

TE WHENUA – THE LAND

Te Whenua – Introduction

The relationship Māori had with their land is based on whakapapa. Land originated as a result of the creative efforts of our kawai tipuna (ancestors who first came to these lands). The relationships Māori have with the kawai tipuna and their descendants are one basis for determining the rights of Māori to use the land. Land was not viewed as a commodity, rather it was perceived as a source of identity, belonging and continuity to be shared between the dead, the living and the unborn. ([http://www.justice.govt.nz/pubs/reports/2001/Māori_perspectives/part_1_whenua.html#126 – 27-05-04](http://www.justice.govt.nz/pubs/reports/2001/Māori_perspectives/part_1_whenua.html#126-27-05-04))

The Rohe of Ngāti Hāmua

Although Ngāti Hāmua lived throughout the Wairarapa both inland and on the coast, our inland focus for this section will be the Wairarapa Valley, north of the Waingawa River and up to the township of Pahiatua. On the coast it will concentrate on the area between the Whareama River in the south and the Mataikona River in the north.

Pre European

Te Tapere Nui o Whātonga (The great forest of Whatonga or The Forty-Mile Bush) dominated the upper valley stretching from the western peaks of the Tararua Ranges to the Puketoi Ranges in the east. This huge primeval forest extended as far south as the Opaki Plains (just north of Masterton). The people of Hāmua were the dominant hapū of Te Tapere Nui o Whātonga. They had scattered settlements in places such as Ngawapurua, Ruawhata, Mangatainoka, Pahiatua, Tutaekara, Konini, Hamua, Moroa (Alfredton), Eketahuna, Ihuraua, Tirohanga and Kopuaranga. Those that lived in the ‘bush’ had to understand the geography of the area expertly to live in such a place.

The bush was so dense that in some places natural light did not reach ground level. Some of the trees were so ancient and huge that people used the trunks to sleep in. The animal life was so abundant that there was no need for tupuna to over exploit any one species. The conditions within the forest had remained consistent for thousands of years so that all the life had grown accustomed to a continuing cycle. This meant that flora and fauna had the opportunity to grow to what we would consider extraordinary sizes.

South of Te Tapere Nui o Whatonga were the river plains that had scattered forests interspersed with grassy plains, swampy wetlands and deep narrow rivers. The swamps dominated lower lying ground near rivers while Totara forests occupied terraces that were on higher, drier ground. This included areas such as Pohue and Te Kai o te Atua (Bideford) and Te Ore Ore. West of the Ruamahanga River and north of the Waingawa were the lands known as Opaki, Akura, Matahiwi, Whakaoriori, Kuripuni, Ngaumutawa, Kuhangawariwari, Pokohiwi and Manaia. This entire area later became the settlement of Masterton.

Today

The Tararua Ranges to the west of the Wairarapa Valley form a magnificent boundary. The headwaters of the valley rivers commence in the ranges and follow an eastward path down slopes and across plains until emptying into the Ruamahanga, the main river. Continuing eastwards the fertile valley extends several kilometres until the land begins to rise again at the beginning of the eastern hills. These run north to south the length of the valley but also fall and rise numerous times before they reach the Pacific Ocean some 60 kilometres away at the eastern edge of Wairarapa region.

There are numerous natural streams flowing into small rivers, all of which either enter the Ruamahanga catchment or empty into the sea on the coast. Manmade lakes, dams and water races have also become commonplace. The land accommodates the towns of Masterton, Eketahuna and Pahiatua. In addition there are a number of small settlements scattered throughout the valley. On the coast are the Castlepoint and Riversdale resorts and a number of smaller coastal settlements. A majority of the land is used for pastoral farming although recent trends have seen landowners diversify into other usage with forestry and viticulture being the most significant. Within the area there are several reserves that retain remnants of the native forests. The most prominent are the Mt Bruce National Wildlife Centre (Pukaha) and the Tararua Forest Park. There are also a growing number of trusts and privately owned stands of existing or established native forest.

He Whakatauki (Māori Proverb)

“Toitu he whenua, whatungarongaro he tangata”

“The land is permanent, man disappears”

Turangawaewae – a place to stand

When a person refers to their turangawaewae they are speaking about the place to which they identify with. As well as their whakapapa connections to certain waka, iwi, hapū marae and tupuna their identity also includes special landmarks that are familiar to them where they were brought up. For Ngāti Hāmua these include Rangitūmau – our ancestral mountain and the Ruamahanga Awa – our river.

Whenua and Pito

In te reo Māori, whenua is also the name given to the afterbirth and pito is the name for the umbilical cord. It is a common tradition for Māori to bury the afterbirth, the symbolic gesture of returning something precious to Papatūānuku. Often a tree is placed on top of the whenua but in earlier times it was hidden in caves or within crevices in rocks.

Ta Moko

Ta moko is the ancient Māori practice of tattooing. The most prominent place moko are seen is on the faces of men and women. The patterns of the moko tell a story about the person, their family, where they come from and previously their rank. The area around the chin describes the hapū of the person and for men the remainder of the face tells the history.

That the ta moko was a particularly prominent sign of status was obvious to Māori. What is not so apparent are the natural moko that adorned the faces of kaumātua and have been worn with pride forever. All the lines that form on the face of a person over the span of their life were the moko they wore. A lifetime of experiences etched these markings onto a face for all to see. This is the story of the person's life permanently scribed into their skin.

If you were to look at an old person's face you can see the likeness between their skin and that of exposed land that has seen many years of weather extremes. In this way the influences of the passage of time can be compared between kaumātua and Papatūānuku. Kaumātua are the connection between the land and man, being the holders of knowledge for their hapū. Just like Papatūānuku has seen the coming and going of many sunrises so have kaumātua though in a much more finite sense. This is why kaumātua impart the wisdom they have gained over many years regarding the necessity for man to treat the land with respect. The moko on their face tells a story of the interaction they have had with the elements.

It was also said that the shaking of Ranginui and Papatūānuku's youngest child, Rūaumoko (god of earthquakes) caused many of the lines on his mother's body that are representative of the moko as well.



Map 2: The above map shows some of the key placenames and names of hapū associated with the Wairarapa today

Quick quiz – Whenua

1. What is the Māori name for 'Forty Mile Bush'?
2. What is the name of the ancestral mountain for Ngāti Hāmua people?
3. What does turangawaewae mean?
4. What is the Māori name for tattooing?
5. What is the Māori name for an umbilical cord?
6. What is the ancestral river of the Ngāti Hāmua people?
7. Who is mentioned here as being Papatūānuku's youngest child?

Answers at the back of booklet

Key Points – Whenua

- Our whakapapa provides our connection to the land;
- The land gives us our identity and provides us with 'a place to stand'; and
- The land represents the skin on our bodies, the ridges of our skin mimic the hills of the landscape. The erosion of the land is like the sores on the body, open to the elements and able to cause permanent scarring.