

The Tale of the Cave of Muriwai, Ngatiawa Ancestress!

A freak cleft from its primal days, gaps the foot of Whakatane's towering Kohi Point, which has developed over the centuries, into a rugged cave never more than ten foot high and reaching back to a narrowing interior. This is ~~the famous~~ Ano-o-Muriwai - 'The Cave of Muriwai' the revered seeress and prophet of the Ngatiawa tribe and direct ancestor of the Whakatohea people of Opotiki. *It is located not far from the Whakatohea beach outlet*

That she arrived at Whakatane in the celebrated Mataatua canoe, ~~some six hundred years ago~~ gives her immediate lustre, but that she was even then, a rare and spiritual identity who conversed with the gods, could see the future, and who was frequently consulted by the warrior chiefs of those days, makes her outstanding.

Muriwai holds her own even against the giant figures of her high-ranking brothers Toroa (captain) Taneatus (tohunga) and Tuhi-Ariki (progenator of the Nga-puhi of North Auckland)

It was only in her ageing years, after living long at Ohiva and founding the family which was ultimately to spread to Opotiki that she left the warm comfort of her whare and retired to the stark and lonely cave at Kohi's foot, which incidently was in those days lapped by the sea.

At its tapering far end she made her-self comfortable at nights, and used its more commodious body for the fire by which she crouched and received her visitors during the day.

This hermit existence must have added to her renown, for it is said that she was widely consulted by mighty chiefs and tohungas, and further that her advice was always wise, and her forecasts uncannily accurate.

The story goes that a small girl from the adjoining Marae-o-Toroa (now Wairaka) brought her food and drink daily, but apparantly fearing the old grey-headed kua, wasted no time on the job. But one day, instead of staring at her, she found Muriwai on her side, and only half-covered with her mats. She panicked and raced home with the news.

Old Muriwai was certainly dead and the news gloomed the whole settlement. Possibly it would be some 30-40 years after the landing, and because of the tapu nature of the deceased, the tribes decided to leave her body to the gods with whom she regularly consulted.

So the early tohungas placed an all-time tapu on the cave, and the news spread abroad, ensuring that there would be no Maori trespassers, in the years to come. Surprisingly too, the ban was respected by the probing Pakeha, who usually felt the urge to explore, and discover, and ^{so} the level of the floor gradually built up.

Not until a matter of just on some 20 years ago, when the local chapter of the Jaycees decided to do something to mark and clean up the old cave, was much thought given to Muriwai's resting place. The idea was to lift the rubble of centuries, finding the original floor, and of setting up a carved memorial archway over the entrance and ^{15' lay} a lawn at its foot.

Though at first the local Maori leaders were hesitant, they finally agreed provided the correct karakia was recited by a Maori tohunga to lift the tapu.

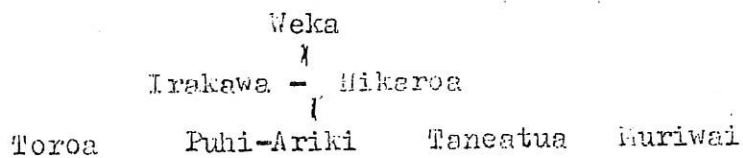
This was done, by two tohungas jointly and Maori superstition was satisfied, as well as the mixed crowd of Maori and Pakeha onlookers, and when the long recitations concluded an excavator set to work on the debris of time until at last the original floor lay exposed - some five foot lower than the passing road.

There was not a fragment, not a sigh of the old prophetsess of the past. Father Time had done his work well and the ancestress of the East Coast's ancient days had truly gone to reinga.

At this distance, it is interesting to glance at the wakapapa (ancestors) of Muriwai for apparantly they came of blue-blood stock, and in this direction the student must be prepared to step into the realm of the gods a little, to understand the superhuman actions of the heroes of old. That is the broad theme of the more ancient karakia (chant).

It must not in anywise detract from the fact that these personalities actually lived, but whether or not they could challenge taniwha (dragons), calm storms, or skip to and from Hawaiiki (sometimes without even a canoe) can be left with the reader.

It is firmly established that Muriwai came of aristocratic lineage for the chart following goes back to the aristocracy of fabled Hawaiiki -



There is a certain gentleness about Muriwai's memory, which is

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quite at variance with that of her brothers, and her high-spirited ^{voice} ~~noise~~ Wairaka. Strangely too, there are still Maoris today who cannot enter her cave without 'feeling her presence' and others who will just not enter it under any circumstances.

Maori heroes of old ~~are~~ ^{were} notably ~~main~~ male. It is somewhat singular there ^{fore} that Whakatane has two main ancestors who lived and died ~~there~~, who were female.

They were Muriwai foremost seeress of the early days, and the high-spirited Wairaka, who, by defying the tapu, while the men were ashore, inspired the hapless women to seize the paddles and bring the drifting Mataatua to shore.

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Footnote: Should the reader reside in Opotiki, it is an open secret, that he or she, might claim that it was their own beloved Muriwai who was responsible for saving the grand old migratory canoe, and not Wairaka, as the Whakatane tribes so proudly ~~claim~~ assert. But at this distance 'what boots it'. It is sufficient to know that the Eastern Bay of Plenty tribes have two heroines from the past, both of whom deserve our reverence and our pride.

C Kingsley Smith

Dear Jack,
 Hope above is suitable.
 Suggest that a photograph of the
 sign board should be added
 to the foot.

Kingsley