

RUAKURI CAVE WAHI TAPU

Introduction

The general area around above and within the original entrance to the Ruakuri Cave is a special place for Ruapuha and Uekaha Hapu of Ngati Maniapoto. It features in the history of a number of tribes having been a place where migrating Maori obtained shelter on their journey to and from the coast. A place with plentiful sources of food nearby.

A good location from which early detection of the approach of unfriendly forces, but for the same reason equally suitable as a place from which to launch attacks on other settlements in the area.

A sacred place associated with the dead and also a place where taonga were stored.

Past Management of the cave has recognized the special history of the area and some effort went into protecting the essential area of the site. However, little had been done to specifically design or undertake development in a matter that assured the protection of the wahi tapu and taonga that were particularly valued by the tangata whenua.

Statutory protection:

The site is located within the Ruakuri Reserves Act 1977 containing specific provisions to provide legal protection to historic sites or features of significance. In 1991 The Maori Heritage Committee Pouhere Taonga of the New Zealand Heritage Historic Places Trust declared the entrance to Ruakuri Cave a "Wahi Tapu" in accordance with the provisions of Section 50 of the Historic Places Act 1980.

Management Objectives:

Given the high public visitor attendance in the area there was a clear objective to protect the taonga, to show respect and sensitivity to the Wahi Tapu, to protect all natural features including the karaka trees to stop people from intentionally or unintentionally trampling the habitation area or desecrating the Wahi Tapu.

A MAORI LEGEND

Many generations ago the Maori people who lived in the Hauturu district were the Ngati Hau tribe. At that time an important chief of Kawhia named Tanetinorau (1st) came over the hills

from the coast with a war party for the purpose of making war on Ngati Hau. When under the shadows of the maunga Tapu te atua the war party arrived in the district and came upon an old hermit (maroro kokoti hu waka, a saying for one who crosses the path of a hostile war party and is killed to ward off ill luck).

Living on a hillside above Ruakuri Cave named Mohoao, this old hermit was killed and Tanetinorau and his war party set up camp nearby to prepare for the attack on Ngati Hau who were living at a Pa in Rotomarama (Waitomo).

One of the warriors was sent to spear birds for food (a-here-manu) and discovered the cave entrance. He found that it was also occupied by a number of wild dogs (kuri) now extinct but were thought to have been brought by Maori on canoes of the great migration in 1350.

The dogs on seeing him approach attacked him, where-upon he fled. In order to protect himself, he threw down two bundles of birds that he had speared so as to draw off the attention of the dogs from himself. The ruse was successful and he rejoined his companions and related the incident about the dogs and the cave.

The party decided to catch the dogs. They selected the spot for their operations and then made several numbers of spring traps (rore) made from supplejack vine. After making and setting them up, one of the party acting as a decoy, approached the cave whilst the others hid themselves. As soon as the dogs saw the man approaching they made to attack him. He quickly turned and fled making sure he went in the direction of where the spring traps were, each of which he jumped over. The dogs following at his heels were caught in the traps and killed by those hiding in wait. The cave was entered and the young pups (kuao) were taken. Tanetinorau had several cloaks (topuni) made from the skins of the slaughtered dogs and the finest was worn by him.

Shortly afterwards Tanetinorau attacked the Ngati Hau pa which stood where the Waitomo Museum stands today. Caught by surprise the inhabitants were killed including their chief. The site has since been known by local Maori as Taware, the name of the chief who died there.

From here Tanetinorau and his followers attacked the Ngati Hia settlement where the people were living in the Waihohonui basin where the stream begins, as well as having a pa called Opapaka (named after a person killed while collecting crabs out at the coast). As a sign of victory and acquisition Tanetinorau laid down his new dog skin on the ground in a place since known as "Te Horahanga o te Kahu o Tanetinorau". The location being two kilometers north of the Waitomo village where a local farmer, Jeff Lee has his cattle yards today.

From here they continued past Haurua to Orahiri (Otorohanga) where they successfully attacked a pa at Puketutu near the Honikiwi Road turn off to Pirongia. From here they journeyed up the Waitomo Valley Road and at the Haurua Road junction across the Waitomo River and on the hill slopes of Paddy Tarrant's farm attacked another settlement and pa called Mokonoa.

Thereafter, Tanetinorau took his people back to live at Mohoao in the vicinity of the Ruakuri Cave. After his death and at a later date his remains (koiwi) were uplifted and placed on a ledge above Ruakuri Cave (approximately 40 feet). This feat was carried out by members of his hapu by climbing up a tall karaka tree that once grew up alongside the rock face. His remains were hauled up on the end of a rope made of vines, attached to a basket (kete). From the ledge it was hauled a further distance of 20 or so feet to a final resting place above the ledge and placed in a small cave, the outside of which was marked by a smear of red ochre (kokowai) which is still visible today.

His remains were re-assembled and supported by a frame made of vines and left in a sitting position facing outward of the cave. The tree was cut down when the cave ceased to be used for the purpose of burials, to prevent further access. This form was visible up to 25 years ago but erosion by the elements over time has caused some of the koiwi and structure to fall on the forest floor below. The bones were taken by a kaumatua and placed in a tomo adjacent to the existing burial cave.

It is known that in recent times photographs of the contents of the cave have been taken. Those who carried out this act descended down a rope from above. Recent investigations have examined the outside of the burial cave but as yet no one is known to have set foot inside.

When James Holden started conducting tours through the Ruakuri Cave he was said to have removed a mummified body and other remains that were wrapped in whariki (mats) and disposed of them to prevent further desecration by curious visitors. At that stage such parts as fingernails and hair were being removed.

Nga Taonga o Ruakuri Caves

Pipitewai and Karioimutu were articles of great significance from the period 1670-1675 as related by Kariana Whakataki of Takapuwhia, Porirua to Elsdon Best in 1894.

Puaora lived at Totara Pa, south of Kawhia Heads in the Kawhia Harbour when the news came to Kawhia that Te Rau who lived over the ranges in the Waipa Valley had completed a

very beautiful huru or kahu topani (dogskin) cloak. Tuahumahina, son of Tuirirangi who lived at Heahea (the present town of Kawhia) sent a messenger over to Te Rau asking him for the cloak. Of course a handsome present would have to be made in return some other time.

Te Rau refused, making Tuahumahina very angry. Now when Pakauae of the Ngati Koata tribe (father of Whiawhia, first wife of Uekaha) heard of this refusal, he decided to journey inland to see Te Rau and try to obtain this beautiful cloak. After much solicitation, Te Rau gave him the cloak. On his return over the ranges at a place named TeWhatu under Mount Pirongia, Pakauae blew his putara (trumpet).

Tuahumahina heard the blast and knowing of Pakauae's errand knew that he, Pakauae was successful in obtaining the taonga. He at once made up his mind to stop Pakauae's people from obtaining water from the Omiti Stream. This resulted in a wrestling match between Tuahumahina and Kawharu. Kawharu was a man of great strength and he was able to pick up his opponent and carry him to the sea and held him under the water till he nearly drowned.

Pakauae and his people knew that there would be trouble and Tuahumahina would be too strong for them so they decided to go to Te Kanawa who was living at Awaroa for help. Pakauae was caught and killed by Tautinimoko who in turn also took the taonga Pipitewai and Karioimutu.

Tautinimoko returned to Kawhia and Te Wehi and on hearing that his older brother's slayer had returned to Te Rau O Te Huia decided to kill him. Going to Waikato to seek help from Wharetipeti and Tapuae who were at that time living at Waahi, Te Wehi went to seek out Tautinimoko who was living at TeRau O Te Huia.

A search of the pa yielded no one but TeWehi spotted Tautinimoko who gave chase hoping to stop the taonga Pipitewai and Karioimutu falling into the hands of the allies. Heading towards the mouth of the Aotea Harbour and in a desperate effort to reach the water Tautinimoko jumped down a steep bank with Te Wehi and Uekaha right on his heels. Before he was able to jump into the water he was caught and killed by Te Wehi who immediately hid the taonga under his cloak. On arriving later, Wharetipeti and Tapuae demanded the taonga from Uekaha who said that Te Wehi had them in his possession and was persuaded to hand them over.

Thus it was that the two taonga Pipitewai and Karioimutu fell into the possession of Waikato. Possibly when Wharetipeti fell in the great battle near Taupiri Gorge, that these two taonga were secured by some members of the Tamaki tribes who took part in the affair and from them, they fell into the hands of Ngati Maru.

As has been previously mentioned, after the ill fated expedition of Tutunui to Tamaki was the naming of several children;

Peehitukorehu	(low lying mist)
Wahanui	(loud mouth)
Whatakaraka	(karaka platform)
Taonui	(big spear)
TeRuitoto	(blood in pools)

Whatakaraka, who was closely related to Te Iwituroa both set out with a taua (war party) to visit a friend called Rangireta living at Hauraki. All went well until they reached Te Tahuna at the mouth of the Piako River where they were encountered by a Ngati Maru taua, who chased them to a point of the headland where they could not escape. Ngati Maru was not bold enough to attack them directly and so both sides decided to sit it out.

Whatakaraka and Te Iwituroa were very skilled in the art of taiaha and displayed them to Ngati Maru who were very impressed. Any thought of an immediate attack was abandoned. However, they remained guarding the only way of escape.

That night Whatakaraka addressed his followers, asking one volunteer to go to Te Haupa of Ngati Paoa to whom he was related, to obtain some canoes in which they could make their escape. So swimming quietly past the Ngati Maru camp the volunteer wasted no time in hurrying along the beach to the village of Te Haupa to whom he made known to the people the plight of Whatakaraka.

The villagers immediately dispatched their canoes, one being the war canoe Tuuiti with sufficient warriors to man them. Both canoes made a successful landing on the headland where Whatakaraka and his companions were besieged and were able to make their escape. Among those who went with Whatakaraka was a tohunga named Tiriwa of Ngati Apakura and as the canoes drew away from the headland he arose and recited an incantation to cause the seas to rise behind them. The escape was noticed by Ngati Maru and they gave chase on their canoes when sudden squalls caused their canoes to capsize, drowning most of the crew.

By this time Whatakaraka and his taua were well out of reach and continuing along the coast line landed at Te Haupa. The chief acting in the role of mediator, made peace with Ngati Maru, the peacemaking being cemented when Ngati Maru returned to Whatakaraka the two taonga Pipitewai and Karioimutu.

Be that as it may, on its return to the original owners, they were both put into Ruakuri Cave but when this cave became known to Europeans they were both removed by Te Moerua Natanahira and placed in a vault at Te Kotahitanga, Otorohanga.

Burials

After death the Rangatira was placed in a sitting position and tied with cords or vines before the body became too rigid. It was placed in this manner in the porch of a house or in the principal building in the village. Cases have been recorded of the body being laid out in a reclining position with the head raised. In either case the body was clad in a korowai or cloak, the face was painted with red ochre and oil, the hair oiled and adorned with feathers and the ears ornamented with the white down of the albatross. Weapons and heirlooms belonging to the dead chief were placed beside the body and other prized heirlooms brought by relatives. The rank of chief might well be judged by the number of slaves who were killed after his death and it was not unusual for a widow to commit suicide. During the period that the body lies in state, the tangi is held and relatives and friends travel from great distances to join the mourners.

Some days may elapse before the body was put into a temporary place to decompose for a period of time. It was carried in a litter and placed in a cave, a hollow tree, a crevice in the rocks, in the branches of a tree or on a platform. Lesser men and woman were buried in swamps and sand dunes. In the case of an important chief heirlooms, ornaments and weapons were placed by the body in honour of the dead to be recovered at a later date. Occasionally the body was cremated, usually when there was no convenient burial place, but burial in a sitting position was not the fate of lesser mortals. Coffins which were also monuments to the dead were erected in villages where they were not likely to be raided by enemies. Those that touched the bodies or bore them to the last resting place were extremely tapu and elaborate ceremonial rites were required to bring them back to their normal condition.

When the body had decayed, the bones were exhumed and frequently painted with red ochre. This was a much more tapu procedure than the actual burial. It was a time of reunion and the recollection of the deeds, sayings and character of former friends, for some years had elapsed before the bones were recovered. Tapu removing ceremonies were again observed and there was much wailing and feasting. The bones were then bundled up and wrapped in korowai cloak and concealed in caves and hollow trees and other convenient hiding places after which the whakanoa (spiritual cleansing prayers) and rites were performed over the workers. Sometimes the teeth were removed from the skull and used as necklaces and pendants.

Kuri (Dogs) Legend

Maui, the demi god was jealous of his brother in-law Irawaru. He went fishing with him and on his return he pressed the outrigger of his canoe heavily onto the body of Irawau and reciting and repeating spells which turned him into a dog. Hina, Maui's sister was dismayed to find that her husband had suffered this transformation.

The dog was the only domesticated animal the Maori possessed, having been brought from the homeland Hawaiiki. The kuri was not a very intelligent animal, nor did it have a well developed sense of smell, but its flesh was appreciated in a land where meat was confined to birds, rats and man. The kuri was used in hunting the flightless kakapo, ducks and the nocturnal kiwi. Kiwi hunting kuri were equipped with wooden or bone rattles tied to their neck in order that they could be heard or located in the bush when a prey was caught.

The kuri had long bodies, short legs and long thick white tails which were prized for decorating korowai (cloaks) and capes. They also had pointed heads and did not bark.

Kiore (Rats)

To the Maori people of Aotearoa New Zealand the kiore (*rattus exullan*) was a historically important food supply. In a land with no indigenous terrestrial mammalian, fauna extended beyond that of nutritional necessity. Kiore were used as currency in the acquisition of land and in the naming of people and places. They were sung about in waiata and haka and acknowledged for their habits and incorporated into whakatauki (proverbs) as well as being depicted in carvings.

Origin of Kiore and Man

Maori accounts of the origin of the kiore are to be found in the creation traditions of our people. These traditions have been orally recorded and handed down by our elders as whakapapa linking each one of us to our tupuna or ancestor and to the gods. One such whakapapa is ;

Ranginui (Skyfather) = Papatuanuku (Earthmother)

1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Tanenuiarangi	Tangaroa	Rongo	Owa	Papa	Ru	Hinamoki
(man)	(fish)		(kumara)	(kuri)	(kiwi)	(lakes) (kiore)

This whakapapa illustrates the origin of kiore in relation to man. Ranginui and Papatuanuku represent mother earth and skyfather. Their children represent the many elements that form the world as we know it today, of which kiore and man are a part of.

Dispersal to Aotearoa

According to our traditions the kiore were brought to Aotearoa by several of the waka which brought our tupuna to this country. Among those waka were Mamari captained by Ruanui, Aotea captained by Turi, and Horouta captained by Pawa.

Aotea left the ancestral home referred to as Hawaiiki laden with many provisions. The karaka tree (*Cornycarpus lacvigata*), ti tawhiti (*Cordyline*), kiore (*Rattus exullan*), kumara (sweet potato) and the pukeko (swamp hen). It was said that the seeds of the karaka tree were brought from Rangitahua (Society Islands) to Aotearoa. It is not known whether this tree is indigenous to that island. It had only been found in the ngahere (forests) of Aotearoa (New Zealand) where Maori had been identified as having occupied in early times.

Ahua Kiore - Biological Characteristics

To pre European Maori, the kiore was known as a vegetarian and lived harmoniously in the environment causing little if any effects on other fauna and flora.

Among the many things known about this animal was the right time to trap kiore was in their prime condition. This was the period between April and December when it was observed to feed on the different berries and fruits of the forest trees. When the kiore was seen to change colour it was a sign that it was starting to get skinny. Names given to the kiore by different iwi include: matapo, maungarua, riirui, hinamoia, hinamoki, moke and ruruwai.

Other names recorded include;

Tapapa the well grown kiore

Torokaha the big buck kiore

Hamua a type of kiore seldom eaten and its call was kato said to be an ill omen.

Muritai a variety of Hamua

Tokoroa a kiore of a light colour

More names exist but require further investigation.

DIET

Kiore were known to feed on fruits such as;

Patete *schefflera digitata*

Miro	podocarpus ferrugineus
Tawa	beitschmiedia tawa
Tawai	nothofugus menziesii
Kie Kie	frycenetia banksii of which tawhara was the fruit
Toetoe	gania lacera
Tataraheke	rubis cissoides
Houhou bark	nothopanex arboreum
Karamu berries	coprosma robusta
Karo	pittisporum excelsum
Kohekohe	dysoxyulum spectobile
Puriri	vitex lucens
Hinau berries	elacocarpus dentatus

It is known that when the kiore ate the miro berries, the berries would ferment in the stomach of the animals causing the kiore to become intoxicated thus making them easier to catch. The flavour of the berries also permeated through the meat of the kiore which was most favoured. Another favourite food of the kiore was the tawhara fruit of the kie kie. Kie kie is similar to a flax plant (phornumium tenax) and the fruit is to be found in the centre of the plant. The old people would go out into the forest when it was ripe and tie the leaves around the plant so that the kiore could not eat it, so saving it for themselves. Sometimes they would leave part of the kie kie open so the kiore could feed also.

Trapping and Preparation

Trapping of kiore for food was a highly organized activity of pre European Maori. Kiore catching tracks were cut into the forest or hillside no matter how steep the gradient was. They were made in straight lines with no turns or distraction lest the kiore be diverted in his travels. The kiore ran in straight lines only and if there was any curvature in the track they would get lost. Unbaited traps (tawhiti) were placed along the tracks along with poki poki (another type of trap) these were baited with berries. Also pits (paepae kiore) were dug in the ground in a shape that made it hard for kiore to climb out once they were caught. Berries were placed at the end of thin sticks which projected over the pits. The kiore eating the berries, unable to turn around would fall into the pit and be trapped.

Once caught the kiore were skinned for their pelts and made into a fine kakahu cloak. Unfortunately few if any such cloaks are now in existence because of their value they were given and buried with their owners.

After skinning the kiore it was either roasted over fire or cooked in a hangi (ground oven). If roasted the fat (hinu) of the kiore was allowed to drip into an oko (bowl). After sufficient fat

was obtained hot stones were placed into the oko to heat the fat which was then strained. The roasted kiore were then placed in a hua hua (gourd) and the fat poured over them. Once set the fat excluded the air and acted as a preservative. The kiore hua hua or kiore huhuti (another name for gourd) would last for a season or until it was eaten.

The value placed on kiore is demonstrated by the fact that all men and women did not eat kiore freely but would use them for presentation to visitors.

Ruakuri Cave Archaeological Investigation

Written by Neville Ritchie April 1989

As those who were involved in the Ruakuri test excavation will be aware, kiore bones were the main fauna remains uncovered. At the time I suspected they were bones of kiore. The Polynesian kiore (*rattus exuallan*) is a small kiore, wide spread throughout the Pacific and in the past a highly valued food. Kiore remains are to be found in Maori sites throughout Aotearoa but as they have rarely been found in large concentrations, the remains have seldom been studied systematically.

Because I wanted to be 100 per cent sure the bones were kiore I sent them to Sue Wilson, of the Anthropology dept at the University of Otago who has developed considerable expertise with regard to rat bones from archaeological sites. Sue has studied the bones from Ruakuri Cave and is adamant that they are all kiore bones. She also determined that they represent a minimum of 20 individuals. Although a few of the bones were burnt, without exception they showed no evidence of butchering ie cut marks.

The best interpretation of the evidence at Ruakuri is that the kiore were cooked and consumed whole, only the indigestible jaw head and tail bones being discarded. One ethnographic account describes the process thus; Individual kiore were rolled in soft clay and put in the fire such as that at Ruakuri Cave. When cooked they were raked out and a stone or stick was used to break the clay case. When opened the hair and skin adhered to the inner surface of the clay, the exposed flesh looked like white chicken. The entrails were scooped out with the thumb nail. All parts were eaten save a few large bones, head and tail.

It is clear from the relatively small area that we excavated outside the entrance to Ruakuri Cave that there is an unusually high concentration of kiore bones around the fire pit, especially head bones, jaws and teeth. This is consistent with people sitting around a fire cooking kiore in it and eating in the immediate vicinity of the fire and discarding or spitting out the unpalatable bones.

Further update of Ruakuri Cave Excavation - date 29-4-89

The main features uncovered were a small fire pit containing charcoal, sparse fragments of shellfish and numerous kiore bones. Some of the bone and shellfish fragments were burnt. No artifacts were uncovered.

I have had the charcoal identified, a routine procedure before radio carbon dating. It proved to be composed of 2/3 matai and 1/3 rata. Unfortunately as the charcoal is derived from trees of longevity it would produce unreliable radiocarbon dates if processed. This is because there is likely to be considerable in-built age in the wood which would result in the production of early dates, but I would not consider it to be very reliable. There is still plenty of charcoal in the hearth, but it appeared to be of similar composition, consequently I don't think it is worth obtaining and submitting another sample.

Despite the lack of radio carbon date I am confident the small deposit is of pre European antiquity based on the presence of the karaka trees and the burial cave, the nature of the fire pit and the presence of the kiore bones and shellfish fragments. At a guess I would estimate the site to be between 200-400 years old.

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