

History of McLaren Falls Park

All historical photos are courtesy of Tauranga City Libraries.

Further historical information is included within Appendix 3 of the Draft Reserve Management Plan

Hydro Electric Generation

Tauranga Borough Council was a pioneer in the generation and distribution of electricity in New Zealand. This began with the construction of the Omanawa Falls Power Station in 1915 and then the McLaren Falls Power Station in 1925, both within the Wairoa catchment. Other hydro generation stations within this catchment are the Lower Mangapapa, Lloyd Mandeno and Ruahihi stations.



McLaren Falls Workers 1924

1917

In 1917 Mr. Mandeno became the Council's chief electrical engineer, and began investigating the possibilities of harnessing the waters of the Wairoa for further power generation.

1921 – 1925



McLaren Fall – 1920's

In 1921, Lloyd Mandeno had completed initial surveys of the upper Wairoa and Mangapapa Rivers and settled on McLaren Falls as a suitable site for a power station. During 1923 detailed surveys and plans proceeded and the power station was constructed. The first generator began operation in 1925.

Most of the land bounding the eastern side of the river above the falls was owned by Mr. Harold Marshall, until a portion of it was purchased from him by the City Council, to be incorporated in the park. Prior to this the Council had in 1918 acquired a limited area extending from the power station to the present site of the hostel building within the park, as well as another area of some eighty acres at the southern extremity, both acquired as water reserves for the existing and possible future development of hydro schemes. The remaining area between these two reserves was purchased from Mr. Marshall in order to give a continuous park land area in the eastern side of the lake. (Kennedy, 1980's).

The Ruahihi Power Station Canal project (1977-1981) caused a 1.2 metre increase in the level of Lake McLaren and the construction of an additional outlet to the Lake.

The original McLaren Falls Power Station was essentially decommissioned in 1981 with the commissioning of the Ruahihi Power station.



McLaren Falls Lake 1924

1977 – 1981

McLaren Falls Park Prayer of Dedication 1982

May all who come to it find Joy and Peace and True recreation of Body, Mind and Spirit.

May they treat it with respect and reverence now and in the years ahead.

Lake McLaren and the park were originally formed as part of the Wairoa River catchment hydro electricity system in 1925.

The park incorporates an arboretum which was been developed in partnership with the then Tauranga District Council and the Bay of Plenty Tree Society.

The first plantings took place in 1965.

1991

In 1991 the Tauranga Joint Generation Committee (TJGC) established Kaimai Hydropower as its trading company responsible for hydro electric and other power generation schemes in the Wairoa River catchment and Kaimai Ranges. The TJGC was formed under an act of Parliament and is the structure under which Kaimai Hydropower operates.

1992

The first Park Ranger was employed at the Park.

1995

The first Reserve Management Plan was adopted by Tauranga District Council under the Reserves Act 1977.

1999

Kaimai Hydro Power and the majority of its holdings were sold by the Joint Generation Committee to Trust Power Ltd for the purposes of power generation. The Park titles transferred to Tauranga City Council following this sale.

Cultural History – Tree Society

1965

Mr. K.H. Armstrong, with the support of Society members, approached the Council with the suggestion that an area of Council-owned land bordering on the McLaren Falls lake and power scheme could be, with the acquisition of some extra land, developed into a substantial park of about 150 acres (60 hectares). The Society offered to supply the trees and to proceed with planting when this was achieved.

In June 1965, land purchase was finalised and the Society was given the approval of the Council to begin planting. This has subsequently become an annual commitment to the Society, and to date many thousands of trees covering over 500 species and varieties, exotic and indigenous, are established in the park.

Subsequent to the purchase of land bounding the lake in 1965, the area was designated “McLaren Falls Park”, and the Tree Society began planting. A verbal agreement had been entered into between the Council and the Society to the effect that the latter should supply and plant as wide a variety of trees as possible. Maintenance from that stage would be the responsibility of the Council. This agreement has continued to date.

Mr W.J. Kennedy, a member of the Tree Society, also played a vital role in the implementation of the Tree Society’s vision for the Park. His record of the Tree Society’s involvement in the Park is found in Appendix 3 – Historical Context.

In later years the Tree Society’s work has been focused around the management of the established trees.