

# TO WAIAREKA VALLEY BY RAIL

## A History of the Ngapara Branch Railway in North Otago

By W. J. Cowan

DURING the early spring of 1870, heavy rains swept through North Otago, turning many of the roads, such as they were, into quagmires. Settlers in the Weston, Whitstone, and Enfield districts, finding access to Oamaru difficult, decided to form a company to construct a tramway alongside the main road into town. The rails were to be bluegum and the sleepers manuka, while the estimated cost was \$500 per mile. The proposed rolling stock was to have wheels suitable for both rail and road use.

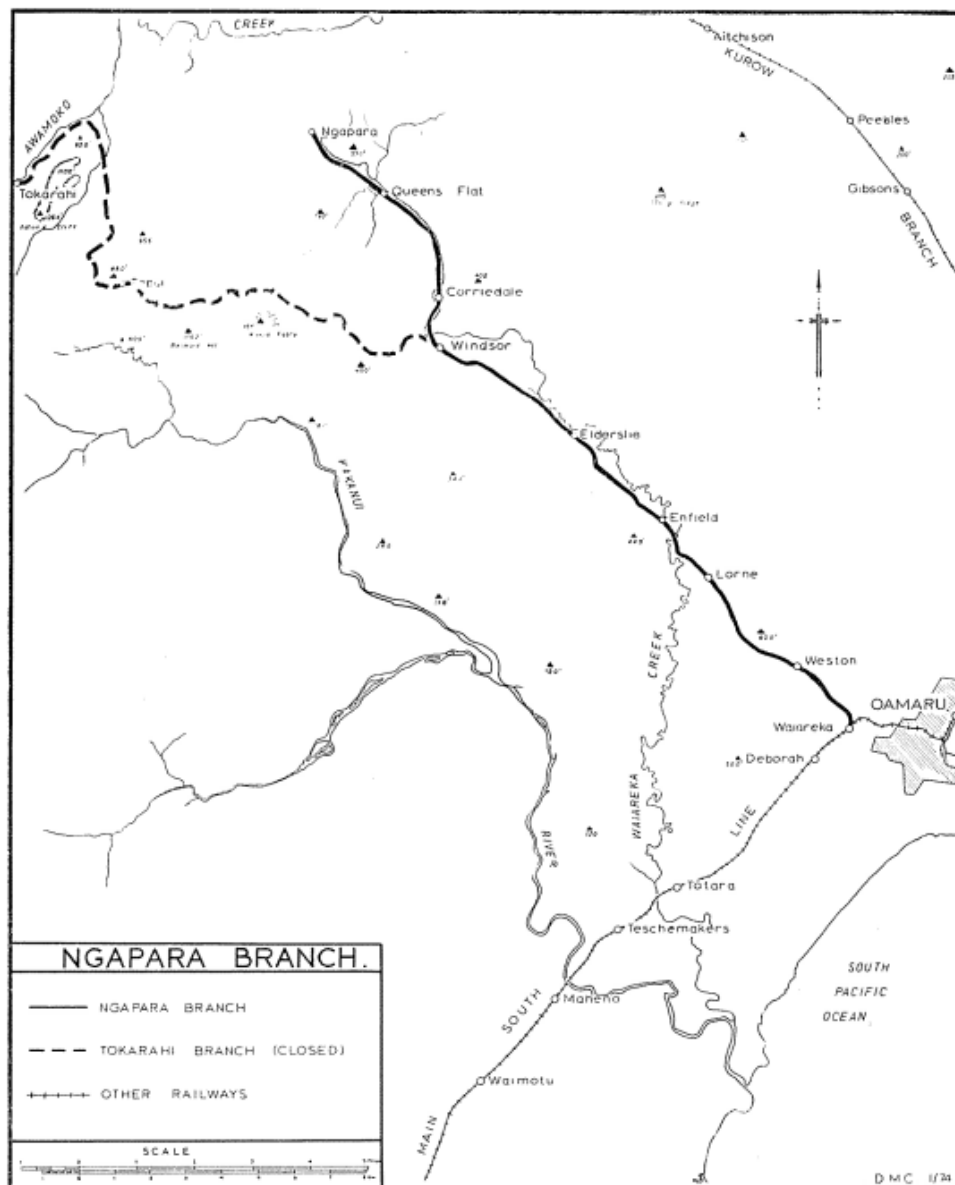
Permission to build the line had to be sought from the local Roads Board, who then took the initiative and decided to recommend the scheme to the Otago Provincial Council. No more was heard of the wooden tramway. Its promoters decided to stay their hands until the Provincial Council clarified its railway policy in North Otago. A public meeting to discuss railway proposals in North Otago was held at Oamaru in May 1871.

An important resolution passed at this meeting and forwarded to the Provincial Council was that immediate provision should be made for a branch line from Oamaru up the Cave (now Whitstone) and Waiareka valleys. At a further meeting in June a select committee had extended the terminus of the proposed line to the Maerewhenua River via Awamoko, a distance of 30 miles from Oamaru. The railway committee drew up what in their opinion was an order of priority as a guide for the Provincial Council:

1. A line from Oamaru through the Waiareka Valley, 12 miles, opening up 70,000 acres and passing large stone quarries.
2. An extension from Waiareka Valley to Awamoko (near Georgetown), 7 miles, opening up 40,000 acres.
3. An extension from Awamoko to Maerewhenua, 11 miles, opening up 40,000 acres and communicating with the Maerewhenua goldfields. (This line was to be joined at Awamoko by a line branching up the Waitaki Valley from Pukeuri.)

Despite an initial rebuff, the Provincial Council in March 1872 decided to construct the line on the terms proposed in the Immigration and Public Works Act of 1870. By July 1873, D. L. Simpson, Provincial Engineer, had completed a survey of the line which would not extend to either Awamoko or Maerewhenua, but instead a distance of fifteen miles to the confluence of the main upper gullies immediately below the table land which is a feature of the Ngapara-Tokarahi region.

W. D. Morrison was the successful tenderer for the line in April 1874 with a price of £45,000, considerably in excess of the estimated cost of £31,000. The first sod was turned with due ceremony three months later, and work began immediately. By mid-1875 the Engineer was able to report that the "whole work was proceeding in a most satisfactory manner" and would "evidently be completed within contract time which ends in October next".



## Ngapara Branch Stations

| Station             | Distance |       | Height    |
|---------------------|----------|-------|-----------|
|                     | miles    | chns. | above Sea |
| WAIAREKA (Junction) | —        | —     | 185       |
| Weston              | 1        | 59    | 264       |
| Taylor's            | 2        | 55    | 297       |
| Lorne               | 3        | 78    | 238       |
| Enfield             | 5        | 19    | 146       |
| Elderslie           | 7        | 33    | 194       |
| Windsor (Junction)  | 10       | 21    | 278       |
| Corriedale          | 11       | 15    | 297       |
| Queen's Flat        | 13       | 28    | 357       |
| NGAPARA             | 14       | 77    | 435       |

A year later, in May 1876, a serious accident occurred during construction. A contractor's locomotive, a vertical-boilered 0-4-0, blew up in a shallow cutting near Waiareka station where the branch left the main line. Two people were killed and four wounded. (See Stewart and Palmer: *A Cavalcade of N.Z. Locomotives*. Reed, 1965.) The contract was extended to July of that year because of difficulties experienced in completing the junction at Waiareka. However by December the contractor was allowing occasional goods trains to be worked as far as Enfield.

On Thursday, 29 March 1877, a special train drawn by the engine *Weka* made an official trip to the terminus at Ngapara to clear the line for passenger traffic. Regular services began during the first week of April.

From southward-facing points at Waiareka Junction, requiring train reversals, the line extends on an initial gradient of 1 in 65 towards Weston. Taylor's Lime Co. has a private siding at the present terminus of the line, a mile beyond Weston and some 300 yards past the original Cormack's station. At the terminus, McDonald's Oamaru Lime Co. buys crushed lime from the adjacent Taylor's quarry and burns it into quicklime, using Paparoa coal. This existing line is served as required by a shunting service from Oamaru.

The line travelled north-west into the Waiareka valley, passing through the Whitstone district with a station named Lorne and crossing the Waiareka stream just before Enfield. The descent on a grade of 1 in 50 from Lorne to Enfield was the steepest on the line. Enfield, formerly known as Teaneraki, had a ballast pit which supplied much of the rock used for Oamaru foreshore protection work.

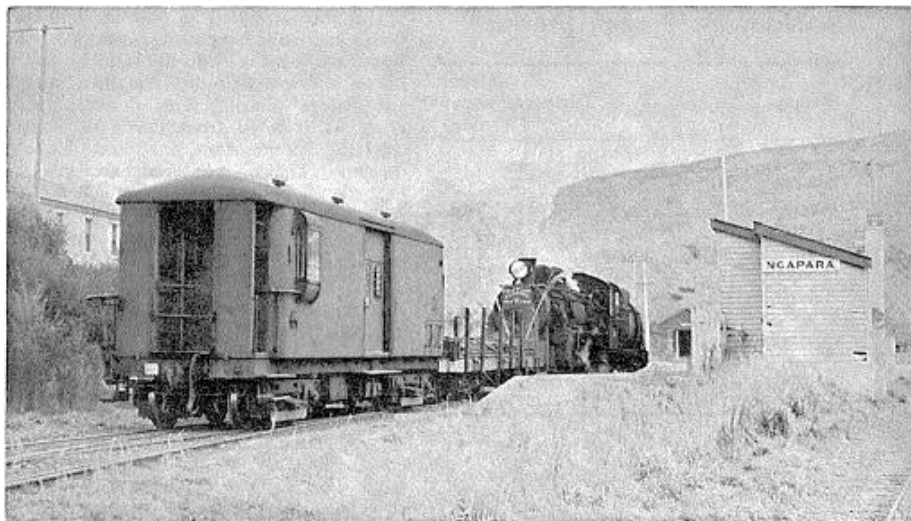
Apart from a short pinch of 1 in 66 out of Enfield, the grades were easy on Ngapara-bound trains as they followed the line through Elderslie and Windsor Park estates which provided much traffic for the line in its earlier days. Windsor Junction achieved its full title when the rugged twelve-mile Tokarahi (once Livingstone) Branch opened in August 1887. Corriedale, a station surrounded by willows on the west bank of the Waiareka, is better remembered as the name given to James Little's famous dual-purpose breed of sheep.

Ngapara, the only officered station on the line, had the usual "accommodations and appliances" of a country terminus. The 50ft turntable was reached via the engine shed, but was isolated in recent years when rails to the shed were lifted. The locomotive shed was closed in 1927 and all trains were subsequently worked from Oamaru.

The first timetable was as follows:

|           | a.m.     |
|-----------|----------|
| NGAPARA   | dep 8.00 |
| Windsor   | " 8.20   |
| Elderslie | " 8.35   |
| Enfield   | " 8.49   |
| Weston    | " 9.07   |
| Waiareka  | " 9.15   |
| OAMARU    | arr 9.25 |
|           | p.m.     |
| OAMARU    | dep 3.00 |
| Waiareka  | " 3.10   |
| Weston    | " 3.18   |
| Enfield   | " 3.36   |
| Elderslie | " 3.50   |
| Windsor   | " 4.05   |
| NGAPARA   | arr 4.25 |

When the Tokarahi branch opened in 1887, mixed trains operated on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, leav-



Photograph: G. W. Emerson

A view at Ngapara station on 31 July 1959, the last day of commercial goods train service on the branch.

ing Oamaru at 6.50 a.m. and 3.55 p.m. and Ngapara at 9.0 a.m. and 6.10 p.m.

Shortly after the turn of the century there was agitation for a more frequent service on both the Tokarahi and Ngapara branches. An unusual pattern of services then evolved and characterised operations until passenger service ceased in 1926. Mixed trains left Tokarahi and Ngapara in the morning to converge at Windsor Junction. Here one engine, usually that from Ngapara, took all the passenger vehicles into Oamaru while the Tokarahi engine marshalled all goods vehicles into one train and brought this in half an hour later. In the afternoon the reverse took place; the combined goods left before the combined passenger train and waited at Windsor Junction. From there each engine took its own mixed train home.

From December 1926 the Railways Department replaced the mixed trains on both branches with bus services, among the first to be operated by the Department. By 1935 only Ngapara services were operating, as the Tokarahi branch had

been closed in 1930. In this year train No. 337 left Oamaru on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays at 7.30 a.m., arriving at Ngapara by 9.40 a.m. Train No. 304 then left the terminus at 10.30 a.m. and reached Oamaru at 12.30 p.m. By 1951 the service was running to the same timetable but on Tuesdays and Thursdays only. Extra services were run to Taylor's Lime Works whence large tonnages of agricultural lime were offering.

Among the various classes of locomotives which worked the branch in its early years were "F" 0-6-0 saddle tanks, "Fa" 0-6-2 tanks, and Baldwin "T" class of the 2-8-0 arrangement. "Ub"s and "Uc"s of the 4-6-0 type were also used before the advent of the larger "A" and "Ab" Pacifics. Engine loads for "Ab"s were:

|                   |          |
|-------------------|----------|
| Waiareka-Ngapara  | 390 tons |
| Ngapara-Enfield   | 800 tons |
| Enfield-Taylor's  | 260 tons |
| Taylor's-Waiareka | 650 tons |

In his article, "Branch Line Inquest 1960" (NZRO, October-December 1960), W. A. Pierre outlined the social and



Photograph: G. W. Emerson

The last train-load of ordinary goods from Ngapara to Oamaru passing Windsor, 47 miles from Ngapara, on 31 July 1959 behind "Ab" class Pacific No. 783. Note that one of the station nameboards still includes an abbreviation for the word "junction" even though the branch line to Tokarahi had been closed in 1930, nearly 30 years before this photograph was taken.

economic factors which contributed to the rise and fall of the Ngapara branch. In terms of profit and loss the Tokarahi and Ngapara branches were together losing \$20,000 in the year ending 31 March 1925. Losses on the Ngapara branch totalled \$1,400 in 1938 and \$5,000 in 1951. Small profits were made in the two years preceding closure, but a newspaper report of the day suggested that \$50,000 would be needed to upgrade the track which had carried a speed limit of 10 m.p.h. beyond Taylor's siding since 1958. Train sizes in the closing years appeared to be small; loads averaging only 51 and 77 tons were carried in 1940 and 1953 respectively.

By 1956 tar-sealed roads extended from Oamaru to Ngapara, and road transport operators were handling the bulk of the traffic. In January 1959 the Minister of Railways announced that he was considering closing the line beyond Taylor's. Representations made on behalf of the

Oamaru Harbour Board and other districts in an attempt to delay the closing were unsuccessful, and the last goods train left Ngapara for Oamaru on 31 July 1959. The last train of all, a work train which travelled to Ngapara on 10 December 1959, marked the closure of rail transport in the Waiareka valley.

#### References

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