

Soldiers Pool



Troops posing at Soldiers Pool on the Hutt River during the First World War
(UHCL Heritage Collections)

With the establishment, in 1915, of Trentham Camp as a training base for the NZ Expeditionary Force in the First World War around 5,000 recruits were stationed there at any one time. Shower facilities at the camp were very limited so in the interests of hygiene men were required to attend “bathing parade” twice a week at the nearby Hutt River. Around 2,000 men would be marched the 2km from the camp to a stretch of the river adjacent to Barton’s Bush that came to be known as Soldier’s Pool.

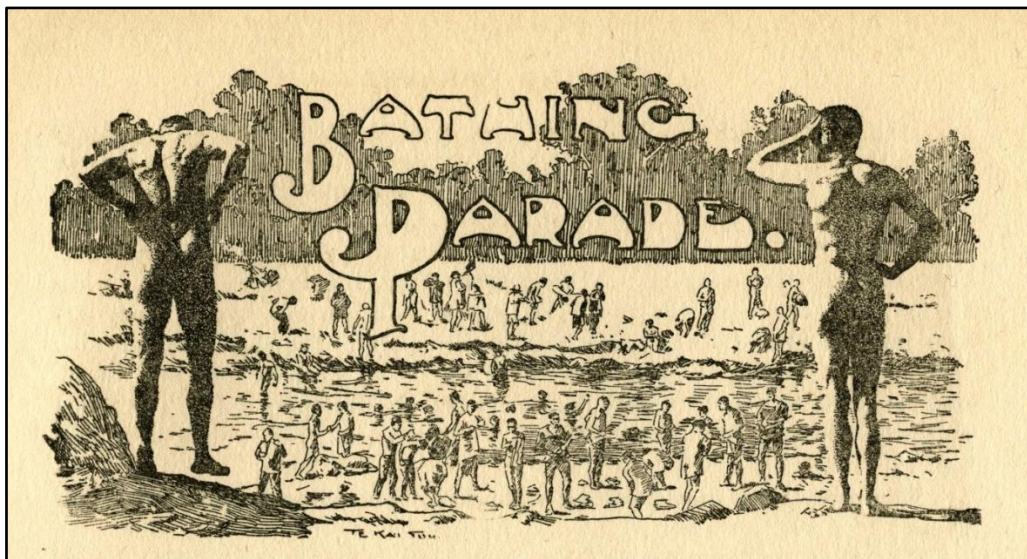
As Howard Weddell explains in his recent book *Trentham Camp and Upper Hutt’s Untold Military History* (2018), Soldiers Pool was not only somewhere for the men to “wash and do some elementary washing of clothes”, it was also a place for them to enjoy a spot of “swimming and relaxation.” In addition to this the “pool had other uses. Due to the easy access the mounted rifles and camp’s domestic horses were often watered at this location and the army field engineers practised the construction of improvised bridges.” Weddell goes on to note that

Soldiers Pool was in use for the duration of WWI and it is estimated that in excess of 85,000 men would have bathed in this location during the war. It was still in use by troops from the camp in the inter war years and as a bathing location in WWII. The Pool was destroyed in the 1960s when the Hutt River was re-aligned and a stop bank built as part of flood protection.

Weddell identifies the location where Soldiers Pool once was as the area marked on the map below.



The earliest history of Trentham Camp, Will Lawson’s *Historic Trentham*, published in 1918 just before the end of the First World War, includes a whole chapter on Soldiers Pool called *Bathing Parade*.

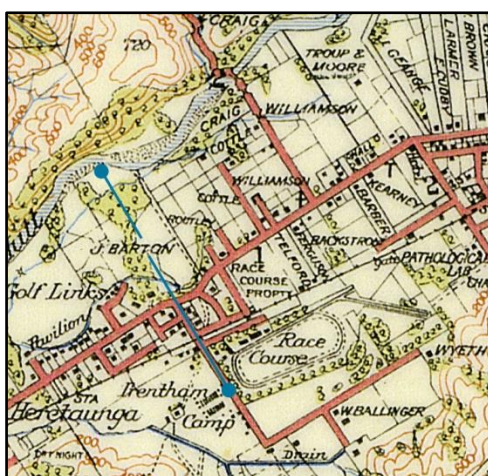


Chapter title illustration from Historic Trentham (1918)

Lawson's vivid description of the troops' regular marching route from the camp to the river underlines the significance that Barton's Bush and its surrounds had as an important part of this experience:

The bathing-place at the river is more than a mile from Camp, across the railway and the main road. On the far side of the road an old dray-track winds down to a creek and crosses it by a ford. The soldiers' swings to the left and crosses on a bridge that is only a skeleton... On the other side of the creek a way has been fenced off through grazing paddocks... [There] is another bridge on the borders of a heavily-bushed portion of land. [The soldiers' path then] dives into the gloom of bush, which shuts out all but tiny glimpses of sky. [Then, emerging from the bush] the soldiers' road loses itself in a grassy, open paddock. From this point there are two ways to the river. It is not advisable that all men should congregate at one point, for with 2,500 men in the water, a considerable stretch of river is required. Beyond the grass paddock the river rushes along. It is rather narrow in the shingle bed, for on the opposite side of the hills rise almost precipitously with bush, broom, and tree-ferns growing in profusion to the highest ridge. Birds flit about, and the river chatters and sings on its way. In the open paddock thrushes and starlings run about on the grass.

The general route described above is very roughly indicated by the blue line added to this detail from a 1915 map below:



Trentham Manoeuvre Map, 1915
(UHCL Heritage Collections)

This image of troops at Soldiers Pool shows Barton's Bush in the background.



From Trentham Camp and Upper Hutt's Untold Military History (2018)

A postcard showing Mounted Infantry watering their horses at Soldiers Pool. Again, note Barton's Bush in the background.



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These two images, one from the 1920s and the other circa the 1950s/early '60s, are both labelled as being of Soldiers Pool and indicate how the name continued to be attached to this spot by members of the general public bathing and picnicking here.

Locals bathing at soldiers Pool



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Children at Soldiers Pool



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