

Tuna (eel)

A mysterious freshwater fish once found in abundance around Wairarapa, tuna are now threatened and an iconic species that should be admired and looked after.

Eels spawn in Tonga, a long way from Wairarapa. As tiny elvers, about 50 mm, they follow the sea currents from Tonga to New Zealand, making their way to river-mouths in the area and then upstream to their new homes.



Photo: Alton Perrie, GWRC

Shortfin eels can generally be found down stream such as Wairarapa Moana whereas more endangered longfin eels travel further inland to areas such as Pukaha Mount Bruce.

Shortfin eels have a lifespan of between 15–30 years and longfin, anywhere between 25 and 80 years. Towards the end of their lives, they start their migration back to the waters of the Pacific Ocean where they breed once and die.



Photo: Mikis van Geffen

Fishing for eels used to be common around New Zealand but as numbers decreased there were less to be caught. Longfin eels are a threatened fish and Department of Conservation advocate for their protection.

View eels feeding at Pukaha Mount Bruce daily at 1.30pm. See page 36 for more information.

Wairarapa tangata whenua: our heritage stories and sites

The tangata whenua of the Wairarapa Region are the iwi of Rangitāne o Wairarapa and Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa. Through shared ancestry the people can celebrate a long and enduring relationship with the land and coastal areas. This section introduces visitors to Māori history within the Department of Conservation estate.

Maui

Maui the demi god of Polynesian mythology hauled up the giant fish Te Ika A Maui out of the depths of the Pacific Ocean. Maui's fish has an unbelievable resemblance to a huge patiki or flounder. The head of the fish, Te upoko o te ika encompasses the modern Wairarapa and Wellington regions. Its salt water eye is Wellington Harbour while the fresh water eye is Lake Wairarapa. The lower jaw is Turakirae Head and the upper jaw Cape Palliser, the western and eastern

extremes of Palliser Bay. The fish's spine became the central mountain chain that starts with the Rimutaka mountains carries on to the Tararua mountains and then stretches right up the middle of the north island. Within this mythology we find the earliest connections to the Wairarapa Region for both Māori and the Department of Conservation.



Hei Matau, the fish hook, symbolises provision and prosperity

Early people

There was a real man called Maui who was a great explorer in the Pacific region. His contemporaries may have been the first people that made their homes on the Wairarapa coast after sailing from Polynesia in the 12th century. Some of the earliest inhabited sites in the country can be found along the Wairarapa coast. These include historically interesting places on or near Department of Conservation land including the Washpool Valley on the Cape Palliser Road and the pa of 19th century chief Wereta Kawekairangi at Glenburn (Wharaurangi) on the east coast. There are numerous other man made features and plantings that are readily viewable in coastal areas. They are particularly prominent along the Palliser Bay Road and remain as monuments to our early ancestors.

Kupe

Approximately 28 generations ago, or sometime in the 14th century another explorer called Kupe sailed to New Zealand from his Pacific home called Hawaiki. Kupe's wife Hine-i- te-apa-rangi is credited with spotting a cloud on the horizon and exclaiming, "He ao, He ao" or "a cloud, a cloud" from which the commonly accepted Māori name for New Zealand was derived. Aotearoa - Land of the long White Cloud.



The orthodox version of events sees Kupe chasing the pet octopus of his enemy Muturangi across the Pacific. After sailing down the east coast Kupe catches up with the octopus in a cave underneath what we now call Castlepoint. Although he did not slay the giant fish there he eventually caught up with and killed it at the top of the south island. Throughout the Pacific stories of Kupe and the octopus abound, interestingly wherever the octopus appears so does a water hazard. Beware of the octopus at Castlepoint because as a Department of Conservation sign points out through the engraving of an octopus, it is in fact the dangerous reef with a strong undercurrent.

There are various versions of how long Kupe stayed in the Wairarapa yet whatever the length of his visit his legacy remains through the continued use of names that he gave to many natural features and or stories associated with him. The Māori name for Castlepoint is Rangiwakaoma, which literally means where the sky runs or alternatively is the personal name of a man that came to New Zealand with Kupe. Or it could be that the reef structure represents the reclining body of Kupe himself where the reef is his body and Matira (lookout) or Castle rock is his head. The personified form of a natural occurrence was used to represent Kupe's claim over ownership of the land. At Glenburn there is Honeycomb Rock where Kupe looked out to sea to await the arrival of family members.

To Māori Palliser Bay is known as Kawakawa in commemoration of Kupe's daughter making him a wreath made of kawakawa leaves. Near Cape Palliser are the rock formations known as Nga Ra O Kupe or Kupe's sails which were said to have been placed there by Kupe after a sail making race with his friend Ngake.

The Kurahaupo Waka

Whatonga was the captain of the ancestral canoe called Kurahaupo. He came from Hawaiki in search of his grandfather Toi-te-huatahi. Whatonga and his family made their home at Heretaunga, today the province of Hawkes Bay. His sons Tara ika and Tautoki and grandson Rangitāne remain important figures to this day.

During a journey of exploration Whatonga spent a long time away from home. In the early part of his long trip

Nga Ra O Kupe. Photo: Joe Hansen

he established a pa called Matirie where the Castlepoint Lighthouse stands today. Sometime later while walking across a mountain range a long way to the west he came out into a clearing. He missed his wives and when looking at “twin peaks” in the distance thought of them. This is how the first name for the Tararua mountain range came about. At the same time he looked to the east and saw a forest so vast that he named it Te Tapere Nui O Whatonga or The great domain of Whatonga. This stretched from Opaki north of Masterton to the Takapau plains in central Hawkes Bay. It was called The Seventy Mile Bush by early European Settlers but was virtually destroyed between 1872 and 1900. The only major remnant to remain was the 942 hectare Mount Bruce Reserve. The site of the National Wildlife Centre has had its original name Pukaha returned to it and has started to take on its earlier functions of matauranga (knowledge), pataka (pantry) and rongoa (medicine), but with a conservation focus.

Later Whatonga’s son Tara Ika became the eponymous ancestor of an iwi called Ngai Tara. His territories straddled the Tararua mountains which lead to a second meaning which is “The span of Tara” in reference to his people having a foot on either side of the Tararua’s.

Rangitāne, the son of Tautoki is the person after whom the Rangitāne o Wairarapa iwi is named. The full name



Aunty Hinerau Te Tau releasing kākā at Pukaha Mount Bruce.

of Kapiti Island off the west coast is Te Waewae kapiti o Rangitāne raua ko Tara or The boundary of Rangitāne and Tara. This meant that if a straight line was drawn from Kapiti island to Castlepoint, land to the north was predominantly Rangitāne and that to the south Ngai Tara.

Haunuiananaia was another passenger on the Kurahaupo. His story unfolds after his wife eloped with two slaves. Haunuiananaia pursued them across the centre of the north island and down the west coast before distributing some rough justice to the threesome. He then decided to return to his home on the east coast. While doing so he named a number of prominent landmarks. Even though the spelling of names may have changed somewhat they are all still used to today. All but one place, the ancestral mountain Rangitumau to the north of Masterton, are present within the Department of Conservation estate. Haunuiananaia named the Rimutaka mountains to the south west of Featherston, Lake Wairarapa, the Tauherenikau river to the east of Featherston, the Waiohine river to the west of Greytown, the Waingawa river to the south west of Masterton, the Waipoua river to the north west of Masterton and the Ruamahanga river from which the main Wairarapa valley was formed.

The Takitimu Waka

The Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa iwi are descendents of Tamatea Ariki Nui, captain of the Takitimu ancestral



Carving of Haunuiananaia. Photo: Rangitāne o Wairarapa

canoe. The iwi name is taken from a politically astute and industrious man called Kahungunu. This famous ancestor is also remembered for his good looks and virility. After making landings along the eastern side of the north island the Takitimu sailed past Castlepoint and further on to the south island. Tupai a tohunga on the Takitimu is said to have established a whare wananga or higher school of learning at either Castlepoint or Palliser Bay.

During the 17th century a number of important migrations took place. The most significant of these was led by Rangitawhanga a Ngāti Kahungunu chief who negotiated the gift of land in the southern Wairarapa with his Rangitāne uncle Te Rerewa. The momentous event led to the establishment of Ngāti Kahungunu in the Wairarapa. The meeting happened near Onoke Moana (Lake Ferry).

The people of Ngāti Kahungunu eventually spread out through southern and central Wairarapa. By the 19th century Ngāti Kahungunu occupied both sides of the Rimutaka peninsular and had numerous pa tuna, seasonal eeling villages around Lake Wairarapa. Hapu with strong Ngāti Kahungunu ancestry became guardians of the Haurangi ranges, the southern east coast and Palliser Bay.

Te Heke Rangātira o Nukutaurua

A series of events that occurred before the first quarter of the 19th century led to tangata whenua living in exile for more than a decade. The displacement of a majority of Rangitāne and Ngāti Kahungunu became known as Te Heke Rangātira o Nukutaurua. Nukutaurua is a place on the Mahia peninsular north of the town of Wairoa in Hawkes Bay. Refugees from the Wairarapa lived at Nukutaurua or within the shelter of Te Tapere Nui O Whatonga while waiting to return home.

Iwi from Wellington had been coming over the Rimutaka mountains which eventually led to skirmishes with Wairarapa hapu. Eventually the problems escalated to the point that Wairarapa tangata decided to retreat to their aforementioned old homelands.

One significant battle was at Wharepapa near the

western shores of Lake Wairarapa. On this occasion Wairarapa won but it caused their foe to come back with greater reinforcements. A battle at Pehikatia pa near Greytown ended in what we might call a draw, but led to the decision to vacate the region until it was safe to return.

Representatives from three hapu stayed behind to keep the home fires burning and to wage a rear guard campaign against the occupiers. One of their temporary camp sites was the pa punanga at Mount Holdsworth. A commemorative sign is found on the Holdsworth lookout track above Holdsworth Lodge. The sign describes how the renegades suddenly appeared from the bush, attacked their foe and then disappeared again.

By 1840 successful negotiations allowed tangata whenua to start coming home. The meeting place for those returning was Te Kopi o Uenuku or Te Kopi in Palliser Bay. The Putangirua Pinnacles reserve is at Te Kopi.

Te Hekenga A Tau

The term Te Hekenga A Tau refers to an annual migration. Over 700 years Māori developed an annual migratory cycle whereby they travelled familiar tracks and waterways so as to be present in an area when plants and animals could be used to gain optimal value.

An overview of the migratory cycle saw people harvesting food from the inner hills and valleys during what we describe as autumn, resting in the sheltered



Photo: Aratoi

Tukutuku panel, displayed at Aratoi. It depicts Castlepoint. The big figure is of Papauma the hapu ancestress, the smaller figure represents all of the mokopuna (descendants) of today standing on the reef where the lighthouse is. At the bottom the shadowy figure is of the octopus, resting in the sheltered

inland areas during winter, preparing gardens and equipment during spring and then fishing the coastal areas during summer.

The coastline has for centuries been less heavily forested than the inland mountains, valleys and hills. People walked and when the weather allowed paddled up and down the coast. Therefore the low flat open land near the ocean became known as the coastal highway.

Coming in from the coast in a westerly direction there were 50 kilometres of rolling hills through which people walked to access shelter and resources of the inland valleys .



Photo: Melanie Burford, Dominion Post Collection, National Library of New Zealand

Taiapure (customary fishing areas) were recognised under new legislation in the 1990s. Haami Te Whaiti (left) and Dick Te Whaiti of Ngāti Hinewaka look over one of the first taiapure, established in Palliser Bay, South Wairarapa, in 1995.

Te Tapere Nui O Whatonga, The Seventy Mile Bush dominated all of the land north of Masterton between the Tararua mountains and eastern hills. Hapu continued to travel through the dense forest until it was destroyed after 1872. Today there are a handful of DOC reserves and privately owned remnant stands of native forest remaining.

To the west and south of Te Tapere Nui o Whatonga tracks were used to cross the Tararua mountain ranges while the less densely forested and swampy land where the western foothills flatten out into the main valley were walked in a north to south direction.

Finally from its headwaters in the northern Tararua mountains the ancestral Ruamahanga River provided the main

transportation route to Wairarapa Moana including Lake Onoke at the southern end of the main valley. A variety of hapu had specific rights to fish in and around the lakes. Again these rights were exercised until the late 19th century.

Inland reserves and tracks such as Waewaepa at Mangatainoka, Millers at Kaiparoro, Pukaha Mount Bruce, Carter Scenic Reserve at Gladstone, Mikimiki north of Masterton and Haurangi at the Haurangi ranges provide the opportunity to see the flora and fauna of the inland valleys that were used by Māori. Likewise Department of Conservation coastal reserves and tracks highlight the centuries long attraction of the ocean.

The future

With shared visions for the future of the Wairarapa region Rangitāne o Wairarapa, Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa and The Department of Conservation are able to work together to protect and enhance both the conservation estate and Māori traditions.



Pa site. Photo: Kahungunu ki Wairarapa