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NGA KORERO O TE NGAHORU: TWO STORIES OF A TARANAKI PA

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In a W.H. Skinner notebook recently acquired by the Taranaki Museum is a previously unpublished story, told by Minarapa Kahu of the Nga Mahanga people, regarding the pa, Te Ngahoro, which lies in the Omata district near New Plymouth (Skinner, ms.). Percy Smith has published another story of the pa (also collected by Skinner) in his History and Traditions of the Maoris of the West Coast (1910:237, 242-243). The new story adds to the history of Te Ngahoro as well as giving some insight into more general aspects of warfare on the Taranaki coast in the eighteenth century - activity which has left an unusually rich archaeological landscape of numerous Maori fortifications.

Te Ngahoro (N108/117) lies just outside the present New Plymouth city limits. It is situated on a prominent hill which stands above the terrace country between Beach Road and Herekawe Stream, seaward of the main road (see Plate 1). Archaeological remains indicate a ring ditch defence encircling two platforms of a total area of 1100 m<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 1; and see Prickett, 1980:4-5). Te Ngahoro is one of the larger pa of the district - this alone being sufficient to indicate an important historical role. Its proximity to the traditional boundary between the Taranaki and Te Atiawa people just north of Herekawe Stream (Smith, 1910:117) gives a focus to the two stories.

The tale of Te Aokaikare

Skinner's story-teller, Minarapa Kahu, was a prominent member of the Nga Mahanga hapu of the Taranaki tribe. He was an old man when he recounted the story, having been involved in peace-making between the Ngati Raukawa, and the Taranaki tribes, Te Atiawa, Taranaki and Ngati Ruanui, during the fight known as Kuititanga which occurred in the Horowhenua district in late 1839 (Carkeek, 1966:55-56). This is a role which suggests that even then he was no mere boy. In the early 1840s he is said to have travelled to England (Scanlan, 1961:34-35). Minarapa's age presumably accounts for the estimate of 150 years for only four generations since the described event took place. A photograph of Minarapa with the famous rock Toka-a-Rauhotu at Puniho is given by Smith (1910:opp. p.32).

The three Nga Mahanga pa named by Minarapa as being occupied at the time of the expedition to Te Ngahoro are all important historical sites of the Taranaki coast. Tataraimaka (N108/100) occupies

a promontory just north of the Katikara River mouth. It fell to a combined northern force in the second decade of the nineteenth century, an attack which is said to have seen the first use of guns in Taranaki (Smith, 1910:285-287). Mounukahawai (N108/187), situated on the south bank of the Kaihihi River mouth, fell to the same force as did Tataraimaka (Smith, 1910:288). Ngaweka is on the left bank of Stoney River (Hangatahua) about 4.5 km from the sea. It was the scene of a victory of the Taranaki people against a northern raiding party, again in the early years of the nineteenth century (Smith, 1910:312-313).

Except for some correction of spelling and punctuation, rendering consistent the spelling of Te Ngahoro (variously 'Te Ngaoro' and 'Te Ngahora'), and underlining Maori words, I have left Minarapa's story as recorded by Skinner in his own hand.

"Story of an attack on Te Ngahoro pa by a taua of the Ngamahanga hapu of the Taranaki tribe, told by Minarapa Kahu of Stoney River. March 1896.

About four generations ago - (say 150 years ago) a taua of our people of the Ngamahanga set out to attack the Atiawa (or Ngapotikitaua) people living in the Te Ngahoro pa. The place was invested after the usual manner but the invaders could not take the place as the fortifications were very strong and the people well provided with food and ever on the watch. Our people were getting dispirited and talked of returning to their homes at Tataraimaka, Mounakahawai, Ngaweka and other pas in our country. Amongst our people was a chief called Te Aokaikare a toa (warrior) of repute and celebrated throughout the tribe as a bird spearer. Early one morning, some time before daylight, Aokaikare with great caution and cunning crawled to the pae tautara (excrement pit) of the pa and, getting into it with his bird spear which he had brought with him, buried himself up to his chin in the tautara to escape detection and then waited his opportunity.

The head chief and tohunga (priest) of Te Ngahoro was Urutira and the besiegers had a great desire to kill or take him prisoner but the opportunity had not come, the people within the pa had fought bravely and repulsed all the attempts to gain admittance by the invaders. (The expedition appears to have been undertaken for the purpose of killing or capturing Urutira in revenge possibly for some curse uttered or witchcraft practised on the Taranaki). As a last resource Te Aokaikare, with perhaps faint hope of success, laid a trap for the coveted prize in the person of Urutira in the pae tautara as stated above. With his bird spear at hand he awaited the dawn, when the Maori on awaking generally goes out to obey the calls of nature at the place or places set aside for this

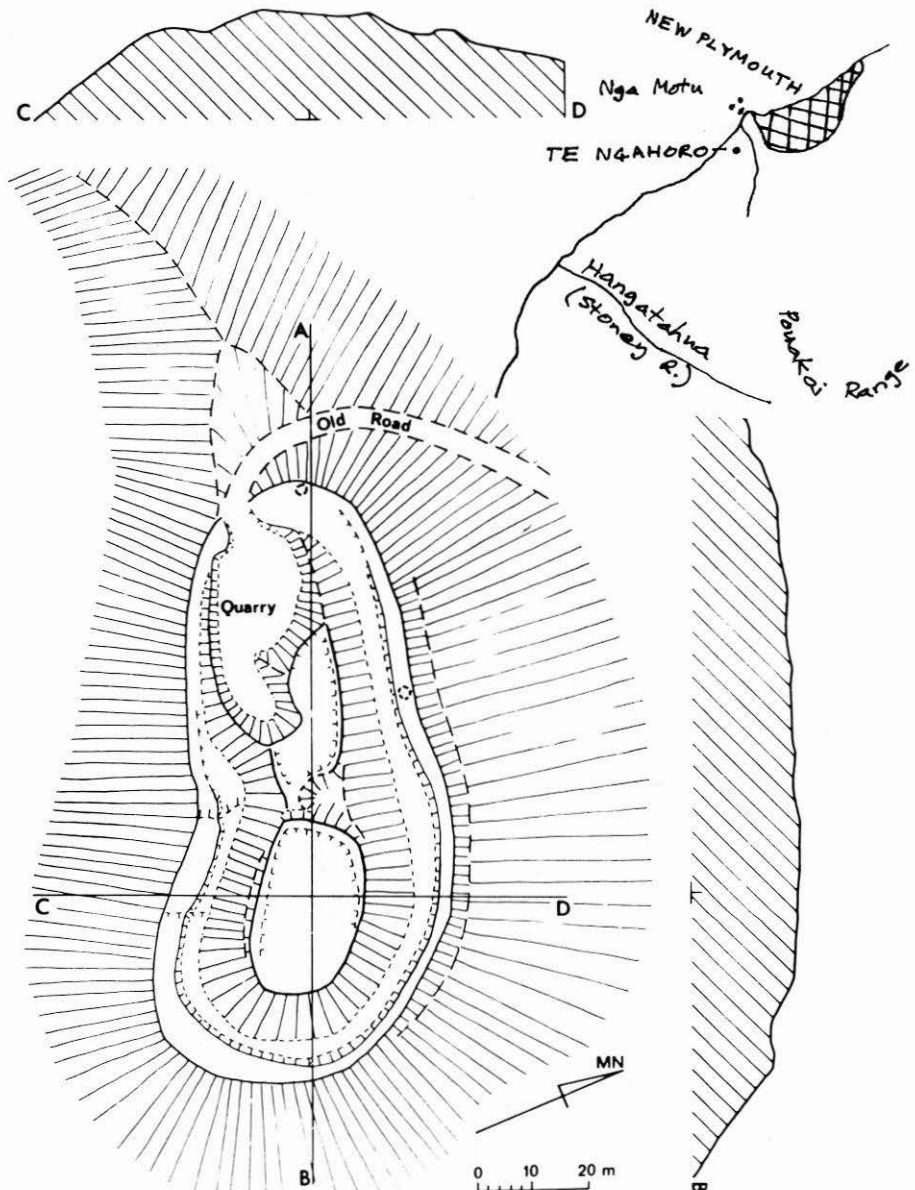


FIGURE 1. Te Ngahoro plan and sections. Inset gives location.

purpose. This particular pae tautara (w.c.) was just without the palisading of the pa and partly hid by a growth of poroporo as was generally the case; this growth helped to shade the bottom of the pit in which the enemy was lurking.

One by one different people of the pa visited the pae and left again unmolested, no notice being taken of these lesser lights; but now comes one which the first light of dawn reveals to the watcher hidden below in the mire as the dreaded tohunga Urutira. Taking his position on the bar that was always placed across these places, the opportunity was taken by Aokaikare who plunged the sharp bird spear into the unsuspecting chief and impaled him (in the anus) as he sat. Springing upwards in his agony he lost his seat or hold and fell back into the pit and was smothered by his relentless foe in the filth of the pa. Quickly scrambling from the hole Aokaikare got safely back to his tribesmen and awaited results. As daylight increased and time went on they heard the inmates of the pa enquiring of one another as to the whereabouts of their leader. Some said, "he is dressing his hair and preparing himself for the fight," others said, "he was consulting their Atuas," but still there was no appearance of Urutira. After leaving them some time in this state of anxiety and alarm Te Aokaikare shouted to the besieged, "Tenei kua tenga I te ringaringa wero kaka o Taurekarekarua", that is, "This (Urutira) was (killed) by the hand of an expert spearer of kakas of (or from) Taurekarekarua."

Having thus obtained utu the Ngamahanga people returned to their own country."

Skinner adds two notes to the story. The first concerns Taurekarekarua. He writes, "Taurekarekarua was the name of a hinau tree near the base or on the lower slopes of the Pouakai Range celebrated for its fruitfulness and as a great gathering place of the kaka and pigeon to partake of the berries. This tree was a favourite resort of Te Aokaikare, possibly (it) belonged to his particular branch of Ngamahanga over which he was chief. However he was known as an expert spearer of kakas etc. and the allusion "by the hand of an expert spearer of kakas from Taurekarekarua" was at once understood by the Te Ngahoro people and they knew by whose hand their leader had fallen."

The second note concerns Te Ngahoro itself. "Te Ngahoro (is) the name of the large pa on Lloyd's farm, Omata, on which the trig station called Lloyds is fixed. At the time of this story it was occupied by Atiawa but I think it was of Nga Potikitaua origin or build."

### Potaka takes Te Ngahoro

The second story concerning Te Ngahoro was collected by Skinner and published by Smith (1910:237, 242-243). Smith's manuscript is held among the Polynesian Society Papers in the Alexander Turnbull Library, where the story of Potaka is written in his own hand (unlike other material in the manuscript which is written by others including Skinner). The written and printed stories conform closely except for the alteration of "Mira-ora" to "Miro-ora" in the printed version. In what follows I have kept with the manuscript spelling.

This story relates to the struggle between the Te Atiawa and Taranaki tribes during the eighteenth century. About a generation earlier than the events described the Taranaki under Tu-whakairi-Kawa and Kahu-kura-makura heavily defeated the Te Atiawa, sweeping all before them as far as Pukearuhe (Smith, 1910: 210-217). A section of the Taranaki tribe known as Nga Potikitaua then remained in possession of Te Atiawa lands as far north as the Waiongana River.

After some years the Te Atiawa people were again strong enough to challenge Nga Potikitaua and they inflicted a defeat on the latter at Amaru, a pa on the right bank of Waiongana River. The Nga Potikitaua in their turn were now under pressure. The recovery of Te Atiawa lands as far as Nga Motu was finally achieved under Potaka.

A full account of the events that led to Potaka's taking of Te Ngahoro is given in Smith. It is sufficient here to relate that a combined force of Te Atiawa under Mira-ora and Potaka went by sea and land to attack the Nga Potikitaua beyond Nga Motu. Mira-ora is said to have lured the Nga Potikitaua fishing fleet out to sea and then bore down in his heavily manned war canoe to inflict great losses. At the same time Potaka came overland and attacked the several pa about Nga Motu which were occupied only by old people, women and children, the men having put to sea in the fishing fleet.

Potaka and his force then went on to Te Ngahoro which was apparently abandoned before their arrival. The Te Atiawa had been told that within the pa were the shin-bones of an ancestor, Ratanui, the recovery of these bones being an ostensible reason for the attack on the Nga Potikitaua. Smith quotes Skinner in this part of the story.

"The bones were found at (Te Ngahoro) hanging up in the roof of one of the houses. They were quite intact, nothing having been done with them in the way of making fish-hooks, needles, etc.,

the Ati-Awa having followed up their loss so quickly. The bones are said to have been discovered in a curious way - curious to us, but quite naturally to the Maoris. As Potaka or some of his family were searching the house, they heard a peculiar sound, a kind of humming noise, as if some one were singing over a tuning fork. Being a blood relation or descendant of Rata-nui's, Potaka at once understood what the noise meant, and advancing discovered the bones concealed in the roof of the house."

(Smith, 1910:242)

### Discussion

In the manner of much recorded Maori tradition it is difficult to establish dates for the events relating to Te Ngahoro for which we have these two stories. Smith suggests a post-1770 date for Potaka's exploit (see Smith, 1910:237 and 239) - although this is to a degree contradicted by the genealogy he gives of a subsequent event (Smith, 1910:244). The suggestion that Te Aokaikare's adventure occurred 150 years before 1896 indicates that this event may have taken place some 20-30 years before the recovery of Ratanui's bones.

From his note on Te Ngahoro, Skinner seems to indicate that, as Minarapa told the story, the Te Atiawa were in residence at Te Ngahoro when Urutira was killed. It is possible, however, that the pa was in fact held by the Nga Potikitaua. This is suggested by Skinner, presumably from the likelihood that the events recounted by Minarapa took place before the taking of the pa by Potaka, and because, while we have a record of the Nga Potikitaua of Taranaki holding Te Ngahoro, there is no record other than here of Te Atiawa ever living there. For what they are worth the suggested dates of the two events indicate that the Nga Mahanga people gained their revenge against the Nga Potikitaua, a related hapu within the Taranaki tribe. The thorough and bloody victory of Mira-ora and Potaka was part of a more fundamental conflict between the Te Atiawa people and their tribal neighbours, the Taranaki.

It may be suggested, then, that there are two levels of warfare involved in these two stories. The resolution of conflict between hapu of one tribe (here the Taranaki) was achieved by the killing of one person, singled out from among the opposition. In inter-tribal fighting, which in this case had a history of some generations and in which the winner gained the land itself, the enemy was both drastically reduced in numbers and thrown out of his home. In the Te Ngahoro stories the levels of warfare appear to coincide with inter-hapu and inter-tribal conflict.

Footnote

Te Ngahoro lies close to Port Taranaki in an area that is earmarked for industrial development. The recent unsuccessful BP proposal for a methanol industry involved using the property on which the pa is located for the plant. The site deserves careful protection for its historical importance, its landscape qualities (the sculptured hill is one of Taranaki's most visible historic sites), and as the major surviving Maori earthwork of the western outskirts of New Plymouth. It is to be hoped that planning for the future of the land will include preservation of Te Ngahoro as a high priority.

Acknowledgements

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THAMES LINTEL. At Mataiwhetu *marae*.



TE NGAHORO. Aerial view from the north.