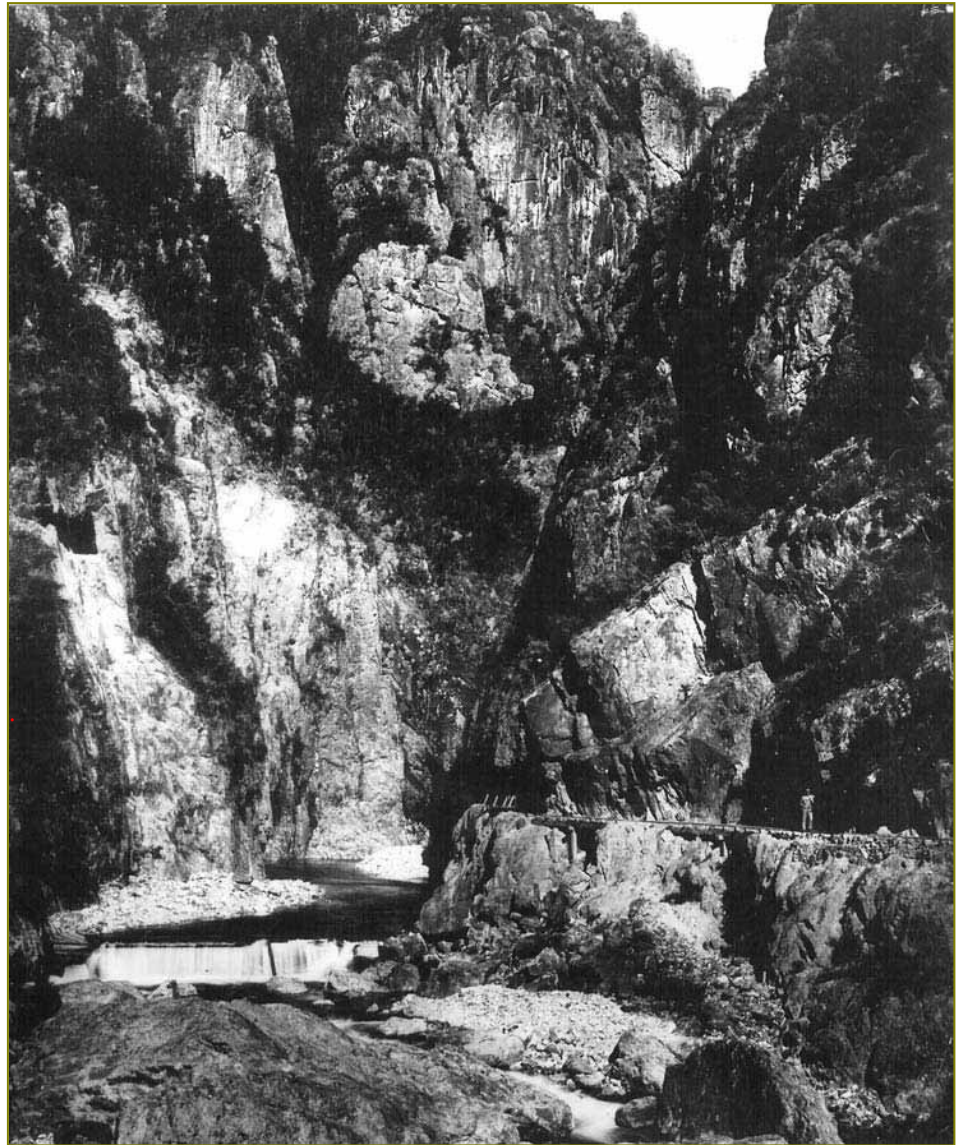




Built c1890

Woodstock GMC 'Windows' tunnels, Waitawheta Gorge



Waitawheta Gorge, c1900, Woodstock tunnel centre left, Talisman dam in river, Crown tramway on right. Alexander Turnbull Library.





Built c1890

Woodstock G.M.C. 'Windows' tunnels, Waitawheta Gorge

Management: Hauraki Area Office, Waikato Conservancy, Department of Conservation
VAMS site number 302097, asset number 30076

Fabric: The Woodstock 'windows' tunnels are on the true right side of the gorge about 35 metres above the river. They follow Shepherd's Lode, the location where most of the rich ore was won. The tunnels are connected by a 500 metre tramway (Woodstock tramway) to the company's battery site at the confluence of the Ohinemuri and Waitawheta Rivers.¹

The main tunnel, cut through sound rock, is about 100 metres long, 2.5 metres wide, and 2.5 metres high (for horse drawn operations), and is 5 to 10 metres inside the cliff face. Crosscuts run off it at right angles into the hillside. Where the crosscuts and tunnel intersect, the miners created 'windows' in the cliff face to dump mullock (waste rock) into the river, while the gold bearing ore was retained and trucked along the tramway to the battery.²

History: The original Woodstock Gold Mining Company (GMC) was formed in 1885. It met with little success because of the difficult, refractory nature of the ore despite its high grade. It wasn't until the introduction of the 'cyanide' process in 1894, which greatly improved returns, that the mine developed. The following year the company erected a 40 stamp battery and cyanide plant at the confluence of the Ohinemuri and Waitawheta Rivers. Around 1900 the company constructed a large underground pumphouse chamber on the west bank of the river to accommodate a headframe and shaft within the narrow confines of the gorge. This then became the centre of the company's operations, continuing after the Talisman GMC acquired the Woodstock GMC in 1904.

Fabric Significance: The tunnels and 'windows' in their spectacular gorge setting were a major engineering achievement and have created a significant and enduring heritage site. Waikato Conservancy has just completed the first stage of a major development (the Karangahake Mines project) of the sites in this area. This work has seen the historic tunnel which runs parallel to the cliff face, extended by 70 metres and in tandem with a new staircase created a circuit walk around the significant mining heritage sites in the lower gorge. In addition track was re-laid on the Woodstock tramway to both remove the tunnelling and recreate an historic element. New tunnel portals and safety barriers have also been installed in key locations. A 'Waitawheta Windows Track Access Feasibility Study' was prepared by Frame Group Ltd in 2000, followed by 'Waitawheta Windows Walk Track Prescription' by the Hauraki Area Office in 2003.³

Historic Significance: The tunnels are part of the Woodstock GMC's mining infrastructure in the lower Waitawheta. The Woodstock GMC, along with the Crown and Talisman GMC were the three major mining operations at Karangahake. Together these mines contributed 8% of all the gold from the Hauraki field.⁴



¹ N. Ritchie Survey of Ohinemuri Goldfield 1990, p217

² N. Ritchie Survey of Ohinemuri Goldfield 1990, p220

³ Information from HAMS

⁴ N. Ritchie Survey of Ohinemuri Goldfield 1990, p220