

Opunake Roadway Construction 1865

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Letter dated 22 May 1865 ... General's Office, New Plymouth to Resident Royal Engineer, New Plymouth

Sir, I have the honor, by desire of the Colonel Commanding, to request you will have the goodness to construct as speedily and as cheaply as possible a tramway at Opunake, to facilitate the removal of stores &c from the landing place on the beach to the top of the cliff on which the Camp is situated. I have the honor to be Sir, Your most obedient servant

Letter dated 31 May 1865 Lieut. C. Ferguson, R.E., Royal Engineer Office, New Plymouth to The Commanding Royal Engineer

Sir, With reference to the accompanying letter from the Deputy Adjutant Quartermaster General here, No.551, I have the honor to forward an estimate for a tramway that would answer the purpose. The present means of transport up the cliff at Opunaki consists of two tackles and a temporary truck, but as these must shortly wear out and require a great number of men in working I should recommend a more convenient and durable apparatus. In this a truck costing £10 and winch costing £7 which could be obtained in Auckland would be the most serious items. The chain requisite I can obtain in New Plymouth very cheaply, from the gear of the several ships that have been wrecked here. I have the honor to be Sir, Your most obedient servant, Lieutenant C. Ferguson, R.E.

28 Jun 1865 Submitted for the consideration and orders of the Lieut. General Commanding, if approval it is proposed to charge the cost to "Field Service." Colonel Thomas R. Mould, Commanding Royal Engineers.

01 Jun 1865 Opunake – Detail for 120 feet run of Tramway on an inclined plane for the purpose of conveying supplies to the Redoubt. 120 feet of second hand chain - £1 10s; Truck for tramway as manufactured by Vickery & Mansfield of Auckland £10; Wynch or Hoisting Crab to hoist 1 ton £7; 40 Tramway sleepers and 2 tramway rails £5 8s; 14 spikes £7s; Labor to preparing Slope, fitting and fixing Tramway, Sleepers, Rails, Wynch and Trunk complete £5 – subtotal £29 5s – add 10% contingency – total £32 3s 6d. G. Single, Clerk of Works.

Letter dated 30 Jun 1865 Major George Dean Pitt, Head Quarters, Auckland to the Private Secretary, Government House, Wellington

Sir, I have the honor by direction of the Lieutenant General Commanding to forward for the consideration of His Excellency the Governor the enclosed documents relative to the construction of a Tramway at Opunaki. The Lt-General is of opinion that as the service proposed is to be connected with the permanent interests of the Colony, the cost is legitimately chargeable to Colonial funds. I have the honor to be Sir, Your most obedient servant, Major Geo. Dean Pitt, Assistant Military Secretary.

Letter dated 22 Aug 1865 Colonel T. R. Mould, Royal Engineer Office, Auckland to the Assistant Military Secretary

Sir, The Deputy Quartermaster General having acquainted me that the Colonial Government will bear the cost of the construction of a Tramway at Opunaki in the manner proposed by Lieutenant Fergusson Royal Engineers, as stated in a letter from the Private Secretary dated 26 July (ulto.) I have the honor to request you will move the Brigadier General Commanding to request that the Sub Treasurer at Taranaki may be desired to meet the Bills for the service to be presented to him duly certified by Lieutenant Ferguson, who I have directed to have the work executed immediately. This mode of proceeding I submit will be preferable to having the matter a question of account between the Imperial and Colonial Governments. I have &c., Colonel T. R. Mould, Commanding Royal Engineers.

Letter dated 05 Sep 1865 Major George Dean Pitt, Assistant Military Secretary, Auckland to the Private Secretary, Government House, Wellington

Sir, Referring to your letter of the 26th July 1865 relative to the construction of a tramway at Opunake, I have the honor by direction of the Brigadier General Commanding to forward for the information of His Excellency the Governor, the copy of a letter received from the Commanding Royal Engineer requesting that the Sub Treasurer at Taranaki may be directed to meet the Bills for this service when presented to him duly certified by Lieutenant Ferguson, R.E., who has been directed to have the work executed immediately. I have the honor to be Sir, Your most obedient servant, Major Geo. Dean Pitt, Assistant Military Secretary.

Letter dated 23 Sep 1865 Camp Opunaki to the Officer Commanding 43rd Light Infantry, New Plymouth

Sir,

1. Having been impressed with the very great necessity there was of a road being made at this post in order to transport goods with ease from the beach to the top of the cliff, on which the Redoubt stands a height of 100 feet particularly Commissariat supplies and other public stores landed here by ships from time to time for the use of the Troops and others stationed at or near Opunaki, - I have the honor to report that in order to carry it out I employed one Corporal as an observer and fifteen privates as labourers belonging to the Detachment under my command at this post who volunteered and undertook the work under the guidance of Private Dougle Carmichael, Taranaki Military Settlers, by whom the scheme was at first devised and who has not only worked at it himself and taken the greatest possible interest in it but has also given me the benefit of his great experience whereby almost insurmountable difficulties have been overcome in carrying out the work.

2. The Road was begun on the 18th July and was completed on the 16th September 1865 and in order to carry out the work it has been necessary to remove about 5000 yards of earth including 500 yards of hard cement and blasting rock and all has been accomplished without tools other than the ordinary common pick and shovel and bars of iron which were picked up on the beach. The length of the Road is about 8 chains or 528 feet. On it's being first proposed to me and the plan and the direction it was to take pointed out I saw that it was feasible and at once decided on carrying it out. It runs up southwards from the beach and has been formed by a cutting into the side of a steep cliff overlooking the Bay with a gradual ascent of one foot in eight and is 13 feet wide, it will therefore admit of a Bullock Cart being driven up and down with ease.

3. I was the more readily induced to put the men on the work from the conviction of the very great advantage the public would derive from it in conveying provisions and other stores from the beach to the top of the Cliff by means of Carts without the smallest risk and in less time than it formerly occupied in getting up some dozen bags of flour or biscuit which has hitherto been done by means of a rope and a small wooden frame or sledge which had to be dragged up the side of a steep precipice over a very rough surface by some 30 or 40 men bay by bag at a time which wearisome fatigue the men have always been subject to for six or eight days after the arrival of every steamer with supplies since the post has been first established.

4. The Road will not only do away with this heavy annoying fatigue but will also be the means of a great saving of expense to the Government as it will prevent damage to the stores from delay and consequent exposure to the weather to which they were formerly always subject for several days owing to the almost unprotected state in which they had to remain while lying on the beach before they could be got up and put

under cover, and even while they were in the act of being got up in the manner described they have frequently been exposed to heavy showers of rain.

5. As the Road is a public one and has been undertaken and carried out for the public good, I have the honor to request you will be pleased to forward this application with the enclosed Roll of daily work and in doing so give it all the support in your power for the favourable consideration of the Colonel Commanding in Taranaki, in view to it's being forwarded and recommended by him to the Major General Commanding in New Zealand in order that the men who have been employed in making the Road may be allowed to receive the rates of working pay prescribed in Her Majesty's regulations page 255 para 54 for the number of days they were actually at work on the Road as seen by the accompanying Roll.

6. I beg to remark that the rates at once laid down in the scale of pay referred to above will hardly be more than sufficient to compensate the men for the wear and tear of their clothing which has suffered considerably as the work has been performed during the worst part of the winter and notwithstanding all the disadvantages the men have had to contend against in the weather they have worked most constantly and surprisingly well as may be seen by the great amounts of labour they have got through in so short a time, taking all their guards in regular turn with the other men.

7. I believe that if the work which has been performed by these soldiers had to be done under private contract by civilian labourers it would have cost between £250 & 300. In this opinion I feel certain I would be borne out by any Engineer Officer who saw the Road.

8. In conclusion I beg to add that I have reason to believe should you be pleased to give this application your support that it will meet with every attention on the part of the Colonel Commanding in Taranaki in forwarding it for the favourable consideration of the Major General Commanding in New Zealand. I have the honor to be Sir, Your most obedient servant, Captain T. Horan, Commanding Detachment 43rd Light Infantry, Opunaki Bay.

Detachment 43rd Light Infantry - Working Roll of the Road making party during the months of July, August and September 1865 dated 18 Sep 1865 – name (number of days worked) - Corporal R. Arnold (40), Privates A. Anstee (37), J. Conlan (29½), J. Craggs (27), W. Dempsey (33), J. Donson (43), W. Gardner (40), W. Mitchell (36), G. Smith (40), W. Wallace (37), J. McCarty (28½), J. Hackett (18½), B. Conroy (15), A. Candey (17), A. Billington (23), T. Bayman (19½), J. Heathwait (17½), J. Pledger (15), C. Carlton (16), D. Clowe (13½), A. Gauge (10½), J. Smith (11½). No work was undertaken on 23 and 24 August and only 2 men worked on the 25th as it was a “very wet day.”

Letter dated 07 Oct 1865 Colonel Warre, New Plymouth to the Assistant Military Secretary, Head Quarters, Auckland

Sir, I have the honor to forward and recommend to the favourable consideration of the Major General commanding the accompanying application from Captain Horan, 43rd Light Infantry commanding at Opunaki for an allowance for working pay for a party employed in constructing a roadway from the beach to the top of the cliffs to facilitate the transport of stores &c up to the Redoubt. I take the liberty of submitting this application to the favourable consideration of the Major General, because I know the difficulty formerly experienced in dragging all necessaries for the Camp, up a nearly perpendicular cliff, upwards of 100 feet in height, and I feel certain that Captain Horan's estimate of the expense which would have been incurred under regular contract is correct. I know the intelligence of Private Dougle Carmichael and I would recommend that the men be remunerated at the rate of 1s 3d a day the usual Colonial working pay – and that Dougle Carmichael should get 2s 6d a day as Overseer of the work during the time actually employed viz 60 days. As this is a permanent advantage to the Post at Opunaki and will benefit future as well as present occupants I venture to submit that the Colonial Government should be requested to make good the expense, but under any circumstances I trust the Major General will take the application into his favourable consideration. I have the honor to be Sir, Your most obedient servant, Colonel H. S. Warre, Commanding at Taranaki.

Letter dated 17 Oct 1865 Lieutenant Ferguson, R.E. Office, New Plymouth to the Deputy Adjutant Quarter Master General, New Plymouth

Sir, With reference to your letter of the 22nd of May 1865, on the subject of a tramway proposed for Opunaki, I have the honor to state that I have this day received authority for the expenditure of the sum of £32 in constructing such. However I found on my recent visit to that outpost that the 43rd Regiment Light Infantry under the direction of a Military Settler named D. Carmichael No. H. Company and by the order of Captain Horan, 43rd Light Infantry had constructed a road up the side of the cliff which will answer all purposes far better than the tramway, and will require far less to keep in repair. The road is constructed on a grade of one in eight, is about twelve feet wide and practicable for wheeled carriages in all weather. It would be offering but a bare remuneration for the service in the sum of fifty pounds (£50). I have the honor to be Sir, Your most obedient servant, C. Ferguson, Lieutenant R.E.

Letter dated 18 Oct 1865 Colonel Warre, New Plymouth to the Assistant Military Secretary, Wellington

Sir, With reference to my letter of the 7th October (No.713) I have the honor to forward the enclosed letter from Lieutenant Ferguson, R.E., who has just returned, from a visit of inspection, from Opunaki, in support of my application for the N. C. Officer and men employed in constructing the road from the beach to the Redoubt at that Post. I beg to state that as the sum named by Lieutenant Ferguson viz £32 is not required for the construction of a tramway, which is not now necessary, I trust that there will be no difficulty in obtaining the trifling additional amount to pay the men who have constructed so good a road, so much better adapted for all purposes of transport and traffic. I have the honor to be Sir, Your most obedient servant, Colonel H. S. Warre, Commanding at Taranaki.

Letter dated 27 Oct 1865 Major George Dean Pitt, Assistant Military Secretary, Head Quarters, Auckland to the Private Secretary, Government House, Wellington

Sir, I have the honor by direction of the Major General Commanding to forward for the consideration of his Excellency the Governor the enclosed correspondence received from Col. Warre, C.B., commanding at Taranaki – and... instructed to express the Major General's approval of Col. Warre's recommendation and to request that remuneration may be granted accordingly by the Colonial Government to the Troops employed in constructing the roadway at Opunake. I have the honor to be Sir, Your most obedient servant, Major Geo. Dean Pitt, Assistant Military Secretary.

Letter dated 07 Nov 1865 Major George Dean Pitt, Major, Assistant Military Secretary, Head Quarters, Auckland to the Private Secretary, Government House, Wellington

Sir, In reference to my letter of the 27 ultimo No.4459 relative to remuneration being granted by the Colonial Government to the troops employed in constructing the roadway at Opunaki, I have the honor, by direction of the Major General Commanding to forward, for His Excellency's consideration, a further correspondence received from Colonel Warre, C.B., on the subject. I have the honor to be Sir, Your most obedient servant, Geo. Dean Pitt, Major, Assistant Military Secretary.

Comments annotated to previous correspondence

10 Nov 1865 Referred to the Auditor – The proposed tramway referred to will not now be made; but a sum not exceeding £45... to be paid for making the road specified in this correspondence.

11 Nov 1865 For His Excellency the Governor – The charge will be paid by the Colonial Government, but Ministers think that it would be better in future that such questions should be referred to them before the expenditure is incurred. Col. Haultain.

14 Nov 1865 For the Private Secretary – The Sub Treasurer at Taranaki will pay this on demand

20 Nov 1865 As to construction of roadway at Opunake; forwards letters from Colonel Warre & Lieutenant Ferguson relative to remuneration by Colonial Government of the troops thereon employed.

21 Nov 1865 Col. Haultain – The Sub Treasurer at Taranaki has been instructed to pay on application a sum not exceeding £45 for making this road.
