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THE NGAI-TAHU MIGRATION: THE 'NORMAN
CONQUEST' OF THE SOUTH ISLAND

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Abstract

The Ngai-tahu migration is far more complex than has been commonly believed. A study of North and South Island traditions suggests that the eponymous ancestor of the Ngai-tahu might be a much more recent figure, Tahu-mutu, rather than the normally accepted Tahu-potiki. TAHU (potiki) may possibly even be the same figure as KAHU (ngunu). There appear to have been at least three movements into the South Island which may be referred to as the Ngai-tahu migration. The number of people actually involved in these movements was very small, and the main figures became overlords of the Ngati-mamoe. It is suggested that the Kai-tahu dialect is a misnomer, since it implies that it was spoken by recent North Island emigrants. The alternative name of Southern dialect is more appropriate.

It is commonly believed that "the vehicle for the spread of Classic Maori to Murihiku [in particular] may well have been the Ngai Tahu" (Golson, 1959:60). Individual artefact forms are sometimes identified with this movement of people. Duff for instance ascribed a fish-hook fragment with a somewhat questionable shank barb from the Pariwhakatau site to the Ngai-tahu, and claimed that this supports the hypothesis of an East Coast (North Island) derivation of Classic Maori in the South Island (Duff, 1961:287-8; see also Scarlett, 1960:5). The idea that fish-hooks of this type have their "widest distribution in the North Island, around the East Coast" (Hjarno, 1967:35), and that their

appearance in South Island sites heralds the Ngai-tahu influx, can be traced to a paper by Skinner (1942:218; see also 1959:237). Although little is known of its antiquity, most examples have been found in late archaeological contexts. Trotter's (1956) study of the type demonstrates that with the exception of the Wairarapa, there is a good correspondence between its distribution and the major areas for which Ngati-kahungunu and Ngai-tahu influences have been recorded. Hooks of this form occur at Mahia Peninsula and nearby Portland Island, at the mouth of Happy Valley near Wellington, at Paua Bay on Banks Peninsula, at Kaikoura, and at Murdering Beach. A few specimens are less securely located but are believed to come from the East Coast area (Trotter, 1956:251). None have been recorded in the Wairarapa itself.

There is little doubt that a series of events took place which might be referred to as the 'Ngai-tahu migration'; however, what is questionable is the extent of Wairarapa and East Coast involvement in these movements, for the traditions are less certain than many secondary sources suggest. In White's account of South Island traditions, for example, the link is clearly stated:

"The Nga-i-tahu, having firmly established themselves at Kaikoura, sent a canoe across the Strait back to Wai-rarapa to inform their friends of their success, with the request that others of the Nga-i-tahu should join them on the Middle Island, to enable them to conquer all the Middle Island tribes. To this request the Wai-rarapa people gladly responded" (White, 1887:309, see also 303).

"The Nga-i-tu-ahuriri again sent an invitation to their friends at Wai-rarapa, on the North Island, for aid, in response to which invitation another body of the Nga-i-tahu from Wai-rarapa crossed the Strait and took up their abode at O-takou" (White, 1887:311).

The validity of these comments is difficult to check since White welds together passages from published papers and Maori manuscript sources without clearly identifying the source of each section. In this particular case the information may derive from

"a valuable paper, 'Nga-ti-mamoe', by James Mackay, Esq., Native Commissioner" (White, 1887:iv). It is unfortunate that it was apparently never published, and the primary source therefore remains unknown. A similar statement made by Alexander Mackay, however, is open to closer scrutiny. Again, no reference is made to the informant:

"Shortly after the removal of some of the Ngaitahu from Kaiapoi to the West Coast, another section of their tribe arrived from Wairarapa, and located themselves at Otakou (Otago), and war was again resumed with the Ngatimamoe, with increased vigour" (Mackay, 1871:44).

It is important to note that Alexander Mackay's views on South Island traditional history diverge in some respects from earlier accounts against which they can be checked. More important, his use of published information involved modification of details and sequences to suit these views. This detracts from the acceptability of the passage as authentic tradition. A comparison of two additional passages reveals Mackay's attitude to his sources:

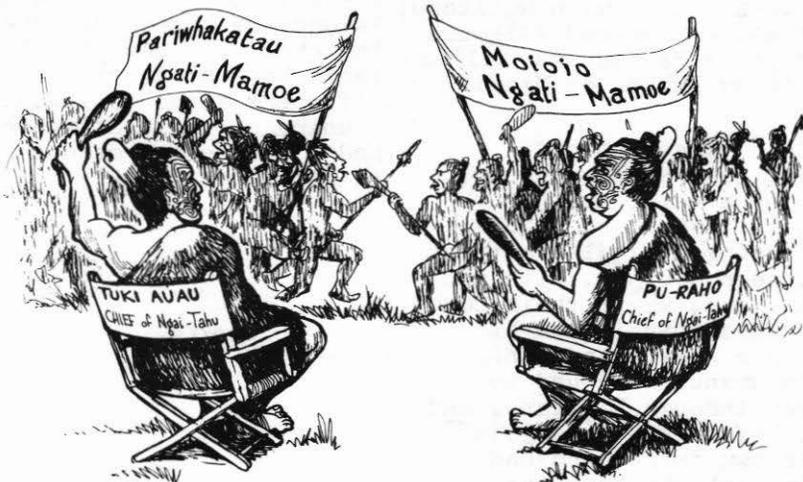


Figure 4: A Whimsical View of Early Ngai-tahu Warfare

From Shortland, 1851: 99-100

(Source stated as Tuhawaiki)

"The desire to possess themselves of the pounamu, which was only to be found on the Middle Island, seems to have been the chief inducement which urged large bodies of this tribe, at different times, to invade the country of Ngatimamoe, who had become celebrated as possessing this treasure.

The earliest of these inroads took place about two hundred and seventy years before the present; for Tuteahunga, a chief of this tribe, who lived nine generations back, is recorded to have been killed at Kaikoura. His family were styled Ngaitahu, from his grandfather, Tahu. Another family, called 'Te Aitanga-Kuri' (Progeny of Kuri), Kuri being a cousin of Tuteahunga, came over soon after, and united their force with Ngaitahu; but did not advance beyond Kaikoura, where their chief Manawa, was killed in a skirmish by Tuikau of Ngatimamoe.

About this time a powerful reinforcement from Ngatikahununu, was brought by a chief named Turakautahi, whose father and grandfather, in making a similar attempt before, had been drowned, with their crew, off Raukawa, where their canoe was upset. Turakautahi with his younger brother Moki, landed his forces at Totaranui; and had to fight his way through Ngaitara, and Te Huataki, before he could join those of his own tribe, who had preceded him, and who were then seated at Kaikoura."

From Mackay, 1871: 40-41

(Source not stated)

"About this time a powerful reinforcement was brought over from Terawiti by a chief named Turakautahi, whose father and grandfather, in making a similar attempt before, had been drowned with their crew, by the upsetting of their canoe off Raukawa (Cook's Strait). Turakautahi, with his younger brother Moko, landed his forces at Totaranui, Queen Charlotte Sound, and had to fight his way through Ngaitara and Te Huataki before he could join the Ngatikuri at Kaikoura..... the branch of the Ngatikahununu who located themselves in the Middle Island, were styled Ngaitahu, from their ancestor Tahu. The desire to possess themselves of the greenstone (pounamu), which was only to be found in the Middle Island, is supposed to have been the chief inducement which urged large bodies of this tribe at different times to invade the country of the Ngatimamoe, who had become celebrated as possessing the treasure."

These two passages are quoted in full because of their importance in the following discussion. There is clearly no doubt that Mackay was basically paraphrasing Shortland, but it is equally evident that he has changed certain details, and the order of events. For instance, Mackay claims that Turakautahi was from Terawiti (a locality in the western Wellington area), whereas Shortland's informant claimed he was a Ngati-kahungunu. The most important difference, however, is that Mackay has deleted the reference to the eponymous ancestor of Ngai-tahu as being the grandfather of Tuteahunga. This claim, made by Tuhawaiki to Shortland, differs from the more commonly accepted view that the ancestor Tahu lived many generations before. The latter Tahu, whose full name is rendered Tahu-potiki is generally regarded as belonging to "an early section of Ngati-kahungunu" (Adkin, 1959:8, see also White, 1887:293). This claim is not easy to reconcile with the genealogies which show consistently that Kahungunu (the founding ancestor of Ngati-kahungunu) lived at about the same time or even later than Tahu-potiki (see Figure 1). In fact Best (1901:120, 132) argues that Tahu-potiki, along with Paikea (variously given as his father or great grandfather), and Tamatea-Pokaiwhenua (the father of Kahungunu) were together in the Takitimu canoe. Buck, on the other hand, names Kahungunu as being in the canoe (1962:58).

It should be remembered that European rendition of Maori names can lead to some surprisingly different records, and too much can be read into slight differences. Kahungunu, for example, is variously referred to as Kahuhunu (Mackay, 1871:41), Kahuunuunu (White, 1887:197), or Kahununu (unu unu) (White, 1887:46), and Tahupotiki as Tahumatua (Mitchell, 1944:ii), and Taupotiki (Shortland, 1851:Table A). Bearing in mind the possible range of generation gaps as outlined by Roberton (1956), it seems likely that Tahu and Kahu were roughly contemporary, and the names could even be references to the same person, for T to K is a common Polynesian sound shift (Green, 1975: pers. comm.). This latter possibility is strengthened by a general lack of stories about a Tahu of this period, compared with the many accounts of the exploits of Kahu-ngunu. Whatever is the case, if the eponymous ancestor was Tahupotiki then the Ngai-tahu could not be a later

branch of the Ngati-kahungunu as is widely believed, and Tuhawaiki's claim that the Ngai-tahu are named after a much more recent Tahu also known as Tahu-mutu (Shortland, 1851:Table A), the grandfather of Tuteahunga, should be seriously considered.

The relevant kinship relationships for Tuhawaiki's claim are outlined in Figure 2, from which it can be seen that Raka-waka-kura had three sons, Tahu, Rakai-waka-ata, and Muruhou. The three lines of descent from these men are known in the South Island as the Ngai-tahu (sometimes referred to as Kai-tahu in the South Island), the Ngai-tuahuriri, and the Ngati-kuri respectively. The eponymous ancestor of the Ngati-kuri is Kuri, and his great grandson Manawa played an important part in the warfare with the Ngati-mamoe in the South Island. In North Island traditions, Manawa lived at Hataitai before moving to the South Island. The eponymous ancestor of the Ngai-tuahuriri is Tu-ahu-riri (qv Figure 3); and it is significant that in the South Island Tuhawaiki referred to the son, Turakautahi, as Ngati-kahungunu rather than Ngai-tahu (Shortland, 1851:100). White on the other hand appears to assume that the Nga-i-tu-ahuriri were Ngai-tahu (1887:310ff), although he applies the latter term far more widely than other writers. If the eponymous figure of the Ngai-tahu were the much earlier Tahu-potiki (as shown in Figure 2) then the three lines of issue would all be described as Ngai-tahu. The fact that Turakautahi is designated Ngati-kahungunu strengthens the suggestion that these three lineages were not Ngai-tahu beyond Rakawakakura, but were Ngati-kahungunu. It must be remembered, however, that the circumstances of recording lineages greatly influences which ancestor is emphasized, particularly when early land claims were being made; White notes (1887:289), for example, that Kuri also traced descent from Ngati-ruanui.

On the whole, there would appear some grounds for suggesting that a branch of the Ngati-kahungunu, at about the time of Rakawakakura, split up into three hapu which later gained tribal or sub-tribal status, known as Ngai-tahu, Ngai-tuahuriri, and Ngati-kuri, although this suggestion does not preclude

the existance of an earlier character Tahu-potiki. A story recorded by White (informant not specified) reinforces the later origin of the Ngai-Tahu:

"It was only in the generation of men after the time of Kahu-ngunu and Tahu-potiki that their descendants began to separate, and some came to this, the Wai-pouamu (South Island). There were two reasons for these people separating - one was on account of a woman and the other was on account of a dog; and it was on account of the quarrel about this dog that part of the Nga-i-tahu-potiki left the main tribe and came to the South Island; and these were ever after called Nga-ti-kuri (the descendants of the dog). And those of the Kahu-ngunu who left the main tribe were called Tu-te-kawa" (White, 1887:178).

It has been shown that Tuhawaiki's account is reliable where it is possible to check. His version of the basic chronology of the so-called 'Ngai-tahu migration' is borne out by the kinship links illustrated in Figures 2 and 3. Tuhawaiki suggested (qv Shortland, 1851:99-100) that there were actually three migrations: the first headed by Tuteahunga (the Ngai-tahu) from Hataitai, the second by Manawa (the Ngati-kuri) also from Hataitai, and a third by Turakautahi (the Ngai-tuahuriri, a branch of Ngati-kahungunu) from the Wairarapa, probably Palliser Bay. Shortland (1844:123) names Turanga as the point of origin of Turakautahi, which could either be Turanga-nui-a-rua in Poverty Bay, or the Turanga-nui area in Palliser Bay. The fact that his father was resident in Palliser Bay according to White (White, 1887:200), suggests that the latter is more likely.

Various authors have attempted to date the Ngai-tahu migration. Duff (1961:270) believes it started about 1602 A.D. Shortland (1851:82) records that Tuhawaiki's son, Topi-kihau, was 14 in 1844, which if used as a datum, would have Tuteahunga born about 1605 A.D. (using 25 years per generation). The three southward movements then may have taken place at about 1635 A.D., 1685 A.D., and 1710 A.D.

Finally the relationship between the southern dialect and the Ngai-tahu should be examined. Shortland recorded a basic vocabulary of the 'Kaitahu dialect' (1851:305ff), and Skinner later commented in 1921:

"In vocabulary the Southern dialect has many words that are rare or unknown in the North, ... It is to be noted that the phonetic differences between Northern and Southern Maori appear to be greater than the phonetic differences between Northern Maori and the dialect of Easter Island" (Skinner, 1974: 20).

Opinions vary on the magnitude of the linguistic differences, nevertheless the idea of a well marked dialect in the south is still favoured. There has been little systematic study of New Zealand dialects, but it is important to note that there is little if any suggestion of a close link between the East Coast and Ngai-tahu dialects; in fact the contrary might be argued (see for example comments by Green, 1966: 28, 32). This situation does not accord with the suggested relatively recent separation of the Ngai-tahu from Ngati-kahungunu, and some explanation is necessary.

In contrast to this apparent linguistic gulf between the East Coast and Kaitahu dialects is the view of one of the informants quoted by White:

"You, the Nga-ti-kahu-ngunu, must not believe that you speak a different language from that which is spoken by us, the Nga-ti-tahu-potiki. No; but our languages are the same, and the two men from which each of our tribes had their origin spoke the same language and lived at the same place. Kahu-ngunu ... and Tahu-potiki ... lived in the districts called Turanga-nui-a-rua ... and Te-poroporo-ki-hua-riki ..., and it is that locality where the cultivation of our ancestor Ue-roa ... is situated, which we call Tuara-haua" (White, 1887:177-8).

The key to this problem may lie in the number of people involved in this Ngai-tahu movement. The commonly held view is that "the Ngai Tahu seem to have been greater in number than the Ngati Mamoe, and gradually forced the latter back from one pa to another, southward" (Scarlett, 1960:2-3). This belief, however, may be invalid. The only numbers recorded in the traditions refer to 70 followers of Tu-ahu-riri who accompanied him on one southward expedition, and the 170 who participated in a later movement (White, 1887: 200, 201); the same traditions suggest that most of these actually returned to Palliser Bay. It is also recorded that the Ngai-tahu chiefs became overlords of the Ngati-mamoe rather than of their own people: for example, the two Ngai-tahu cousins Apoka and Tute-ure-tira were chosen by Ngati-mamoe as their leaders (Mackay, 1871:41; White, 1887:239). On some occasions these groups were considered Ngai-tahu, and on others, particularly during warfare, Ngati-mamoe (see for example Mackay, 1871:42). In short, while large numbers of people may have been involved in the internecine battles, on many occasions it may have been Ngati-mamoe pitted against Ngati-mamoe encouraged by a few Ngai-tahu leaders (see Figure 4).

Another relevant factor is discussed by Shortland as follows:

"Thus the two races [Ngai-tahu and Ngati-mamoe] became incorporated into one tribe, which, as most of their principal families had in their veins the blood of Tahu, was generally called Ngaitahu, or Kaitahu.

I found that all the families of the present day, of any consideration, traced their origin to the Turanga, or Poverty Bay sources - as being the conquering side, and therefore the more honourable - and neglected altogether the Ngatimamoe sources, beyond the time of their conquest" (Shortland, 1851:102, emphasis mine).

It is therefore suggested that as with the Norman Conquest of Britain only a relatively small number of people may have been involved in the 'Ngai-tahu migration'. While the newcomers were instrumental in the cultural upheavals of the 18th century, and may indeed have

spread certain aspects of what we call 'Classic Maori' culture to the South Island, they appear to have had little influence on the language spoken by the conquered tribe. In short, what is known as the Kai-tahu dialect is more aptly referred to by its alternative name of southern dialect.

This suggestion, however, does not really resolve the problem, because the implication - that the dialect was the native tongue of the Ngati-mamoe - is not without its pitfalls. It is well known that the Ngati-mamoe were themselves relatively recent North Island emigrants. This dilemma was touched upon by Helen Leach in a paper to the N.Z.A.A. Conference in 1977, and she intends to publish an extensive review of the problem in the near future.

In this brief survey of the traditional background testifying to a Ngai-tahu migration to the South Island it has become clear that with the exception of Tu-ahuriri and his followers who probably lived in Palliser Bay, little direct contact is indicated in tradition between the Wairarapa and the South Island people at the beginning of the 18th century. While the invaders traced their tribal affiliations to the Ngati-kahungunu, as did the people of the Wairarapa, their traditional connections are in fact indirect, and probably rather more ancient. It would appear that the main impetus for any changes in the South Island which may be attributed to the Ngai-tahu are more directly traced to Hataitai on the shores of Wellington Harbour in the 17th century.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Genealogy adapted from Mitchell (1944:ii, vi).
2. Paikea was one of the principal men on the Takitimu canoe (Best, 1901:120, 132).
3. Rua-wharo was one of the priests on the Takitimu (Buck, 1962:58).
4. Tahu-potiki is widely claimed to be the eponymous ancestor of the Ngai-tahu, and is claimed to have been on the Takitimu (Best, 1901:120, 132).
5. Tamatea-ariki-nui was the chief man on the Takitimu (Mitchell, 1944:Gen. 2; Buck, 1962:58).
6. Kahungunu is the eponymous ancestor of the Ngati-kahungunu and was on the Takitimu canoe (Buck, 1962:58).
7. Most of the information for this was extracted from Shortland (1851).
8. Also known as Taupotiki (Shortland, 1851:Table A).
9. Also known as Tahumutu (ibid.). Tuhawaiki claims this man to have been the eponymous ancestor of the Ngaitahu (Shortland 1851:99).
10. Killed at Kaikoura (ibid.:Table A).
11. Killed at Kaikoura (ibid.).
12. Died at Kaikoura (ibid.).
13. Died at Kaikoura (ibid.).
14. Died at Lake Ellesmere (ibid.).
15. Died at Timaru after being paid for Otakou (ibid.).
16. Chief person at Otakou (ibid.).

17. See Figure 3 for further details.
18. The eponymous ancestor of the Ngati-kuri (ibid.:99).
19. The principal chief of Te Aitanga Kuri, and known to have lived at Hataitai in Wellington before migrating southwards (White, 1887:204).
20. Is also claimed to be the direct ancestor of Karetai (Shortland, 1851:Table A).
21. This genealogy is a combination of information from several sources. The central eight figures from Rakaiwakaata to Turakautahi were recounted to Shortland by Tuhawaiki (Shortland, 1851:Table G); the rest are taken from North Island information recorded in White (1887:180ff etc.). The overlap between the two sources involves the five characters below Te Hauiko-raki. The circumstances of the birth of Tuahuriri and his mother and legitimate father are recorded by White (1887:197ff). Ra-kai-te-kura's father is given as Tama-ihu-pora by Best (1901:140).
22. Also known as Te-au-hiku-raki (rangi) (White, 1887:198) and Ahu-ku-rangi (ibid.:180). According to White (ibid.:198) Tu-marō, who was descended from Kahu-kura-te-paku, married Ra-kai-te-kura, who was seven generations removed from Tahu-potiki. In Tu-marō's absence from Hataitai in Wellington Ahu-ku-rangi took Ra-kai-te-kura as a lover; and their offspring, Tu-ahu-riri, was therefore the illegitimate son of Tu-marō.
23. Tuahuriri or Tu-ahu-riri, also known as Te-hiku-tawa-tawa-o-te-raki (White, 1887:201) as well as & Tuahu and Tahu (Best, 1901:141) is well known in North Island traditions. Upon reaching manhood
24. he shifted from Hataitai to the south-east coast of the North Island (presumably in or about Palliser Bay) and established a famous pa called Te-mata-kikai-poika. Some time later he crossed Cook Strait searching for his father, whom he believed to be Tu-marō, and after a series of events (described by White, 1887:200ff) he returned to his pa with his classificatory grandfather, Kahu-kura-te-paku. A famous battle then occurred at this pa and most of Tu-ahu-riri's

followers were killed. The North Island tradition states that his enemies were drowned in Cook Strait upon leaving the pa; the South Island version (Shortland, 1851:100), however, claims it was the father and grandfather of Turakautahi who were drowned in Cook Strait (i mate ki Raukawa), and this probably refers to Tu-ahu-riri and his classificatory grandfather, Kahu-kura-te-paku. Tu-ahu-riri is variously said to have had wives named Hine-to-wai (White, 1887:181), and Hine (or Hina)-kai-taki (ibid.:212) or Hine-kahitangi (Best, 1901:142) and Tuara-whatu (White, 1887:212; Best, 1901:142). His progeny are better known in South Island traditions, but occur in North Island stories also. Moki, one of his sons, is known to have died at Kaikoura.

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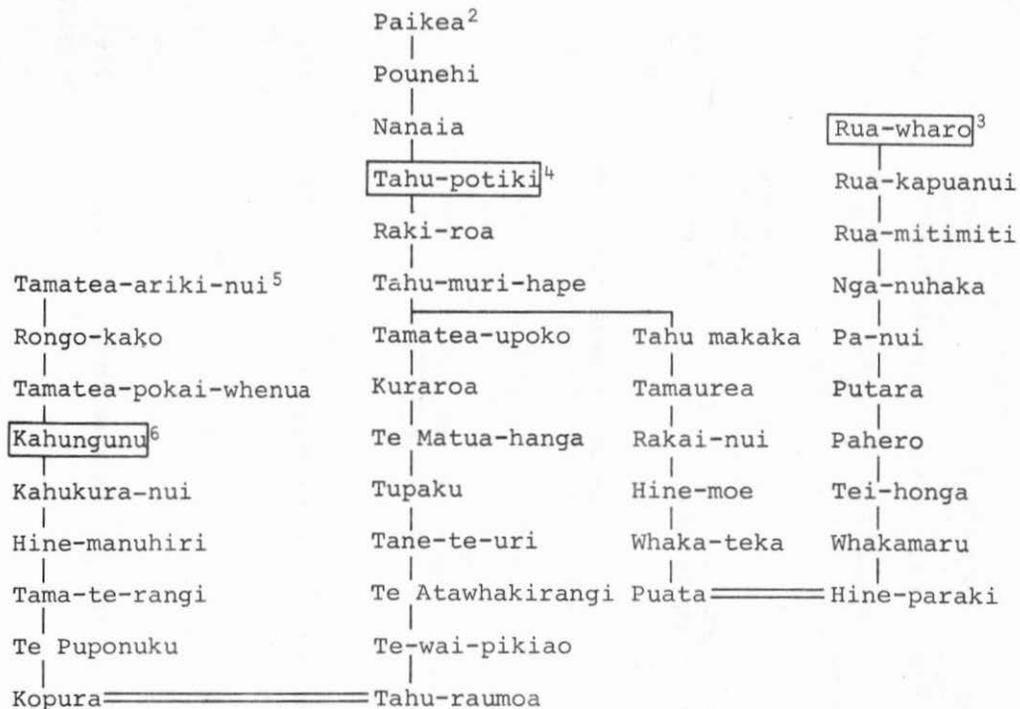
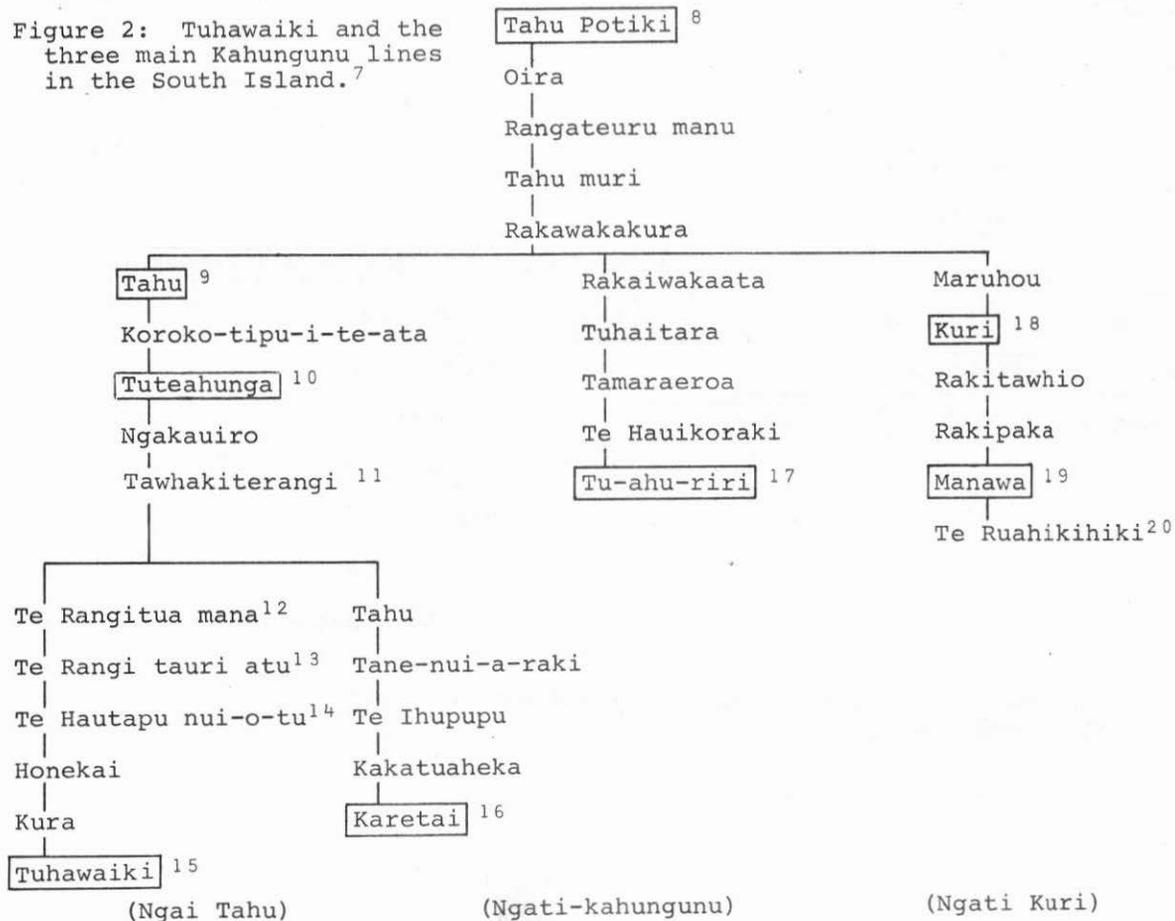


Figure 1: Genealogy of Kahungunu and Tahu-Potiki.¹

Figure 2: Tuhawaiki and the three main Kahungunu lines in the South Island.⁷



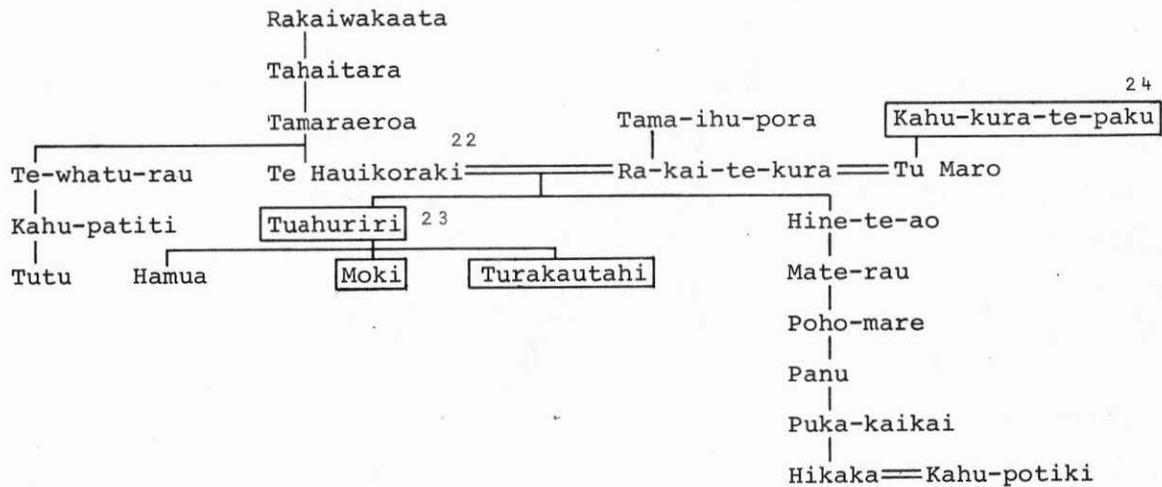


Figure 3: The Wairarapa Branch of the Ngati-kahungunu in the South Island.²¹