

NGA MAUNGA – THE MOUNTAINS

Nga Maunga – Introduction

Sheet 4 of this series looks at the mountains in more detail and discusses their significance and relevance to Ngāti Hāmua.

Wairarapa Maunga

Here is a list of well-known maunga in the Wairarapa

Aorangi – name of ranges in southern Wairarapa that overlook Lake Wairarapa and Palliser Bay

Maungaraki – the range of hills that border the eastern Wairarapa Valley

Otahoua – Mt Bennett – just east of Masterton past Te Ore Ore. This was an important kiore (Māori rat) snaring area and was the start of the coastal trail

Pukaha – Mt Bruce, translates to mean ‘strong wind’: Pu – *blow*, kaha – *strong*

Rangitūmau – meaning ‘standing up to the sky’

Remutaka – the original spelling of Rimutaka, which means ‘to sit down’. The ancestor Haunuiānaia gave this name, as this was where he sat to rest before going on to discover and name the Wairarapa and its rivers

Taratahi – Mt Holdsworth

Tararua – Named by Whātonga to commemorate his wives. Another explanation as to the origin of the name relates to Tara. The name Tararua being derived from the saying "Nga waewae e rua a Tara" or "the spanned legs of Tara", meaning that his people had a foothold on either side of these ranges.

Te Maipi – near Homewood on the Wairarapa Coast

IDENTITY

“Mountains and other landmarks define Māori people’s identity, we say who we are by name and mention the particular land points around which we live. For my iwi, Rangitāne o Wairarapa, we identify with Tararua, Rangitūmau, Rimutaka and Maungaraki.

For Māori, mountains are both protectors and providers. Some of our ‘mountains’ or maunga are not big but they are significant to us for many reasons. The mountains are sacred places where we bury our ancestors.

The area around Pukaha or Mount Bruce used to be a huge forest and was a provider of kai, food, and rongoa (medicine). Some mountains have more of a spiritual significance.

Rangitūmau is one of these. From the top you can see all the major landmarks of the Wairarapa it is a place to understand how we are part of the land.”

Pers comm. Michael Kawana 2003

PERMANENCE

“Maunga are part of creation put in place by atua at the beginning of the world.

Mountains are permanent, while mans life lasts but a fleeting moment in time.

Our mountains have looked over our people for centuries and we have looked up to them. Our mana whenua comes about as a result of our relationship with maunga.

For generation after generation our tupuna refer to the same maunga, awa and whenua. The history of our people cannot be severed from these poutokomanawa.

They are more important than anything created by the hand of man. Even the buildings on marae are less important than maunga. The whare will eventually decay but the maunga will be there to watch over the land that remains.”

Pers comm. James Rimene Snr 2003

He Whakatauki (Māori Proverb)

“Whaia e koe ki te iti Kahurangi; ki te tuohu koe, me maunga teitei”

“Seek the treasure you value most dearly: If you bow your head, let it be to a lofty mountain”

Rangitūmau

The ancestral mountain of Ngāti Hāmua is called Rangitūmau. This mountain can be seen from any point in the Wairarapa Valley including the land around Lake Wairarapa. Looking north from the lake the hazy form of Rangitūmau can be seen more than 50 kilometres away, standing up to the sky. In the old days a new born baby would be held aloft in the air where it was presented to the physical landmarks that would determine its turangawaewae or place to stand, the land to which it belonged. The baby would always be presented to Rangitūmau.

When a person of Rangitāne o Wairarapa descent dies their spirit travels to Rangitūmau. It then begins its final ascent to the top where its ancestors will be waiting to accompany the person from this world to the next. Rangitūmau is the place where the primal parents Ranginui, the sky father, and his beloved wife Papatūānuku, the earth mother, can reach out to each other during their eternal separation. Sometimes Rangi's tears form a mist that envelops Rangitūmau creating a potae (hat) for the maunga.

Rangitūmau, ever present, is the one landmark we connect to when we first come into the world, that we look up to during life and the last place we go to when we die.



View of Rangitūmau looking north-west from Weraiti (Pakaraka Hill east of Masterton). Okurupatu and Te Ore Ore are in the foreground

“Maunga tapu, he poutokomanawa, nga maunga teitei”
“Sacred Mountain, the pillar of strength, our great mountains”

Quick quiz – Nga Maunga

Unravel the names of these maunga:

1. UGMANRAITU
2. UOHATO A
3. IM PEATI
4. KMAGARNUIA
5. APUAKH
6. IATMURAK

Answers at the back of booklet

Key Points – Nga Maunga

- Rangitūmau, just north of Masterton, is the ancestral mountain of the Ngati Hamua people and many other hapu in the Wairarapa;
- Maunga provided navigational landmarks for travelling both overland and out to sea;
- Maunga provide us with identity, and help others to understand where we come from;
- Mountains are long-lasting yet erode over time to feed the rivers with gravel;
- Some maunga are sacred as they were places where we buried our tupuna; and
- We look up to our mountains and they watch over us.