

TAKETAKERAU

A BURIAL TREE

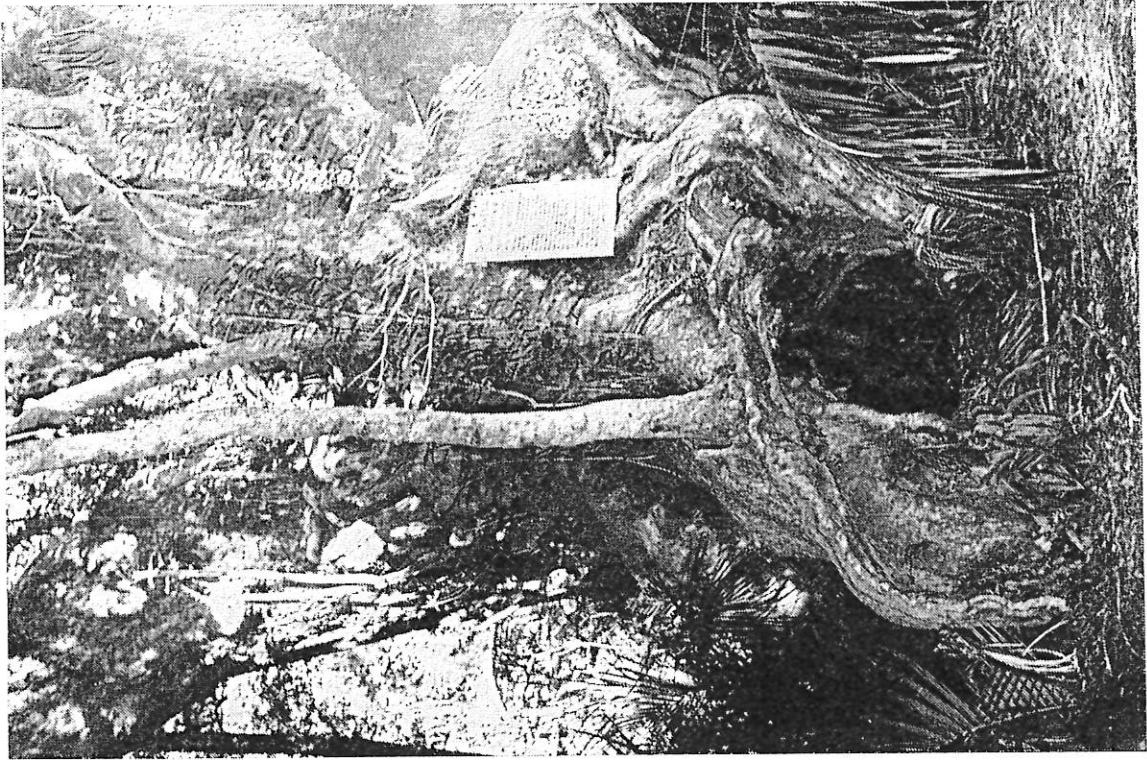
This gigantic and sacred puriri is located in the Hukutaia Domain four miles from Opotiki at the end of Woodlands Road. Access to the tree is easy by a well formed path.

Burial customs of the ancient Maori were complex and varied. In forested areas the use of burial trees was relatively common. Some time after interment in the ground, the bones of important people were exhumed, scraped and coated with a preservative paint. They were then deposited, to the accompaniment of elaborate ritual, in caves or hollow trees set aside for this purpose. One object of this custom was to protect them from desecration by enemy tribes. Insults offered to the remains of their dead ancestors, were considered extremely humiliating by the living, and were the cause of much bitter strife.

Taketakerau is a tree which was used for this purpose by Upoko-Rehe, a sub-tribe of Whakatohea. This tree which is 67 feet in girth is estimated to be about 1000 years old. When it first came to the notice of Europeans the hollow interior (16 feet by 14 feet) contained many bones and skulls since removed to safer keeping.

As may be imagined, such a locality was extremely sacred and as the notice attached to the tree describes it — "He wahi tapu tenei no mua. This was a prohibited place of olden times."

The tract of bush which comprises the Hukutaia Domain is a vestige of the original primeval forest which covered this area. Local enthusiasts have developed the domain by the addition of many species from other areas, and by maintaining the paths which enable visitors to experience the fascination of our native bush in relative ease.



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