

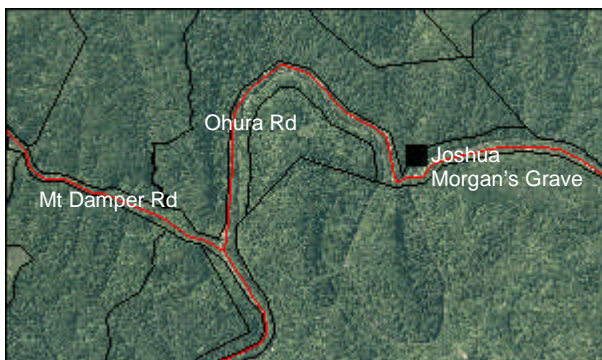


Joshua Morgan's Grave

Ohura Rd, Tangarakau Gorge

1893

Use:	Grave site	Historic Value:	3 out of 5
Materials:	Concrete	Architectural Value:	1 out of 4
NZHPT Registered:	Not registered	Technical Value:	- out of 2
Legal Description:	Legal Description: Sec 13 BkIII Pouatu SD Historic Reserve	Symbolic Value:	2 out of 3
		Rarity Value:	1 out of 2
		Townscape Value:	1 out of 2
		Group Value:	- out of 2
		Overall Heritage Value:	8 out of 20



Joshua Morgan was born in 1858. He was a surveyor and true pioneer – often venturing into bush areas where no white man, or even Maori, had been.

On 12 April 1892, Sydney Weetman, the Chief Surveyor for Taranaki, received instructions for a “detailed survey of a dray road” to be made through the Tangarakau Gorge. Weetman chose Mr. G.T. Robinson, a Road Surveyor, to oversee this work. Letters from Robinson to Weetman show his confidence in Joshua Morgan – the following exert from 14th March 1892 states:

“I think Morgan’s experience and youth and strength would compensate for his lack of technical skill”

And a later letter, written after work on the road had commenced, states:

“Before concluding this preliminary report, I beg to draw your attention to the arduous and responsible work being performed by Mr. Joshua Morgan. The amount of work he has done in difficult country and in exceptionally wet season shows how energetically he is working”

Morgan started his surveying work from the head of the Mangaotuku Valley near the Pohokura Saddle around 1888 – working to try and improve the road over the Whangamomona Saddle and carry it on to Ohura, with the aim of meeting up with Mr. W. Adams’ party



Morgan was a staunch supporter of the ancient Roman method of making the roads as straight as possible, and so favoured piercing through ridges with tunnels, instead of undertaking the difficult climbs up and down the hills. He therefore proposed seven tunnels in total – five to replace the Pohokura, Whangamomona, and Moki Saddles, and two west of Whangamomona. These were rejected mainly because of the cost, and also because they would completely side-step the Whangamomona Township. However, the Moki Tunnel, Morgan’s pet scheme, was finally formed in 1936.

While in charge of this survey party, Joshua Morgan become severely ill. According to his leather-bound diary, on the 10th of January, 1893, he *“was still suffering from Influenza”*, which he had first got when he went home for Christmas, and he returned to work only partially healed. On the 1st of February he wrote that he had *“wricked his back”* and the next day he had to *“lie down all morning with a pain between his shoulders”*. On the 4th of February he was *“still suffering from a pain in the back of his neck”*, and the next day, his entry simply reads *“Stayed in camp all day”*.

On Friday morning, 24th February, Joshua Morgan was seized with violent burning pains in his stomach and bowels. William Laing, a member of the party, left the camp on Sunday morning to make the long and harsh journey (without food or sleep) to New Plymouth to seek medical help. He arrived there on Monday afternoon, and returned on Wednesday afternoon with medicine prepared by Dr. Leatham. The medicine eased the pain, but made him delirious, and so Archie Thompson made the same journey on Friday morning to get more supplies, planning to start back early on Sunday morning.

However, at 2am on Sunday, Fred Willison arrived at G.F. Robinson's, with the news that Morgan had died on Friday, 3rd of March, at 11:45. He was 35 years old. He was buried where he died by the members of his camp, only 200 yards from the highway he helped peg.



Because of the nature of the country, and the distance from the Settlement, no medical person was present, and so we cannot be completely sure as to exactly why he died. Mr. Sladden believed Morgan died of appendicitis, while others believed his death was due to his large consumption of un-ripe apples a few days prior. The general opinion, however, is that Joshua Morgan died of peritonitis.

Joshua Morgan married Anne Dent in 1888, and four years later they had a daughter, Edith Leila. Anne never re-married, and, although she moved to Auckland, her dying wish 60 years later was for her ashes to be buried beside the man she never ceased to love.

Interestingly, it is above her ashes that the memorial stands – as it is a point which can be viewed from the road (see *opposite picture*). Joshua Morgan is actually buried a few metres behind this – and from what has been written about him, it is sure that he would have liked it this way.



His simple grave has become a landmark in the Tangarakau Gorge, and can be seen as a memorial to all the original surveyors who spent their lives working in harsh conditions to pave the way for the roads which we enjoy today.

Bibliography

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Council Records