

Te Taurahere o Ngāti Porou ki Poneke

The Story of Ngāti Porou

By Sir Tamati Muturangi Reedy

When Māui hauled up the North Island from the ocean depths, the first point to emerge was the mountain that Ngāti Porou claim as their sacred icon: Hikurangi. Subsequent ancestors included Toi, Paikea (the whale rider from Hawaiiki), the chief Te Kani-a-Takirau, who refused the offer of kingship, and later, Sir Āpirana Ngata. For Ngāti Porou, independence and unity are as enduring as Mt Hikurangi.

Ancestors

The Ngāti Porou tribe derive their name from the ancestor Porourangi. According to the Ngāti Porou scholar Sir Āpirana Ngata, Porourangi and his brother Tahupōtiki inherited Toikairākau, Uenuku, Kahutiaterangi, Paikea and Ruatapu bloodlines.

Porourangi was born in the crimson red-tipped dawn: his full name is Porou-ariki Mata-tara-a-whare, te tuhimāreikura o Rauru. Tahupōtiki's birth was in the evening flushed red with the setting sun: his added title is Te tuhi-māreikura-o-Oho, a tama-wahine.

The tribe has taken Porourangi's name for two main reasons. First, many lines of descent converge on him from ancestors in the Pacific homeland of Hawaiiki, and from Toi, one of the earliest voyagers. Secondly, his descendants produced great warriors whose conquests in battle, along with strategic marriage alliances, subdued many of the competing forces in the Gisborne and East Coast regions.

Māui

The story of Ngāti Porou lies in mythology, legend, oral tradition and historical record. Fundamental to the tribe's history is the godlike figure of Māui-tikitiki-a-taranga. Māui is the ancestor who binds Ngāti Porou descendants to the beginnings of human existence. It was he who fished up the North Island from the ocean depths. This fantastic feat is commemorated in the songs and haka of Ngāti Porou. The funeral lament 'Haere rā e hika' (Farewell dear one), sung in farewelling the dead, closes with a reference to Māui's canoe

Nukutaimemeha:

Ko te waka i hīia ai te whenua nui nei.
The canoe which fished up this great land.

The deed is also extolled in the haka 'Whakarongo ake ki te hīrea waha o Māui' (Hearken to the faint call of the voice of Māui), which celebrates the rising of the sacred mountain Hikurangi from the ocean depth:

Whakaeteete mai ko Hikurangi.
Thrusting upward, is Hikurangi.

Paikea

The epic character Paikea is a key ancestor who came to New Zealand on the back of a whale. His story is shadowed by treachery in Hawaiiki, where a battle took place over family status and rivalries, and ended in the slaughter by Ruatapu of some 70 'brothers', his senior kin.

The ancestress Paimahutonga had been taken captive by the great Hawaiiki chief Uenuku. She then married Uenuku and had a son named Ruatapu. Uenuku belittled Ruatapu as a low-born son, and in revenge Ruatapu

killed all of Uenuku's older sons out at sea; the sole survivor was Paikea. The tragedy is known in Ngāti Porou history as Te Huripūreiata.

Paikea was buoyed ashore by calling upon his sea gods and ancestors. He married the beautiful Huturangi, daughter of Te Whironui, who had arrived with his wife Āraiara in the *Nukutere* canoe. Their marriage is commemorated in 'Paikea', the anthem of Ngāti Porou, with the words:

E ai tō ure ki te tamāhine a Te Whironui.
May you cohabit with the daughter of Te Whironui.

Canoes

Māui's canoe *Nukutaimemeha* is the foundation canoe of Ngāti Porou. According to tribal tradition it lies upturned in stone on Mt Hikurangi. Other canoes that brought some of the Ngāti Porou ancestors are *Horouta*, whose captain was Pāoa, *Tākitimu*, captained by Tamatea, and *Tereanini*, captained by Rongomaituahō, who had followed his father Paikea from Hawaiki.

Hamoterangi, Porourangi's wife, came with the *Ikaroa-a-Rauru* canoe migration. Other canoes such as *Mangarara*, *Kurahaupō*, and *Ārai-te-uru* are sometimes named in association with Ngāti Porou, but the information is fragmentary. Āpirana Ngata has commented that Ngāti Porou Māori Land Court claims of the 19th century were established mainly through the mana of Māui-tikitiki-a-taranga, and that the origin canoes were largely neglected.

Links to other tribes

Ngāti Porou is proud of their links with kindred tribes such as Te Whānau-ā-Apanui. This tribe is referred to as the senior line, because one of its prominent members, Taua, was settled in that region after a dispute with his brother. Taua was the son of the famous marriage of Hingangaroa to Iranui (Kahungunu's sister), both descendants of Porourangi.

Ngāi Tahu, the largest South Island tribe, is known as the 'younger brother'. The tradition says that Ngāi Tahu and Ngāti Porou are descended from the brothers Porourangi and Tahupōtiki. They were further bound by the marriage of Hamoterangi to both brothers.

Kahungunu and Tainui–Waikato

To the south of the region is the large tribe of Ngāti Kahungunu. Their founding ancestor Kahungunu is a direct descendant of Porourangi. His daughter Tauheikurī is also a key ancestor for both Ngāti Porou and Ngāti Kahungunu. She produced two sons, Tawhiwhi and Māhaki, who in turn are important members of Ngāti Porou and the Te Aitanga-a-Māhaki sub-tribes.

Ngāti Porou is also linked through the Kahungunu whakapapa to the prominent Tainui–Waikato tribes. This is the result of the marriage of the ancestress Māhinaarangi to Tūrongo, which produced the famous ancestor Raukawa.

Tribal boundaries and resources

The Ngāti Porou homeland is the most easterly region of the North Island. It sits inside the two canoe boundaries of Horouta and Tākitimu. The traditional *Horouta* canoe territory is from Te Taumata-ō-Apanui in the north to Paritū in the south, then inland to Ngāti Ruapani territory and to Waikaremoana. It then runs north along the Raukūmara Range. The Gisborne region is regarded as the overlapping boundary between the two canoes.

As set out under the Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Porou Act 1987, Ngāti Porou's internal boundaries are from Pōtikirua in the north to Te Toka a Taiau in the south.

The traditional tribal area is mountainous, hilly and blessed with a long beautiful coastline. The native forests were largely cleared in the early days of farming, while quite significant stands of radiata pine have been planted since the mid-1950s.

One of the tribe's greatest assets today is its isolation and strong sense of sovereignty – *mana motuhake*.

New territory

In the early 1800s some sections of Ngāti Porou moved to Harataunga (Kennedy Bay, Coromandel), where land was gifted to them by the Chief Pāora Te Putu. This was Ngāti Porou's only formal occupation of a territory outside their traditional homeland. The gift acknowledged the generosity shown by Ngāti Porou during the early trading period. Returning from shipping expeditions to the Auckland markets, they would take shelter in the Harataunga region and share the benefits of their trade, including the protection of arms, with the locals.

The tribal proverb of identity

Ko Hikurangi te maunga
Ko Waiapu te awa
Ko Ngāti Porou te iwi.

Hikurangi is the mountain
Waiapu is the river
Ngāti Porou is the tribe.

Especially in the presence of other tribes, this saying is accompanied by songs of famous ancestors such as Māui and his canoe *Nukutaimemeha*, and Paikea and his grand history. Many sub-tribes recite their own proverbs and songs at Ngāti Porou gatherings.

The rugged terrain and coastline of the tribal region is dotted with settlements, each rich in local stories. Their proverbs echo the tribal saying, reinforcing the *mana* of the sub-tribes and families who live there.

Mountains and rivers

The mountain of Hikurangi remains the tribe's most significant icon because of the legend in which the ancestor Māui fished up the North Island. As he hauled up the great fish, the first part to emerge was the mountain, on which his canoe, *Nukutaimemeha*, became stranded. Hikurangi was the refuge of the people during the great ocean deluge known as Te Tai a Ruatapu, sent to destroy the survivors of the Te Huripūreiata massacre in Hawaiki. The ancient name of Hikurangi is also found in Rarotonga and Tahiti.

Mt Hikurangi is celebrated in the Ngāti Porou haka, Rūaumoko (the earthquake god). Its pulsating rhythmic flow resounds with:

He atua! He tangata! He atua! He tangata! Ho!
Behold, it is divine! It is human! It is divine! It is human! Ah!

The Waiapu River is the most famous in the region and, like Hikurangi, its name is also found in Tahiti. Offering a protected region where people could settle and find safety in times of war, the river valley is referred to in a tribal saying:

Hoake tāua ki Waiapu ki tātara e maru ana.
Let us shelter under the thick matted cloak of Waiapu.

Toi descendants

Conflicts with related neighbouring tribes led to the spread of influence of Porourangi's descendants in the region. These many major kin groups were descended from the ancestor Toi, and were referred to by Āpirana Ngata as Ngā Uri o Toi. Among them were:

- Ruawaipū (later Ngāi Tuere), in the territory north of the Maraehara valley to Te Araroa and Wharekāhika (Hicks Bay)
- Te Wahineiti, in the southern part of the Waiapu valley
- Uepōhatu, between Tūpāroa and Reporua on the sea coast and inland to the base of Mt Hikurangi
- Ngāti Ruanuku and sections of Te Wahineiti, from Whareponga, Akuaku and Waipiro on the coast into the mountainous hinterland
- Ngāti Ira, commanding the inland ranges from the back of Mangatū (west of Gisborne) to the southern part of Mt Hikurangi and the coast at Tūpāroa.

Ngāi Tuere

In the conflict known as Te Heke a Ngāi Tuere, the descendants of Tuere (Porourangi's grandson) reclaimed the northern territory of the Ruawaipū people, who were invaded by the Bay of Plenty tribe Ngā Oho. When Ngā Oho killed the Ruawaipū chief Tamatea-arahia, his daughter Tamatea-ūpoko and others fled to Whāngārā. Tamatea-ūpoko was married to Porourangi's descendant, Ue-kaiahu. Their sons Raramatai, Tahania, Uetaha and Tamakoro were determined to avenge the chief's death and regain their mother's territory.

To defeat Ngā Oho, they set off on an arduous trek, described by Sir Āpirana Ngata as 'the last deliberately planned warlike expedition to traverse on foot the whole length of the Ngāti Porou territory'.¹ This episode took several years. The final strategy of Uetaha's warriors was to draw out the enemy forces until they were thin and straggling, and then mount a counter-attack. Pākanui was to use a similar tactic in his campaigns at Whareponga to avenge the death of Poroumata.

The descendants of Ruawaipū who married into Porourangi stock took on the name of Ngāi Tuere, because of this conquest.

Taua, Māhaki and Hauiti

A major conflict occurred in Ūawa (Tolaga Bay), when the brothers Taua and Māhaki helped themselves to some fish caught by their younger brother Hauiti. They began to fight, and Hauiti ousted his brothers from the region, spreading the influence of Porourangi further afield.

Taua settled in the region to the north-west of Ūawa, and gave rise to the founding ancestor Apanui Waipapa, after whose grandson Apanui Ringamutu the tribe Te Whānau-ā-Apanui was named.

The second brother, Māhaki, settled in the Waiapu Valley, marrying Hinemākaho, sister of the Ngāti Ruanuku chief Poroumata. They produced warrior descendants like Hiakaitāria, Tukiumu and their sister Rākaitemania. They provided some of the key ancestors who established title to land blocks in the lower Waiapu Valley, during the land court investigations of the late 19th century.

The third brother, Hauti, remained in the Ūawa region. His name was given to the sub-tribe Te Aitanga-a-Hauti because of his incursions into Uepōhatu territory, his ousting of the powerful Ngāti Ira tribe from the territory, and his descendants' strategic marriages.

Poroumata

Another significant incident was the murder of Poroumata at coastal Whareponga. Poroumata, a descendant of Porourangi, lived peacefully there as chief of Ngāti Ruanuku; it was his sons who caused the tragedy. They plundered the fishing nets of the common folk without his knowledge, and ultimately Poroumata and his sons were killed at sea. However, his three daughters Materoa, Tāwhipare and Te Ataakura survived. Ngata ranks these women 'amongst the most outstanding members of the Porourangi line who bred its greatest chiefs and most celebrated warriors.'²

To avenge the murder, Tūwhakairiora (son of Te Ataakura) set out to annihilate Ngāti Ruanuku from the north, while from the south his nephew Pākanui's army swept through Te Wahineiti and the remaining Ngāti Ruanuku people. These two ancestors have had enormous influence in the modern settlement of the tribe, and provide an important genealogical foundation for all of Porourangi's descendants.

Ngāti Ira

The powerful Ngāti Ira once held sway from Mangatū and along the mountainous hinterland to Tūpāroa on the coast. The conquest of the tribe was the result of many conflicts with Porourangi's descendants. According to Sir Āpirana Ngata, the assault came from three sides – from the south by Tūtepuakī, from the east by Kahukuranui, son of Hauti, and from the north by the grandsons of Tamaihu (Te Atau, Kūkū, Korohau, and Rongotangatakē).

Footnotes

1. Āpirana T. Ngata, *Porourangi School of Maori Culture, rauru-nui-a-toi course, 1972.* › Back
2. *Porourangi School of Maori Culture, rauru-nui-a-toi course.* › Back

Post-European conflicts and developments

During the 1820s, the northern tribe Ngāpuhi went on the rampage throughout the North Island, armed with muskets newly acquired from Europeans. Their massacres of Ngāti Porou at Te Whetūmatarau and Kokai are noted events of this period.

Captives taken from these areas also brought Christianity to the tribal region, notably in 1834 through (Piripi) Taumata-ā-Kura. Rangitukia became the foundation point of Christianity in the region. Later, some 4,000 people gathered at the huge inland pā of Whakawhitirā in the south of Waiapu Valley, to witness this new phenomenon.

The arrival of Christianity is often referred to as ‘te taonga nāna i tango te kiko tangata i ō mātau niho’ (the instrument that removed human flesh from our teeth). The practice of cannibalism ceased. Peace and the settling of old grievances were also achieved through arranged marriages, even into modern times.

The ensuing period was generally one of peace and calm, a time when new cultural opportunities were explored. This brought about an acceptance of changing circumstances and challenges, and resulted in several Ngāti Porou chiefs signing the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. The 1850s was an era of great economic expansion for the tribe, who traded on locally owned ships as far as Auckland and Port Jackson, Australia.

Civil war

Between 1865 and the 1870s civil war broke out. Ngāti Porou fought Ngāti Porou, and two factions emerged.

One group was the Hauhau converts, among whom were sections of the sub-tribes from north of the Waiapu River, Tokomaru Bay, Tolaga Bay and Gisborne regions. The Hauhau were identified as those who had killed the Reverend Carl Völkner in 1865, and were moving into the territory to spread their form of religious fervour, Pai Mārire. This promised immunity from bullets, aiming to drive Pākehā from Māori land, and seeking support for the Kīngitanga, the movement to create a Māori nation under a Māori king. However, Ngāti Porou had already refused the kingship when it was offered to Te Kani-a-Takirau.

The other faction of Ngāti Porou stood to repel what was seen as an invasion by Hauhau forces.

Internal conflicts followed in a number of places from northern Waiapu to Tokomaru Bay, Tolaga Bay, and Tūranganui–Waerenga-a-hika in the Gisborne region. They ended in the pursuit of Te Kooti through the Urewera in 1870.

Hikurangi does not move

When the high-born Te Kani-a-Takirau was offered the position of Māori king, he famously replied: ‘My kingship comes from my long line of ancestors. My mountain Hikurangi is not one that moves, but one that remains steadfast.’

This has become the Ngāti Porou statement of fierce independence (some say arrogance!) that characterises the tribe even today. Ngāti Porou fondly refers to itself as Te Wīwī Nāti. Coined by Sir Āpirana Ngata, the name compares the people to wīwī – close, compact-growing rushes.

In 1865 the Te Aowera sub-tribe at Mangaone, led by Hēnare Nihohiho and Rāpata Wahawaha, repelled the well-armed forces of Hauhau advancing into Ngāti Porou. Hēnare was killed, and Rāpata assumed the mantle of leadership in subsequent battles.

Initially Ngāti Porou were poorly equipped with muskets – a war party of 70 men who went from Te Aowera had only five guns. But the government soon supplied them with more guns: its motive in joining forces with Ngāti Porou was to stem the growing influence of the Hauhau in the region. Ngāti Porou’s motive was clearly to maintain its own sovereignty.

New leaders

The most noted of the Ngāti Porou leaders who rose to quell the opposing Hauhau forces and maintain the mana of Ngāti Porou in its homeland were Rāpata Wahawaha, Hōtene Porourangi, Tuta Nihohiho, Hēnare Pōtae and Mōkena Kōhere.

‘Your land is your own’

Through the influence of the military leader Rāpata Wahawaha, the government administrator Donald McLean acknowledged that Ngāti Porou’s conflict with the Hauhau was their own business, not the government’s. In his journals Wahawaha recorded McLean’s statement, ‘The government has no influence over your battle, it is your own. Your land is your own, the government has no business with it.’

At the end of the wars on the East Coast, the government moved to confiscate Ngāti Porou lands because of the tribe’s ‘rebellious’ factions. However, along with Rāpata Wahawaha, Mōkena Kōhere argued that the battle with the Hauhau was an internal Ngāti Porou matter and had nothing to do with the government. Mōkena Kōhere said, ‘Mauria tō moni, nāku tonu taku riri, ehara i a koe i te Pākehā.’ (‘Take your money away, the fight was mine, not yours, the Pākehā.’)

When it heeded their warnings not to confiscate any land, the government was also aware that Ngāti Porou were well armed. The tribe was so well supplied with weapons that their leadership considered taking revenge on Ngāpuhi for the massacres 50 years earlier, but the influence of Christianity prevailed, it is said.¹

Peace and development

From the late 1870s to the 1900s, peace was established among the people. Along the coast enterprises flourished, including trade in produce for the expanding markets in Auckland and Sydney. This resulted in the vigorous pursuit of education to bring literacy to the people.

Sir Āpirana Ngata

From the 1890s onwards, Ngāti Porou’s greatest leader, Āpirana Turupa Ngata, rose to prominence. He was the first Māori to graduate with a degree. He not only set an example for his tribe through political leadership and achievement, but also made a monumental contribution to the young nation through his erudition and fearless stance on Māori development.

His leadership in the revitalisation of the Māori people at a period of the lowest ebb of population and morale brought about far-reaching changes. Ngata instigated farming on land that remained in Māori hands, land administration, cultural revival in the arts and literature, and the promotion of sports (rugby, hockey, tennis) through intertribal competition. The positive impact of these initiatives is still felt today.

Ngata helped to organise Māori participation in both world wars, and he is remembered by the Māori Battalion as ‘the father of the battalion’. Ngāti Porou’s contribution was through the large numbers who fought overseas, many of them paying the ultimate sacrifice. Their war service is commemorated in the memorials built on many Ngāti Porou marae. There is also a sense of pride that the only Victoria Cross of the Māori Battalion was posthumously awarded to one of Ngāti Porou’s sons, 2nd Lieutenant Moana Ngārimu.

Footnotes

1. Personal communication, Hānara Te Ohāki Reedy, c. 1960. > Back

1900s and beyond

Ngāti Porou's population grew rapidly from the early 1900s to the end of the Second World War in 1945. After this, the people began leaving their ancestral regions in large numbers. This was a result of several factors including changing farming practices, dwindling land resources, and the relocation policies of government aimed at both supplying the employment market and enabling families to find better educational opportunities.

'Kei te aha country'

Koro Dewes, a Ngāti Porou elder, demonstrated the tribe's particular character at a gathering at Hinerupe marae in 1995. Lining up for the customary greetings, one of the visitors reached Koro and opened with the usual 'Kei te pēhea koe?' (How are you?). Instantly Koro responded, not without a hint of disdain in his tone, 'Eta, you're in "Kei te aha country" now!' 'Kei te aha' is known as the most distinctive greeting of Ngāti Porou.

2000 onwards

In 2013 the tribe numbered almost 72,000 members and was the second largest in the country. About one-sixth remained within the tribal territory and Gisborne city, while the vast majority lived in Auckland, Wellington and other urban centres.

In the 21st century Ngāti Porou's main challenges are maintaining contact with the large tribal membership, keeping the home fires burning (ahi kā), and maintaining a secure and vibrant cultural base.

The tribal authority Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Porou was established in 1987 to provide a strong political collective voice for the tribe and its sub-tribes, especially in negotiations with the Crown. The ultimate aim is to strengthen the tribe's economic, social and cultural base. The Rūnanga has as the most noble of its objectives:

Ko te whakapūmau i te mana motuhake o Ngāti Porou i roto i tōna mana atua, mana tangata, mana whenua.
To retain forever the sovereignty of Ngāti Porou within its spiritual, human, and territorial sanctity.

Facts and figures

Iwi (tribal) identification

In the New Zealand censuses since 1991, residents of Māori descent were asked to indicate the tribe to which they were affiliated. The figures below show the number who indicated Ngāti Porou (including those who indicated more than one tribe), and the regions where they were found in the greatest numbers in 2013.

The only previous census asking Māori to indicate tribal affiliation – but not of multiple tribes – was that of 1901.

- 1901 census: 4,164
- 1991 census: 48,525
- 2001 census: 61,701
- 2006 census: 71,907
- 2013 census: 71,049

Major regional locations

- Auckland: 13,161
- Gisborne: 11,985
- Wellington: 11,133

External links and sources

More suggestions and sources

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More links and websites

Ngāti Porou

www.ngatiporou.com

www.ngatiporoukiponeke.org.nz

This website includes information about Mt Hikurangi, tribal history and the region, and Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Porou.

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