

T H E MOTUROA

O I L F I E L D



N E W P L Y M O U T H

N E W Z E A L A N D

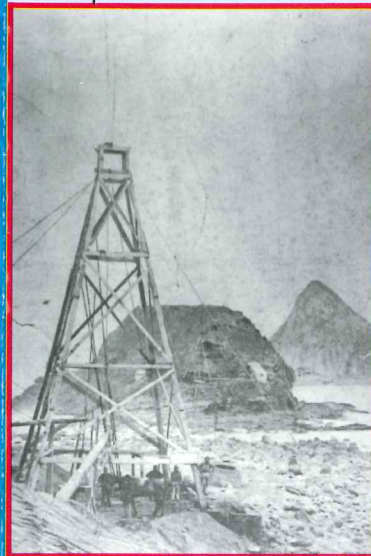
The Moturoa Oilfield

The beam pump on the foreshore at Ngamotu Beach, marks the site of Moturoa No 4 oilwell, drilled to a depth of 666 metres in 1931 and closed in 1972. During its life it produced 32,996 barrels (5 million litres) of Moturoa's waxy crude oil. The pump was erected by Shell BP and Todd Oil Services as a memorial to the pioneers of oil exploration in New Zealand.

History

It was in 1865, only seven years after the first industrial drilling for oil in Ontario (Canada) and Pennsylvania (USA), that initial attempts were made to exploit the petroleum resources of the Moturoa oilfield in New Plymouth.

In that year four individuals, Josiah Carter, John Smith, John Scott and Andrew Ross formed the Alpha Syndicate and began to hand-dig a shaft near the oil-seeps on the beach near Mikotahi Island (now joined to the mainland) This pioneer company was soon to be followed by several others, including the first Taranaki Petroleum Company and the Peoples' Petroleum Company. By 1869, eight wells had been drilled or dug on Sugar Loaf Point, but their total production was little more than half a dozen barrels.



**Carter & Co's Alpha Well,
Sugar Loaf Point,
New Plymouth, 1866**

Exploration began again between 1890-1901 with nine wells, most completed by a company founded by local lawyer, Oliver Samuel. One of the most successful of these produced enough oil to be sold for gas manufacture. It was the 1904 Moturoa Petroleum Company that finally established the halcyon days of the industry in New Plymouth.

Their "Birthday Well", which blew out impressive quantities of oil in 1905, continued producing intermittently for many years. The largest of the many companies subsequently founded, the second Taranaki Petroleum, was established in 1906 and drilled several producing wells opposite the present Taranaki Cool Store Ltd building in Breakwater Road.

A continuous-distillation refinery was established on adjoining land and commissioned amid great fanfare in 1913. Unfortunately fluctuating or failing oilflows from the wells forced its closure only twelve months later and the industry slid into its second major decline.

**Moturoa oilfield and Taranaki Producers' coolstores,
New Plymouth, 1913**



Following this downturn in activity, a second refinery began, in 1931, to process the small but continuing flow of petroleum from the Moturoa Oilfields Company's several new wells in the area. The struggling industry re-established itself and, during the 1930s and 40s, the small operation produced diesel and other products that were marketed throughout Taranaki. Petrol was sold to the public in several local service stations.

How to get to The Moturoa Beam pump



History

A further phase in the field's development was initiated by the introduction of deep-well pumps (beam pumps) in the 1950s. These pumps allowed mechanical, round-the-clock oil extraction and production figures increased markedly as a result. Before the advent of the well pumps, the derricks remained on site to allow bailing of petroleum from the producing wells and they became a major feature of the Ngamotu landscape.



Ken Butcher dispensing locally refined gas, Butcher's Service Station, Gill Street, New Plymouth, c1935

In recent years, as a result of the increasing sophistication of seismic survey techniques, several companies have continued with exploration in and around the field.

The oil-producing levels in the Moturoa oilfield are from within the five million year old Matemateonga Formation in shallow sandstone horizons at about 280 and 680 metres in depth. The geology of the area has been distorted and complicated by the volcanic activity at Sugar Loaf Point one million years ago.

Many of the wells sunk in the Moturoa oilfield were completed by percussion drilling, a method in which a heavy chisel-like bit was repeatedly dropped to break up rock formations. Debris was then removed frequently by bailing the well. Rotary drilling was introduced as early as 1912, but the local industry continued to use the percussion method well into the 1930s.

In 1954 the trademark, Peak, was registered for locally refined oil products. They included oil, diesel, petrol and kerosine and a third refinery, commissioned in 1957, continued to operate until 1975 on condensate from Kapuni and "washings" from tankers.

The last of the producing bores were closed and capped in 1972. In all, nearly 50 wells have been sunk in the Moturoa oilfield and its surrounding area. The tiny field's total production has been estimated at 220,000 barrels. [An imperial barrel = 159 litres].

**Beam pump at Moturoa No 4, 1972
Photo: TNL**



**Peak Petrol Pump,
Grundy's Garage, Gill Street,
New Plymouth, 1963
Photo: D.Wills**



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**NEW PLYMOUTH
DISTRICT COUNCIL**

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