

Mt Ruapehu Crater Lake Lahar threat response

- NGATI TUWHARETOA AND CRATER LAKE

In 1887 Ngati Tuwharetoa's Paramount Chief, Te Heuheu Tukino IV, gifted the sacred peaks of Tongariro (which included the Crater Lake area) to the Government. The gift provided the initial focus for the creation of the New Zealand national parks system and is thus of great significance to the country as a whole. The gift has preserved spiritual and cultural associations with the mountains, protected and built on them, and created a bond between Pakeha, Maori and the land.

These factors led to the designation in 1993 of Tongariro National Park as a World Heritage Area for its outstanding universal value as a cultural landscape - the first site in the world to be recognised for possessing outstanding natural and cultural landscape values.

Ngati Tuwharetoa's rohe (tribal area) includes the central-northern area of Tongariro National Park, but they consider the entire maunga (mountain) as sacred. The late Sir Hepi Te Heu Heu, and others of his standing who have now passed on, described the Ngati Tuwharetoa association with the Tongariro volcanoes in the following words:

Whatungarongaro te tangata, toitu te whenua
(Man passes but land endures)

The spiritual association with the mountains remains with us today. An inalienable association, fused by the high priest, Ngatoroirangi, when he lit his symbolic fires, his **Ahi Kaa** of occupation.

To explain the physical and spiritual affinity our ancestors held for the land, one must have an understanding of the philosophy of creation, as they knew it!

The vision of all creation, as stemming from a common ancestry, established a kinship with all nature. Man, though superior by his dual personality; "te Ira Atua - te Ira Tangata" and the last in the order of creation, acknowledged his junior status and subjugated himself to the



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sacred principle of kinship, respect and reverence for nature.

Unfettered then by materialistic passions he studied nature, co-operated with nature and throughout the ages, learnt to live in the tenor and rhythm of nature, creating a symphony of harmonious unison. He did not equate nature to man, *but man to nature* and this is the very essence of our respect for those mountains. To us they are symbols for which a true leader aspires - dignity, majesty and autonomy.

Today we look upon them with deep respect and reverence, and a tinge of many other complimentary emotions - pride being certainly one of them. Proud that they are ours - "*te Ha o taku maunga ko taku manawa,*" (*the breath of my mountain is my heart*). And proud that they are bequeathed to the nation who as nature lovers, accord them their deep respect.

Our reverence for the mountains goes deeper, because all life originated from the same parents, Papa-tu-a-nuku (*the earth mother*) and Rangi (*the sky father*) so that Man and all other life forms are in harmony with one another in the bonds of kinship.

Conditioned then by these ties, we look upon these mountains as ancestral and this relationship evokes memories of our human ancestors who once roamed and settled within its shadows centuries ago. By those memories the past and present mingle, ensuring continuity.

Today we sing or chant ancestral compositions, paying them homage. The death of a chief is likened to the tip of a mountain having broken off. The stern anchor of the Arawa canoe, *te Rangi Haruru* or *Toko turua*, is firmly fixed on Tongariro with the plow anchor, *Toko Parore* firmly fixed at Maketu on the east coast Bay of Plenty. This gives rise to the saying, "*Mai Maketu ki Tongariro,*" inferring it's unshakeable stability. All these are tributes paid to the mountains.

To us, the mountains are symbols of the implacable authority of nature. As our ancestors saw them centuries ago so do they now stand ageless, towering above all with sublime supremacy; Immovable, immutable and impervious to the relentless march of time. Puny man in the face of such overwhelming evidence of the inevitable suddenly feels small and insignificant and so the reverence from these mountains go further deep.

The Department of Conservation's mission is: To conserve New Zealand's natural and historic heritage for all to enjoy now and in the future. Ko ta TePapa Atawhai he whakaute he tiaki i nga taonga koiora me nga taonga tuku ibobei painga mo te katoa inaianei, mo ake tonu ake.

