

Tauwhare Pa, Ohiwa – A Tradition 1847

At one time, Whakatohea's influence spread over the islands and they claimed the entire harbour. But high on a headland on the western shore Ngati Awa had asserted their rights by building an occupying a pa, Tauwhare.

On the foreshore below the pa lived a young couple. Mere Aira Rangihoea, daughter of Te Kepa Toihau, Ngati Awa chief of the Tauwhare Pa, had married Kape Tautini, a Whakatohea chief from Ohakana Island.

Shortly after the birth of their first child, a son, Mere Aira noted that her husband had become restless and moody. Then one day he disappeared without trace on a fishing trip. Mere Aira was inconsolable, but in the midst of her grief she had a nagging fear.

One morning shortly afterwards a flotilla of canoes was seen approaching. Mere Aira's fears were justified. Whakatohea, becoming resentful of the presence of Ngati Awa, had determined to drive them back over the hill before they became powerful enough to be a real threat. Among the young warriors in the waka was Kape Tautini.

The Ngati Awa were caught totally unprepared and gathered round their chief. Mere Aira begged her father to prevent any fighting. "We have no choice", said Te Kepa Toihau sadly. "We are neither prepared nor strong enough to stand against Whakatohea. We can only plead with them." So Ngati Awa crowded helplessly on a small hill above the beach, standing passive and fearful.

Though somewhat nonplussed by this, the Whakatohea chiefs rushed up and down on the shore shouting and gesticulating,



Artwork by Shirene Ene, courtesy of New Zealand Geographic

remembering past insults and injuries they had suffered at the hands of Ngati Awa. The Whakatohea on Ohakana Island shouted encouragement to their kinsman.

Mere Aira stepped in to avert the battle using their son. Holding the child above her head she cried, "The child I am holding in my arms, is the symbol of our two tribes and could make peace or war. Unless the killing is stopped for now and all time, I shall throw my child on these rocks." Kape Tautini and Whakatohea were moved and peace was sealed on the waters edge.