

Te Uretara Island.

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## Uretawa Island.

Uretawa Island is situated in the Ohuwa harbour, Whakatane Survey District. It is 73.3 hectares in area, and is densely covered in secondary and tertiary growth - mainly Kanuka forest, Pohutukawa, wattle, and manuka scrub.

The island is uninhabited and is used only by the Scouting Association and fisherman, occasionally during the year.

A report was conducted by the Lands and Survey Department in 1984 as part of the on-going biological survey of reserves in the South Auckland district.

Beadel, who investigated the island was instrumental in classifying the island as a Scenic Reserve.

He noted at least eleven different bird species, this being large in number, a strong possum population and also sighted a deer.

Although the island has been extensively modified by past human activity, the remains of pa sites, middens etc were still discernible. Beadel acknowledged that the Ohuwa harbour area was one of the most densely settled places in New Zealand in pre European times. (1)

In 1986, K. Jones of the N.Z. Archaeological Association briefly visited the island (2). He noted the remains of 2 large pa sites. It is estimated that the larger pa site Panipani would have been capable of supporting 500 people.

1. Beadel Report pp 8. N2 1.

See site report forms Nos W362 - W366 inclusive and Nos W348 - W350 inclusive plus W15/485.

According to Best, the early inhabitants of the territory from Oponoiki to Whakatane were Te Hapu oneone, 'a tribe of the original Polynesian peoples of these isles'. (3). They were descended from Hape, the chief of the Rangī-Matoru canoe which had landed at Oniwa.

The Ngāti Awa, Whakatōhea and Tuhīe tribes are closely related (4) and have continued to occupy this area of the Bay of Plenty for several centuries.

Ownership of Uretara has fluctuated between the three tribes, particularly the Ngāti Awa and Whakatōhea since early occupation.

Due to the rich sea and land resources, the island has been the source of many tribal disputes.

The favourable strategic position of the island was a major bonus <sup>due to</sup> its close proximity to the mouth of the harbour and the ability to cross from the mainland at a particular point over to the island during high tide - (Wainui Peninsula end).

The pā sites were built at <sup>the</sup> top of steep cliffs on the island, where the land flattened out enabling extensive sites to be built. The pā sites were surrounded on 3 sides by water and were naturally defended.

Terraces were built to access the pā on the western side of the island where the mudflats were.

The middens were located at the bottom of the cliffs and are heavily concentrated with pipi and mussel shells.

4. Their progenitors being Wairaka, Muriwai and Ruaihona respectively, descended from Wekanui and Irakewa.

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During the 1820's, the Ngati Awa and Omarutuhū of Thames subdued and carried the Whakatonea away into slavery.

Some of the Whakatonea escaped and fled to Tauranga and through time, others were redeemed and liberated.

During this period, the Ngati Awa cultivated and held Opotiki as well as Ohīwa at length.

Apanui, the principal chief at Whakatone and Toihau Cape's father invited them back and placed them in Opotiki again, giving them seed potatoes and kumara. (5)

The Ngati Awa built at least 2 main pa on the island. The names of the 2 pa are Paripari and Karamea, Paripari being the largest.

1839.

In 1839, the island was purchased by Alfred Nicholas on behalf of Black, Green and Company. Keapa Toihau, his father, and his brother Hokimoana of Ngati Awa according to Thomas Black sold the island to Nicholas for goods to the value of fifty pounds. £50. The deed was signed in the Bay of Islands.

According to B.V. Cottrell (6), the first ship building venture south of Hokianga (Northland), was on Uretara Island. It was run by three Europeans, A.J. Nicholas and the 2 Waddy brothers Richard and Robert who were master mariners.

<sup>5</sup> Land Conv'l Meeting held at Opotiki, Presided over by Henry Clarke (Registra Magistrate) on 1st October 1862.

Refer Thomas Black's letter to the Editor, Southern Cross Newspaper.

<sup>6</sup> Whakatone Historical Society - see notes held by them of B.V. Cottrell.

Thomas Black claimed to have purchased the island from Nicholas

1848. In 1848 while still in residence in Tauranga, Black arranged for the placement of cattle on the island. The whakatohea were still disputing Ngati Awa's claim to the island, however it was to be another 14 years before they were able to actively protest against them.

In 1856, the whakatohea warned Black to remove the cattle off the island, which he did. The females he sold to Hira te Popo for cash and the males he slaughtered and salted down.

Finally in 1862, the whakatohea crossed the river and took possession of the island. Black asked them the cause of their coming to build pas on the island after having held it for 22 years without them ever raising any claims. They replied it was true that it was taken from them by the Ngati Awa, but now they were recruited and increased in number. They added that they had seized the land as far as Whakatane.

It is obvious at this point that the whakatohea totally dismissed Ngati Awa's claim to the island and consequently Black's claim. They reestablished themselves on the island and rebuilt a pa.

An arbitration meeting was held at Whakatane on the 1st October 1862, with Henry Clarke presiding. Thomas Smith (Civil Commissioner of Bay of Plenty) was present and he was accompanied by all the native assessors of Tauranga, Maketu, Rotorua, Matata, Rangitauki and Whakatane, plus some 40 odd native police.

7 Hira te Popo of Ngati Ira, Whakatohea.

Minutes of this meeting are not able to be located, however a letter written by Thomas Black to the Editor of the Southern Cross Newspaper, outlines the proceedings of the meeting.

It must have been a pretty important meeting to all concerned, especially the Ngati Awa who numbered no less than 400 men.

This meeting can be considered to be one of the most significant for both Ngati Awa and Whakatane, as not only was the ownership of the island being debated, but also the tribal boundaries.

Black reports that at the open air court, 400 Ngati Awa men 'danced the war dance well armed and naked save a shawl or shirt tied round the loins'... (Appear. 8 item 1).

The case was then opened by selecting some twenty men on each side to state their claims.

It was subsequently confirmed at this meeting that Ngati Awa had taken the island by conquest.

The Whakatane refused to have the matter settled in this or any other court in the land.

Smith wanting a quick settlement of the dispute suggested that the meeting be transferred to Opoiki, but the Whakatane told them that they went uninvited.

The meeting was shifted to Opoiki the next day (October 2nd, 1842) and the Whakatane were still adamant that they owned the island.

Busby, a native assessor on the East Coast was their speaker and he used a taiaha as a symbol of their dispute (the pakanga) and a bone mere named Ohiva to symbolise the land.



Two Kingites who were with the Commissioner's party asked if the pakanga (taiaha) and the whenua (mere) be handed over to them to settle.

Smith in wanting to avoid bloodshed, agreed and so too did the Whakatohea. Wiremu Tamihana Tarapipi was nominated by the King's men to decide the outcome of the case.

The Ngati Awa however were not satisfied. Te Hura and Petera of Matata (spurred on by Black) declared that the issue be settled by the 'Queen and the Court'.

Tamihana eventually decided in favour of Ngati Awa.

They told the Whakatohea that they must go back to their own place at Opotiki and give up the land in dispute as it belongs to the Ngati Awa. Tamihana and all were unanimous.

The Whakatohea treated the decision with contempt and immediately hoisted their flag.

(Black writes to the Editor of the Southern Cross).

... 'there is nothing for it now but war to the knife and unless the Governor foreseeably interferes and drives the Whakatohea off, it will be a bloody and exterminating war in which the whole of the Bay of Plenty will be engaged.

Signed Thomas Black.

26th December 1862.

In 1866, following the Māori Land Wars, the island was confiscated by the Crown.

A notice was published in the NZ Gazette 1866 pp 348 (proclamation No 18/1/1866). Black at this time was still living in Tauranga.

The compensation Court sitting at Opoiki in March 1867 did not include the island as part of the lands being returned to the natives. The island has been in the Crown's hands ever since.

On 3rd March, 1869 Pitcairn whom Black commissioned to survey the island was killed by Te Kooti's raiding party who had sought refuge on the island. (refer Stafford's 'Te Arawa' pp 425). Gilbert Mair and his men buried Pitcairn. Pitcairn's death turned out to be a great loss for Black in years to come as the survey plans which Pitcairn had prepared were burned in the William Denny Hotel (Opoiki) <sup>some time</sup> during early 1900's. Black claimed that he paid Pitcairn fifteen pounds for the survey.

H.G. Wilkinson, Land Claims Commissioner wrote on 29th June 1875 to Black informing him that if he has the original plan of survey certified by the Surveyor, and signed by at least two principal witnesses to the sale, then a Crown Grant would be made to Black. Black who had been corresponding with the Government now for some 35 years had given up almost all hope of getting Uretara and had previously asked for a Crown grant in lieu of the island.

Black wrote to R.S. Bush (R.M.) in 1886 advising him that witnesses to the original deed could not be contacted. William Green had died in Panmure, George Grey had died at Whakatane; Taylor had also passed away. Charles Fullon another witness had since moved to New South Wales.

& see map Appendix 3.



Because Black was unable to comply to Wilkinson's request, the claim was disallowed, under clause VII of the N.Z. Settlements Act of 1863.

In 1879 Black wrote to T.W. Lewis re his disallowed claim and requested a rehearing. The request was turned down and Judge Wilson ruled on 13th January 1880 that Black's claim was invalid.

On the 21st July 1886, Wepiha Apanui of Ngati Awa wrote to the native Minister in Wellington asking for the island to be returned to him and his people. In his letter, he referred to the promises of Sir Donald McLean. A reply was sent to Apanui by W.J. Morpeth in which he refused to acknowledge Apanui's claim to the island (see Appen. 8)<sup>(9)</sup> He stated that Donald McLean had no authority to grant land without an act of Parliament.

Wepiha who had been involved in the trials of Fulloon and Volkner and had since been liberated, continued to seek the return of Confiscated Ngati Awa tribal lands. Although his correspondences to the government were written in Maori<sup>10</sup>, his experiences with the Pakeha had been greatly increased (however negatively), following the trials and his incarceration. He had also found a friend in a Pakeha named George Graham (MP) who had assisted in gaining his release from prison.

9/ Refer Appen. 8, File NO 86/2637.

10/ NO evidence to support that Apanui could not write in English.

The Ngati Awa tribe had been heavily penalised by land confiscations during the 1860's and suffered greatly from the effects of loss of land, mana and people. (11)

Black still pursuing his claim in 1886 wrote to L.M. Grace (H.R) offering to sell to the government the island at a price to be negotiated.

He estimated that it was worth 20/- (20 shillings = 1 pound) per acre. Grace was sympathetic to Black's case and arranged through John Ballance (then Minister of Lands) for a rehearing of his case\*. The case was reheard at Opoiki on 22nd November 1886.

Black was unable to produce to the court satisfactory evidence of his ownership to the island, and thus the case was closed. Black was advised by Bushi

not to enter the claim again to any court in the land. Black by this time was in his eighties, was sick and weak. Following this court case, he reluctantly dropped all claims to the island.

He estimated that by this time, the whole business had cost him £214.10-6, and said the island was worth no more than twopence now to him.

\* It is interesting to note that the Government was able to keep reviewing Black's claim, but would not grant a special hearing to the Ngati Awa.

11. For example the Ngati Rangihouhiri and Hikakino who were left with 100 acres out of 20,000. A large number left the area and went to stay with relatives at Tauranga and Taupo.

The island still in the Crown's possession in 1898 was gazetted as a Public Reserve Ground (NZ Gaz. 1898 pp 1467)

It was left uninhabited up until 1906 when due to increasing trespass and damage to native trees, a Mr Frank Drucker of Auckland was appointed caretaker. In return for his services, he was granted a tenancy of the island for farming purposes, which the lease stipulated was specifically for raising poultry. The island became known then as Drucker's Island.

Drucker raised fowls and sold them at 3/- 3 pence per head. Drucker's Island was an early trading post and had a 'good' kauri house.<sup>12</sup> As a point of interest, the first cows were taken to Fiji by Drucker who died there.

It is presumed that during this time wattle was introduced to the island. Wattle was once used extensively in the tanning industry and this was the original source of the plants that cover large areas around China harbour.

In 1909, the island was gazetted as a Public Domain (NZ Gaz. 1909, pp 2386).

Drucker maintained the lease of the island up until 1920 when he transferred it to a Mr F. H. Cunningham.

Whakatane meanwhile continued to pursue ownership of the island and evidence

12. Notes by B. V. Cottrell (held by Whakatane Historical Society).

establishing their claim to the island was made in a Royal Commission (1920).  
[Vide G.S. 1921 pp 24-27].

The Government in their compensations and return of lands back to Whakatohea however did not include the island and it remained with the Cunninghams up until 1951.

Mr Cunningham died in 1940 and when his wife applied to transfer her lease, it was discovered on inspection that there had been gross abuse of the terms of the lease. The lease was cancelled, and not taken up privately after 1951.

Old Maori horses were found to be roaming about on the island in 1954 during a Lands & Survey Dept. check on the island. They found no persons to be living there.

In 1956, the island was again reclassified as a Recreation Reserve (NZ Gazette 1956, pp 1738). It was visited occasionally by picnickers and sea food gatherers.

A fire in 1969 destroyed most of the remaining vegetation, and <sup>the island</sup> was considered by the Lands & Survey Dept as having minimal merit for a Suncid Reserve.

In 1979 the island was reclassified as a Reserve for Recreational Purposes (NZ Gazette 1979, pp 1908).

It was during the early 1970's that the Suncid Association were made honorary caretakers of the island, in return and used intermittently by them.

In 1984, the island was made a Scenic Reserve (Gazette 1984: pp 4229).

According to Don Prentice currently of the Dept. Survey & Land Information, in Hamilton, there has never been a Maori Court title since the confiscation (1866), and no sign of a Grant having been issued from the Crown.



Appendix.

Item No

1. Lands and Survey File No 1/323  
(part 1.) - letter from Skeet to Under Secretary for  
Lands, 4/10/1922.  
  
(part 2) - letter from Thompson to Clerk, Native  
Affairs Comtee, House of Representatives 16/10/1922
2. Extracts from 'The NZ Wars Vol No 2'
3. Map - Lands & Survey dated 28/1/1971  
prepared by P.R. Washbourn.
4. Whakatane Historical Society - Te Uretara Island  
notes by B.V. Cottrell.
5. Map. - Whakatane Museum  
No MS 287.
6. Extract from 'Te Kooti and the Whitmore Expedition',  
in 'Te Arawa' 1st edition by Don Stafford.
7. Whakatane Historical Society - Map
8. Maori Affairs File No MA1922/230.
9. Lands & Survey Report, prepared by S.M. Beadell  
July 1984.
10. Archaeological Site Reference Forms.  
NZ. Arch. Association.