



NEW ZEALAND  
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**NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER**



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THE TAMAKI PORTAGES by G.M.Fowlds.

Both east and west of the isthmus on which the widespread city of Auckland now stands, the waters of the Waitemata and the Manukau come within a quarter of a mile of each other. It has been stated that canal reservations were made at these two points, but there is certainly still one at Otahuhu, because the local authorities have been trying for some time to get hold of it and build houses. But the Lands Dept., has strongly opposed this step and just recently it was reported that a tablet marking the route has been erected and it is likely that the National Historic Places Trust may erect plaques at the other three sites. In any case there are Portage Roads at Otahuhu and at New Lynn alongside the upper Whau Stream.

For many generations, the old-time Maoris used these various routes to drag their large and small canoes overland from sea to sea. The routes made use of in this way were up the Tamaki estuary and over the narrow isthmus past Otahuhu to the Manukau, across the Manukau Harbour to Waiuka and via two alternative routes thence down the Awaroa Stream to the Waikato River; to the Whau Stream near Avondale and over a narrow saddle at Green Bay to the Manukau Harbour; and finally from Riverhead to a stream running into the Kaipara Harbour near Eulensville. The Rev. Samuel Marsden was probably the first European to see the last named route about 1820. In a land where roads did not exist and no horses were available, to avoid cutting tracks through heavy bush, the Maori perforce made use of waterways wherever he could. Many of the early passages over these portages figure in the legendary lore of the pre-European people.

Arrival of the Fleet

According to Maori tradition, the first canoes to make the traverse ( earlier records not being available ) up the Tamaki estuary and over the isthmus at Otahuhu into the Manukau, were three famous canoes of the well-known migration party of 1350 A.D. The first canoe was the Tokomaru, and, sailing in company with it were the Aotea and the Tainui, which was captained by Turi. Because of their length, and the narrow winding nature of the upper stream, the transfer gave trouble, requiring the cutting off of some of the corners. Thereafter they went down the west coast as far as Mokau, but later returned to Aotea harbour, which took its name from one of the canoes. Eventually, the Tainui was beached at Kawhia, and to this day, two pohutukawa trees are pointed out as marking the bow and stern-post where the canoe was buried. About 1400, Turi's

son, Turanga-i-mua, becoming dissatisfied with Taranaki, set out with a war party to move back to the Hauraki gulf and thus must have crossed over one of the portages again.

### The Tamaki Portage

It would appear from all accounts that the Tamaki-Otahuhu isthmus was the route most used, and naturally the hill forts overlooking this waterway, occupied strategic positions. As Dr. Hocken says, "It is almost an epitome of the history of New Zealand during many years, for this was the highway of the armies of the tribes in the old days." On many occasions from the watch-towers of their elevated citadels, must have gone forth the cries of the sentries warning of the approach of a tauu or war party. On the Waitomata side opposite the entrance to the Tamaki estuary was Brown's Island, or Motukorea, whose cratered cone had obviously been fortified as had the West Tamaki Headland, where there was Taurere Pa which figures frequently in later history. There were also extensive defensive earthworks of the East Tamaki Head now known as Musick Point. Past Buckland's Beach stands the pretty tree-topped hill of Pigeon Mountain, but the most prominent bastion in the area was Mt. Wellington at Panmure, whose Maori name, Maungarei, was particularly apt. It means "hill of the ever watchful" and its military significance is continued by its present name of the Iron Duke. It was from this eminence that the Rev. Samuel Marsden and the Rev. J. Butler caught their first glimpse of the Manukau Harbour in 1820. Just where the Panmure Basin empties into the Tamaki Estuary were two villages which suffered heavily in the last great fights during the Nga Puhi raid of 1821. One was at Mokoia, on the northern headland leading into the basin where the new bridge is now being built across to the Pakuranga side; the other was Manuinaina, meaning "caught basking in the sun", thus recording a surprise attack by an earlier war party. Again, more directly overlooking the head of the estuary was McLennan Hill, known as Apunga-a-Tainui, apparently commemorating the passage of the famous canoe of the Great Fleet.

Then there is the extensive series of explosive craters and cone of Mt. Richmond, alongside the portage track, which earlier had a name, Tahuhunui, and also O-Tahuhu, the personal name of one of the chieftains of the party of 1350, from which the name of the town is derived.

Proceeding down the Manukau Harbour on the southern side, was the outstanding stronghold of Mangere Mountain, and nearby was the tripled peak of Puketutu Island. This is claimed to have been occupied by people who were here before the Maori came and they left a most extensive series of gardens and stone walls. Its many attractions had earned for it the pleasant title of Motu-o-Hiroa, "island of the long-wished for, or desired". As well as providing passage for parties going to war or following peaceful pursuits, these short-outs enabled ready access to rich supplies of fish and shellfish in either harbour without venturing into the open sea. It would be realised that even the transfer of medium-sized canoes over these relatively narrow necks of land would have required a large muster of man-power and possibly even of woman-power. It is probable that in addition to the attachment of ropes, rollers made from small trees would also be used to carry out these operations.

#### Coming of the European

So far as we know (though there are hazy reports of run-away sailors) as mentioned earlier, the first Europeans to see the Waitemata and to cross the upper reaches to the Kaipara, were the Rev's Samuel Marsden and J. Butler in 1820, who also in company with the chief Kawau explored the Manukau. Following him about three weeks later, was Captain Cruise in the Prince Regent to make the first survey of the harbour approaches. Then, in 1827, the French navigator, D'Urville climbed Mt. Victoria and like Balboa on the isthmus of Darien, may have caught sight of the ocean on the other side of the island. One of his lieutenants rowed up the Tamaki estuary, and in 55 minutes crossed over the land to the shores of the Manukau. Possibly one of the next parties to make the traverse over this portage was that of Dr. J.L. Campbell and his partner, Mr. W. Brown, on their way to buy eggs from the chief Kawau for Brown's Island. It was the sight of the chief handling large quantities of gold sovereigns, that confirmed the news of the purchase of the site of Auckland by the emissaries of Captain Hobson. The most recent use of the Waikato-Waiuku portage, was by a flotilla of canoes built by a group of boy scouts from the Waikato on the way to the Pacific Jamboree at One Tree Hill in December, 195

Since the settlement of Auckland over a century or more ago, many yachts and launches have been transferred from one harbour to the other, but these have been moved by horse trucks or motor lorries. The unique situation of the present site of this growing metropolis has attracted the largest number of Pakehas in the Dominion, just as it for so long had exercised such a fatal fascination for the Maori tribes. Truly, "Tamaki the spouse contested for by the hundred lovers."



# THE TAMAKI ISTHMUS

## THE LOCATION AND EXTENT OF SETTLEMENT

Portages marked by a dotted line thus ---

