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MARAEKOWHAI: A MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY SETTLEMENTON THE UPPER WANGANUI RIVER

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Maraekowhai is located at the confluence of the Wanganui and Ohura Rivers. The New Zealand Historic Places Trust became interested in two niu poles at Maraekowhai in the late 1960s. The land (Part Maraekowhai A3A5 Block, Block XI, Heao Survey District) is currently "protected private land for historic purposes" under the Reserves Act 1977, owned by Mr Owen Bunn and administered by the Department of Conservation. This paper documents the history of Maraekowhai, and associated events on the upper Wanganui River, in the middle and late nineteenth century.

History

The history of Maraekowhai, in so far as it is recorded, goes back to the late 1850s when plans to build a flour mill on the site led to fighting between two of the hapu resident in the vicinity. In about 1861 one of these hapu, Ngati Haua, settled at Maraekowhai and a flour mill was built soon after. This was either not used at all or had only a short working life as soon after it was built war came to the river. Many of the inhabitants of Maraekowhai became adherents of Pai Marire and niu poles were erected: one at the outbreak of war in about 1864 and one when the fighting ended, probably between 1870-1873. In this period, from the early 1860s to the early 1880s, Maraekowhai was one of the more important settlements on the upper Wanganui River (Figure 1).

Maraekowhai was an important settlement in these decades because it was the usual residence of a noted chief: Mamaku, leader of Ngati Haua. Mamaku's career up to the early 1850s is described by Taylor (1855:350-7). On 16 May 1846 Mamaku led an attack on an advanced military post at Boulcott's farm in the Hutt. After the engagement at Horokiwi early in August 1846 he and his people returned to the Wanganui. Almost immediately he raised a taua and came down to

Wanganui, then a small settlement of some two hundred people occupying land that the New Zealand Company claimed to have purchased in 1840. The following year a larger taua was raised and for three months (May to July 1847) it harassed the settlers and the military, launching some attacks on the town itself. Subsequently Mamaku returned to Whakahoro on the upper Wanganui River where he lived peaceably for the next decade. On his baptism Taylor gave him the name, Topini, or Topine, by which he was later to become commonly known (Taylor, 1855:357).

In 1857, however, the peace of the Upper Wanganui was broken by fighting between Ngati Haua te Rangi and Ngati Tu. Ngati Tu had lived at Rauponga, opposite the site of Maraekowhai, through the 1840s and 1850s. In 1843 the Rev. Richard Taylor of the Church Missionary Society counted 54 people living at Rauponga (Taylor, MS a). The population was almost the same when a second count was (Taylor, MS b) done three years later. Taylor does not identify the inhabitants but they are listed as Ngati Tu in a census taken by the Rev. William Kirk of the Wesleyan Missionary Society in the summer of 1849-50. At that time the population was 51 (NM 8 1851/284).

By the late 1840s wheat was being grown in large quantities on the river and hand mills were no longer seen as an adequate means of processing the crop. A water-powered flour mill was more than just useful, its possession brought prestige to the owners. By the 1850s demand for mills had become an important new element in rivalry among the various hapu. In about 1857 Mamaku decided to build a mill at Maraekowhai. Ngati Tu, who appear to have had plans of their own for the proposed site, objected and the dispute soon degenerated into a fight. Ross (1965:181) indicates that "a large armed party with supplies of ammunition went up the river (to reinforce their pa) with the priest, Lampila, at its head. When passing Topine's pa they were ordered by him to return. They refused, were fired at, and a youth was killed". This narrative is based on Lampila's own account in his autobiography but there is an account in Taylor's Journal (14-15 October 1857), a letter to Governor Browne from a number of Whanganui chiefs dated 13 September 1858 (J 1 1859/331), and an oral tradition reported by Downes (1921, 1926), that tell similar stories.

Ngati Tu were forced to withdraw from Rauponga but were able to blockade the river at Pahitaua. A number of attempts were made to restore peace: a deputation of chiefs went up

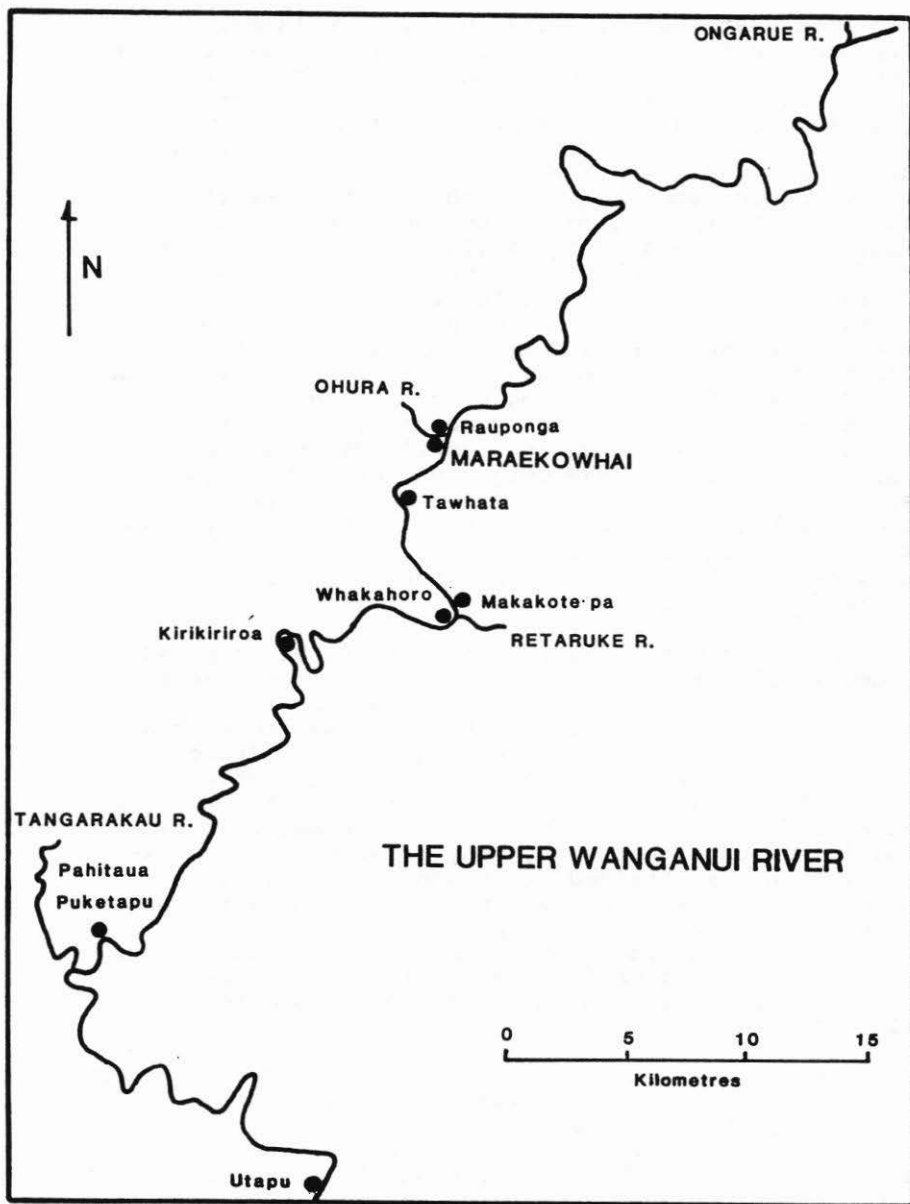


FIGURE 1. Upper Wanganui River showing places mentioned in text. Utapu is 118 km from the coast. The limit for canoe travel was near the Ongarue River confluence, 243 km from the coast.

the river in August 1857 but were turned back (Ross, 1965:182) and the following month the Rev. Thomas Grace and Te Heuheu came over from Taupo to mediate (Grace, 1928:74) but again without result. In October another deputation, which this time included Taylor, went upriver. They were allowed to pass the autaki line at Pahitaua and went on to visit Mamaku who proved willing to try to negotiate a settlement. He insisted that the other party were the aggressors but offered not to occupy the disputed land while a settlement was being negotiated (Taylor, Journal 12-16 October 1857). Nothing seems to have come of this as the quarrel flared up again. In a letter to Governor Browne dated 28 July 1858 (J 1 1859/331) some Whanganui chiefs reported that Ngati Tu and Ngati Ruru (of Utau) had blockaded the river and that a prominent Whanganui chief, Pehi Turoa, had "been to them twice, but they would not listen. All the meetings we have had condemn the conduct of these tribes, but they will not listen". It was not until 1859 that peace returned. On 20 October 1859 Deighton wrote McLean (quoted in Ross, 1965:183) "the Native quarrel up the River appears to have died a natural deathI have been told that the natives wish the matter to drop, they say blood has been shed on both sides and they have made peace and accordingly don't wish the matter revived".

Any summary of what occurred is bound to be compiled from a number of sources, none of which tell more than part of the story. Downes (1921:32-3, 1926) and Crawford (1880:160) both report fighting at Kirikiriroa and Puketapu but it is not clear when these events occurred. (Puketapu is in the same locality as Pahitaua.) Crawford (1880:160) reports that six or seven people were killed at Kirikiriroa and that Mamaku reduced the Ngati Tu pa at Puketapu by sap "with small loss on either side, many prisoners being taken". This information was obtained by Crawford when he was travelling in the area in early 1862. His informant appears to have been Mamaku himself. Lampila (Ross, 1965:184) reports that Mamaku decided to let the besieged Ngati Tu go ("a miraculous deliverance!") which seems at variance Crawford's account, although it is not impossible to reconcile the two.

Taylor makes no reference to fighting at Kirikiriroa or Puketapu in his Journal when he was upriver in October 1857 and it is likely that these events came after this visit. There is an intimation in his journal (30 September 1858) that Lampila and others were either under siege, or being held as prisoners: this would put the events at Puketapu as

late as September 1858.

This account differs significantly on a number of points from that of Downes (1921, 1926) which was based on information supplied by a man named Punanaki (Downes, 1921:20-21). Either Punanaki or Downes confused the events surrounding the abortive plan to build a mill which led to the fighting in 1857 with those surrounding the actual construction of a mill in about 1863. Downes was told that the fighting took place before the battle of Moutoa Island in 1864. Downes took this to mean immediately before the battle and accordingly assigned the events to the same year. His account of the fighting is exaggerated, particularly in terms of the numbers killed ("about 300"), as he himself realised. It is a very partisan account and perhaps this is why it obscures the ultimate outcome of the fighting at Puketapu.

One result of the fighting was that Rauponga was abandoned and when peace was restored it was not re-occupied. When Crawford visited Maraekowhai on 12 February 1862 he described it as Mamaku's "chief residence". Later that same year Taylor also visited Maraekowhai. He noted that it was a new settlement (but even so it was in a dilapidated condition) and that there were about 15-20 men, women, and children living there (Taylor, Journal 9 October 1862). He also noted that the Runanga had discussed an offer from Father Lampila to help build a flour mill and that they had agreed to become converts to his church. As a result the mill appears to have been built soon after, probably during 1863. The mill had a very short working life as war broke out on the river soon after. The inhabitants of Maraekowhai, Taylor noted, not without a hint of satisfaction, had turned over to "popery" in order to get the mill built at a low price, but had then become adherents of Pai Marire (Taylor, Journal 8 March 1872). It is sometimes asserted that Governor Grey assisted with the building of the mill but no evidence has been found for this.

Pai Marire was introduced to the Wanganui area early in 1864 and immediately gained followers amongst those groups which had lost men in the fighting in Second Taranaki War (Cowan, 1983 I:227, II:30). The Resident Magistrate in Wanganui (White) advised the Government Agent in a letter dated 4 February 1864 (JC WG 4) that the Whanganui men had left Taranaki and were returning home. Topine was reported to be angry with Pehi Turoa for leaving and had vowed to go on and fight in the Waikato. In a later letter dated 12 February 1864 (JC WG 4) White reported that the men had

arrived at Kaiwhaiki on the lower Wanganui River on the 9th February and at a meeting "Topine Te Mamaku proposed to attack the European towns; vowing to die in battle and not be taken alive ...that the land should not be taken while he was alive". Although White subsequently (Letter to Government Agent, 17 March 1864 - JC WG 4) noted that a number of chiefs, and some men, had left for the Waikato, Mamaku is not mentioned. The role he played in the events leading up to, and in the aftermath of, the battle of Moutoa Island (14 May 1864) is unclear.

An attempt by adherents of Pai Marire to attack Wanganui was repelled at the battle of Moutoa Island by the tribes living on the lower part of the river. It is not clear whether the groups living far up the river were involved in the battle. The Resident Magistrate advised the Colonial Secretary in a letter dated 13 July 1864 that Mamaku "does not wish for war in this district" (JC Wanganui 5). It is just before the battle of Ohautahi (February 1865) that "part of Topini te Mamaka's tribe" were noted as being amongst those involved in the hostilities (A.J.H.R., 1865 E4:12). After the siege of Pipiriki in mid-1865 the war fizzled out and little is known of Mamaku's activities until the end of 1869. By then a number of other prominent chiefs, such as Topia Turoa, had made their peace with the Government.

Little is known about Maraekowhai in these years. In December 1869 reports reached Wanganui that Te Kooti had "plundered Mamaku's cattle and crops, and is going to attack him" (A.J.H.R., 1870 A8a:13). The tribes on the lower River were reported to be "furious with Te Kooti for molesting Mamaku" and were going upriver in strength to assist Mamaku. The reports do not seem to have been correct for soon after it was reported that Mamaku "had gone over to Kooti" (A.J.H.R., 1870 A8a:17). However, by the end of the month, the taua had reached Maraekowhai and Mamaku was reported to have "withdrawn his opposition to the taua ...going up the river in search of Te Kooti, and that he and his people are supplying the taua with food" (A.J.H.R., 1870 A8a:20). Te Kooti, however, escaped as the taua closed in.

On 17 February 1870 the Resident Magistrate (Booth) reported that "the chiefs Te Waka, Wiremu Pukatea, and twelve other men of importance, with their wives and families, have come in from Maraekowai, one of Topini te Mamaku's pas on the Upper Whanganui ...these men have given up Hauhauism ...it was feared that the action taken by the men sent back (from the taua) would have made a breach that could not be easily

healed; as when they found Topini and his men had gone away, they destroyed the villages and carried away so much of the property as they were able to do. Te Waka and the others, however, only say, 'Na te taua tena mahi' (the work was that of a war party.) Topini, it appears from Waka's account, would not be adverse to come in, but he is very jealous of Topia having been allowed by the Maori King to take such a prominent part in the movement against Te Kooti, and that he (Topini) should not have been consulted in the matter" (A.J.H.R., 1870 A16:22).

The following month Booth reported that Mamaku had sent down his wife "for the purpose of making peace with ...the Government Natives on the river". Furthermore, "on account of Te Kooti's threat, which seems to be pretty generally believed by the Hauhaus, Topini has removed all his people from Taumaranui and other places to Maraekowai, where they are storing their provisions" (A.J.H.R., 1870 A16:22).

The following year (1871) the Resident Magistrate visited "Topini's place, Maraekorohai" where he held a meeting "in the large runanga house, and addressed them at some considerable length, dwelling more particularly on the importance of friendly relations being again established between the races, and the desirability of the Wanganui tribes becoming a united people, and the advantages to be gained by the restoration of peace ...I have great pleasure in stating that Topine and people heartily concurred in my remarks" (A.J.H.R., 1871 F6b:19). By 1873 good relations had been restored (A.J.H.R., 1873 G1:17).

It appears that Maraekowhai continued to be Mamaku's "chief residence" throughout the 1870s and early 1880s. It is not listed in the 1874 census (A.J.H.R., G7:16-7) although there were clearly people living there about that time (eg A.J.H.R., 1875 C4a:9). It is listed in the 1878 census (population 44) and in 1881 census (population 28) and the inhabitants were reported to be Ngati Haua (A.J.H.R., 1878 G2:18; 1881 G3:17). However, the tribal register shows the 1878 figure is for both Maraekowhai and Whakahoro, and it is listed as such in the manuscript version of the published table (MA WG 9 4/3).

In 1875 the Resident Magistrate (Woon) reported much agitation in the area "owing to the disposition shown by the notable chief Mamaku to sell several tracts of land in that part, and his eagerness to push on the surveys in the interior, for which he has been called to account by many of

the subordinate chiefs and others who are alarmed at the action taken by the old chief ...Te Mamaku ...is now a staunch adherent of the Government, and has lent his influence and active support - regardless of all opposition by the land leaguers - towards opening up the inland districts" (A.J.H.R., 1875 G1:11; see also A.J.H.R., 1876 G1:35).

In 1876 there was an important meeting in the area at which representatives of the King movement announced that as far as the King movement was concerned they were free to deal with their land as they wished and that there would be no further efforts to restrict selling in the district (Ward, 1978:235).

In 1877 the Resident Magistrate reported that a flour mill on the Ohura would soon be completed (A.J.H.R., 1877 G1:17). This appears to be the mill referred to by Downes (1921:21-23) as the "Hourangi mill" as the Resident Magistrate subsequently makes reference (A.J.H.R., 1877 G1:18) to the Moffatt case and this is very similar to the story told by Downes of a man arrested for illegally manufacturing gunpowder. Moffatt was convicted, served his sentence, and returned to the area, ignoring warnings that he should stay away. He was subsequently killed there in 1880 (Ward, 1978:286). A number of the flour mills on the Wanganui River were rebuilt in the 1870s including the Kawana mill, and the mills at Koroniti and Pipiriki (A.J.H.R., 1875 G1:13; A.J.H.R., 1876 G1:33; A.J.H.R., 1877 G1:17). It appears, however, that for some reason the Maraekowhai mill was not rebuilt and the new mill was erected on a different site.

In 1884 Pemberton (Diary 19 April 1884) described Maraekowhai as "an old settlement". In 1885 Payton (1888:269) reported that "the remains of a once large pa were visible. Dozens of whares of all sizes and a big mill were standing empty and forsaken, the natives having gone up river to live". Mamaku himself was living nearby, at Tawhata. In 1887 the surveyor J.R. Annabel in a sketch map in his survey book marked Maraekowhai as an "old pa". The settlement seems to have been abandoned some time between 1881 and 1885. Mamaku himself died at Tawata in 1887 (Wanganui Herald, July 1887) and was buried on Makakote pa just north of where the Retaruke River flows into the Wanganui.

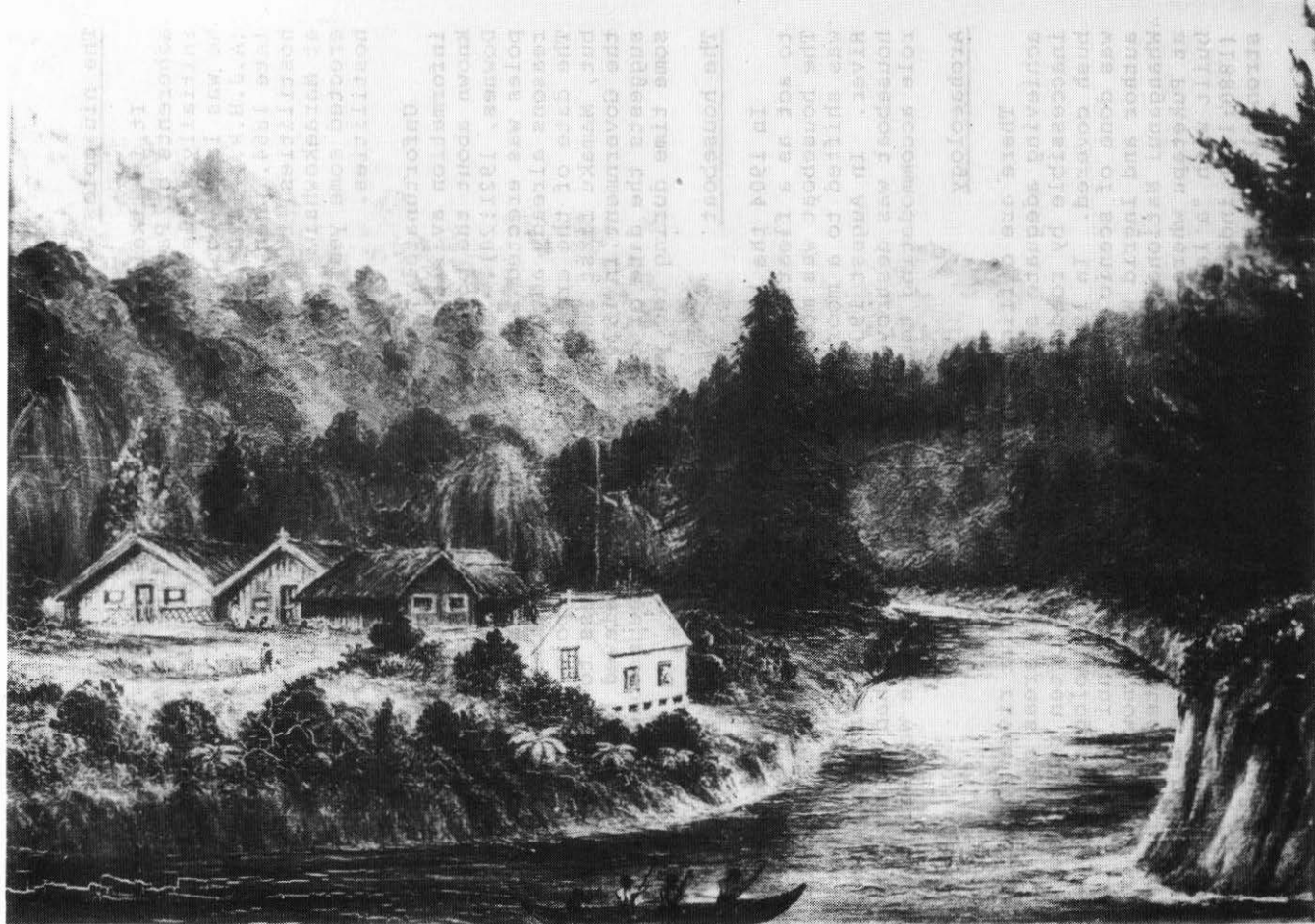


FIGURE 2. Maraekowhai in the 1870s. Oil painting from original sketch by John Skinner. Note Riri Kore niu pole behind mill. Taranaki Museum.

The niu poles

It is likely that the inhabitants of Maraekowhai became adherents of Pai Marire sometime in late 1864. Mamaku, initially at least, was not an adherent (Taylor, 1868:66) but he was later to be described as a "pou" of Pai Marire (A.J.H.R., 1870 A16:23). It was probably about this time, in late 1864, when the upper river hapu became involved in the hostilities, that the niu pole called Rongo Niu was erected at Maraekowhai. A second niu pole, called Riri Kore, was erected some years later to mark the cessation of hostilities.

Unfortunately, there is very little first hand information available about the niu poles. Most of what is known about the poles was recorded early this century (eg Downes, 1921:20). Downes surmised that the first of the poles was erected in 1862 but this appears improbable, for reasons already adverted to. The most likely date is 1864. The date of the erection of the second pole is also not known but, Mamaku first indicated a willingness to make peace with the Government in 1870 and this was achieved by 1873. This suggests the date of the erection of the second niu pole was some time during the years 1870-73.

The houseboat

In 1904 the houseboat "Makere" was built at Taumaranui to act as a floating hotel for tourists doing the river trip. The houseboat was moored at Maraekowhai until 1927 when it was shifted to a mooring a short distance up the Retaruke River. In August 1933 there was a fire on board, and the houseboat was destroyed. For many years it had an important role accommodating tourists travelling on the Wanganui River.

Archaeology

There are difficulties in the Wanganui river valley in achieving adequate survey coverage. Many areas are inaccessible by road, and the terrain is often rough, and bush covered. In 1978 a preliminary archaeological survey was done of scenic reserves along the Wanganui river by the author and Ingrid Wilson. The reserves are now part of the Whanganui National Park. One area investigated was the area at Puketapu where Downes (1921:35) had reported a pa had been built with "a large and deep trench right round". Crawford (1880:163) indicated that "Puketapu did not prove to be the strongplace that I had expected; it is commanded in every

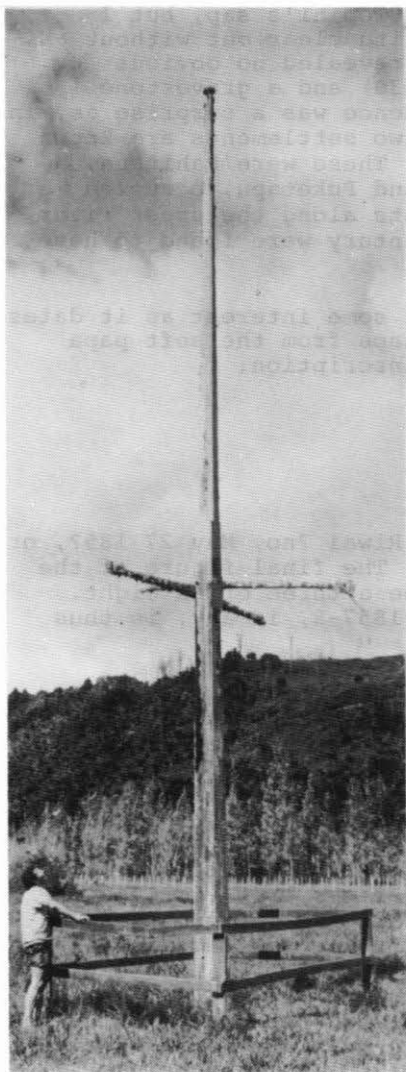


FIGURE 3. Rongo Niu.
Photo: Arthur Bates.



FIGURE 4. Riri Kore.
Photo: Arthur Bates.

direction. I was shown the lines of Topini's sap, but I thought he might have made the Ngatitu clear out without a sap at all". A search of the area revealed no obvious features except for some rua (N110/30) and a gravestone (N110/44). The limited surface evidence was a surprise as, in addition to the events of 1857-8, two settlements are known to have been located in this area. These were Pahitaua, a settlement occupied in the 1840s, and Puketapu, occupied in the 1870s. However, many settlements along the upper river known to have been occupied last century were found to have disappeared without a trace.

The gravestone (N110/44) is of some interest as it dates to the 1850s. It has been cut to shape from the soft papa rock of the area and contains the inscription:

KOTET
OHUTE
NEORI
WAI ?NO
MEI 27
185?

This becomes: Ko te tohu tene(i) e Riwai ?no, May 27 185?, or "this is the gravestone of Riwai". The final figure of the date is difficult to read but may be a three or an eight. The association with the events of 1857-8, if any, is thus unclear.

A further survey of reserves along the Wanganui river was done in 1983-4 by Jenny Hellen and Kate Olsen. Puketapu was re-visited and new records filed for the sites there, and those at Maraekowhai (the mill site N111/31, and the grave mounds and niu poles N111/32) and Rauponga (N111/34) were also visited and mapped. Downes (1921:20) noted that the only sign of the old mill was "some old totara timbers, and on the flat above the graves, the remains of mill stones". A report prepared by the NZ Historic Places Trust in 1967 (HP 8/9/1) noted that the mill stones, and the headstones from the graves, had all been removed. Little now remains to indicate the presence of the mill.

The major conservation problem with the niu poles is the rotting of the bases (HP 8/9/1). Rongo niu had fallen but was re-erected by canoeists in the 1950s. Further major restoration work was done in 1964, and again in 1982. The original arms have had to be replaced with replicas. Riri Kore has needed less work done on it but it has also been repaired.

Conclusion

Documentary records show that Maraekowhai was occupied between the early 1860s and early 1880s. A flour mill was first proposed for the site in the late 1850s, and this led to fighting on the upper river. A mill was finally built there in the early 1860s. It is not possible to say exactly when the nui poles were erected but the most likely dates are c1864 for one and between 1870-73 for the other.

References

Abbreviations:

A.J.H.R. Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives.

National Archives:

J 1 Department of Justice, Series 1, Inward letters.
 JC WG 4 Resident Magistrate Wanganui Outwards letterbooks 1863-4.
 JC WG 5 Resident Magistrate Wanganui Outwards letterbooks 1864-5.
 MA WG 4 Department of Maori Affairs, Wanganui Office, Series 4, Office Papers.
 NM 8 Province of New Munster, Series 8, Colonial Secretary's Inward Correspondence.

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