

A change of scene was imminent. Coincidentally with the Commission's visit Featherston was about to ride up to Manawatu to pay the Maori owners £12,000 in gold, due on the purchase of the upper Manawatu or Ahuataranga Block. It was desirable that Murphy and partners should see something of the province—and Wanganui—although, as Docker commented somewhat gloomily, the visit meant that they would be obliged also to travel into the hinterlands of Marlborough and Nelson.

Apart from Wellington, Wanganui was the only contender north of the strait, a burgeoning garrison town in the build-up for Cameron's later 'advance' up the coast. The Chamber of Commerce, buoyant in the expectation of profit from supply and other benefits, was metaphorically reaching for the sky in the mood of its jumbo-jet candidature a century later. The chance of being the capital, however remote, was worth some effort and a fillip to its curious struggle for independence from the Wellington Provincial Council.²⁶ This campaign, an annoyance, if not a worry to Featherston, would doubtless have prompted him to persuade Murphy to give the town the honour of an examination. For Docker and Gunn it was to be the highlight of the tour.

Accordingly, a week after their arrival, early one afternoon, they left for Otaki and places north 'in a carriage with an American van to carry all our luggage', Docker again regretting the constraints of travel and duty while his 'apparatus' rolled unused amongst the baggage. Five hours later, 'after a most romantic drive... which made me disgusted that I had not time to stop...', the party arrived at 'Horokiwi' (Pauatahanui) where they dried out 'and slept in a middling inn'. Next morning, after Docker had secured one picture, they set off 'up a very beautiful gorge' to the extensive view from the Paekakariki summit, everything from Queen Charlotte Sound to Egmont, which, at Featherston's request, Docker took in 'three views... but they were not well suited [to] the camera being too extensive'. The zigzag descent 'without the slightest protection on the outside where the hill went almost sheer down', was not a time for photography.²⁷

After lunch at Waikanae, Docker and Gunn rode ahead with Featherston to take pictures at Otaki 'with some Maoris to carry the camera to the pa of a famous chief called Wi Tako who had lately made his submission and who Dr F. was very anxious I should take':

I told him I was afraid it was no use trying with a dry plate; however he [Wi Tako] stood very well and I think it would have been very fair only I found on developing it in the evening that I had put in the plate with its back foremost, so that it had got scratched & going through the glass was out of focus.