



Mackay

ON MONEY

BY AUTHORISED FINANCIAL ADVISER CHRIS MACKAY

It's good to get away. It's great to go somewhere different. Recently I got away. I went somewhere that turned out to be nowhere. The Bridge to Nowhere actually. It's a concrete road bridge spanning the Mangapurua Stream in Whanganui National Park. It has no roads leading to it, but it is accessible by walking or mountain bike tracks. You may have heard of it or even been there too.

I'll tell you a bit more about it presently but what's its relevance to a "money" article? Well, it cost a truckload when it was built in the mid 1930s, and its uselessness was exacerbated by economic events and some foolish decisions by the Government who created the need for it and then let it die.

Based on our guide's lecture and some research from DOC, Wikipedia and NZ History online, here is the background on what is now a terrific tourist attraction.

Our journey started from Ohakune where we bussed via the once busy

little town of Raetihi to Pipiriki on the Whanganui River. Once the site of a big hotel (Pipiriki House) built in 1903 and boasting 65 double-bed rooms, six bathrooms and three separate showers and servicing overnight travellers on riverboats heading to and from Wellington, all that is left in the Pipiriki CBD seems to be the public loos. The hotel burnt down in 1909, was rebuilt within nine months and burnt down again for good in 1959.



Pipiriki House, built 1903 burnt down 1909. Photo from kiwi.gen.nz/pipirikihouse/ website

If we had driven another few miles past the road, we would have reached James K. Baxter's Jerusalem, but we didn't.

We jet boated from Pipiriki up the beautiful river for an hour and then did a 45 minute tramp through regenerated native bush up to this historic bridge and this is where we had a history lecture. It was so interesting I did some more reading when we got home. Here's what DOC says:



The old timber swing bridge. Photo from DOC Website.



The Bridge to Nowhere today. Photo from envirohistorynz.com

"A REWARD FOR RETURNED SOLDIERS"

During World War 1, the government offered land in the Mangapurua and Kaiwhakauka valleys to returned servicemen as part of a soldier settlement scheme. In 1917 the first pioneer settlers started taking up the available holdings.

Life was difficult from the start. The land was remote, hilly and untamed. Road access was limited and the settlers had to clear their holdings of dense forest and transform them into farm land. Despite the obstacles, the returned servicemen were enthusiastic and determined. At the peak of settlement there were 30 farms in Mangapurua and 16 in Kaiwhakauka. The shared experiences – through war and these new challenges – created a strong bond, and for a number of years the community thrived.

THE BRIDGE

A wooden bridge [Morgan's Bridge] was constructed across the Mangapurua Stream in 1919. This connected the isolated valley with the riverboats that brought goods along the Whanganui River. However the settlers had always expected that roading access would be improved – a more solid bridge would be built – and that it would form part of a road between Raetihi and Taranaki.

Planning for the new bridge started when the [old] timber bridge began to rot. In 1936 the new steel-reinforced concrete



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bridge was finally opened. It was an impressive sight at nearly 40 metres above the river within the steep ravine walls. Today, you can still see the remains of the old swing bridge from the concrete bridge that replaced it.”

AND HERE IS SOME COMMENTARY FROM NEW ZEALAND HISTORY ONLINE

A SIGN ON THE BRIDGE STATES:
“Started in January 1935 and completed in June 1936, this bridge was built by the Raetihi firm of Sanford and Brown, for the Public Works Department. It is 130 feet long, and 125 feet above the stream.

The cost of labour was 598 pounds 11 shillings 7 pence, and cartage of all materials (via the Mangapurua Valley road) cost 419 pounds 14 shillings. Unfortunately the cost of materials was not recorded. Aggregate for the concrete is said to have been transported from the Rangitikei River.

The completion of the bridge was delayed considerably due to floods, slips, and the consequent delay in the supply of materials. The bridge was built to facilitate vehicular access to the Whanganui River, to link the settlers of the valley with the riverboat service.”

AND HERE IS SOME COMMENTARY FROM NEW ZEALAND HISTORY ONLINE

“After the First World War, the government had promised a land fit for heroes, but the Reform government’s generosity sometimes fell well short of its platitudinous patriotism. Writer Rewi Alley later wrote feelingly about his struggle in rural Taranaki [but] the 40 families who took up land in the isolated Mangapurua Valley inland from Whanganui were let down even more cruelly.

They began optimistically enough. Their 450-ha farms had to be hacked out of the steep, virgin bush in one of the last large-scale pioneering efforts in New Zealand history. New Zealand’s brief post-war recovery collapsed sharply in 1921 and the rest of the decade was bumpy. Prices fell, yields dropped and the high rainfall washed out bridges and sent unstable rock crashing down onto the road. At first the settlers relied on river steamers but after the road was metalled it became their outlet to the railhead at Raetihi. In vain they struggled to patch the road while appealing for a concrete bridge to replace their timber suspension one. With almost fictional irony, by the time that contractors Sanford and Brown handed the expensive, permanent bridge over in June 1936 most of the soldier families had walked off their land. Just three families were holding out in 1942, when heavy

rain wrecked the road. The Public Works Department refused to restore it and in May 1942 Cabinet ordered the remaining settlers out, compensating them with £250 per family.

They trudged out wearily and sadly, leaving the bush to reassert itself. Hunters and trappers had ‘the valley of abandoned dreams’ to themselves until 1986, when the government added the valley to the new Whanganui National Park. By then weeds were growing thick on the decking of the bridge, which had acquired iconic status with the ever-increasing number of park users. In 1995 the ‘Bridge to Nowhere’, as it had become known, was repaired to serve a new public.

The bridge is now busier than ever, catering for sometimes well-heeled tourists. It has become a symbol of futility, but we should remember most of the [other] 5,000 servicemen and their families who took up farms offered by the government did not walk off the land. Some did very nicely. The ones who threw in the towel were the people on isolated and/or infertile land, and some of them might have stuck it out had they not also been clobbered by the “Great Depression”.

MY THOUGHTS

I’m sure the government was well intentioned but this project was a disaster.

The new settlers arrived by riverboat, painfully cleared the forest and bush

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land by hand and then burned what was left. Once completed they took the long journey to town and back by river transport.

Along with a few well earned beers, they bought sacks of grass seed which they lugged back up the steep access way and then sowed the blackened dirt. Somewhere along the way, they whacked some fences in to create paddocks or pastures. I presume this massive undertaking took a few years.

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MEETING THE GROWING DEMANDS OF LOWER HUTT COMMUTERS

BY PRUE LAMASON

As Lower Hutt residents we are well used to battling the rush-hour traffic in our cars and watching in frustration as the train roars past the gridlock on the motorway. But how many of us are willing to leave the car at home and utilise bus and train services?

We are fortunate to live in an area that has many rail stations and bus routes making the commute to and from Wellington city simple and easy. Already thousands of people catch the train each day to get a jump start on the traffic, and I encourage anyone in the Hutt who makes the regular commute to Wellington to join the exodus and find out how much easier the journey is with public transport.

Our Rail Plan aims to make the journey even easier within the next five or six years with more frequent services from hubs such as Waterloo. Regional Council is also in the process of acquiring more new Matangi trains, with plans for them to make up a majority of our fleet by 2016.

In the meantime, we need to ensure we are offering the best services possible to commuters and ensure the train network is able to run on-time and meet the increasing demand of peak travellers.

We are also currently reviewing all of our public transport in the Hutt Valley to ensure better connections between bus, rail and harbour ferry services, that better match demand and timetables are as reliable as possible. We'll explore opportunities for additional services and Hutt Valley to Porirua connections, and the possible discontinuation of poorly patronised services.

To meet the rising cost of providing a public transport service, regional council will be raising the cost of non-cash ticketing by one per cent and cash tickets on some routes by 50 cents. The fare increases are currently open for consultation as part of our Annual Plan 2014/15 process and I encourage you all to have your say on this and on other aspects of the Annual Plan.

The Annual Plan sets out Greater Wellington Regional Council's spending for

the next financial year, and this year will see increases in spending for Lower Hutt including the purchase of land adjacent to Petone Railway Station to increase the park'n'ride capabilities.

It also sets out the rates for the upcoming year, with council intending to raise rates by an average of \$22 per year per household (about 43 cents per week) – or 6.1 per cent – which is a significant drop from the 11.3 per cent earmarked in the Long Term Plan.

The Lower Hutt Community will benefit from the increase in spending with projects including improvements to public transport, investigations into running an underground water pipeline between Petone and Wellington city and planning work for the Lower Hutt City Centre flood protection stopbank.

GWRC is also in the process of establishing the second of its Whaitua committees, this time focusing on the Hutt and Wellington harbour catchments. Whaitua committees are a whole-of-catchment approach to managing our waterways and land use and utilise the knowledge and expertise of people within the community.

The Ruamahanga Whaitua Committee was established last year, and this year the council will start the Hutt and Wellington Whaitua Committee to ensure our waterways, and the surrounding land, are able to be maintained and protected for future use and enjoyment.

Submissions for the Draft Annual Plan 2014/15 are currently open and close on April 28. I encourage you all to get involved and to tell us your thoughts on the spending and service needs of the Hutt and how we can work together to ensure the Hutt – and the greater Wellington region – continues to be the best place in the world to live.

Prue Lamason represents the Lower Hutt constituency on the Greater Wellington Regional Council. She also chairs the regional council's Hutt Valley Flood Management Subcommittee and is Chair of Greater Wellington's Holding Company.
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Clearing over 1,100 acres was back-breaking work. Once the grass was growing, they headed back to town (Raetihi, Wanganui, Taumaranui, not sure where) had their annual beer, bought some sheep, got them on the riverboat and herded them up the hill to their new farms.

The sheep did their part, but the bottom fell out of the wool market in the early 20s. By the time the settlers had sheared the sheep, baled the wool, got it down the hill to the riverboats and shipped it to the markets, they were lucky to recover costs. Because the land had been burned off, a lot of the wool was blackened and sooty and this further reduced the market price.

Of course later in the 1920s, the Great Depression was upon the country and life must have been pretty tough for these Kiwi battlers who were supposed to be getting a prize.

It sounds like the floods and slips which characterised the delays in building the bridge were exacerbated by the clearing of the forest and bush. Nothing was holding the sides of the hills together. So one thing literally lead to another.

The whole initiative was doomed from kickoff. This solidier settlement scheme and this bridge were never going to fly. It was the wrong place and the wrong time.

I'm not sure whether the earlier settlers who had to walk off their farms got any compensation. They should have. Poor buggers. Even the £250 paid out to the three families in 1942 only equates with about \$21,500 in today's dollars. Hardly a just reward!

They fought for King and country, survived Gallipoli and the Somme only to be defeated by the terrain, geography, nature, the commodity market and a poor government decision in the first place.

On the flipside, since then, a lot of water has passed under the bridge (bad pun) and this is now a fabulous attraction. Tourist operators are making money out of it and I reckon DOC could recoup some costs too. If they started charging non New Zealanders for using our National Parks, they could generate income to help maintain these wonderful treasures.

In the meantime put The Bridge to Nowhere on your bucket list. It's worth a visit.

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