

Early Days At Turakina Beach Remembered

Some of the early days at Turakina Beach were recalled yesterday by Mr Scott Cameron, of Marton, who has known the area since 1914 when as a young man he helped exercise the hunters from the Simpson Estate at Heaton Park.

Turakina Beach, or more correctly Koitiata, has been in the news lately with the Wanganui-Rangitikei Electric-power Board bringing electricity to the settlement and the Rangitikei County Council undertaking to develop the area with the opening up of about 40 residential sites.

Mr Cameron was asked by "The Chronicle" yesterday for some of the early history of the area and his impressions.

He said the settlement opened about 1919 when sections were leased by the county.

"There was a small Maori fishing settlement at what was known as 'Spud Hill,' but this hill disappeared in the flood of 1931.

"There was a sand track from Simpson's house, The Planes, down to the river where tents were used, transport being provided by brake or gig.

"Cooking was done on open fires or camp ovens."

Mr Cameron recalled that in a bad storm all the tents were levelled and the bed-ragged inmates had to

trudge through the mud and rain to The Planes where they were taken in. and a new outlet had to be dug to the river.

"There big fires were lit at 2 a.m. and everyone dried out.

"The first building at the settlement was a cookhouse and later a few lean-tos. These were on the present waterfront, which at that time was the banks of the Turakina River.

"The houses became sanded up — some to the roofs — and they were subsequently shifted further inland to the middle of the present settlement," he said.

The oldest house at the beach at present was built by the late Mr Arthur Way and Mr Cameron's garage was subsequently added for a dining room.

Today the house is owned by Mr B. Pierson, of Marton.

Mr Cameron said two dwellings were burnt down, Mr A. Rink's and Mr C. A. Wainwright's, the latter with a serious loss of valuable shooting and fishing gear.

"A few years ago a sand lake burst," he said, "and the whole road was flooded

"The river has changed its course on many occasions and gradually the high sand-hills beloved by children have disappeared as well as the large lagoon on which there was so much boating.

BUSY HOLIDAYS

"Although lacking amenities, which today are considered necessities, children had busy holidays, the yearly highlight being a huge bonfire followed by fancy dress parties in which the youngest to the oldest joined seldom breaking up before the sun rose over the hills at daybreak.

"Watching the godwits preparing for their annual migration, the black swans on the lagoon, hunting for frogs and tadpoles, bringing home baby rabbits and ducks, building huts in the lupins, roasting potatoes on the beach while the grown-ups fished, the huge bowls of whitebait in season, morning calls with flounders for the family breakfasts — these are the memories of what are called 'the good old days,'" Mr Cameron said.