

History of Maungatautari

Thanks

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History

The mountain known by this harmonious and lyrical Maori name has long been considered a symbol by the various people who have lived on its lower slopes. These inclines had the advantage of good contour allied with a relatively frost free environment, where it was possible to grow the Polynesian staple foods of kumara and even taro, the latter of which would normally produce well only near the coast. To this beneficent climate was added a central and strategic position, with the many foothills capable of being fortified with pa. The mountain has three main peaks, Maungatautari (797m), Pukeatua (752m.) and Te Akatarere (727m.)

There is some divergence of opinion as to the meaning of the name of Maungatautari. Te Kaapo Clark has said that his people like to think that the name of the mountain itself was conferred by Rakataura, who was a tohunga on the Tainui canoe. He first saw the mountain apparently hanging over the fog that often lies in the lower areas of the Waikato Valley. The name therefore can be interpreted as suspended mountain. On the other hand, Dr Laurie Barber states in his introduction to Sally K. Parker's 'Cambridge', "the Tainuicalled their settlement area Maungatautari - 'maunga' meaning mountain and 'tautari' meaning upright rock." Such is the poetic licence of the Maori language.

The first inhabitants of this area that can be identified are the Ngati Kahupungapunga, who, for an unknown number of years, probably centuries, lived in the foothills around Maungatautari. They would have enjoyed the relatively frost and fog free climate; however the winds, especially those from the south, would have been a reminder that they were no longer in the tropics of their ancestors.

The great advantage of the terrain would have been the rainforest which extended much further than today and would have been teeming with birdlife. As these birds had evolved with virtually no natural predators and ample food supplies, they developed in many cases into large and sometimes flightless birds with little fear of being preyed upon. The bush moa, kiwi and of course the kereru would have been especially favoured. Koura, or freshwater crayfish were plentiful in the clear and clean bush streams as were the invaluable tuna, or eel.

Berries, notably tawa and karaka, pikopiko (young fern fronds, usually of the hen and chickens fern), harore (fungus), tawhara (fruit of the kiekie, *Freycentia banksii*) could be easily gathered and numerous rongoa (herbal remedies) prepared from the natural flora. Rarauhe, or bracken fern, grew freely in areas cleared of bush and the starchy root of this was a staple food for pre-european Maori, although modern research has proved that this root can be carcinogenic. Large areas of bush near human habitation were often burned to create more open space for additional plantations of this crop. Ti kouka, (*Cordyline australis* or cabbage tree) was an important food and fibre source.

The root of the swamp plant, raupo, was also used as a food. Harakeke (Phormium species or New Zealand flax) was abundant in more open spaces and was one of the essentials for clothing. The huge totara, matai and rimu trees as well as others, would have been used with regard to their varying timber properties.

With the low population density it is probable the Ngati Kahupungapunga lived relatively peaceful lives for the long period, at least six generations that they lived here. Before the sixteenth century, however, these people were conquered and displaced by the powerful tribes of Tainui, whose ancestors had arrived in Aotearoa in the Tainui canoe, probably about 1300 AD and settled on the west coast of the North Island, near Kawhia.

This iwi fairly quickly established themselves around the lower slopes of Maungatautari. Ngati Raukawa were the first of the Tainui tribes to make the district their home, and this powerful and somewhat warlike iwi continued to have undisturbed possession for centuries. Their war parties raided adjoining lands as far afield as Hawkes Bay, the Urewera, Tauranga and Taupo. During this time three hapu or subtribes of Ngati Raukawa were formed, Ngati Wairere, Ngati Haua, and the iwi now resident in the Maungatautari and Hora Hora areas, the Ngati Koroki. Many are the stories of battles long past, which finally established the present day tangata whenua.

The last great pre-European battle and the best recorded, was that of Taumatawiwi. This was precipitated by the unrest caused by the introduction of firearms to the Ngapuhi of the north. They displaced the Ngati Maru, a Tainui tribe, from their location on the southern and eastern shores of the Hauraki Gulf. The latter took up residence at Maungatautari, especially on the southern side of the present day Luck-at-Last Road in a strongly fortified pa called Haowhenua. It soon, however, became obvious to the Ngati Haua and even more so to the Ngati Koroki that the powerful Ngati Maru and their strongly fortified pa were a real threat to the continued possession of their traditional lands.

In about 1830, the Ngati Haua, led by the well known Te Waharoa with only 300 warriors defeated the 3000 Ngati Maru warriors in the famous Battle of Taumatawiwi. It must be noted here that Te Waharoa was supported by 1000 Ngai-te-rangi warriors who were supposedly there only as a show of strength, however as C.W. Vennell indicates in 'Such Things Were', Te Waharoa "was a shrewd psychologist. In nearly forty years of warfare he had yet to meet a Maori warrior who could keep out of a fight if he saw one in progress." After the battle and subsequent negotiations the Ngati Maru were evicted from Maungatautari and escorted back to their Thames homeland.

Karapiro gets its name from that great battle. Kara means rock and piro, in this context, means putrid smell. After the battle Te Waharoa was concerned about a counter attack from the Ngati Maru, and therefore ordered the bodies of the dead warriors to be burned, in case they should fall into the enemy's hands. The cremation took place on a large outcrop of rocks, near the edge of the river. Most of these rocks were flooded when Lake Karapiro was formed in 1947. In 1975 they were removed to make way for the rowing course for the 1978 world rowing championships. After some delay, the rocks were finally relocated as originally promised. One rock is now situated at the Maungatautari Marae and others at the memorial site at the Karapiro Domain.

After a short time in possession of Haowhenua, Te Waharoa re-established his kinsmen the Ngati Koroki in the Maungatautari area and he and the Ngati Haua

returned to Matamata. Ngati Koroki have remained the tangatawhenua to the present day. Ngati Raukawa remain the tangatawhenua of the western slopes of Maungatautari, although it must be noted that most of that tribe travelled south with Te Rauparaha in 1822 and settled at Otaki. A small group of about 80 later returned and took up residence on the land on the western side of Maungatautari around and including Parawera. Their principal kainga in those times was Aratitahi. These lands were awarded to Ngati Raukawa by the Native Land Court , following many claims by many tribes to the whole Maungatautari area. (The famous 'Maungatautari Case' of 1884). Ngati Haua and Ngati Wairere retained, and still retain, ownership of lands on the southern slopes of the mountain.

Te Rauparaha actually travelled across the saddle of the Maungatautari range on a well known track known as Te Rauparaha's track. A legend holds that Te Rauparaha's greenstone mere was lost on this track, and remains there perhaps to be found.

The very central position of Maungatautari, together with its large Maori population were two reasons that it was frequently visited by explorers, missionaries and traders.

The Rev. Henry Williams, the Rev. John Morgan and the Rev. A.N. Brown visited Maungatautari in August 1834, and held the first Christian service there on the 31 st of that month.

In the summer of 1841-1842 William Colenso, that man of many talents, missionary, printer, explorer, botanist and politician visited Maungatautari. He crossed the Waikato River at the well known crossing over the chasm at Aniwaniwa, Hora Hora. He continued up to the lower slopes of the mountain to reach the village of Whareturere , where he was hospitably received, on a very hot day.

Between 1839 and 1850, Brown, from the Tauranga Mission Station, travelled frequently (by foot) over the Kaimai ranges to visit Maungatautari, particularly Te Wera a te Atua and Whareturere. At this time the Maori had already built stockyards for their cattle and were arranging to have an undershot water powered flour mill built. This was subsequently erected near the present day Taane Road . Large numbers of fruit trees were also planted.

In 1844 Bishop Selwyn arrived at Maungatautari from Te Awamutu, and stayed to celebrate Christmas.

At this time too, Maungatautari was host to a Hawai'ian from the island of Oahu . He could undoubtedly communicate with the Maori in their own language, as the two eastern Polynesian languages are very close. However, his claimed power to cure diseases did not sit comfortably with Brown. (It will be remembered that, about 80 years earlier, James Cook had brought a Tahitian by the name of Tupaia to New Zealand with him as an interpreter. The language of Tahiti is even closer to Maori.)

By the mid 1850s James Shepherd and his wife Ann had established a trading station near Whareturere and an account of this venture was written by Ann some time later. She looked back very fondly to the time they spent in the area, and especially to the industry and hospitality of the Maori of Whareturere.

Surgeon and naturalist to the New Zealand Company, German born Ernst Dieffenbach spent some time in New Zealand , arriving in 1839. He passed by Maungatautari in early May 1840, observing two of the deserted pa of Ngati Raukawa. An attempt by him to climb the mountain was thwarted by the dense bush.

In May of 1859 the Austrian (also German born) geologist and explorer Dr Ferdinand von Hochstetter visited Maungatautari and stayed at Whareturere as the guest of Tioriori. Tioriori was one who later attempted, together with Wiremu Tamihana, to avert war with the Pakeha. (The attempt was, sadly, unsuccessful and Tioriori fought alongside his people at the Battle of Rangiriri. He was injured whilst assisting a British soldier to reach safety during the fighting, but was later taken prisoner. He was held for about 14 months on the hulk 'Marion').

On the southern slopes of Maungatautari, the district now known as Pukeatua was first visited by a European in the person of Ensign Best, of Governor Hobson's staff, in 1842. He stayed overnight at Aratitahi Pa. As Dieffenbach had found on the western side two years previously, the dense rain forest covering the upper slopes of the mountain proved impenetrable.

Increasing European settlement after 1840 put great pressure on the Maori inhabitants of the Waikato to sell their lands to European settlers. This pressure culminated in the well documented Land Wars of the 1860s. Orakau to the south of Maungatautari, saw the last battle of the Waikato phase of these wars, and the famous cry, "E hoa, ka whawhai tonu ahau ki a koe ake, ake." has still power to quicken the pulse.

Although it never transpired, the pa Te Tiki o te Ihingarangi, in the foothills of Maungatautari known as Pukekura was intended to be the next Maori stronghold but Wiremu Tamihana and his people crossed the river under the cover of darkness and went to Peria.

A British redoubt, the "Crow's Nest", was built nearby to guard the Aukati or Confiscation Line which was drawn across the Pukekura Hills. Many Maori north of that line retreated to the Maungatautari area. However, even there, the strong and well organised village of Whareturere, together with the adjoining pa Porewa, was regarded as a threat and was consequently sacked by 550 men of the 50 th Regiment under the command of Colonel Waddy.

The last act of these Land Wars was played out as late as 1873. Tim Sullivan was shot and beheaded whilst building a crossing into land outside the Aukati (on the north west of the Pukekura Hills) which it had been agreed by the Maori owners to lease to E. B. Walker. The killing probably followed King Tawhiao's much earlier decree that it was death for a white man to venture over the Confiscation Line.

Then began the phase of European settlement of the Maungatautari area. All land south of the Aukati had to have Maori ownership verified for legal reasons by the Native (later Maori) Land Court . It could then be sold by the (multiple) owners.

The money which consequently flowed into Maori hands through these transactions stimulated the formation of Te Peeke o Aotearoa, the Maungatautari Bank in 1886. It was criticised by the press of the day and, according to press reports, was burned down by unhappy investors. However, Stuart Park in the N.Z. Journal of History, Volume 26 states "The Bank of Aotearoa was created to meet the monetary needs of the King Movement and its treasury and to express the financial autonomy of the Maori people. During its 20 year history it apparently filled those needs well. ... Te Peeke o Aotearoa was a bank indeed." The 1870s were the period of the formation of the large land companies in the area. One such was the Auckland Agricultural Land Company which had acquired large areas of Hora Hora, on the lower mountain slopes and plateaux. Maori continued to resist settlement of their lands. This culminated in their burning of the bridge across the Waikato at Aniwanuiwa in 1881. Sir James

Fergusson was the principal of another company which owned 8000 acres of Maungatautari (district). It too, was subject to considerable resistance by local Maori. However, the depression of the 1880s signalled the end for these large estates and by 1887 they were collapsing. The formation of the Assets Realization Board in 1895 enabled the land held by such large companies to be subdivided and sold to pakeha settlers.

Formal settlement into the Maungatautari area commenced with Pukeatua in 1888, then Hora Hora in 1896 and Maungatautari (district) in 1899.

Gradually, pakeha ownership of the land increased. Farms with pasture took the place of Maori cultivations and bush was cleared from the lower slopes of Maungatautari. Pakeha schools and halls were built in the early years to serve the needs of the settlers. Maori were also encouraged to use these facilities.

The old Maori foot tracks were upgraded, firstly to accommodate horse drawn vehicles and later motor vehicles.

Rabbits were an early introduction to the area and were a great plague to the farmer/settlers and to Maori cultivations too, but, for the welfare of the mountain itself, the arrival of the possum in the 1950s was much more devastating. Within 30 years the natural cover remaining on the mountain was showing signs of severe stress from the concentrated browsing of these marsupials.

In the early years of the twentieth century, the Waihi Gold Mining Company built the first hydro-electric power station on the Waikato River at Hora Hora. At about the same time they sank a test shaft into the mountain to explore possibilities of gold production. The gold, which does exist, was not in payable quantities. Again, in the late 1970s, the possibility of mining the mountain for gold was raised, with the argument that more efficient methods of extraction could prove to be profitable.

The relentless chipping back of the bush line, started by Maori with adze and fire, continued with increased effectiveness and efficiency with pakeha saws and axe, and later chainsaw, and always fire. Land development schemes with tax incentives and grants, gave more encouragement to the conversion of bush to pasture. Sheep and beef farming predominated until the infrastructure for the dairy industry was established after the First World War.

To the north and east of Maungatautari the many Maori kainga and pa such as Taumaihi on the summit of Oreipunga, Raukura, Waniwani and Taane among others are now only survived by the Ngati Koroki-Kahukura marae of Maungatautari and Pohara. To the west and south Parawera alone remains.

Maungatautari has always held great symbolic significance for Maori, the present iwi of which have been here for at least 500 years and have celebrated te Maunga by many references to the mountain in waiata.

These two simple and elegant lines from the old waiata composed by Kahoki are but one of the many Maori references in verse and song and appear to me to be particularly appropriate to these times:

Tera te pukohu tairi ana mai Te tara ki Tautari, kia tangi atu au.

(Lines from a "Waiata Aroha mo Petera Pukuatua". Translation by Apirana Ngata:

Behold the mist suspended high up yonder, On the peak of (Maunga)Tautari, which causes me to weep.)

As yet, to my knowledge, no one has been inspired to compose poetry or song in English about our mountain. However, Pakeha who live under the influence of the mana of the mountain also have great feeling for those misty peaks clad with seemingly eternal rainforest.

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