

Kawa - Protocols

Kawa

The word kawa is commonly associated with the ceremonial rituals that occur on marae. Kawa in this sense varies from place to place but is essentially the correct sequence of proceedings to be followed between a host people and their visitors. On a marae it can be likened to the word etiquette where it is important that visitors inquire to their hosts as to what the kawa is before any formalities begin. Matters such as the correct order of speakers are important parts of kawa.

It is not only man that adheres to a localised kawa. All life forms that possess wairua tapu have their own kawa that they follow throughout their lives. Every natural feature that was created by the gods has its own kawa. Each kawa connects to the kawa of other beings within the same environment. The clouds are pushed by the winds through the sky until they collide with the mountains. The clouds release raindrops that gather together and begin a journey downstream. Bodies of water continue to grow from streams to rivers until they reach the sea. As each body of water continues on its own journey it is following its predetermined kawa until it joins with a larger body. The larger body then takes on its kawa.

The forest, the swamps, the seas and all the life within them each have a kawa that was set by the gods at the beginning of time. Man has to be careful not to upset the sacred order of life, or if he does he needs to explain to the gods what he is doing and why so as to engender a favourable response. To not respect the kawa of other life will leave man in a precarious position whether at that moment in time or sometime in the future. This interaction is perhaps something like the relationships that are described in the European concept of ecosystems.



(Top) The recently completed carvings on top of Nga Tau E Waru at Te Ore Ore Marae 2004 – The figure at the top of the carving (tekoteko) is Te Hāmua. The figure beneath him (Kohuru) is a personification of Rangitūmau, our ancestral mountain. Beneath that is a carved depiction of the Ruamahanga River

(Above) Te Oreore Marae as it appears today

(Right) Potangaroa Monument outside of Nga Tau E Waru whare tipuna – Te Oreore Marae

