

The First Mine in the Waikato

Kupakupa Mine / The Waikato Mine

Coal was first discovered in the Waikato in the 1840's. A landslip uncovered two seams of coal on land belonging to Chief Te Wherowhero on the west bank of the Waikato River, opposite Taupiri.

Reverend Benjamin Y Ashwell, who had established a Mission Station opposite Taupiri Mountain, is believed to have used this coal for domestic purposes.

In 1850, Dr Arthur G Purchas (a Vicar, Doctor and Geologist) relieved Reverend Ashwell.

Digging around, he uncovered about a half of ton of coal, some of which was sent to Auckland for testing. Mr Watson, Blacksmith, of High Street, Auckland, found the coal *'to be too good for smiths purposes'*. *'For domestic purposes and steam boilers it is said to be superior to New South Wales coal'*.

In 1859 the Government surveyor Dr Ferdinand von Hochstetter surveyed this outcrop.

The Kupakupa Mine, was situated on today's Riverview Road, Huntly West. It was initially mined in the early 1860's to fuel the river steamers which carried supplies to the military camps' stationed along the banks of the Waikato River.

In 1876 the Waikato Steam Navigation Company began mining the coal commercially.

'The miner's camp is situated on a beautiful flat, nicely and conveniently raised above the level of the river on one side of the coal hill.The camp consists of a Manager's house and four good houses for the men. there are thirty men working'

New Zealander, 31st August, 1864

On the 8th April, 1864, a young man, John Viall, died at the mine from Typhus.

New Zealander, 16th April, 1864

We believe, though, that our first mine accident death, was in November, 1864, to Patrick Gorman, who was killed when a heavy piece of coal fell on him.

New Zealand Herald, 30th November, 1864

'There cannot be the remotest doubt that when the Waikato coal-field has been fully opened up, which will at some not very distant day, the quality of the coal will be proved to be equal to any other coal in the world.....'

New Zealander, 14th November, 1865

AND SO IT BEGAN.....

In 1883 the Waikato Steam Navigation Company merged with the Waikato Coal Company. At this time Kupakupa Mine became known as the Waikato Mine. The Waikato Mine was worked until 1899, when production was suspended.

Coal from these early mines was originally sent by barge to Mercer, and on to Auckland by rail. After 1878, when the railway reached Huntly, coal was brought across the river to a small railway siding on the east bank. It was then transported by rail to Auckland.

