

# The Maitai Valley - Taonga of Whakatū

## *Treasured by Generations*

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## Summary

The Maitai Valley has for centuries held a special place in the hearts of generations of Nelsonians as a taonga, a precious gift. For tangata whenua it was valued as a source of food, pakohe (argillite) and as transport route. There were numerous early Māori kainga (settlements) in various parts of the valley and Ngāti Kuia burial ground is sited on Kaka Hill.

Nelson's European settlers immediately identified the area as an asset. There are many references to the beauty and recreation value of the Maitai Valley throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in newspaper articles, books, poems, letters (new settlers wrote home about the beautiful valley, the trees, the birds and flowers that grew there) and even in political speeches.

Settlers farmed, grew market gardens of potatoes, peas, strawberries, hops, and milled timber for building. An early hop kiln remains on the subdivision site.

School parties used Black Hole, Dennes Hole, Girlies Hole and Sunday Hole for their swimming sports. Church groups, lodges and companies held their annual picnics at Branford Park or the Maitai Reserve. The three swimming holes (adjacent to the PPCR area) continue to be Nelson's most popular freshwater swimming spots to this day.

In 1914 land was taken under the Public Works Act for designation as reserve. This included Dennes, Sunday and Black Holes, and 16 acres of prime flat land designated as the Maitai Reserve.

The picturesque qualities of the Maitai Valley have inspired artists and poets for over 150 years. Well known 19<sup>th</sup> century painters such as John Gully<sup>1</sup> and Lady Mabel Annesley<sup>2</sup> also found inspiration in the Valley. Professional art photographers William and Frederick Tyree and Ellis Dudgeon featured the Maitai Valley in their work which is still valued today.

***In 1980, esteemed New Zealand author Maurice Gee wrote a children's book of uncanny prescience. Set in the Maitai Valley, Gee's story warns of goblins with a destructive culture, who having flattened their own part of the planet, dammed its rivers, felled its trees, and constructed cities, wish to inflict a similar regime on the other half of the planet.***

Nelson's traditional green space close to the city, its own 'Central Park', is the envy of many visitors and tourists. The area is being enhanced with recent Council investment in restoration of riverbanks and other conservation work, in cooperation with groups such as Friends of the Maitai and Ngāti Koata.

Until now, consecutive councils have followed the wishes of the majority of ratepayers and pledged not to develop the Maitai Valley for housing suburbs, but that it would remain rural.

Just as it was described in the *Colonist* in 1896, the Maitai is still a 'place of resort, such as no other town in New Zealand possesses'.<sup>3</sup>

***In September 1897, the then mayor of Nelson received a visionary letter from Premier Richard Seddon, who had the foresight to note: 'The project to open up the Maitai Valley as a tourist resort is most commendable, and will prove advantageous, not only to your district but to the whole colony.'***<sup>4</sup>

## Pre-European References

The Maitai River was a rich source of kai for pre-European Māori. The forests and wetlands provided birdlife such as the kākāpō, pūkeko and weka, and the river was a source of inanga (whitebait), tuna (eels) and 'shoals of [now extinct] upokororo or upokorokoro<sup>a</sup> (grayling, or native trout) which were a "highly esteemed" source of food for Māori'<sup>5</sup>. Harakeke (flax) was also plentiful, and the mineral belt above the river was a source of pakohe stone (argillite) for tools and weapons.

References have been made to numerous early kainga (settlements) in various parts of the valley. One of these, close to the current Maitai Golf Club, has been recorded as MS58 by T.M Lawrence in a document prepared for the Nelson City Council in 1994.<sup>6</sup>

## The Maungatapu Track

Ngāti Kuia tradition states that 'Matua Hautere saw the river when he climbed Maungatapu on his way to find Whakatu (Nelson). Ngāti Kuia later explored the area to find the trails between Te Hoiere (Pelorus) and Whakatu, which used both the Mahitahi and Te Hoiere Rivers. While doing this they also discovered sources of valuable pakohe which they gathered and quarried near these rivers.'<sup>7</sup>

## Pakohe – Argillite

Argillite was important to Māori as a stone with ideal properties for making tools and weapons. It was therefore highly valued as a trade item. Evidence of pakohe quarries and working sites can be found as unworked stone, tools, flakes or weapons in archaeological sites.

One notable quarry site is the Rush Pool quarry in the eastern hills above the Maitai Valley. The site was described by H.D. Skinner in a paper presented to the Otago Institute as on the old Maungatapu track about a mile from the Forks and 9 miles from Nelson city, with the pool probably man-made. Skinner suggests it may well have been worked by ancient Māori for more than a century and was probably edged by whare used as storehouses for food. Stones from the Boulder bank and Mackay's Bluff were carried up to the site to be used as hammers.<sup>8</sup>

The following is taken from an article written in 2008 by Māori historian John Mitchell and his wife and research partner Hilary:

Known to Māori as pakohe ... argillite is particularly associated with the Nelson-Marlborough region. It is found on Rangitoto (D'Urville Island), along the Whangamoā mineral belt, and in the upper reaches of the Maitai, Wairoa and Motueka Rivers.

Māori obtained pakohe by quarrying it from lenses in the mountains or by finding boulders which had survived millennia of pounding in mountain streams. Quarries with extensive areas of discarded argillite pieces which have been won from outcrops, but are unworked or only partly worked, can still be seen...

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<sup>a</sup> Spelled both ways within the same document.

Māori often took argillite boulders overland or in waka, to be worked closer to home: many locations throughout Te Tau Ihu have stone-working sites where partly worked adzes and numerous argillite flakes can be found.<sup>9</sup>

## Recorded early Māori sites

On the Kaka Hill the site of a Ngāti Kuia lookout and burial grounds was recorded by T.M. Lawrence in a document prepared for the Nelson City Council in 1994. This is marked as site MS57. Lawrence states: 'TuMatakokiri used this hill as a lookout for raiding war parties. Site of Ngāti Kuia burial grounds.'<sup>10</sup> The exact location of this site is yet to be confirmed.<sup>a</sup>

Lawrence also records the site of a kainga (settlement) a little further up the Maitai Valley on the other side of the road, past the Maitai Golf Course/Waahi Taakaro. This is marked as MS58. Lawrence describes it as 'Site of Ngāti Kuia Pa. From here they gathered food such as Eels, birds, and Forest Fruits. Whiro O Wira of Ngāti Kuia resided here. Buried on Kaka Hill.'<sup>11</sup>

Seven of the eight iwi that make up the Top of the South (Te Tau Ihu) have a Statutory Acknowledgement over the Maitai River and its tributaries – a place of cultural, historical, spiritual and traditional influence to them – as part of the Treaty of Waitangi settlement. One of these iwi is Ngāti Kuia.

Another is Ngāti Koata, whose Trust has committed \$2M to the Mahitahi/Kaka Valley housing proposal and is one of the partners in CCKV Maitai Dev Co Limited Partnership.<sup>12</sup>

## Post-colonial References

There are many references to the beauty and recreation value of the Maitai Valley throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, in newspaper articles, books, poems, letters and even in political speeches. Originally horses and carts filled with picnic goodies would ford the river to get to beloved picnic grounds and recreation areas. Meanwhile, farm carts laden with milk, wool, pigs, chickens, or hops, plied the route from large and small holdings in the valley, the largest being owned for more than a century by the Richardson family.

In 1860 packhorses were using the Maungatapu Track from Nelson over the Bryant Range to the Pelorus River valley in Marlborough. This continued until '1885 when the road over the Whangamoia Saddle and the Rai Saddle to Rai Valley ... was completed with a bridge over the Pelorus River.'<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, the Maitai Valley Road pushed further and further up the valley in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Bridges replaced fords, cars and cyclists replaced horses and carts, and walking, picnics, swimming and camping became increasingly popular forms of recreation for thousands of locals, who felt privileged to have such a beautiful, peaceful green space so close to their city. New settlers wrote

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<sup>a</sup> The urupā site is believed to be close to or within the PPCR 28 proposed subdivision area.

home about the beautiful valley, the trees, the birds and flowers that grew there. Locals took their holiday visitors to their Maitai baches or campsites, picnic grounds and swimming holes. Schools in earlier times had no swimming pools of their own and school parties frequented the swimming holes, particularly Black Hole, Dennes Hole, Girlies Hole and Sunday Hole, for their swimming sports. Church groups, lodges and companies held their annual picnics at Branford Park or the Maitai Reserve, and in summer weekends the valley was bustling with walkers, cyclists and other recreational users, while hardier hikers tramped up the Tantragee Saddle, or the Dun Mountain, or even followed the Māori and early European trails over the Maungatapu to Marlborough's Pelorus River.

## Early European Settlement

The South branch of the Maitai attracted early purchasers mainly because of access to mineral resources, copper and chrome in the Dun Mountain.<sup>14</sup>

'The North branch was settled from around 1842 until 1960 when the Nelson City Council bought the land for the planned Maitai Dam.'<sup>15</sup> These settlers farmed, grew market gardens of potatoes, peas, strawberries, hops, etc, and milled timber for building. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries houses and baches in the Maitai Valley were occupied by landowners, leaseholders and farm managers, or holidaymakers. Several of the landmarks carry their names: e.g. Smiths Ford, Jickells Bridge,<sup>16</sup> Sharlands Creek and Groom Creek.

Between 1882 and 1938 there was also a series of small schoolhouses for the children of valley dwellers.<sup>17</sup>

## The Richardson Family

The Richardsons' land covered a considerable area of the lower and upper Maitai Valley beginning close to Nelson city and in the vicinity of several of the Maitai's most popular swimming holes today. The Richardsons were the largest landholder in the Maitai Valley. Parts of the proposed subdivision area are adjacent to or within what was the Richardson holding.

The original 4000 acres (1619 ha) were purchased in 1840 by Ralph Richardson through the Wakefield Company in England. This was gradually added to by his son Ralph junior and after Ralph junior's death in 1889, his wife Effie. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century Richardson family holdings in the valley numbered 2630 ha.<sup>18</sup>

Leaving the Maitai run in the hands of an agent, Effie and her two young daughters returned to England in 1890 and remained there for 18 years. When they returned in 1908 Mrs Richardson was not happy. The land was 'abounding in noxious weeds' and 'People and tenants had run rife. During their absence the public had used the property as if it were their own land and various tenants had their little sidelines such as paid camping and subletting.'<sup>19</sup>

The first Richardson house in the Maitai Valley, Edendale, once thatched, was on what is now the Mahitahi-Kaka Valley property proposed for the zone change (known as the 'Private Plan Change' or PPC area). It also sported a hop kiln. Mrs Richardson and her daughters moved there permanently from their house in town in 1926, to be closer to their Maitai Run, which as well as dairy cows, sheep and hop

growing, had during WWI been used as 'land under cultivation as a War effort', and had shipped 'strawberries, raspberries, plums, and potatoes' to Wellington.<sup>20</sup>

The main house was located on a rise on the other side of Maitai Valley Road where it still stands and is in private ownership today. When the family moved to this house the original house was used as shearers' accommodation. This building also still exists.

Mrs Richardson died in 1928, and full responsibility for running the Maitai Run passed to her daughter Ralphine. Miss Ralphine Richardson was a remarkable woman for her time. She 'found the strenuous work of dairy and hill-country farming eminently satisfying ... She soon learnt to muster, crutch and dip her sheep, working alongside her employees. Using hand-shears, she learnt how to shear sheep but the later machine-shearing she left to the experts. Ralphine was to excel in this male dominated world, and by the time she was 30 she had the respect of her workers and peers alike.'<sup>21</sup> Ralphine died in 1969. Shortly before her death the Richardson Maitai Run was sold to Maitai Farms Ltd.

## Public Reserves

The Richardson's estates came with riparian rights, and Mrs Richardson was constantly frustrated by people trespassing on her land to get to the river. In 1910 she had applied to the Waimea County Council for permission to fence off parts of the Maitai road reserve to block access to her land, but this was refused by the council when their engineer pointed out that the fences 'would block access to the river and prevent hundreds of people from the city to use the area for recreation and fishing'<sup>22</sup>. The article in the *Colonist* that reported on this meeting concluded: 'It is therefore hoped that action will be taken promptly to preserve for the public a privilege which by long usage has come to be regarded as a right, and the loss of which would be deeply felt by hundreds of people who have never dreamt of abusing it.'<sup>23</sup>

Mrs Richardson continued to erect fences however, and this led to many altercations with the public, in particular with Fred Gibbs, the Headmaster of Central School who continued to take his pupils to swim at what is today called Dennes Hole and would cut down fences she had erected. Battles raged in and out of court.<sup>24</sup>

On 5 March 1914, the *New Zealand Gazette* announced the intention to take certain lands under the Public Works Act. The lands included Dennes and Sunday Holes, later swapped for Big Hole (now called Black Hole), and 16 acres of prime flat land 2½ miles south of the farm entrance, the latter to be used as a public recreation-ground, the Maitai Reserve (today's Maitai motor camp and picnic area). This was followed by several months of petitions and court cases. The *Nelson Evening Mail* editorial on 10 November 1914 reported under the heading 'Nelson's Pleasure Ground Threatened' that 'The two thousand or so of Nelson people ... who spent their holidays yesterday by the pleasant banks of the Maitai will learn with consternation that their right of access to the numerous picnic resorts which they have used unquestionably for generations is about to be taken from them.'<sup>25</sup>

Several years of petitions, protests, claims and counterclaims followed, and it wasn't until March 1918 that the 'land in question became the property of the mayor, councillors, and citizens of Nelson'.<sup>26</sup>

## Beauty & Peace

On 2 February 1843 two men went on an exploration trip up the Maitai Valley and described the area in a letter as follows: 'The ka-kas and canaries are numerous as well as most of the smaller species of birds . . . The banks of the river are here and there adorned with a fine shrub bearing a profusion of blossom of a vermillion colour . . .'<sup>27</sup>

*The Otago Daily Times*, in April 1871, published a contribution from its 'special correspondent', describing towns he visited on a trip through NZ from 'the capital of the south to the capital of the north'. His comments about Nelson were 'At the eastern extremity of Nelson the river Maitai flows through the town, to whose beauty it adds not a little. ... Its banks are lined with weeping willows, which serve the double purpose of checking the inroads of the river, and of adding to its beauty.'<sup>28</sup>

In 1887 a columnist named 'The Warrigal' visited Nelson and wrote in *The Press*: 'And even now I have only begun the list of attractions Nelson offers to the visitor; for no matter where one walks one finds variety and charms; a walk up the Maitai Valley can give you a glimpse of an English dale, and yet there are scores of things un-English about it.'<sup>29</sup>

In 1896 the *Colonist* stated 'it is only necessary to improve the road up the Maitai Valley, and it would have at its door a place of resort, such as no other town in New Zealand possesses'.<sup>30</sup>

And in a letter to the editor of the *Nelson Evening Mail* in November 1896 a correspondent echoed this sentiment: 'So many visitors to Nelson would find their way up the Maitai for a day's outing if there was any means of getting up this interesting and pretty valley without having to wade three times through a river with large and slippery stones, or scrambling along dangerous rocks and steep hill sides. In the present state of the road hundreds of people with their children wend their way up the Maitai for picnics during the holidays, it being quite a favourite resort.'<sup>31</sup>

In 1897 the Scenery Preservation Society called a meeting in the Council chambers to discuss 'bridging the Maitai Valley so that people could have easier access to the upper valley'<sup>32</sup> which started beyond where Jickells Bridge is today (just before the entrance to the proposed subdivision at Ralphine Way).

In September 1897 the then mayor of Nelson received a visionary letter from Premier Richard Seddon, after his visit to Nelson, who had the foresight to note: 'The project to open up the Maitai Valley as a tourist resort is most commendable, and will prove advantageous, not only to your district but to the whole colony.'<sup>33</sup>

## Camping and baches

An article in the *Nelson Evening Mail* in 1899 bemoaning the state of ill repair of the access road described the Maitai Valley as 'a pleasure resort unique in its attractions for picnics and camping ... within an hour's drive from the centre of the city, and with a rugged grandeur that grows into one's soul and haunts the memory' and referred to the 'hundreds who use the valley for picnic and camping purposes'.<sup>34</sup>



By the early 1900s a number of Nelson families had built primitive summer holiday baches up the Maitai Valley, for 'fishing, hunting, tramping and exploring'. These were sometimes jointly owned by several families and their friends. The baches were strung along the road or river side of the North Maitai from the Forks as far as Smiths Ford and beyond, and in early days several fords had to be crossed in order to get to the family bach. When the new dam was constructed, the council bought those sections near the top and many are now covered by water.<sup>35</sup>

## Swimming

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the only public swimming baths were the Marine Baths on Rocks Road near the present Yacht Club. These salt-water baths, which opened in 1878, were closed in 1909, due to deterioration from the waves and weather.<sup>36</sup> The Maitai River provided the only freshwater swimming close to Nelson.

As early as 1868 the *Nelson Evening Mail* printed a letter from a reader complaining about male bathers at Sunday Hole improperly dressed and in full view of female cart passengers crossing the Sunday Creek ford.

In the words of Mr C.H. Broad, who attended the Nelson College from 1884 to 1892, 'All bathing was in the Maitai in various holes. The annual swimming sports were held in Sunday Hole ...'<sup>37</sup>

On 26 February 1892 two schools held their annual swimming races at separate Maitai swimming holes. Results were reported in the *Nelson Evening Mail*, preceded by the following comments:

Two schools, the Bishop's, and Haven Road, held their annual swimming races up the Maitai yesterday, the former chose Denne's hole while the boys attending the latter school took Sunday hole ... Swimming is a very healthy exercise and as Nelson is so well supplied with bathing places no boy or girl in robust health should grow up ignorant of this most useful art.<sup>38</sup>

Until Municipal Pool opened in 1927, there were no public freshwater baths in Nelson and for the local people, as well as the schools, the Maitai was a popular place to cool off on a summer day. In 1910 Central School teacher, Fred Gibbs, was continuing to defy the landowner, Mrs Richardson, by pulling down her fences and crossing her land to take his pupils to swim at Dennes Hole.

## Picnics and Sporting Events

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Maitai Valley was a popular venue for picnics with family and friends. It was used frequently by businesses, schools, church groups, Sunday schools, lodges and other societies for organised picnics and sporting events.

As early as January 1861 the *Nelson Examiner* and *New Zealand Chronicle* reported a Wesleyan Sunday School picnic up the Maitai. 'On Tuesday, the Annual Fete took place in the Maitai valley, where upwards of 300 children, with their parents and friends, assembled and enjoyed themselves.'<sup>39</sup>

In 1870 the *Nelson Evening Mail* describes another one of these picnics:

At an early hour cab loads of happy-looking children were stringing down to the beach, and on walking down to "the rocks" at about one o'clock we felt convinced that all Nelson had chosen that locality for the scene of their day's enjoyment, but on strolling up the Maitai Valley at a later hour we were surprised to find some five or six hundred people congregated there. Mr. Richardson's paddock, which had been selected by the Artizans, and also by a Sunday school, for the scene of their picnics, appeared to have been turned into a fair ground, and dancing, cricketing ... rounders, and games of all kinds, of course including the fascinating kiss-in-the-ring, which is as essential as sunshine to the success of a Nelson holiday, were being carried on with great spirit in every direction.<sup>40</sup>

In 1872 the *Colonist*, reporting on the Prince of Wales' birthday celebration, had this to say:

Monday, November 11th being a beautiful fine day, the general holiday was very largely spent in out-door pleasures. ... the Artizans' Picnic, held in the picturesque Maitai Valley, attracted a number of pleasure-seekers, who amused themselves with various sports. The dancing parties, [despite] the heat of the day, unweariedly pursued that delightful amusement ...<sup>41</sup>

By 1876 the numbers of picnickers had grown considerably. The Caledonian society also frequented the Maitai Valley for picnics and organised gatherings. In 1876 the *Colonist* reported:

Since the formation of our Caledonian Society their Annual Gathering in Richardson's Paddock, Maitai Valley, has always been well attended, but on January 1st more than we had ever seen before had gathered together to witness the sports that had been arranged for their amusement; there must have been nearly 3000 people on the ground during the day.<sup>42</sup>

And again in 1878:

The amusements provided by the Caledonian Society for the public on New Year's Day were again largely patronised yesterday, when the attendance must have been somewhat in excess of 2000. ... There are few places ... that for picturesqueness can beat the Maitai Valley, and that alone proves an attraction to many. Yesterday was a perfect day, and the holiday appeared to be enjoyed to the full by all those who visited the grounds, the Artillery Band, under the conductorship of Mr Oakey, largely contributing to the success of the Gathering.<sup>43</sup>

The popularity of the Maitai for picnics and events continued through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with various clubs, lodges like the Masonic, church groups and Sunday schools often gathering at the Council open recreation area at the Maitai Reserve for picnics, with fun races and sports events. One Nelson resident remembers a Masonic Lodge picnic there in the 1950s, where 'three legged races, and sack races were particularly popular, and after the races children would leap from the large trunk of an overhanging tree, its jump off spot worn by hundreds of little feet over many summers, into the swimming hole below.'<sup>44</sup>

Families and groups of friends also frequented the Maitai Reserve, and other swimming holes in the Maitai, on foot, in cars or often on bicycles, with picnic goodies and swimming togs on board. Dianne

Pannell, who lived as a child in Manuka Street, remembers on many summer weekends during the 1940s and 50s cycling with her family up the Maitai Reserve, 'she and her sister on child seats attached to their parents' cycles, with bicycle baskets filled with sandwiches, fruit, bacon & egg pies, swimming togs, and a jar of coconut oil to "protect" them from the sun'.<sup>45</sup>

## Art and Literature

The picturesque qualities of the Maitai Valley have inspired artists and poets for over 150 years.

David Burns' Ode to the Maitai Valley', published in 1893,<sup>46</sup> extols the birds, butterflies, flowers, tree ferns, fruits, and fragrances, the sounds and seasonal changes in the valley, and in particular its calming qualities in times of stress and war:

Here, far removed from war's alarms  
May I reside, in Peace's arms  
And sleep at last amidst thy charms  
Fair winding Maitai valley.

The Maitai Valley has always been a favourite spot for artists, both professional and amateur. Well known 19<sup>th</sup> century painters such as John Gully<sup>47</sup> and Lady Mabel Annesley<sup>48</sup> also found inspiration in the Valley. Pupils attending private art classes or those run by the Nelson Technical School (the former NMIT) in the earlier part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were often seen beside the river with their sketch pads or brushes and easels, and the Maitai Valley was the subject of several exhibition artworks.<sup>49</sup>

Photographers too, in particular professional art photographers William and Frederick Tyree, who founded Tyree studio in Nelson 1875–1947, had a large number of Maitai Valley photographs in their collection, several of which are in the Nelson Museum.<sup>50</sup> In the 20<sup>th</sup> century photos by Ellis Dudgeon (1905-1979), many featuring the Maitai Valley, were sought after by editors and his extensive studio portraits are still treasured in many Nelson homes.<sup>51</sup>

Esteemed New Zealand author Maurice Gee lived on Cleveland Terrace and set one of his children's books at the entrance to the Maitai Valley. Heroine Caroline finds a pair of magic spectacles which reveal a hidden world at the Centre of New Zealand, a world threatened with destruction if the spectacles fall into the wrong hands.<sup>52</sup> The story synopsis mirrors the current situation of a peace-loving community fighting the destruction of an environment of beauty and tranquility.<sup>53</sup>

## Present day – the past 50 years:

Nelson's traditional green space close to the city, its own "Central Park", continues to attract locals year-round and is the envy of our many visitors and tourists. Its low traffic volumes, and its peace and rural quality have ensured that Nelsonians have a place near the city that supports their physical and mental health, a place for recreation and exercise for both people and dogs, where all can enjoy the quiet, the trees, the birds, and the sound of rippling water.

Until now consecutive councils have followed the wishes of the majority of ratepayers and pledged not to develop the Maitai Valley for housing suburbs, but that it would remain rural.

The Maitai is a great playground for Nelson ... The council-owned land extends over 10,000 hectares up the Maitai Valley.<sup>54</sup> Today, walkers & dog walkers, trampers, campers, mountain bikers, cyclists, golfers, swimmers and picnickers, as well as artists and writers, regularly enjoy the rural quality and make full use of the valley.

Just as it was described in the *Colonist* in 1896, Nelson's Maitai Valley is still a 'place of resort, such as no other town in New Zealand possesses'.<sup>55</sup>

### Swimming and picnics

Many of the favourite swimming holes used in previous centuries are still in use and highly popular today. In the vicinity of Branford Park and the proposed subdivision there are three swimming holes, Black Hole (once called Big Hole) and Dennes Hole, and a little further up, and with its entrance on the other side of Gibbs Bridge is Sunday Hole.

Both Black Hole and Sunday Hole have jumping off ropes suspended above them. Black Hole, next to Branford Park and the community fruit and nut orchard, is deep and wider, and the adjacent area is favourite haunt for picnics with its tables and BBQ area. Dennes Hole, another 100 or so metres along the track upriver, also accessible by crossing Jickells Bridge and walking across the cricket ground, is very popular for parents and grandparents with young children in tow because of its safety and ease of supervision. Grandparents can often be seen here teaching their mokopuna to swim. Dennes Hole is directly adjacent to the area proposed for a mass housing subdivision.

A little further up the road on the right, just across Gibbs Bridge and almost directly opposite the entrance to the PPC area, a driveway leads to Sunday Hole, where there is a small carpark with a playground and a large grassy games area bordering the swimming hole. This area is very popular in summer, often used by picnicking groups, especially on public holidays like Christmas day and New Year Day. Several families and their visitors have their Christmas lunch there. Sunday hole has a rope hanging from a tree on the park side and a small pebbly isthmus protruding into the hole from the opposite side of the river where swimmers can sit and sunbathe. This isthmus can also be accessed from the walking track (see Walking and Tramping).

Further up Maitai Valley Road are several other popular swimming holes, including those at Smith's Ford and the Maitai Reserve Camping Ground and Picnic Area.

## Walking and tramping

Walking and tramping the innumerable tracks that run through the Maitai Valley and the hills above is equally as beautiful and calming a pursuit now as it was back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In the lower valley, closer to town, is a flat and easy walking track that begins on the east side of the Maitai River below and to the left of Clouston Bridge. This is used daily by many cyclists and walkers, with or without dogs, to exercise and enjoy the early morning light before a day sitting at a desk, or to relieve stress at the end of a busy work day. It is peaceful and tree lined, with little to disturb the silence except for the sound of birds and the Maitai flowing beside the track. The walking and cycling track follows the river, passes the east side of Black Hole and continues beneath the Maitai Valley road bridge to Dennes Hole (which borders the proposed subdivision area). From there it continues behind the popular cricket ground to Sunday Hole (across the road from the proposed subdivision). In summer weekends many locals and their families, visitors and friends walk or cycle this track, stopping to swim or picnic at these popular recreation areas. From Sunday Hole the track continues on the flat through exotic and native tree planting, as far as the stile at the beginning of the hill, where it begins to rise. The return journey can be made the same way, or one can join Maitai Valley Road at Jickells Bridge and walk back along the road and through Branford Park.

Many of the Maitai walkers have at least one dog with them; some have several. The Nelson City council website states that in 2020 there were 6000 dogs registered in the city. The council welcomes them and their owners and describes Nelson as a 'dog-friendly city'. Exercising the dog at the Maitai is a regular activity for many Nelson residents, possibly because there are few other areas in the region where dogs are allowed off the leash for most of the year. However, from December through to March dogs are prohibited from entering Dennes Hole, Sunday Hole and the Maitai Camp swimming hole, so as not to disturb the large numbers of swimmers and picnickers using these areas.<sup>56</sup>

For those who want more of a challenge than a just a gentle walk, Maitai tramping tracks further up the valley listed by the Nelson City Council<sup>57</sup> include:

- Dam Crest (20 minutes return)
- Dam Crest & Caretakers Lookout (1 hour return)
- South Branch Intakes (30 minutes return)- turn left at the ford and follow the river's edge to the intake.
- Maitai Caves (2.5 hours return) - a torch required for exploring the cave
- Rushpool Quarry (2.5 hours return) - along the track, vegetation changes from pine forest to interesting native plant cover on the Mineral Belt.
- Dew lakes (5 hours return) - for excellent views down the Pelorus Valley towards Havelock, then another clearing 3 minutes later opens to Tasman Bay and the Western Ranges.
- Maungatapu track to Maungatapu saddle (5.5 hours return)
- Maungatapu track to Pelorus Valley Road end (4.4 hours one way)- via the 4-wheel drive track
- Dun Saddle (3 hours one way)
- Dun Saddle to Dun Summit (route only) 1 hour one way

- Dun Saddle to Brook Valley - via the Dun Mt Walkway 3 hours one way

### **Maungatapu track**

The Maungatapu track is accessed from the end of Maitai Valley, 11 km up Maitai Valley Road from central Nelson.

Maungatapu Circuit traverses Bryant Range, in the Maitai Water Reserve east of central Nelson. The circuit incorporates Rush Pool Track and Maungatapu Track, via Dew Lakes and the peak of Maungatapu (1014 m). It is a quieter alternative to nearby Dun Mountain Trail, whilst still showcasing the fascinating mineral belt landscape and mossy beech forest along the crest of Bryant Range. There are several other ways you can utilise the track network to create different half-day to full-day walking circuits.<sup>58</sup>

## **Council Reserves**

### **Recreation Reserve & Branford Park**

In 1918 the Council procured from the Richardson family land that included Dennes Hole, Sunday Hole and what is now called Branford Park, close to the city and Black Hole. These popular areas for swimming and picnics were 'designated as places of public recreation'.<sup>59</sup> In 1973 a playground area was added to the park and its name became Branford Park. In 2006 it was further enhanced for public recreation.

### **Maitai Reserve:**

Nelson City Council in 1971 bought 1731 acres as a recreational reserve from the new owners of the Richardson lands (Maitai Farms Ltd). This area covered both river flats and hills from Sunday Hole to the Maitai Motor Camp. It was to be used to provide access to two miles of river for swimming, flat land for recreation and sports, and hill tracks for trampers.<sup>60</sup> Part of this land was later used for the Waahi Taakaro Golf Course.

The council also wished to use the steep hill land they had been forced to include in the reserve purchase for commercial forestry, which they would run and profit from. After considerable protest by the Waimea County Council and Friends of the Maitai, who were concerned about this use of a public reserve, the loss of native forest and the destruction of the soil which a pine forest would bring about, a huge fire broke out on Tantragee hill, between the Brook and the Maitai Valleys. This destroyed native bush, new forestry planting, and an area set aside for an arboretum, as well as a house and other buildings. The Forest Service then made an offer the Council could not refuse and in 1985, 544 hectares of the hill portion of the previously designated reserve were sold to the forestry. 'The council ... retained from the original land purchased areas for the golf course, motor camp extensions, pipeline and riverbeds.'<sup>61</sup>

After the Council purchased the land from Maitai Farms, extensions were made to the Maitai Reserve picnic area and campgrounds. This area today is just as popular for camping, swimming, picnics and recreation as it always has been.

## Flora

When Nelson was first settled in the 1840s the Maitai Valley was dense and beautiful native bush, with flourishing beech, tītoki, mānuka, clematis and other natives, resounding with the calls of tui, kōmako (bellbird) kākāpō and kākā, while the river's wetlands abounded with waterbirds like the pūkeko.

After two centuries of burn-offs, clearing, farming, pine forestry, rodents and invading exotic plant species, that forest is nothing but an ancient memory, particularly on the flat lands of the lower valley and the pine plantations; though on the more remote tracks from the dam and up towards Maungatapu, there are some pleasant areas of mossy beech forest, and today there is an active community and council attempt to restore the balance.

### Friends of the Maitai & Project Mahitahi

Friends of the Maitai (FOM) has taken an active role as an environmental watchdog several times over the past 50 years, when issues with potential impact on the river have arisen. The original FOM existed from 1977 to 1984, formed to oppose the Nelson City Council's plan to plant the Waahi Taakaro hillsides in pine trees. Instead FOM envisioned a river valley full of native plantings and recreational opportunities. Unfortunately, they lost that fight and disbanded when the High Court allowed the planting of pine trees to proceed.

The latest incarnation of FOM emerged in 2014 after local residents got together with Nelson City Council staff to share some ideas for re-vegetation of the riverbank. The group gathered more members and again took up the title of Friends of the Maitai. Council launched a project called Project Maitai/Mahitahi and FOM took on the community aspect of this project, organising interest groups that include planting, plant care and river monitoring. FOM gained a grant from Council in 2019 to install a continuous river monitor to improve the reliability of data. Sediment from the harvesting of *Pinus radiata* has been identified by the Cawthron Institute as the main issue affecting water quality of the Maitai River. The FOM forestry group now works with the industry and Council on improving practices, with a view to eventually retiring pine forest.

Project Maitai/Mahitahi was a four-year project between Nelson City Council and community partners to improve the health of the Maitai River and all its tributaries. The overarching aim of the project was to create a river that is safe to swim in and take kai from, and that everyone can enjoy and feel proud of.

The restoration of the Groom Creek wetland, which borders the Maitai Reserve Camping Ground has been a major focus of Friends of the Maitai since 2014. Regular planting and plant care has transformed the area, with the trees now reaching maturity and the riverbanks clad in flax and grasses. The Nelson City Council has carried out further restoration, including ponds and extensive planting.<sup>62</sup>

### Branford Park Poplar Walk & Community Orchard

At Branford Park several very old poplar trees are still standing, the remains of the Poplar Walk, which was part of the main access road up the valley built in the early 1900s.

Branford Park is also the site of a community orchard. The flat area on both sides of the road and the hill section of the park above Dennes hole have been planted in some 100 fruit and nut trees in memory of respected lawyer, poet and community guide, David Phillips (1948–2012).<sup>63</sup> ‘This flat pleasant walk in Branford Park was planted by members of the public supported by the Nelson City Council as part of the Open Orchard initiative.’<sup>64</sup>

### **Tantragee Arboretum**

The Tantragee arboretum sits alongside the Maitai River on the route to the Maitai Dam. The idea for the Arboretum was first proposed in 1979. Converting the 14-hectare block, from gorse and weeds to a carefully arranged palette of deciduous and evergreen trees under-grazed by sheep, would complement established amenity plantings in the valley and create a much-needed fire break between Sharlands Hill and Fringed Hill.

In February 1981 a disastrous fire started in the Tantragee saddle area and swept onto Fringe Hill and the Hira afforestation areas. In 1983 the arboretum proposal became a reality as a joint New Zealand Forest Service and Nelson City Council project. Private forestry companies continue to support the arboretum. Today there are over 50 species of trees; deciduous species chosen for autumn display, conifers for contrast, other species for scientific interest, timber quality or flowers and fruit.<sup>65</sup>

## **Sports**

### **Cycling and Mountain-biking**

The Nelson Mountain Biking Club has more than 3500 members and operates several substantial trails of various skill levels located in the Maitai Valley, starting from Sharlands Road, between Black Hole and the Waahi Taakaro Golf course, as well as trails over the Tantragee Saddle to the Brook.

The Maitai Valley road forms part of the Coppermine Trail, one of New Zealand’s most accessible alpine mountain bike rides, and one of the Ngā Haerenga New Zealand Cycle Trails – a tourism attraction for Nelson.

It is also the route followed by Tour Aotearoa riders (annual event and permanent cycle route) over the Maungatapu & down the Maitai Valley.

The area is one of the top NZ sites for mountain biking. Plans were in place for the Nelson Mountain Biking Club to host the prestigious international Enduro World Series (EWS) in Nelson at Easter 2021. These plans have been put on hold because of Covid.

### **Golf**

The original Maitai Golf Club, a small nine-holer sited near Sunday Hole and accessible only through a ford, operated from 1937 till 1953 on land leased from owner Ralphine Richardson. The lease expired in 1953 and the owner did not want to renew it.<sup>66</sup>



The Waahi Taakaro municipal golf course was opened by the council in 1977 on part of the land they purchased in 1971 for recreational purposes. The course lies further up the road from the original Maitai Golf Club course, about halfway between Sunday Hole and the Maitai Reserve Campground. It is a place of great beauty and tranquility.

In the winter season the course is open to the public on Thursdays, Fridays and Sundays, but on Saturday it is reserved for members of the Waahi Taakaro Golf Club and for special events. The club, which has 180 members, some of whom play up to 4 times a week, manages the course. Including both public users and the club members, currently between 16,000 and 20,000 rounds a year are played here.<sup>67</sup> The club website extols the beauty of the course with its tree-lined valley, the resident 'tui, kererū, kingfisher and quail that create an all-day chorus and the ducks, eels and trout that swim in the river that winds through the well-maintained course'.<sup>68</sup>

### **The Maitai Recreation Hub**

On 22 April 2021 the Nelson City Council confirmed the location for a Maitai Recreation Hub to be based in the Maitai Valley at Waahi Taakaro Golf Course. The hub is aimed at families, walkers, runners and cyclists, as well as golfers.

Community and Recreation Committee Chair Tim Skinner said the hub's location, in a recreation reserve, was in one of the most beautiful places in the region and would provide a fantastic new amenity for locals and visitors alike.

... plans also include the addition of composting toilets, a bike repair station, a bike washdown station, a water fountain, a car parking area and potential for a commercial space to be used for such things as equipment hire or sale, or a cafe.

Council has worked closely with the Nelson Mountain Bike Club, Nelson Tasman Cycle Trails Trust, the Waahi Takaro Golf Club and Sport Tasman on the proposed site of the new hub ...<sup>69</sup>

### **Archery**

Past Sharlands Creek further up the Maitai from the golf course is the Two Arrows archery range. This large archery range is set amongst the bush, with picnic tables and a barbecue. It provides lessons in traditional archery and facilities for the use of clubs, youth clubs, and special events.

### **Cricket:**

There is a cricket ground beside the Maitai Valley Road between Jickells and Gibbs Bridges. It has a small car park and provides walking access to Dennes Hole for swimmers. This swimming hole and the cricket ground are only metres from the entrance to the proposed subdivision. The cricket ground is used as a recreation area and 'dog playground', a practice area for junior soccer players and for games of social rugby. Other games such as Frisbee are played there and, of course, cricket. An Indian group play cricket there regularly.

Groups of refugees settled in Nelson also hold regular cricket games at Branford Park and use the Park area frequently for picnics, sport, big social occasions and gatherings.<sup>70</sup>

In a 2019 scholarly article on refugee resettlement in Nelson, Amber Kale stated that there were some 700 refugees in Nelson. Kale discusses the phenomena of 'place detachment' and writes:

Whilst there is an extensive body of literature concerning the negative impact of forced displacement, there has been much less focus on how resettling refugees might cope with their loss and enhance their wellbeing by building new attachments to places of settlement (Bogac, 2009; Coughlan & Hermes, 2016; Sampson & Gifford, 2010)<sup>71</sup>

She writes that 'Places of "pleasure" (commonly referred to as leisure or recreational spaces) ... can be significant in terms of wellbeing and feeling well is also central to surviving and thriving in places of settlement.'<sup>72</sup>

### **Cross-country and long distance running**

Several nationally and internationally successful athletes have trained in Nelson's Maitai Valley. Nelson athlete and Olympic Bronze medal winner Rod Dixon rates the Maitai Valley as one of the best training grounds in the world and has described it as a breeding ground for world class athletes.<sup>73</sup>

Athletics Nelson organises a number of events in the Maitai Valley. The 'Summer Pub Runs' from the Prince Albert pub in Nile Street to Sharlands Creek began in 1979. They are held every October and are still popular today. Some 50 runners took part in October 2021.

The Nelson Striders have been holding races down the Maitai Valley since the early 1980s. These are organised by Averil and Grant West from Athletes Nelson. The annual event of four races covers distances from 2–3km up to 10km, beginning further up the Valley and each ending at Branford Park.<sup>74</sup>

Primary schools St Josephs and Nelson Central each hold a cross-country event every year at Branford Park. This is organized by groups of parents of school pupils, and the children walk up to Branford to take part.

In addition, Athletics Nelson organises an annual Children's Winter Cross Country event in May, involving 4 race days, one of which is usually held at Branford Park. Races are for several age groups from primary to secondary school age, competing for school trophies.<sup>75</sup>

## Conclusion

In the process of researching and writing this paper it has become increasingly evident that the Maitai Valley has for nearly two centuries held a sacred place in the hearts of generations of Nelsonians as a taonga, a precious gift.

Nelsonians who grew up here, many of whom may today, in the midst of a pandemic, be scattered round the world and unable to return, have happy memories of the green and peaceful delights of this valley, the picnics and swimming with friends and family, the recreation and sports played here, walking the family dog or cycling the mountain tracks, and days climbing and exploring its many trails.

Today similar memories are still being created in the younger generation, and the community and the council are working tirelessly to keep the Maitai river clean, to restore parks and riverbanks with plantings and to provide recreation away from the noise, stress and traffic of the city. Large numbers of past and present Nelsonians, and their family members scattered abroad, would therefore be devastated should this beautiful area be sacrificed for housing development and suburbs.

Should one area close to swimming holes and parks be rezoned for residential housing it would be the beginning of a vast tragedy, not only permanently spoiling the character of the area, but also setting a precedent that would make it harder to refuse further applications for other subdivisions in this valley. Nelson's "Central Park in the city", the envy of the rest of New Zealand, would then become just another sprawling suburb filled with traffic and noise.

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- [https://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/fms/Colleges/College%20of%20Humanities%20and%20Social%20Sciences/PEP/PDF\\_documents/Sociology/Beatson/the%20world%20around%20the%20corner%201980%20characters%20and%20summary.pdf](https://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/fms/Colleges/College%20of%20Humanities%20and%20Social%20Sciences/PEP/PDF_documents/Sociology/Beatson/the%20world%20around%20the%20corner%201980%20characters%20and%20summary.pdf)
- <sup>54</sup> Nelson City Council in *Live Nelson* 2009; Updated 2021 <http://www.theprow.org.nz/places/maitai-valley/#.YYSkz2BBw2w>
- <sup>55</sup> *Colonist*, Vol. XI, Issue 8719, The Maungatapu, 19 November 1896, p 3.  
[https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/TC18961119.2.11?items\\_per\\_page=100&page=3&phrase=2&query=up+the+Maitai+&snippet=true&sort\\_by=byDA](https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/TC18961119.2.11?items_per_page=100&page=3&phrase=2&query=up+the+Maitai+&snippet=true&sort_by=byDA)
- <sup>56</sup> <http://www.nelson.govt.nz/services/licencing-and-environmental-health/dog-control-3/dog-owner-responsibilities/>
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>58</sup> <https://nelsontrails.co.nz/maungatapu-circuit/>
- <sup>59</sup> Venner p 117
- <sup>60</sup> Venner, p 129
- <sup>61</sup> Venner p 140
- <sup>62</sup> All information about Friends of the Maitai and Project Mahitahi comes from Friends of the Maitai website: <http://friendsofthemaitai.org.nz/>
- <sup>63</sup> <https://www.lawsociety.org.nz/news/people-in-the-law/obituaries/obituaries-list/david-gordon-phillips-1949-2012>
- <sup>64</sup> <http://www.nelson.govt.nz/assets/Leisure/Downloads/walks/edible-walks/Branford-Park-Edible-Walk-2.pdf>
- <sup>65</sup> Nelson City Council in *Live Nelson* 2009; Updated 2021 <http://www.theprow.org.nz/places/maitai-valley/#.YYSkz2BBw2w>
- <sup>66</sup> Venner, pp 42–46
- <sup>67</sup> Phone interview with Peter Watson, club manager, 11 October 2021
- <sup>68</sup> <https://www.waahitaakarogolfclub.co.nz>, accessed 11 October 2021.
- <sup>69</sup> *Our Nelson*, Nelson City Council, 22 April 2021, p 1
- <sup>70</sup> Information from Rosemary Shaw who with her husband Charles is a volunteer working with Nelson’s refugee resettlement program.
- <sup>71</sup> Amber Kale, ‘Building attachments to places of settlement: A holistic approach to refugee wellbeing in Nelson, Aotearoa New Zealand’ in *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 65, p 1  
<https://communityresearch.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Building-attachments-to-places-of-settlement-holistic-approach-to-refugee-wellbeing-in-Nelson.pdf>
- <sup>72</sup> Ibid, p.6
- <sup>73</sup> Conversation with Vern Mardon, Ahtletes Nelson committee member, 15 November 2021.
- <sup>74</sup> Athletes Nelson information from secretary and treasurer Vern Marden, 15 November 2021.
- <sup>75</sup> <https://athleticsnelson.co.nz/>