

d o w n s t r e a m

Stefanie Young

FOREWORD

DOWNSTREAM (photographer – Stefanie Young; sound – Kent MacPherson)

This was a project that evolved from an idea to create an installation of sounds and photographs that were choreographed from 30 selected places along the Waikato River. Running 425 kilometres from Mt Ruapehu on the Central Plateau to Port Waikato, the Waikato River is of vital importance to the daily life and the communities of the Waikato region, as well as being a central contributor to New Zealand's economic infrastructure by way of hydro electricity and agriculture.

The river has seductive qualities to inspire contemplation and caution. The textures and depths of this changeable river invoke a diverse range of responses. Every sound and photograph is unique to its time and place at the river showing a connected complexity to this everchanging, moving body of water.

DOWNSTREAM was presented as an aural/visual installation at the Taupo Museum in December 2018 with the intention of giving audiences the experience of activating both visual memory and perceptions of time and place through the combination of images and sound.

A note of thanks to Waikato Institute of Technology for supporting this project to completion with a contribution of research funding. The installation video can be viewed on <https://vimeo.com/335771538>

The Waikato River

The Waikato River is the longest river in New Zealand. It starts its journey to the sea from the Central Plateau with the snow melts of Mount Ruapehu at 2797 metres above sea level, and winds its way on its 425 kilometre journey to flow into the Tasman Sea at Port Waikato – Puuaha o Waikato. En route, the Waikato River carves through many of the Waikato's natural attractions, contributing and bearing witness to the beauty and breadth of Lake Taupō (New Zealand's largest lake), the mesmerising power of Huka Falls, and steaming thermal areas such as Orakei Korako. It flows northward through the Waikato Plains, depositing ash into the soil to provide some of the most fertile, nutrient-rich and productive land in the country for dairy and other farming.

The Waikato River's catchment covers 14,260 square kilometres or 12 per cent of the area of the North Island. The river is taonga to Waikato-Tainui, Raukawa, Ngāti Tūwharetoa and the Te Arawa iwi, and is central to the daily life and communities of the Waikato region.¹

The Waikato region generates more power than any other region in New Zealand. Eight hydro electric dams sited along the river provide capacity to generate 1450MW of electricity. It is a little known fact that it takes several weeks for a drop of water to flow from Taupo to Port Waikato and without the dams it would take about seven days².

¹ <https://waikatoriver.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/River-Authority-Map-Sept-2012.jpeg>

² <https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/environment/natural-resources/water/rivers/waikato-river/about-the-waikato-river/>

Huntly towards Port Waikato

The Waipā River is the largest tributary of the Waikato and enters the river at Ngāruawāhia. The Waipā can contribute up to 50 per cent of the Waikato flow. Sediment from the Waipā River reduces the clarity of the Waikato north of Ngāruawāhia. The Waikato River leaves the Hamilton Basin at the Taupiri Gap north of Huntly where the river flows across a flood plain that is interspersed with shallow lakes and wetlands.







