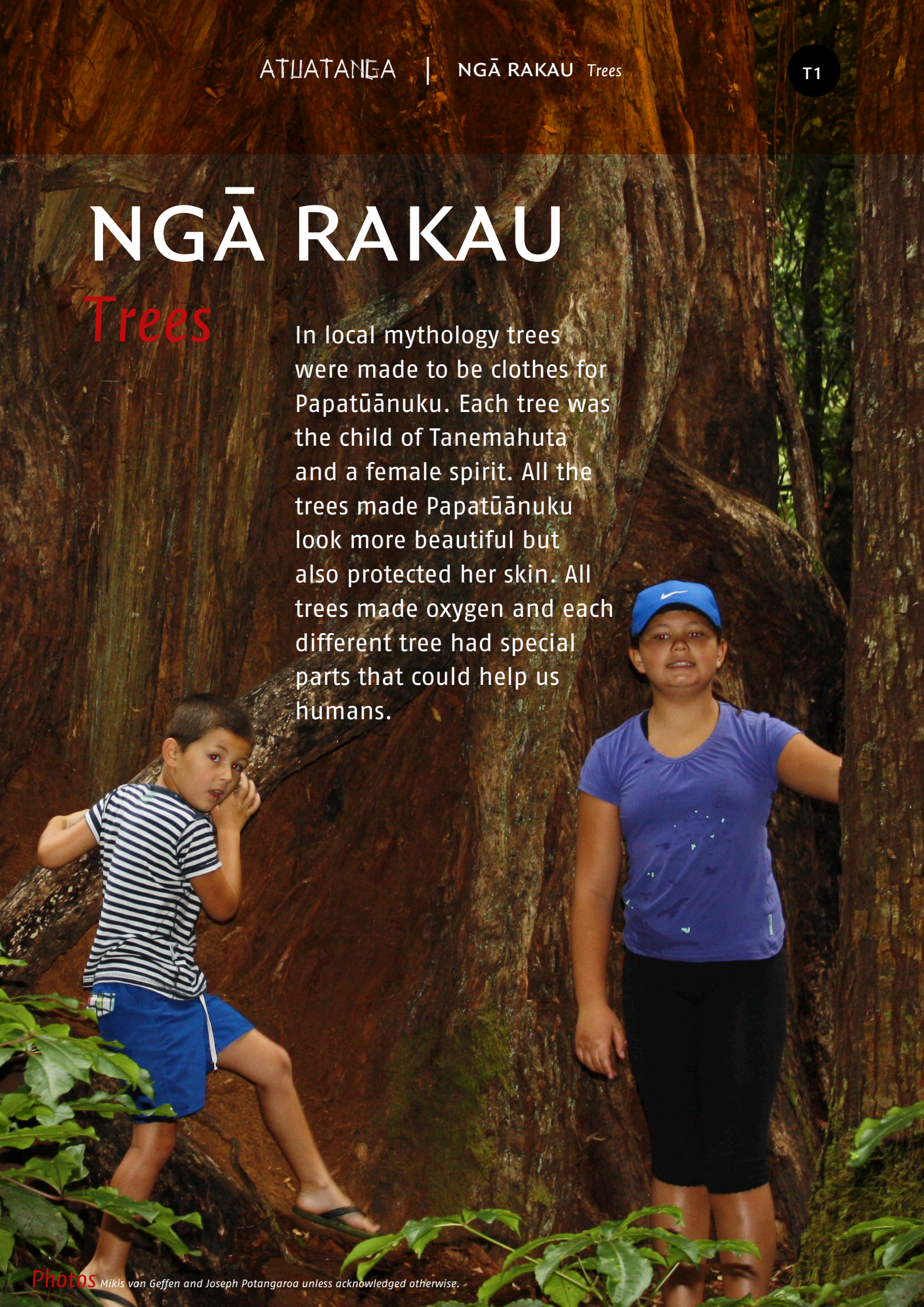
NGĀ RAKAU

Trees

In local mythology trees were made to be clothes for Papatūānuku. Each tree was the child of Tanemahuta and a female spirit. All the trees made Papatūānuku look more beautiful but also protected her skin. All trees made oxygen and each different tree had special parts that could help us humans.



Photos *Mikis van Geffen and Joseph Potangaroa unless acknowledged otherwise.*

AKEAKE

Akeake means forever and ever because it has very hard wood.

Akeake trees can be found all over the place. People like to grow akeake in a row to make a hedge.

Akeake wood is very hard so it can be used to make handles, weapons, paddles and digging sticks. The leaves and seeds can help make perfume. You can make dye out of young leaves.

AKIRAHO

The Akiraho is a small tree. During Autumn it has the most lovely smelling flowers.

Sometimes akiraho are planted side by side to form a hedge. At the old Lansdowne School on Te Ore Ore Road Masterton there is a long Akiraho hedge.

KAHIKATEA

The kahikatea is New Zealand's tallest tree. Kahikatea are the main tree of low lying swampland. They grow close together so that different trees shallow roots can link together for support in the soft ground.

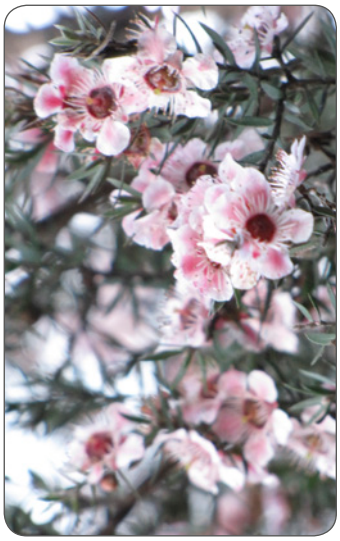
In autumn kahikatea have lots of little berries that can be picked and eaten straight from the tree. Although not done much today the soot from burning the middle of a tree trunk was used in dye for tattooing. Tupuna used kahikatea wood for making spears but it became really popular for making boxes to ship butter overseas.

Swampland has nice soil so European settlers liked it for making farmland. This meant that lots of kahikatea and all the other trees, plants, insects and other creatures in swamps were destroyed.

Today there are still kahikatea to see like at Carter's Reserve at Gladstone. This place even has its own kahikatea walk. Or there is Garland's Bush in Hogg Crescent Masterton which has a couple of massive old trees. Examples of kahikatea forest can be seen from the road in between Opaki School and Kiriwhakapapa Road north of Masterton or off Kahutara Road in south Wairarapa.

KANUKA AND MANUKA

Kanuka and manuka are possibly the most wellknown trees around town. They are different but most people see them as one and the same. The basic difference is that kanuka is a taller bigger tree. Another unseen fact is that kanuka is endemic but manuka is also found in Tasmania.



These days manuka is getting really well known for its honey which is full of goodness although the value of manuka and kanuka has been known for a long time. The vapour from leaves and young branches when placed in hot water helps sort out head and breathing problems. Boiled leaves and bark are good for massaging sore areas. Tea made from the young leaves promotes good bladder and kidney function and when mixed with a slice of lemon doesn't taste to bad either.

Nature also assigned a special role for Manuka; they act as nursery trees for regenerating bush. That's good for the trees because plenty have been cut down over the years to make way for grass. It is also good for insects who love the pollen and nectar from the trees sweet smelling flowers.

Both trees have very strong hard wood which people like for firewood because it burns slowly. The wood is also good for handles and clubs. The inner bark can be used for waterproofing the roof of a hutt.

KARAKA

Groves of karaka trees can be found around the Wairarapa Coast. Groves at places like the eastern side of Palliser Bay, Glenburn and Mataikona show us where there used to be Māori villages.

The ancestors of these trees were probably brought there by people hundreds of years ago beause karaka trees don't naturally grow this far south. There is a huge karaka tree on the way to Mt Dick near Carterton. It is estimated to be at least four hundred years old. Why it was planted by itself so far inland is a mystery, perhaps it was a stop over place for people walking along the foothills of the Tararua Mountains. There are four karaka trees on the road near Te Wharau that were used by people near Masterton to test if karaka berries on the coast were ripe or not.

Solway Showgrounds and Garland's Bush Reserve in Masterton have mature karaka too.

Karaka berries were an important food. The Māori word for orange is karaka because of these berries. Of course you can still eat the flesh and kernel/nut of the karaka but you have to be very careful because the nut is toxic and can cause you to become very sick. There are records of people dieing from eating karaka nuts.

The top of karaka leaves can be used to heal wounds.

KARAMU

Karamu is one of a family of trees that look similar and can be found in forests all around the region. It is one of the first endemic trees, along with ferns, that grow in between introduced trees to restart native forest.

Because karamu grow fast and get bushy they are favourites for planting alongside of streams and in reserves.

You can make a tea drink out of karamu leaves and the orange to red berries can be eaten.

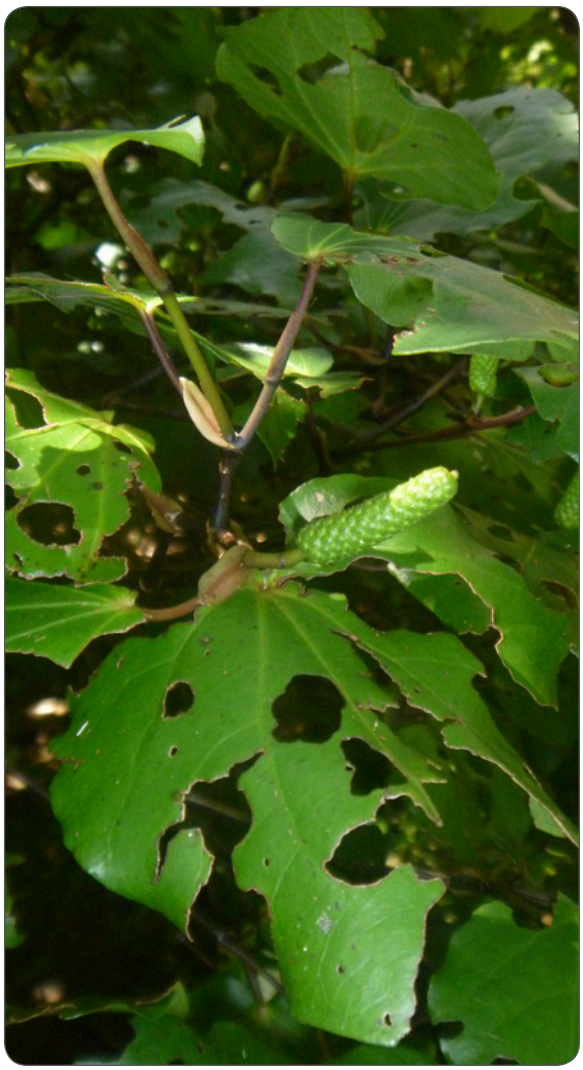
KAWAKAWA

Kawakawa is a small tree that you can tell by its heart shaped leaves. In late summer it has really sweet tasting long orange berries but it is best known for the leaves which are really good for you.

The leaves can be chewed to clean your teeth, burnt to keep away insects, crushed to put on a sore to heal it, put in socks to help sore feet and boiled to make a healthy drink.

The Māori name for Palliser Bay is Kawakawa because a daughter of the famous explorer Kupe made him a wreath of kawakawa leaves to wear on his head.

You can find kawakawa at many places but there are some nice stands at Rathkeale College and at the Featherston side of the Rimutaka Rail Trail.



KOROMIKO

There are lots of koromiko relatives in gardens but not all of them are real koromiko. If you are ever at Pukaha Mount Bruce take a look at the row of koromiko right by the grassed area of the visitor centre carpark. Real koromiko are also grown at places like Kiriwhakapapa, Mount Holdsworth and in reserves around the Wairarapa.

If you have the runs try chewing, don't swallow, the young tips from the centre part of leaves. Dried koromiko leaves were sent to soldiers during World War II to help stop dysentery and diarrhoea.

If you know how to prepare them koromiko leaves can also be used to make a drink to help kidney troubles, as a mouthwash, to get rid of boils and even to help heal broken bones.

Koromiko wood gets really hot very quickly when burned while the sap can be used to help skin problems.

KOTUKUTUKU

Kōtukutuku is part of a family that in English is called Fuchsia. Actually Kōtukutuku is the biggest tree fuchsia in the world. You will find lot's of fushcia in gardens but are more likely to see Kōtukutuku in reserves or beside tracks. There are some on the way up to Mt Dick near Carterton.

Kōtukutuku have pretty drooping red flowers that birds like tui, tauhou and korimako like to get nectar from. The dark purple berries are good to eat.

The very top end of the Ruamahanga River Valley up near Pukaha Mount Bruce where the hills climb up after crossing the road bridge is called Kōtukutuku after the tree.

KOWHAI

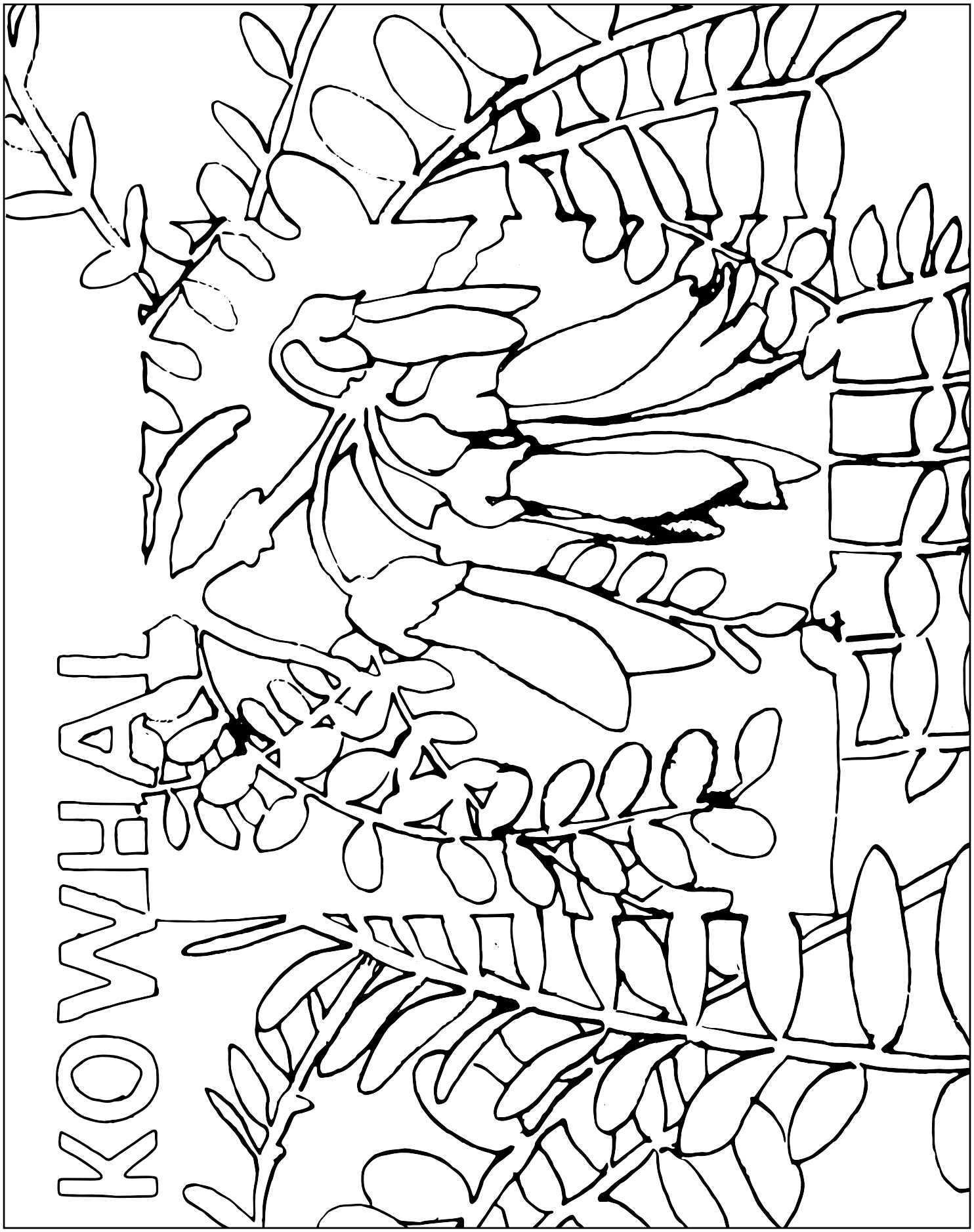
The kowhai is well known because of its large bell shaped yellow flowers. In fact New Zealand's national flower is the kowhai and the Māori name for yellow. When the flowers are at their prettiest in spring it can be a sign to start thinking about going to the beach to look for karengo and kina.

All parts of kowhai are poisonous to humans but the bark from the southern side of the tree, the bit thats away from the sun, can be used to heal wounds, and if boiled in water then dabbed on skin can help acne and other skin problems.

Kowhai wood is strong and lasts a long time so it can be used to make tools, furniture and even in houses.

Tui, korimako and kereru like to feast on the nectar of kowhai flowers.

There is a story that the flowers of the kowhai trees around The Hidden Lakes north of Masterton are tears of people who died there during the big earthquake of 1855.


KOWHAI

HOROEKA

Horoeka is a very interesting tree. When it is young it looks very different to when it has grown up. Young trees have long leaves with teeth on either side that grow right up the tree but when horoeka gets older all the leaves are bunched right at the top.

Until it gets really big the trunk looks sort of like a lance which is how it gets its English name Lance-wood. It isn't to surprising that in days gone by Māori used horoeka wood for spears.

You can use the strong horoeka leaves for emergency show laces or pull out long hairs to use as a paint brush.

TARATA

Tarata are another tree that is found all over the place. In gardens, parks, schools, reserves, forests, on farms... If you take a leaf from tarata and fold it in two so that the skin breaks have a sniff and you will find it smells like lemon. This is how it gets it's English name Lemonwood.

Tarata gum, flowers mixed with titoki and kohia, a vine, berries made a perfume although tarata flowers in spring have a nice smell on their own.

MATAI

Matai is the one of the forest giants. From a distance it looks similar to totara but when close up it is quite different. Matai bark looks like someone has hammered it leaving round red marks.

When matai get big it looks like someone has tried to set fire to the tree because there is a line of black soot going down the trunk. This is where juice or sap from inside the tree has built up then leaked. You can drink this juice. In the old days people would put a tap in the tree. When ripe, matai berries are black, about the size of a cherry and edible.

Matai can be used to make lots of things

Adze handles, bowls, fire, canoe bailers, canoe paddles, eel weirs, wakahuia, digging sticks, spears.

Toys and musical instruments

Spinning tops, toboggans, flutes, pukaea or trumpet, bullroarers, kororohu or whizzers, pahu or gong, ku which is a single string instrument, roria or Jew's harp, pakuru or a piece of straight wood tapped with a smaller piece.

You could make these using different materials too.

RANGIORA

If you are walking beside a track in a reserve or in the forest chances are you will see rangiora.

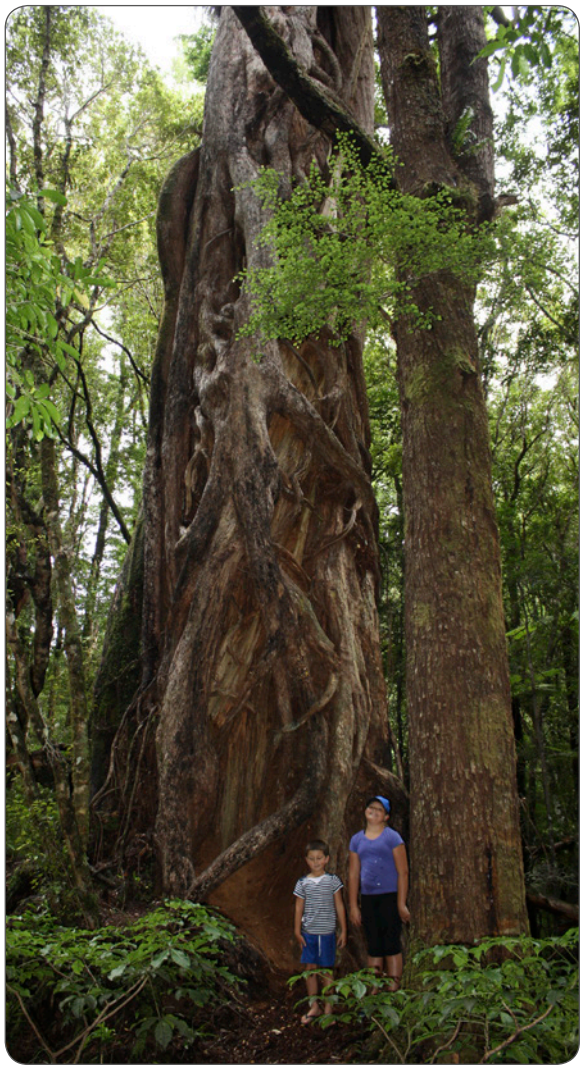
The big leaves are a giveaway. The white underside can be used as paper. If crushed they can stop bleeding and help heal sores.

You can chew the gum of rangiora to stop bad breath but don't swallow the gum or any part of the tree because it is poisonous.

It is sometimes called bushman's friend or bushman's wipe because the leaves can be used as toilet paper.

RATA

If you go to Pukaha Mount Bruce in December look on the hill behind the visitor centre. You will see a number of patches of red with tui and kaka darting around them. The red are flowers of the rata tree which signal it is near the longest day of the year. Another way to look at it is that Christmas is close.



Rata are so cool unless you are a tree they decide to make their home. A rata seed floats on the wind until it lands in a large tree. The rata then sends out a shoot that starts making its way down, round and round the tree it is on. Over time more roots are sent out until the rata kills the host tree and only a hollow is left where it used to be. There are records of rata in the 1800s that were big enough for a dozen people to sleep inside.

The Patupaiarehe or little fairy folk were said to live in rata.

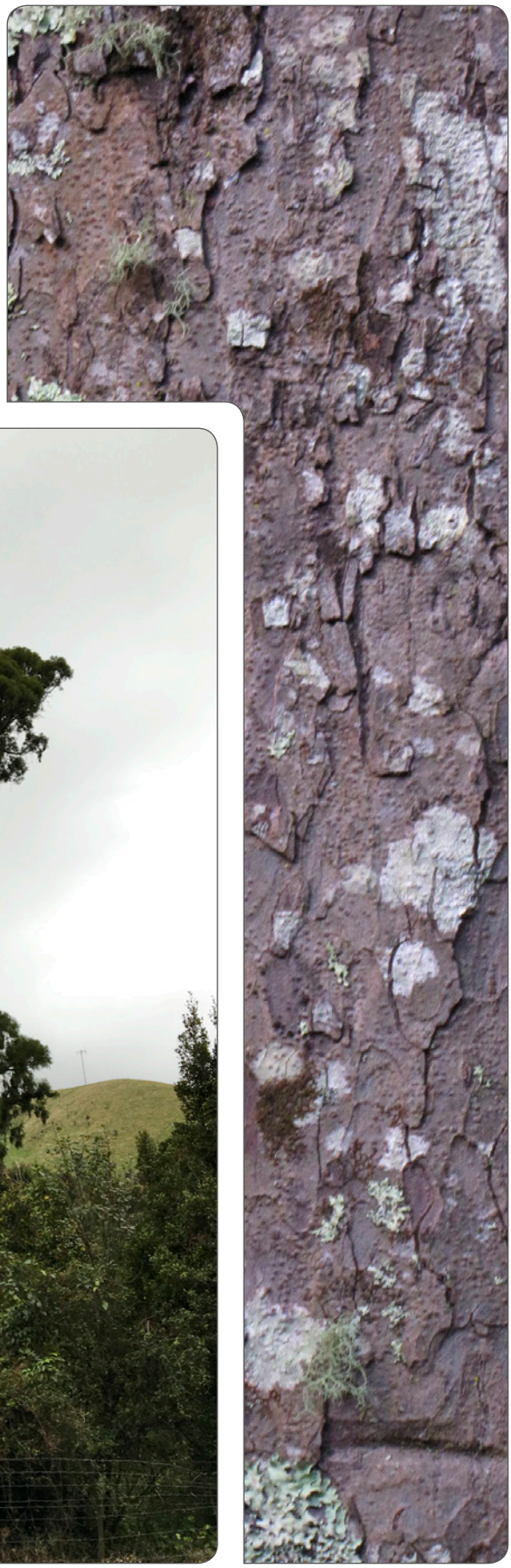
Possum love to eat rata but it can only take three years until they can kill a tree.

RIMU

Rimu can live to be 1000 years old and grow to nearly 50 metres tall. Their long drooping leaves help make them stand out amongst other giants of our lowland native forests.

Captain James Cook made a beer from rimu. Then when European settlement sped up rimu became the main tree used for timber. Today rimu from old houses is sought after.

There are some nice rimu on the track to Donnellys Flat at Mt Holdsworth.



TAWA

There is a nice stand of tawa beside the Kiwi house at Pukaha Mount Bruce while Millers Reserve up the road is full of tawa. Both of these are near streams which is what the tawa likes.

In late summer the large purple drupes (berries) of tawa ripen in late summer. The juicy flesh can be eaten.

The nut can be boiled, roasted on embers or cooked in a hangi. Stored nuts need to be soaked in water and steamed until soft.

Part of the ceiling in New Zealand's Parliament is made from panels made from tawa wood.

Very long spears were made from tawa. Some taking a couple of years to finish. A straight tree was selected then cut down then very slowly fashioned to make the spear. It was turned in a pit made of wet clay and then hardened in embers.

TI KOUKA

Ti Kouka are tough. You can see them swaying to and fro in strong winds but they don't often fall over. If they do fall down they will start growing again, even if year after year cows chew off the fresh young leaves.

The heart of the clumpy leaves of the cabbage tree can be used as a food. The outer leaves are stripped off leaving a vegetable that can be eaten raw, cooked on embers or boiled.

The leaves of ti kouka have various uses. By rubbing them a clear liquid comes that helps to heal cracked skin and sores. They are also used in the weaving of cooking baskets. A sled can be made for racing down hills from a clump of ti kouka leaves.

The tinui township on the way to Castlepoint is named after the many big cabbage trees that used to be in the area. Actually if you look there are still quite a few ti kouka around

Although tī kouka are less abundant than in past times you cannot go many miles on Wairarapa roads without seeing a cabbage tree. Kaumātua remember driving along on the back of old trucks while their elders looked for food. Sometimes a group of healthy tī kouka would be spotted. The kids had to scramble off the truck and see who could climb up a tree and come back down again with the head of the tī kouka.

TITOKI

When looking at titoki two things stand out on titoki trees. The first is the bright red fruit that has what looks like a black eye in the middle. These can take up to a year to mature. The second is the twisted trunk and roots of old trees.

Titoki fruit is a favourite of birds and while you can eat the red part it isn't that tasty.

The black berry can be crushed to make oil. This is good for the skin and when added to tarata gum or kawakawa leaf a sweet smelling scent is produced.

Titoki wood is strong but easy to work with so it was used for tool handles.

Crunching up or boiling titoki leaves and then rubbing the liquid or broken leaves directly on skin will keep insects away and help if they have already bitten you.

TOTARA

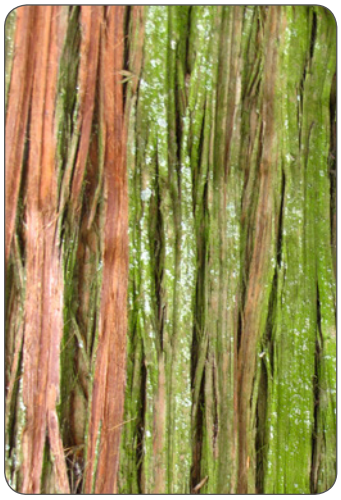
For the Ngati Hamua hapu our totara tree is king of the forest. Our mythology says that the totara was the first child of Tanemahuta and that four totara posts were made to keep Ranginui apart from Papatūānuku.

Our legends also say that because the totara is the oldest of trees it, is also the wisest.

The berries can be eaten.

At Rathkeale college north of Masterton there are many beautiful old endemic trees. Some of the totara have scars from where bark has been peeled or dug out to make patua baskets and thatch.

A grove of totara near Carterton was planted in a circle and was used as a meeting place.



Totara wood can be used for many purposes.

The timber for waka, carving, buildings, posts, bowls, trays and trumpets.

Bags, splints and thatching from the bark.

BUSHFIRE

MOKONUI

Totara trees were once all over the drier parts of the Ruamahanga River valley. In the 1600s a big fire burnt down the forest between Opaki (Wingate Road) and Whakaoriori (Masterton).

After a long dry summer the gardens at Te Ore Ore did not have many vegetables so a group was sent north along the Ruamahanga River to catch eels. They got as far as Mokonui at Opaki where they made fires to smoke the eels they had caught. As the eels hung on racks over the smoke a north westerly wind fanned the embers. The dry ground caught fire and was soon out of control. The fire ate everything in its way as it raced south but when it reached the Waipoua River could not jump across and so it died.

COINCIDENCES?

One day I was driving my uncle and aunties, one was a Matakite, around to look at land. One place we went was Mokonui. Our aunty told us the story about the fire while we looked at the land where it had happened. Later I read about the fire in the book early Wairarapa by Charles Bannister. A few years ago I was looking for puha on the farm where we lived. I met a man who was taking core samples from kahikatea trees in a protected grove on the farm. As we talked I told him about the Mokonui fire story and he said that he had taken a sample from a very old totara nearby that had ash on the rings about 400 years before!

Okatia

Did you know that the biggest totara tree ever smashed its way through the mountains to make the Manawatu gorge.

Next time you are sitting in a car on your way to Palmerston North looking at the river beneath you and the steep walls of rock above you might remember this story...

There once lived a magical creature called Okatia.

Okatia lived in the Puketoi Ranges in a huge totara tree that was so tall he could look at all the land around. After a long time living in the same place Okatia got bored and so decided to go exploring and find somewhere new to live.

Using his magic powers Okatia uprooted his totara tree and put it on its side so that it could slide along the ground. They started off in the morning so that they could follow the sun as he moved across the sky.

The totara tree was so heavy that as he moved he ploughed the ground up leaving a deep, wide channel behind him. They were making good time enjoying new sights as they moved along. Then quite suddenly they ran straight into a mountain.

When Okatia's head stopped spinning he thought, "I won't let this massive wall of rock and dirt stop me". So he reversed the totara a little bit, took a deep breath and then shouted, "FORWARD". They gathered speed, faster, faster until they hit the mountain.

They rammed it so hard that rock shattered, earth flew into the sky and the air was filled with a thunderous BOOM. They got through, the mountain had been split so Okatia and his totara carried on until they got to the sea where Okatia was able to enjoy life by the ocean until he got bored again.

This was how the Tararua and Ruahine mountains were parted. It was also how the Manawatu River and gorge were made. That part of the river is called Te Aurere a Tonga (the flowing current of the South) to remember Okatia and his totara.

Rakairuru

Rakairuru was a tipua, a special supernatural creature with magical powers. Rakairuru lived around Wairarapa Moana and Onoke Moana. Like Okatia who lived at the northern end of what we now call the Wairarapa Rakairuru lived in a totara. But unlike Okatia Rakairuru lived in a totara log instead of a huge totara tree.

Sometimes Rakairuru might be floating on the lake or sometimes lying on the shore. Anyone who came across Rakairuru found that if you touched it the next day it would be gone.

Rakairuru did something very special for people who lived around the lakes. Every year during autumn thousands of eels gathered at Onoke Moana because they were getting ready to migrate out into the Pacific Ocean to breed. Just before the first big rains came Rakairuru would go out through the Onoke Moana into Kawakawa and then carry on down to Te Waihora in Te Waipounamu.

When he left Onoke Moana a wall of sand would close behind him. When it rained in the mountains a lot of the water would flow downwards into the rivers and streams and then into Onoke Moana where it would try to flow out into Palliser Bay. But because the sandbar stopped the water it would back up and the land all around would flood and the eels would be trapped. This was called the Hinurangi.

Once the water started to go down people would be able to catch just enough tuna to keep their stomachs full for months or to swop for goodies with other people who didn't have tuna.

Once Rakairuru was ready to come home he would make his way into the lakes and the people would watch for when he headed back off for his yearly holiday.