



Wet'suwet'en Report: Māori Iwi & Bathurst Resources Educational Trip to Aotearoa (New Zealand)



November 21, 2024

Prepared by Office of the Wet'suwet'en and Witset First Nation

Introduction

The Office of the Wet’suwet’en (OW) and Witset First Nation have prepared this report for the Wet’suwet’en community summarizing the Māori Iwi & Bathurst Resources Educational Trip to Aotearoa (Māori word for New Zealand).

Tenas Coal is an open pit coal mine proposed to be built in Wet’suwet’en Territory. The mine site would be located 10 kilometers southwest of Telkwa on Cas Yex (Grizzly House) territory, and a rail loadout facility would be built on Kwen Bea Yex territory (House Beside the Fire). The proponent behind Tenas Coal is Telkwa Mining Limited, a corporation owned by a New Zealand-based company called Bathurst Resources Ltd.

Tenas Coal is undergoing a Wet’suwet’en Assessment process that will equip the Wet’suwet’en to understand the potential impacts of the coal mine and to make a fully informed decision on whether or not to support it. Tenas Coal is also undergoing a British Columbia Environmental Assessment (BCEA).

From May 25 – June 1, 2024, members of Cas Yex, Kwen Bea Yex, the OW and Witset First Nation participated in an educational trip to Aotearoa, funded and organized by Bathurst. The purpose of the trip was for Wet’suwet’en representatives to gain valuable information

for the Wet’suwet’en Assessment, including viewing Bathurst’s mining operations, learning about the environmental management of coal mines, and connecting with the Māori Iwis in whose territories Bathurst operates. The Māori are the Indigenous people of Aotearoa, and Iwis are their largest political groupings, similar to Clans.

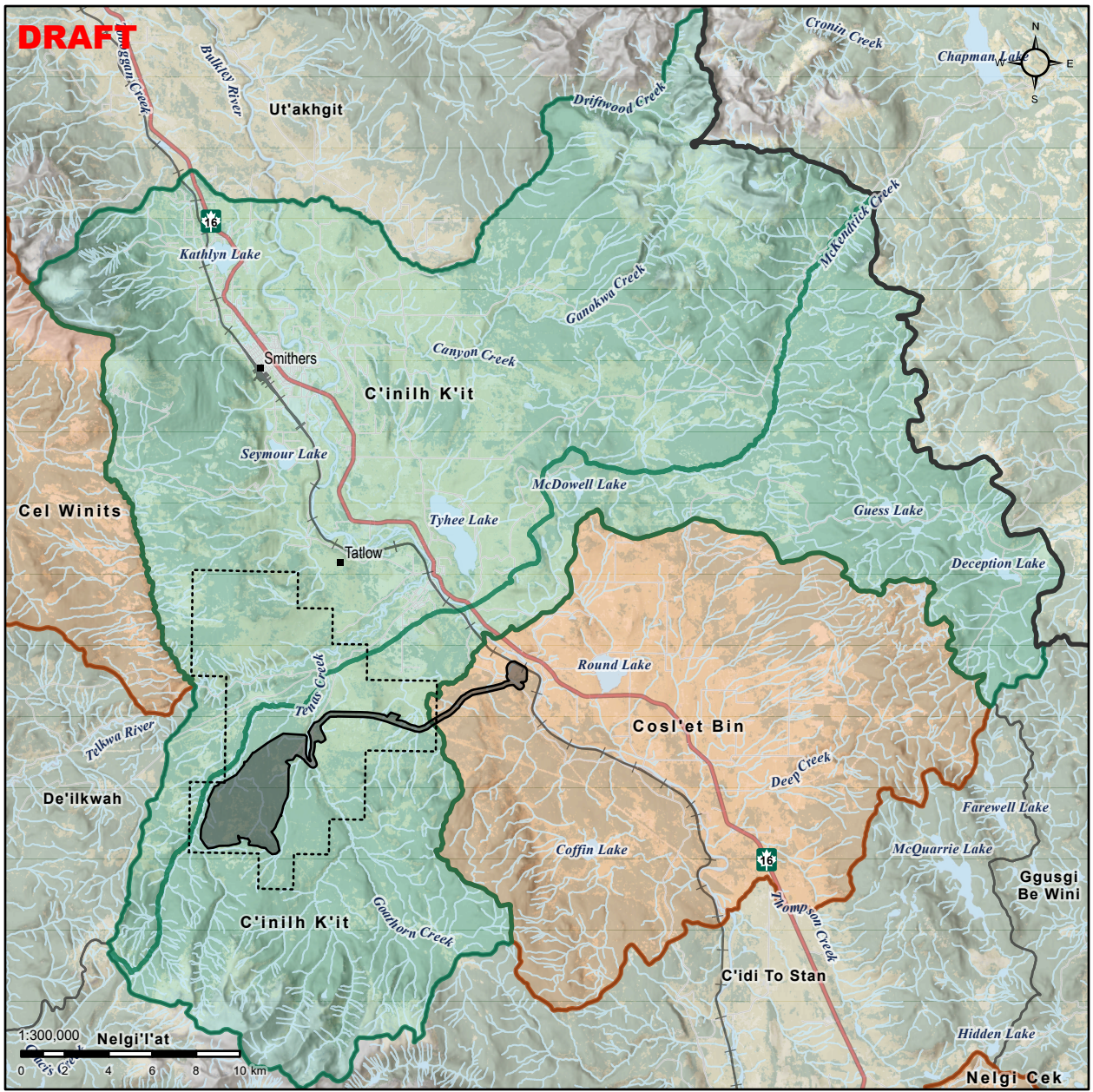
Witset First Nation saw its participation as a way to forward its strategic commitment to fostering unity and collaboration with the Office of the Wet’suwet’en. Participants sought to establish meaningful connections between the teams, enhancing relationships that support shared goals and foster mutual understanding across our respective processes and priorities.

For this eight-day journey, Wet’suwet’en representatives started in Christchurch on the south island, and travelled through the country to Auckland on the north island. Stops along the way included one of Bathurst’s loadout facilities, a reclaimed coal mine, two active coal mines, and participation in two cultural exchanges with Māori Iwis.

Project Engagement 101

It is important to note that project engagement is not consultation or consent – this was clarified and documented with Bathurst prior to travelling.

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Location of the Proposed Tenas Coal Project in Relation to Wet'suwet'en House Territories

Tenas Coal Project		Hydrography	
----	Coal License Boundary		Waterbody
	Project Area		Watercourse
Wet'suwet'en Territory		Transportation	
	Wet'suwet'en Territory		Highway
House Territories			Minor Road
	Cas Yex Territory		Railway
	Kwen Bea Yex Territory		
	Other House Territory		

Map produced by the Firelight Group on 05 November 2024. Base data originates from Natural Resources Canada, Statistics Canada, and the Office of the Wet'suwet'en. Base map originates from ESRI, Natural Resources Canada. Project-specific data originate from the Proponent. Map projected to NAD 1983 BC Environment Albers.

This map does not fully capture the relationship of the Wet'suwet'en community to their traditional lands or the extent of the practice of Aboriginal rights. This map is a living document and is intended to be amended and refined over time. The data from this map originates from multiple sources. This map is property of the Office of the Wet'suwet'en and may only be reproduced with written permission. This map is part of the Wet'suwet'en Assessment of the Tenas Project, and is subject to the limitations of that Project.



Lyttleton Port

Lyttleton port is used by Bathurst as a coal loadout facility, and is located on the coast southeast of Christchurch. The capacity of this port is approximately 300,000 tonnes – much larger than the capacity of the proposed Tenas Coal rail loadout facility. From the port lookout, the group viewed large piles of coal ready to be loaded onto vessels. Several Wet’suwet’en representatives noted that the coal stockpiles seemed exposed, and inquired about air quality concerns and dust suppression methods. Bathurst staff noted that since air quality is a concern especially on windy days, water trucks and sprinkler systems are ready to spray water on the coal during high-risk weather¹. The port also has dust deposition gauges for monitoring dust levels.

Canterbury Mine Rehabilitation Tour

Canterbury mine is located 70 kilometers west of Christchurch on the south island. Canterbury has been mined since the 1800s, but was only taken over by Bathurst in 2012. Bathurst closed this mine earlier than expected (2021) due to disagreements with local regulatory bodies regarding resource consent approvals. The thermal coal was mainly used for energy generation at local dairy operations. Bathurst noted that the proposed Tenas Coal mine would be established to access metallurgical coal, which is used for making steel, not for energy generation.

Since the closure of Canterbury Mine, Bathurst has nearly completed environmental rehabilitation, including returning the site to its historical use (farming and forestry), restoring waterways and ponds, and planting indigenous vegetation. Bathurst’s goal was to return the land to a better condition than it was in when they acquired it in 2012. Due to historical underground mining practices that created acid rock drainage issues, a big part of Bathurst’s rehabilitation process involved addressing legacy water contamination. Bathurst claimed that water draining from the site now meets water quality standards, due to their successful water treatment and containment of acid generating rock. Water quality is especially important considering the presence of the endangered Canterbury mudfish downstream. While Bathurst may be meeting water quality standards at the site currently, it’s important to note that they have had incidents in the past where resource consent conditions were not met. For example, Bathurst was fined for a 2018 incident in which inadequate erosion and sediment management infrastructure led to the release of

¹ Lyttleton Port Company. (2022). *Renewing Our Coal Air Dust Consent*. <https://www.lpc.co.nz/renewing-our-coal-air-dust-consent/>

sediment-laden stormwater that made its way into Bush Gully Stream, a critical habitat area for the endangered Canterbury mudfish².

There is little evidence of mining at Canterbury now. Looking at the site, the group could see natural looking hills and vegetation where there once were pits or piles of rock. Bathurst has its own plant nursery, called the “Buller Nursery,” where they grow plants for rehabilitation at Canterbury and other mine sites. A portion of the land is now used as sheep and cow pasture, and the rest is forestry. Bathurst staff test the water regularly, and the local Iwi are involved in setting standards for water quality.



Canterbury mine rehabilitation tour with Wet’suwet’en representatives and Bathurst staff

Stockton Mine Tour

The second tour was at Stockton mine, which is near the west coast of the south island. Wet’suwet’en representatives travelled right into the active coal mining area, and were able to see both mining and environmental reclamation in action.

² Dwyer, B.P. (2019). *Canterbury Regional Council v Bathurst Coal Limited, Notes of Judge B P Dwyer on Sentencing*. https://gallery.mailchimp.com/056bc28505444958c9358e331/files/de81adcc-d56c-4b3c-9aff-1d38d69b0e76/NZDC_23872_Ecan_v_Bathurst_271119.pdf?utm_source=Media&utm_campaign=a9ce497ebe-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_01_22_11_00&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_5e2be43a95-a9ce497ebe-339252985



Active coal mining seen during Stockton mine tour



Demonstration of direct vegetation transfer environmental reclamation technique. Vegetation, including a thick layer of original soil and roots, is directly transferred to its new location in a reclaimed area.

Bathurst offers tours to the public at this mine, attracting around 1,300 visitors annually. This is New Zealand's largest coal mine. The coal is shipped overseas for steelmaking operations, which is the stated intent for the Tenas Coal mine as well. The Stockton Mine loads four to five train loads per day, requiring two worker shifts per day. Bathurst wanted to highlight that the mine only operates Monday to Friday, which attracts more local workers (as opposed to 7 day shifts, which may attract more out-of-town workers). This has a positive effect on the community and local work force. Bathurst also offers transportation for employees from the town of Westport to the mine site.

Like Canterbury mine, Bathurst's acquisition of Stockton mine in 2017 came with legacy issues from historical underground mining practices and poor management of acid rock drainage. Now, Bathurst implements proper management, including isolating acid-forming rock so it is not exposed to water and air. Mine affected water in creeks is captured and treated before being discharged. Treatment involves pumping water to a treatment plant, where calcium oxide and mussel shells are used to neutralize the pH of the water before being pumped back into the waterways. However, one mine affected creek remains untreated, appropriately called Mine Creek. Bathurst is currently working on water treatment plans for Mine Creek to further improve water quality downstream.

The Ngākawau river drains all of the water from the Stockton mine catchment. Maintaining the aquatic life in this river is a priority for Bathurst. They perform annual fish surveys, and believe they have nearly brought water quality back to pre-mining levels despite the influence of Mine Creek. Staff claim that locals do consume fish from the Ngākawau river.

In addition to a tour, Wet'suwet'en representatives received a presentation on Stockton's wildlife management, environmental reclamation, and community involvement. Bathurst rehabilitates land on an ongoing basis, reclaiming 20-30 hectares of land each year at Stockton. Bathurst also highlighted their community involvement and sponsorships, including support with emergency response to flooding in the local town, and donations to local community initiatives. Finally, Bathurst showcased their wildlife surveys which are performed before an area is disturbed to identify and safely relocate wildlife.

During the presentation, questions were raised around employment and partnership with the local Iwi. The group learned that there are no Indigenous partnerships at this mine. Some of the land is leased from the Iwi, and Bathurst has done some environmental conservation and cultural work with the Iwi as well. There is also no compensation, and no Indigenous involvement in governance. Top salaries are generally truck drivers at around \$90,000 NZD per year, and lowest salaries for administrative staff are around \$55,000 NZD per year.

Rotowaro Mine Tour

The third and final mine visited by Wet’suwet’en representatives was the Rotowaro mine on the north island of New Zealand. Including Rotowaro, Bathurst does operate several thermal coal mines in Aotearoa, with coal destined for use in energy generation for various industries³.

In addition to a complete tour of the mine, the Wet’suwet’en met with a group of Māori employees, who make up around half of the workforce at Rotowaro mine. The relationship between these employees and Bathurst sounded very positive, as Bathurst leases land from the local Iwi, employs many Māori people, and has been very supportive of Māori-led environmental reclamation on the site.

In particular, the Māori Rotowaro staff were eager to showcase their 2023 Mangakotukutuku Stream Diversion project. As part of the development of a new pit, it was necessary to relocate an existing stream so it would not be impacted by mining activities. Bathurst created a new stream section, 1.4km long, in an area that would not be affected by mining activities. With direction from the local Iwi, staff performed six days of fishing to catch every last Indigenous fish species and relocate them to their new section of stream, where they will be left undisturbed.

Lake Puketirini

Before visiting Ngati Naho for a cultural exchange, Bathurst brought the group to Puketirini Lake. This site was drained and mined for coal in the mid-1900s⁴. After closure, a mining company called Solid Energy rehabilitated the mine and turned it into a lake. Lake Puketirini is now used recreationally for trail walking, water sports and diving. This is a good example of how mines post-closure can be used for recreational activities.

Ngati Waewae Cultural Exchange

The Ngati Waewae are a hapu (sub-tribe) located near the town of Hokitika on the south island of Aotearoa. Wet’suwet’en representatives were welcomed onto the Ngati Waewae marae (ancestral courtyard) through a formal welcoming ceremony called a pōwhiri. During the pōwhiri, the Wet’suwet’en followed formal traditional protocols. First, guests

³ Bathurst Resources. (2023). *2023 Annual Report*. <https://bathurst.co.nz/assets/Uploads/Annual-Report-2023.pdf>

⁴ Waikato District Council. (2019). *Puketirini Management Plan*. https://www.waikatodistrict.govt.nz/docs/default-source/your-council/plans-policies-and-bylaws/plans/reserve-management-plans/puketirini-management-plan/puketirini-management-plan.pdf?sfvrsn=dcf2b9c9_2

must gather outside the gates to the marae. The guests must stand closely together and move slowly onto the marae. A woman stands at the front of their group to respond to the karanga (call) from the hosts. The exchange of karangas establishes respect between the guests and hosts, and expresses the reason for the guests' visit. Wet'suwet'en representatives used this ceremony to showcase their traditional songs, instruments and regalia.

Once inside the marae, the Wet'suwet'en and Ngati Waewae each designated a speaker to exchange remarks, first in their traditional language. When complete, the Wet'suwet'en guests provided koha (gifts), as per pōwhiri traditional protocol. Finally, the Wet'suwet'en guests and the hosts performed the Hongi: a pressing of noses that represents a meeting of minds between two people. This concluded the formal welcoming ceremony, which was followed by a question period and a shared meal.



Wet'suwet'en representatives being led into the marae while exchanging Wet'suwet'en and Māori songs

During the question period, Francois Tumahai (chairman of Ngati Waewae Arahura Marae, Non-executive director of Bathurst Resources) explained the benefits that have resulted from the relationship between Bathurst and Ngati Waewae. Because of their relationship with Bathurst, including land lease agreements, they were able to fund the construction of the marae. He also noted that since Bathurst took over the three mines previously owned

by Solid Energy, environmental management at the mines and relationships with the Iwi have improved significantly. He believes that having a strong relationship with Bathurst gives his people a voice at the table that can have a positive impact on both environmental protection and economic prosperity.

Ngāti Naho Cultural Exchange

Ngāti Naho is a Māori tribe located on the north island of Aotearoa. Wet'suwet'en representatives were welcomed into their marae, where they were greeted by traditional songs and a welcoming in Māori language by leader Chief Brad. The Wet'suwet'en also had the opportunity to showcase their Wet'suwet'en language, songs and traditional regalia. Following this, the two groups ate lunch together, and then moved on to a tour of Rangiriri battlefield.

British invasions in the Waikato region, including the battle of Rangiriri, resulted in the confiscation of 1.3 million hectares of Māori lands subsequently designated for use by settlers⁵. Recently, the Rangiriri lands were purchased by Ngati Naho who restored the pa (defensive settlement) back to its historical state, including trenches and fortifications once created by the Māori before the battle of Rangiriri. The site is now used for authentic educational tours.



Climbing a ladder out of the Rangiriri Battlefield trenches

⁵ Radio New Zealand. (2021). *Rangiriri restoration 'significant, beautiful' – Ngāti Naho*.

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/te-manu-korihi/446618/rangiriri-restoration-significant-beautiful-ngati-naho>

Conclusion and next steps

The Māori Iwi & Bathurst Resources Educational Trip to New Zealand was a valuable opportunity for Wet'suwet'en representatives to learn about the mining industry, understand how Bathurst operates, meet other Indigenous Peoples, and establish stronger relationships

“Together, we are responsible for stewarding the Yintah and supporting the current and future generations of Wet'suwet'en.”

between elected and hereditary leadership and staff. Together, we are responsible for stewarding the Yintah and supporting the current and future generations of Wet'suwet'en.

Representatives from Witset, OW, Cas Yex and Kwen Bea Yex now have first-hand experience and knowledge of what is involved in coal mining and mine reclamation. This includes a better understanding of what coal mining actually looks like on the land, what kinds of transportation networks are required for processing and shipping coal, and common environmental and water quality management concerns and techniques. Furthermore, having elected and hereditary representatives participating in the trip together led to relationship-building and constructive conversations around working together and being stronger together.

While the trip was valuable, it was only one small part of a much bigger Wet'suwet'en Assessment process. The Tenas Coal project has the potential to result in significant adverse impacts on Wet'suwet'en title and rights, and on the entire Wet'suwet'en community. Through the Wet'suwet'en Assessment, a full understanding of potential impacts to the Wet'suwet'en will be built by determining how Tenas Coal could impact water, wildlife, climate, culture, land use, health, wellbeing and socio-economics. This will equip decision-makers with the knowledge required to reach a fully-informed decision on whether to grant consent to the Tenas project.

The Wet'suwet'en Assessment will be made possible by engaging the affected House Groups and the wider Wet'suwet'en community, as all Wet'suwet'en would be affected by this proposed mine. We look forward to inviting you into the Wet'suwet'en Assessment process and emphasize that your participation will be extremely valuable in undertaking a robust and defensible assessment process that reflects Wet'suwet'en values and respects our community needs.