

**TIMARU DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**HISTORIC HERITAGE ITEM RECORD FORM**

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**HERITAGE ITEM NAME** former Timaru Waterworks Dam  
**ADDRESS** near Pareora Gorge Road, Pareora River  
**PHOTOGRAPH**



**District Plan Item No.** New      **HNZ LIST No. & CATEGORY** n / a

**LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

**VALUATION NUMBER**

**DATE OF CONSTRUCTION** 1878-79

**ARCHITECT/DESIGNER/  
BUILDER** H Wrigg, Borough Engineer

**STYLE** Industrial vernacular

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION**

Concrete dam with wing walls.

**MATERIALS/STRUCTURE**

Concrete.

**ADDITIONS/ALTERATIONS**

Original bluestone cresting blocks replaced by concrete after flood damage in spring of 1887 (1887).

**SETTING**

The dam spans the Pareora River within the gorge to the north of Pareora Gorge Road and to the west of Evans Crossing Road. The extent of setting is the immediate environs of the dam. It is noted that the bridge structure may extend in to Waimate District Council's area.

## **HISTORY**

The fire that destroyed a large part of Timaru's CBD in December 1868 highlighted the inadequacies of the town's water supply and prompted renewed discussion about its improvement. In the early 1870s steps were taken by the borough council to create a town water supply sourced from the Pareora River via a water race. In 1873 the council accepted James Fraser's offer to build a 39 kilometre race from the river with a storage reservoir on the outskirts of town. The race and reservoir were completed within a few years but the scheme was a failure; no water reached the people of Timaru. Renewed efforts to secure a water supply led to the construction by the Timaru Borough Council of a concrete dam across the Pareora River in 1878-79. In 1880 a loan to pay for the town's waterworks scheme was authorised; the new scheme opened on 16 December 1881. This system, designed by Christchurch engineers Edward Dobson & Son 'on scientific lines', provided the townsfolk with 'an abundant supply of water for domestic purposes' and also ensured the town's volunteer fire brigade had sufficient water to fight fires. For many years after the system was built the £60,000 waterworks loan was the borough council's only major liability. By 1903 scheme improvements had doubled the supply and there was surplus water which was used as a source of motive power, to drive pelton wheels and turbines, and for steam engines which contributed to the development of industry in Timaru. In 1910-12 the original reservoir was enlarged and a second reservoir built. Later improvements included a new intake dam in the upper Pareora gorge and the replacement of the open race by a pipeline in 1939, after which the original dam became redundant. Two new reservoirs were built on Claremont Road in 1960 and the Brookfield Road reservoirs were subsequently decommissioned. Today a number of sites and structures provide evidence of the historic development of Timaru's water supply system.

## **HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE**

The former Timaru waterworks dam has historical significance as a component part of one of the most notable engineering achievements of the district's early years. The dam facilitated the growth and development of Timaru in the later 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and is associated with the men who built and then maintained the water supply system.

## **CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE**

The former Timaru waterworks dam has cultural value as a demonstration of the way of life Timaru residents could enjoy thanks to access to a plentiful and secure water supply.

## **ARCHITECTURAL AND AESTHETIC SIGNIFICANCE**

The former Timaru waterworks dam has aesthetic value for its vernacular industrial design by Henry Wrigg (see below), which was intended to be fit for purpose.

## **TECHNOLOGICAL AND CRAFTSMANSHIP SIGNIFICANCE**

The former Timaru waterworks dam has technological value for the evidence it provides of colonial water race technology. Henry Wrigg (c.1814-79) was appointed engineer to the Timaru Borough Council in 1877, having previously been in government service in Auckland and then practising on his own account in Christchurch. Wrigg had emigrated to New Zealand from England in 1863 and his funeral in May 1879, which took place roughly one month after the dam he had designed was completed, was attended by the Mayor and Councillors of Timaru Borough Council. Wrigg's son Alfred served his apprenticeship with his father and was later City Engineer of Auckland (1900-6). Day labour was responsible for constructing the Pareora dam; tenders from contracting firms having been considered too high by the Borough Engineer.

## **CONTEXTUAL SIGNIFICANCE**

The former Timaru waterworks dam has contextual significance as a local historic feature that is closely related to both the water race tunnel at Adair (heritage item # 98) and the Brookfield Road reservoirs.

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND SCIENTIFIC SIGNIFICANCE**

As the dam pre-dates 1900 its site has potential archaeological significance relating to the development of the district's water supply infrastructure and the technology involved in its construction.

## **SUMMARY OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE**

The former Timaru waterworks dam has overall heritage significance to Pareora Gorge, Timaru and Timaru district as a whole. The structure has historical significance as evidence of one of the district's most notable early infrastructure developments and cultural value as a demonstration of the way of life of those who benefitted from the water supply network. The former Timaru waterworks dam has aesthetic value owing to its industrial vernacular design and technological value for its design by Borough Engineer Henry Wrigg and its part in a notable colonial infrastructure project. The former Timaru waterworks dam has contextual significance as a local historic feature and potential archaeological significance in view of the structure's date of construction.

## **HERITAGE CATEGORY**

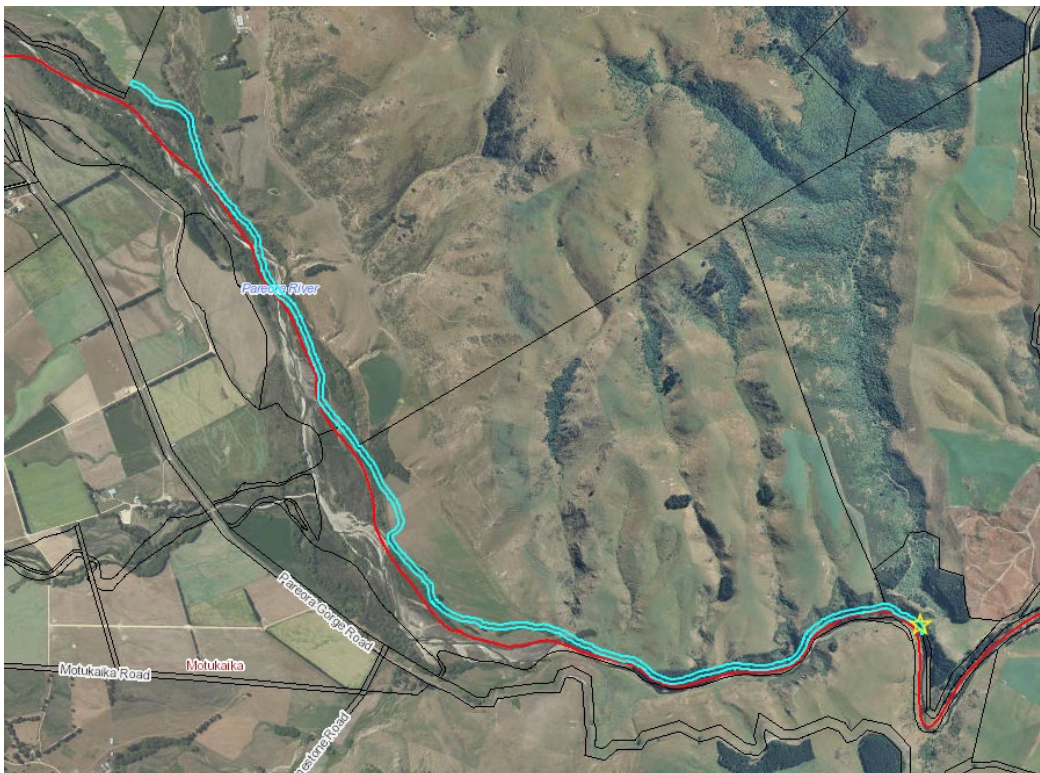
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## **REFERENCES**

- *Lyttelton Times* 13 February 1879, pp. 3 & 7; 25 April 1879, p. 3; 21 May 1879, p. 2; 23 May 1879, p. 4.
- *Timaru Herald* 11 July 1866, p. 2; 28 December 1870, p. 5; 3 March 1873, p. 3; 20 December 1876, p. 3; 9 January 1877, p. 3; 10 December 1878, p. 3; 30 April 1879, p. 2; 23 December 1879, p. 3; 23 December 1880, p. 2; 28 February 1888, p. 3; 5 November 1900, p. 4; 10 June 2008, p. 9; 11 October 2008, p. 19; 15 September 2015, available online.
- *Press* 10 October 1939, p. 5.
- *Ashburton Guardian* 28 August 1901, p. 2.
- *Wanganui Herald* 12 February 1907, p. 5.
- *Cyclopedia of New Zealand - Auckland Provincial District* Christchurch, 1902.
- *Te Ara Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, available online.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNi7QnlEcWU>
- <http://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/7266>
- <http://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/7664>



Extent of setting, Pareora River. It is noted that the bridge structure may extend across the territorial border in to Waimate District Council's area.

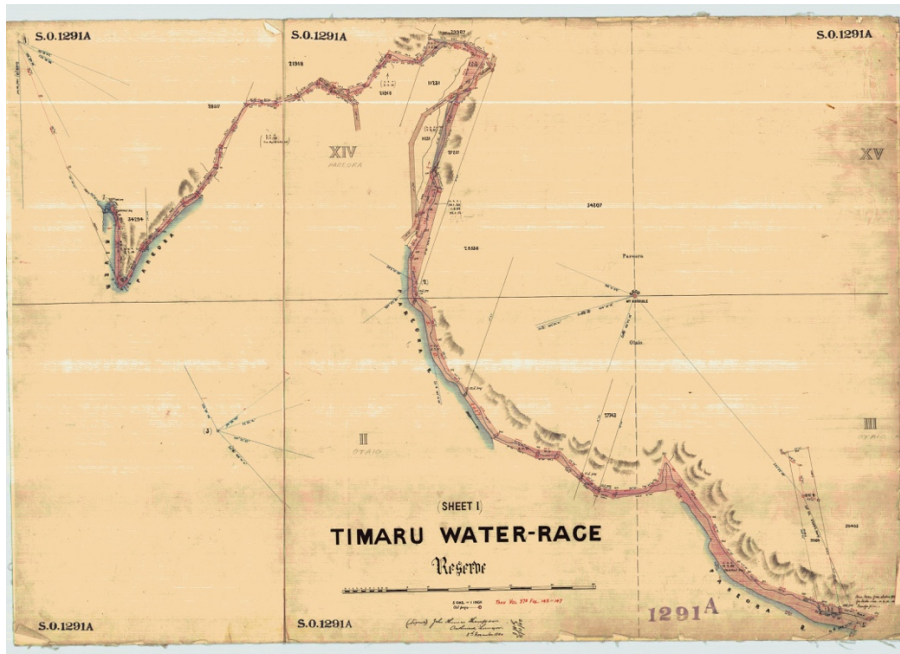


Land parcel as a whole with dam marked by star.

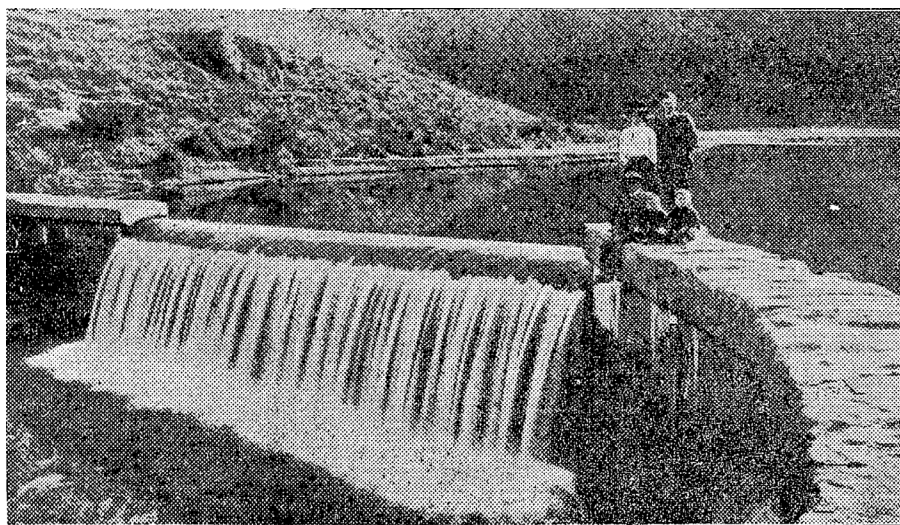




Group sitting along edge of Pareora Dam  
Courtesy of South Canterbury Museum, 2893



SO 1291A, dated 8 November 1880.



'The dam in Pareora, source of Timaru water supply' *Timaru Herald* 11 June 1914, p. 24.