona in 1918 registered the mismatch of settlers' expectations and reality.

Whangamōmona flourished in the early 1900s. Its residents included farmers, stock buyers, railway and road workers, sojourners and charlatans. Harder times came with fluctuating stock prices, rising rates, loss of life to World War One and the 1918 flu epidemic, and the 1920s depression. A Chinese merchant – Chew Chong – saved many Taranaki farmers by paying for the edible fungus they collected. It is now a ghost of the former town. The fantasy of settlement endures in the Republic of Whangamōmona, 'declared' in 1989 when the area was removed from Taranaki to the Manawatu-Whanganui region. A local passport can be purchased, but the tiny population make it very few peoples' country.

Today, the Whanganui National Park threatens to absorb the eastern Whangamōmona valley, turning wasteland into official wilderness. It is also Māori land and the subject of Treaty of Waitangi claims. The route of State Highway 43, which runs through Whangamōmona from Stratford to Taumarānui, was formerly a major forest trail known to Māori as Whaka-ahurangi. As New Zealand's first heritage highway in 1990, it is now advertised as 'the Forgotten World Highway', complete with rugged scenery, historic Māori sites and remnant pioneer settlements.

The Bridge to Somewhere is a two-hour diversion from the highway. A popular route for four wheel drive vehicles, quad-bikes, and horse treks, the isolation, immobility and wasted labour of the first Europeans is hard to recapture.



[An example of punga construction.] Daniel Louis Mundy, A digger's whare, Punga Flat, Thames goldfields, 1867-1869. Auckland War Memorial Museum. C17269.



The Evening Post, Wellington, Friday, 2nd June, 1905.

The Evening Post, Wellington, Saturday, 3rd November, 1900.



FIDELITY to settlement is not the same as a commitment to settlement. Truthfulness is not the same as loyalty. Some roads don't lead anywhere, even less to us (who find ourselves 'somewhere' today). The abandonment of somewhere is doubled here, not recovered.

A mechanical-photographic historiography is not sentimental. Its 'fidelity' is documentary – light enters the camera lens – and not human. We experience a truth of its function.

Twinned pictures tell two truths [1] an image encodes a concept, not a present or past reality [2] an image of what isn't there anymore encodes a relation between past and present. This relation, or non-relation, is mechanical and theoretical because it lies outside experience. One cannot have experienced something that is inaccessible. The absence of what isn't there anymore is not the simple absence of the past, but the inaccessibility of what has left almost nothing of itself. The bush-covered area of the bridge to somewhere suggests no community, past or present, that we can relate to.

Reality, past or present, is not the photographer's subject here. An inaccessible absence that structures the present is her subject, that is, what lies outside documented reality yet inheres in it, and shapes it from the inside. This is a relation to the past in terms of an image without reference to it, a relation of absent-presence, or absent community, that inheres in the present.

Fidelity to the truth of an inaccessible relation is a mechanical truth procedure. Taking a photograph of what doesn't exist anymore forces into presentation an element of the present that is otherwise inaccessible to us. We see an artificially generated and unnatural image. Across two pictures our monocular vision is bifurcated, internally split. Because one picture is a mirror of the other, it is not the same picture. What we see doubled is not the same as itself. The self-presence of the settler past, and settler-subject, is ruptured.

Purposeful vision, the inner coding of the eye, is interrupted. Two bridges get you somewhere no better than one. Extending the bridge in the image is redundant. Without relation to its purposeful design, its in-built futurity, the bridge relates only to itself. This image of redundant public works is a public work of another kind, concerned with truth, not just knowledge of settlement, with interrogation, not just 'stories of settlement.' It is concerned with

the lack of continuity between there and gone and here and now.

The truth is constitutive redundancy, the 'wasteland' that settlement produces. Māori names, sites and claims signify that somewhere was not 'nowhere' or 'nothing' before second settlement. Nor does fidelity to settlement make its waste 'for us.' Settler self-tourism has replaced settlement.

VISITING THE SOBER MONUMENTS OF FAILED SETTLEMENTS HAS BECOME A FORM OF SETTLER THANKSGIVING.

Ann Shelton,
Ballot,
Bridge to Somewhere,
Whangamōmona Road, Aotuhia,
East Taranaki, New Zealand, 2007.

THE embedded history of the Kawarau Gorge in Central Otago is as difficult to sift as the gold it once contained. Following its discovery in 1861, a pastoral backwater was flooded with prospectors, many 'professionals' from Victorian and Californian fields. Seeking further deposits amidst the schist-outcrops of the Clutha tributaries, they formed numerous would-be towns, Gees Flat, Bannockburn, Quartzville and Carricktown, the more populous with store, post-office, butcherery, hotel, blacksmiths, stables, school, and mud, wood and corrugated-iron cottages. But so ephemeral, mobile and transient was the shoaling of miners, as the Clutha valleys were panned, sluiced and later dredged, that the temporary settlements they formed can hardly be reconstructed. Their tents, their handcarts and heavy swags, the sheer lack of bridges and roads, and the uncharted landscapes they faced, must be imagined. Their payload was real, making Otago the most populous and wealthy province in New Zealand, Dunedin its de facto capital, and driving the colonial economy.

Disappeared settlements with-hold history. After the first arrivals in 1866 the number of Chinese matched Europeans in the Cromwell basin by the mid-1870s, yet little is known of their lives. An 1878 survey of the planned town of Bannockburn, south of Gees flat and southwest of Cromwell, registers 70 inhabitants but no Chinese, and no women. An accompanying map details Chinese huts, gardens and store. There were notable names (Choi Sew Hoy and James Shum), Empire-era racism grew, from petitions of protest before any Chinese had even arrived to the imposition of the poll tax in 1881. But there is no physical evidence of Chinese residence. By the 1920s the Chinese had disappeared, along with many towns created by gold-seekers.

A rich Bannockburn heritage landscape study (Stephenson et al.) tells us that little too is known of Māori occupation. Māori names signpost an already inhabited landscape, Mata-Au (Clutha), Mākahi (Mt Aspiring) and Aoraki (Mt Cook), grandson of Kilikili Katata of the waka Araitaura. Early routes

into the interior followed the seasonal pathways of Kati Mamoe and Kai Tahu, seeking weka, waterbirds, eel, tools, flax and pounamu to the west. The rangatira Reko of Tūtūrau guided the early explorer Nathaniel Chalmers to Canterbury. For Māori the landscape was inscribed by use, whakapapa and ancestral deeds; for Europeans it was a resource to be parcelled out. In Bannockburn miners and pastoralists beat surveyors to the land. Few located themselves in the planned town, which bore no reference to the landscape. As mobile as miners themselves, the town shifted as gold was found beneath it, and only ever existed on paper.

Settler interests in mining and pastoralism relied on coal and water for prospecting and irrigation. An arid region in Alpine rainshadow, the Clutha landscape was remodelled by the diversion of existing waterways. Water for hand-panning, cooking cradles, washing grovels, and faster sluicing was channelled in races, which proliferated and grew longer. The champion Carrick race extended 22 miles from the upland ranges to the Young Australian waterwheel

mine at Carricktown. Despite settler ingenuity, the pile-up of tailings and debris inhibited further mining. Sludge destroyed land, clogged water-courses, and fouled water. Mining went underground, and deeper over-ground, thanks to quartz-crushing batteries and dredging.

Settler industry can be sampled at the Goldfields Mining Centre in the Kawarau gorge. Absent one-time towns make Scots names as imaginary as those of *The Lord of the Rings* on the AA map. Tourism isn't the only new industry in the area. Since the 1980s viticulture has flourished, and appropriated the waterways. Urban and lifestyle subdivision is repopulating the area, making it over once more, and filling in the pockets of absent history.



Ann Shelton, *Payload, Gees Flat, former gold mine, Kawarau Gorge, Otago, New Zealand, 2007.*

ONE'S gaze is drawn to the gap between twinned images, directed down it, and there disappears. The gap is a vanishing point of settler mind, habituation, residence. Transient settlement bypasses settler memory and cognition, forming spots of invisible, inaccessible history. Gold-miners were sojourners in the main, so the 'foreign' Chinese were called, and only secondarily settlers. The sojourner is a split settler-subject, unyoked to the future, making settlement a split screen projection, and the place-to-come a fantasy, one we cannot see whole. There's no 'here' here.

The split does not register an experience, but the internally fractured present of a place whose past is foreign to it. A mirror image is not the same as the image it mirrors (are there two images here, or one?). We do not see anything whole, or something quite natural, but a fractured representation. We experience the past-present relation as disconnected, and we experience reference to the past in the present as an internal absence or void.

Reference cannot function because its basis in the continuity of image and object, present place and past settlement, is made void. The past here is dispossessed, ownerless, an experience of self-estrangement in the present. The what of this history has no who. The sojourner is witness to a futureless history.

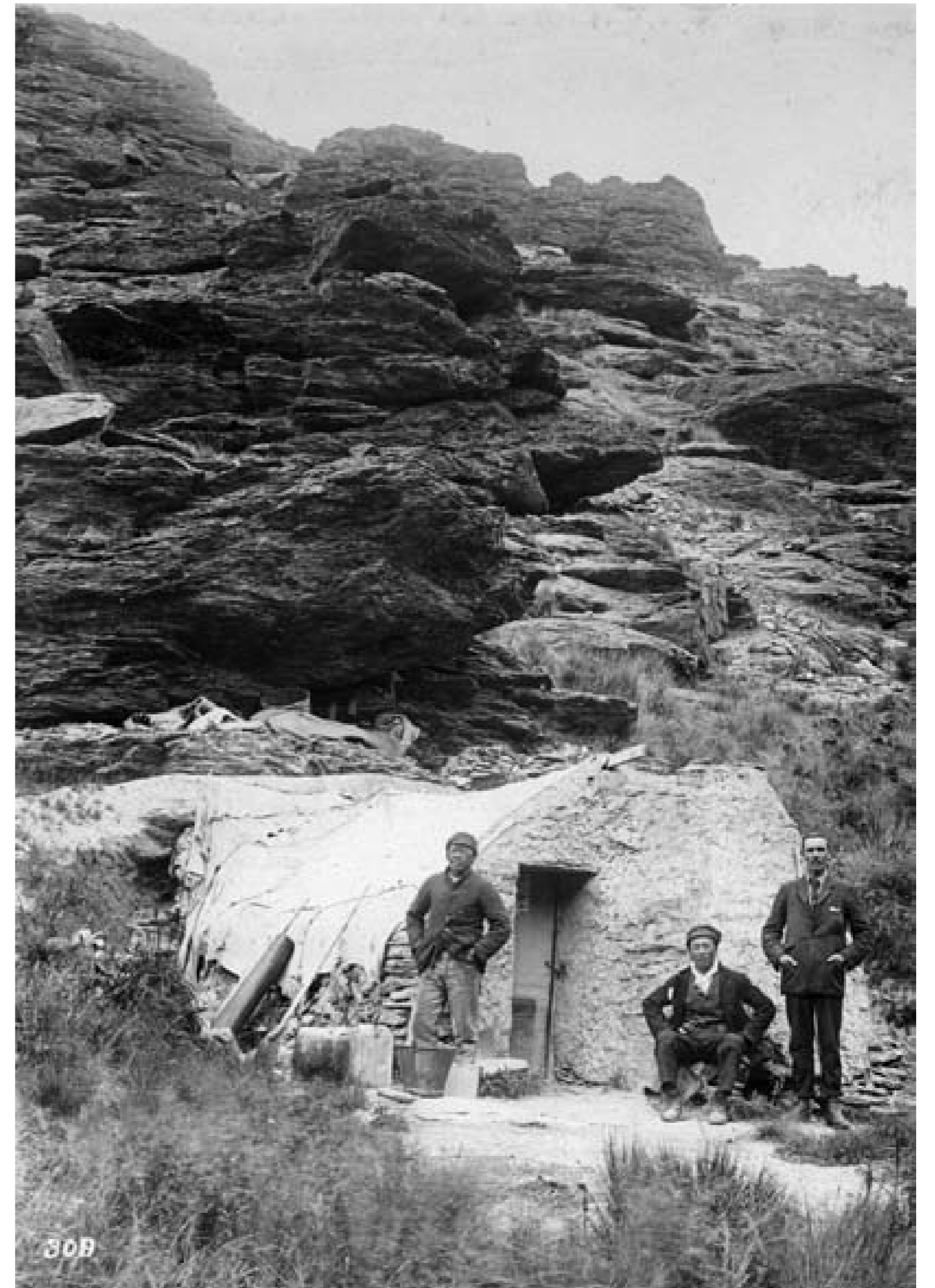
What is experienced, a past futurelessness, cannot even be said to have been experienced. The photo presupposes this broken relation. Its strict geometry, its shapes out of nature, questions 'the natural', negates the organic, severs past and present, people and place. Land-as-history is triangulated, codified, estranged. The photo is the index or trace in the present of a past that does not support it. The present is internally

striated, split by an absence that may be felt but not seen.

Witnessing here takes place outside the time and settled place of the settler-subject. There can be no witness to a future that doesn't happen (who can say they have seen a future not happen?). While the witness (the camera) is mechanical, its truth is a splitting that cannot be seen but that inheres in settler seeing. The splitting of the photo forces into historiography a double-take, a double-look or second seeing. We do not see ourselves; we see ourselves seeing. The image shows a place blasted out of present reference.

What you see here you must imagine. The image is a Rorschach test, settler inkblot and spot of time. We are forced to see history as a concept, 'our history' as a construct. What we see is not our unconscious; it is something unconscious that sees 'us'. The Rorschach-photo is an historical aperture, an opening to a past we can't strictly know. The image not only makes us witness to a foreign country, it makes us foreign to the country we witness.

IT MAKES US ALL
'CHINESE'.



Potters Gully, from Album in McNuer family papers, S10-506, MS-1007-009/009. Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hakena, University of Otago.

PICTURING WASTELANDS

MORE than a concept, 'waste land' is a set of behaviours. The content of the proposition that land might be 'waste' determined the action of European settlers in new countries. It made the places they came to prone, ripe for their choosing, and available for their occupation. A waste land belonged to no one, and was strictly no place. The proposition did not so much reflect reality (it didn't) as produce a new reality through the settler's enactment of its premise. Without a sense of waste land, and the 'wastefulness' of Indigenous people, settlers could hardly occupy new countries in good conscience. The waste of un-used land stands opposed to a set of values – labour, cultivation, improvement – that explained why the settler's society was more advanced. The nature of the new country, however much its wildness and picturesque beauty was remarked and in time set apart, referenced the European imaginary of second settlers. Un-used land, once transformed by their labour, made them its natural occupants, and made its nature their own.

Settler dominion established a new nature. The wholesale transformation of land made second settlers, self-evidently, its 'rightful' occupants. The poetic fiction that critic Lynda Hardy calls 'natural occupancy' applies to the fact of dominion. Failed settlements highlight the *made-nature* of a country that settlers considered new. Such now empty sites show settlement to be merely prospective, a *mere* prospect: a picture of place drawn by settlers that was also the promise of a better life (gridded town plans that did not account for the geography of their location illustrate the mental landscape of settlement). For settlers of untenable lands the prospect proved illusory. The picture could not be filled in and the promised life made real. Such places starkly reveal the existential and economic speculation of settlement. Goldminers make the prospect of a new country the very business of prospecting, but also raise the spectre of transience. Settlement can tolerate transience no better than Europeans tolerated the Chinese miners of central Otago. Settlement had to offer a return, a home here and not simply a return home. The remains of one-time settlements are testament to misplaced confidence, wasted labour and desperately hard lives. If unused land could be converted and made productive, the cultivation of un-usable land created true waste land. Such places could never be claimed to be God's own. Pushed by settler numbers, pulled by the promise of settlement, people poured into such places and disappeared, as if down some drain of Empire.

Picturing the country does not necessarily lay claim to place. Dominion requires that the picture of place be given ideological content. Waste land makes settlement *motivated*. More than a wild or picturesque prospect, land that appears waste rationalises the settler occupation and use of it. Settler assertion of dominion is therefore a proposition: the place becomes one that settlers propose will be their own. 'Waste' is the content of the proposition, without which dominion could not be asserted. Waste land makes settlement logical to settlers, giving every appearance of reason to the existential and economic thrust of Empire. However invasive and self-aggrandising, settlers were sincere in this view.

At once concept, imperative and fact, dominion is a total picture. As concept dominion makes man nature's master. As imperative it is dominion that man is duty-bound to exercise. And as fact the civil society of man follows upon the exercise of dominion. The proposition that land even existed as waste gave European settlers working instructions: waste land was to be occupied and improved. The injunction had biblical authority. God had commanded Adam and Eve 'to replenish the earth and subdue it'. Large tracts of uncultivated land in other countries, where millions in Britain had none, told of the idleness and indolence of indigenous peoples. Settlers' view of waste land was nearly unanimous, says Stuart Banner in *Possessing the Pacific* (2007). 'Allowing the fertile land to lie uncultivated,' for settlers, 'was worse than a waste; it was a sin' (p.89). It wasn't clear that Māori in New Zealand even *possessed* what they didn't cultivate. Nor did holding land in common, as they appeared to do, suggest any incentive beyond collective subsistence to work it. The decent society to be founded by the industriousness of settlers would instil further Christian virtues of chastity and prudence, and lift Māori out of 'barbarism.'

If the *Book of Genesis* put the earth at man's disposal, and commanded his cultivation of it, John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* (1689-70) made individual property the result of such labour, and prosperity and liberty its reward. The intermingling of labour and soil converted land into private property, located right in possessive individualism, made men of property the stake-holders of Government, and ensured that the protection of their property was the function of law. The law that issued from Government, and established property-holders as its spokesmen, firmed up the territory of European nation-states. A corresponding civil society was consolidated through the political representation of property-owners. This was the public sphere of free and fully human men. The logic and law of property infused the business of settling new countries, which could have no other basis.

The Colonial Office, the New Zealand Company, colonial administrators, missionaries and just-landed settlers could not but think of New Zealand in terms of waste land. Such spare capacity, assumed by the Crown, would secure the prosperity of the colony. This sparked a debate about waste land in the 1840s. Progressive 'Whiggish' sentiments towards the lands of new countries united politicians, the 'city' business community, the London press and prospective settlers. The proposition of waste land was put about by Dr. Thomas Arnold, headmaster of Rugby School and New Zealand Company supporter, and the Swiss Emerich de Vattel, an influential exponent of the developing law of nations. The question urged upon home government was whether Māori had title to anything more than the land they actually occupied and used. The rest, un-used, was surely waste land available to an incumbent Crown. Acquired for a nominal sum – it was of little value uncultivated – its sale to settlers would fund further emigration. Unbound by law and lacking civility, Māori society only stood to benefit from the emergence of European communities nearby. The idea of self-funding settlement naturally held great appeal to the Colonial Office.

But the concept of waste made no sense of Māori land. As a resource for hunting and gathering widespread flax, timber, fern root, birds, eel and fish, and not just domestic agriculture, the distinction between used and un-used land could not be made to stick. Land was not held in common, making Māori a people without property, but striated with multiple userights. Genealogy secured and related land to users and each other. As ancestral taonga, with no hill in the country un-named, dominion lay with the land. The survival of Māori communities depended on the nurture and husbanding of its resources, and the spiritual principles that mediated relations among land and local people. Tikanga in every locale, considered Māori law, ensured the flourishing and freedom of Māori as tangata whenua. Waste, if anything, meant taking more than was needed from the land, or mistreating and thereby 'wasting' the resource. In the 1840s the reality of Māori 'occupation and use' became clearer to Europeans and made conflict all the more likely. The pragmatic doctrine of pre-emption, as a result, came to dominate the legal business of land transfer.

Under customary title, Māori could claim the whole country, Treaty or no Treaty, so that land, waste or not, would have to be purchased. Resemblances between Indigenous occupation of land and feudal English tenure were hard to dismiss. The troublesome doctrine of customary tenure for land-hungry settlers was negotiated by the evolution of the Native Lands Act in the decade of the 1860s, and its creation of the Native Land Court. Customary title was converted through its means to Crown-registered freehold land. Inscribed in article two of the Treaty, pre-emption had made the Crown the only buyers of Māori land. The underlying international doctrine, long established in British colonies and the United States, and immediately affirmed by statute and Supreme Court in New Zealand, meant that only the Crown could extinguish title. Pre-emption was imagined to protect aboriginal interests and to stabilise a potentially volatile land market. Conceivably, its basis was humanitarian. Equally, it cloaked a highly acquisitive scheme to extract land from Māori at non-market value and profit from settler ballot. Its periodic restatement in New Zealand throughout the second half of the nineteenth century made the Crown itself the source of good title.

Waste land plays little role in the legality of land transfer, says Richard Boast in *Buying the Land, Selling the Land* (2008). His authoritative book takes into consideration willing Māori sellers as well as resisters, notably the Māori King movement. The 1850s saw Māori balk at the robbery of pre-emption. But whatever today's attitudes, holding onto land could equally prove a curse. Unemployment, poor health and penury defied the settler claim that Māori would benefit from surrounding European settlement, and forced many to seek buyers. Boast concludes that the transfer of land did not make any economic difference to the well-being of Māori, whether Māori were willing to sell or not: 'Māori might as well have given their North Island lands to the Government for nothing for all the economic difference it would have made (p.40)'. The legal machinery of land transfer proved more effective than war in the systematic colonisation of the country. It is hard to see how it could have been otherwise. Boast would have us avoid an anachronistic interpolation of present-day attitudes.

The forced individualising of title under successive Native Land Acts (1862, 1865, 1873) attacked tribal brokerage of land deals, unbundled iwi and hapu collectives as land-owning entities, and freed up land for settlement. The legally orchestrated process of alienation was unrelenting, and rapacious. Māori could scarcely bear the costs of surveying, court-hearing and title-granting that might establish their title.

Coercive as Crown legalisation of land tenure in the later nineteenth century seems today, Māori were supposed to benefit politically as much as economically. Holding freehold land proved a civic capacity for participation in government (to vote one had to own or rent land). The logic of private property rationalised the application of settler land law and justified the dominion of settler government. But pre-emption enriched settler government, leaving Māori marginalised and in relative terms impoverished, as cheaply acquired land was crown-granted to settlers. By 1860 two thirds of a country of 66 million acres had passed into settler hands, South Island deeds of nearly 30 million acres making up the most part. By 1911, estimates Stuart Banner, the 22 million acres of the North Island left in Māori hands was reduced to 7 million (a sixth of it had been confiscated). Where waste land enabled settlers to picture the new country, and their dominion in prospect, pre-emption provided the effective mechanism.

But here-now and there-then attitudes are linked by the settler psychology of waste. It is fear of presentism – thinking past people's thoughts through our own – that makes historians wary of our condescension. Defaulting to rich description, the present becomes the past's only possible outcome, making for an historical account that overlooks bridges to nowhere. Failure can't figure, for it has no bearing on the future. The past as an ever-present set of possibilities is quashed by 'what happened next.' The *genealogy* of waste land reconfigures settler history, and makes presupposition part of it. More than the fact of its occurrence, much less a natural occurrence, second settlement was presupposed. Waste inheres in the dominion of settlement, hard-wiring settler psychology. A society created out of the intensive combination of capital and labour – Edward Gibbon Wakefield's hypothesis – made the new country a proposition. It had to be imagined, or pictured, on a daily basis, most especially in unnatural sites of occupancy, where settlement seemed most unlikely.

In areas of remote bush, settlers could only imagine settlement because there were no signs of it. Such would-be settlements needed more than private capital and the broad acreage of South Island pastureland. They needed public funding: roads, bridges and rail. The Public Works Act of 1870 allocated a vast sum for acquiring land (£200,000), spawned a new era of settlement, and generated a sense of the nation larger than the sum of its provinces. The country was dynamised by the dairying industry, and forever transformed by 100,000 new settlers in the same decade. In the dairying centre of Taranaki the family farm and school-centred community consumed the settler imaginary. Prosperity hinged on the combination of ownership and labour that the dairy farm seemed to epitomise. The Government's confidence was settlers' own, its credit an investment in their future, and the picture of place enlarged. Public works are performative, making the promise of settlement real, a fact on the ground. But settlement is also a confidence game. Where picture and waste land did not cohere, occupancy turned obdurate, conditions ever more trying. As confidence waned, settlers found themselves stranded by promise.

Letters, pleas and petitions reveal the settler's plight: the lack of access, amenities, equipment and contact, floods, fouled water and the mud created by their own clearings. In failed settlements the picture of place is despoiled. In untenable sites waste land becomes human waste. Dominion is no fact of the matter. It is more obviously a proposition, 'waste' working as concept, imperative and would-be fact. The proposition drove settlers to labour, however inhibiting the physical reality of the place they tried to make home, or like home. As a proposition, or proposed place, settlement requires waste for its support if a new country is going to be made real. Without waste, and the labour to reduce it, no new country can emerge that is distinct from the older one already there. Waste lands make graphic the imaginary of settlement. The remnants of failed settlements show the picturing work of settlers more clearly than the established heritage architecture of provincial towns. Historical 'sites' rather than 'sights', there is little to see. Such places highlight the importance for settlers of the prospect, steadily dimmed by steep valleys, dense bush, fast-flowing and un-fordable waters. Settler dominion is a fact of settlement, but waste is its condition. Considered in terms of its legal and economic basis, the dominion of settlement is a part-picture. Failed and futureless settlements offer settler historiography a different vantage point.

The fait accompli of settlement may be resituated in an anterior psychological landscape, which inheres in our own. Waste lands link the existential and the economic dimensions of settlement, adding a less visible dimension of labour. This is the work of imagining home in unlikely, unfamiliar surroundings – the work of the prospective, prospecting settler mind. The scoping activity of second settlers (more literally surveying) constitutes an imaginary pre-emption that provides no existential account. The possible loss as against the potential profit of settlement is equally in prospect. After a decade or more of the most severe labour in the most trying conditions, having unproductively subsisted, would-be settler families emerged from the bush, landless and penniless. They hardly contributed to the young nation, apart from the colourful story told today of their struggle, nor had their investment gained any return for themselves.

Settlement was never already decided, inevitable and inexorable. Settlers had to decide to stay, to believe in the future prospect of place, and to persevere. Untenable settlements made this all the more difficult, and the work of settler's imagining all the more obvious. Settlement was made harder by those sojourners who weren't going to stay, leaving behind one-time towns that weren't going to last. Central Otago gold-diggers with experience of earlier California and Australian fields might feel no compulsion to stay put. Settlement in fleeting goldfield-towns is reversed, doubling back, like Chinese workers returning home to Guangzhou province, unbound to the country-to-come. The redundancy of failed or passing settlement, the waste of place, exposes the fantasy of dominion (something the Chinese did not and could not share). Nor is dominion something that settlers have given up. Such places provide an aperture through which history that does not lead to 'us' may be seen, history that stops short, and appears to disappear. In such settings the time and labour of settlement is abbreviated.



An old water wheel on the Carrick Range.
Ex. Gavine Mclean Collection. S04-272c.
Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hakana,
University of Otago.



[Letter to] The Hon. The Minister of Lands, D H Guthrie Esq MP from
J S Walsh and 33 other Tenants in Common in the Mangapuru Soldiers'
Settlement [ca October 1922].
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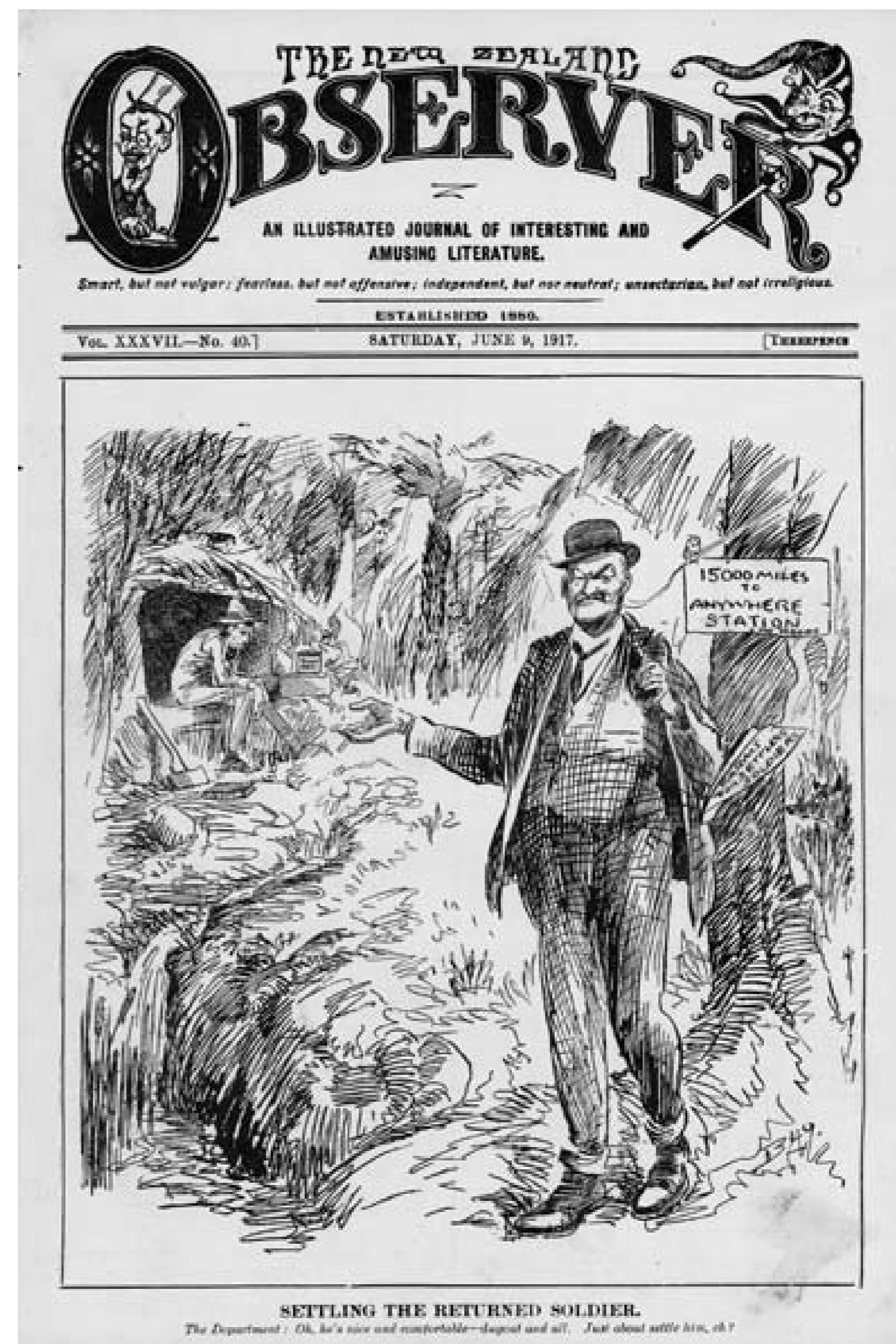
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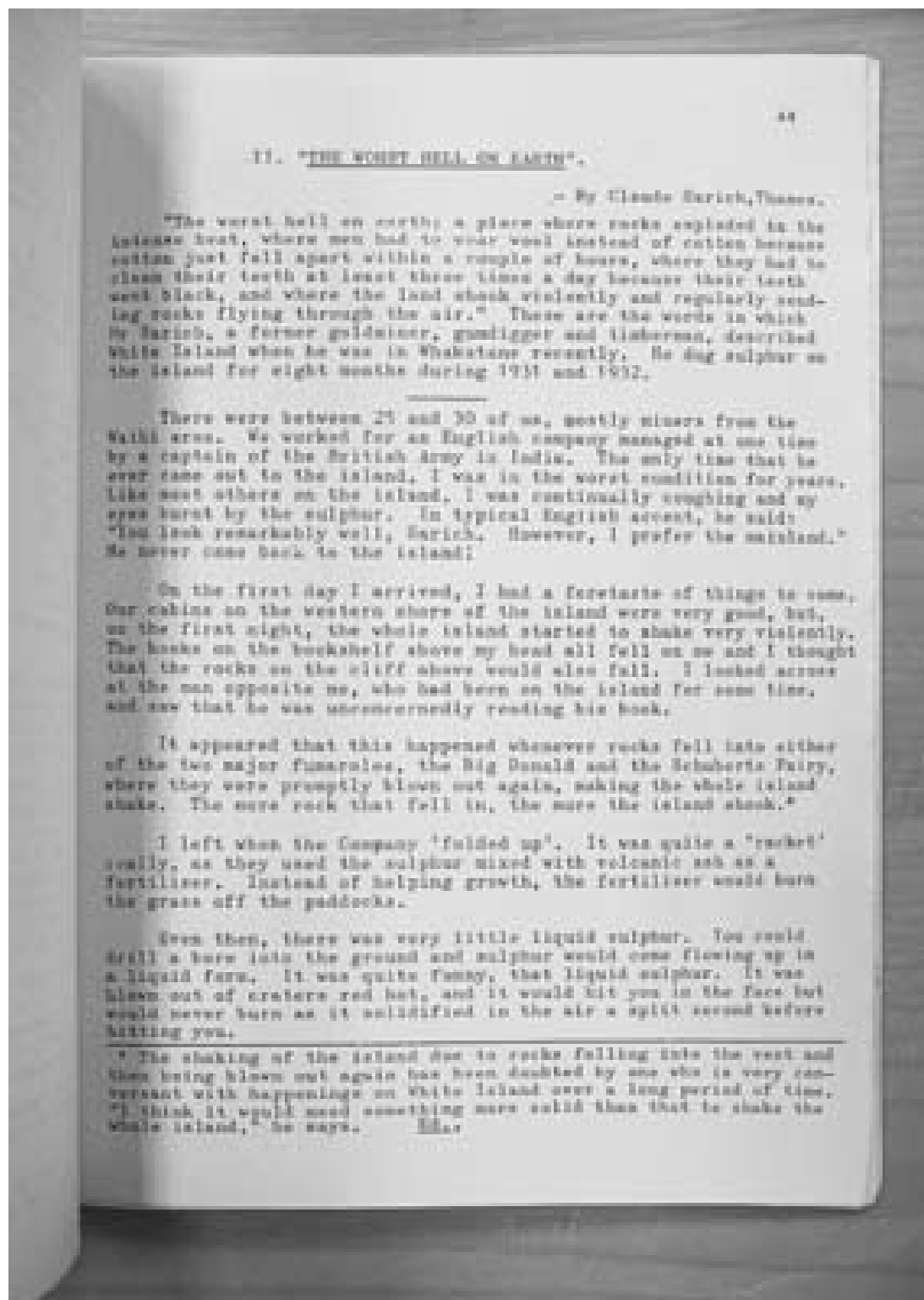
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William Blomfield, 1866-1938, *Settling the returned soldier*. New Zealand
Observer, 9 June 1917 (front page).
Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, N.Z.
A-312-1-193.



Photographer unidentified, White Island Products sulphur extraction enterprise on White Island, showing a plant worker in the foreground, and a stationary steam engine driving extraction machinery [Between 1925 and 1930]. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, N.Z. F- 59931-1/4.



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