

# The WAIOEKA Journey

*Te Awa a Tamatea*



WHITE ISLAND

EAST CAPE

NORTH TO OPOTIKI

OPOTIKI

WAIOEKA Gorge Scenic Reserve



TAURANGA VALLEY ②

GOLDSMITHS ③

OPONAE ④

MONUMENT ⑤

MANGANUKU ⑥

GISBORNE

OPATO ⑦

SOUTH TO GISBORNE

AUCKLAND

MAHIA

WELLINGTON

CHRISTCHURCH



PLEASE DRIVE WITH CARE

The WAIOEKA Journey  
*Te Awa a Tamatea*

# The WAIOEKA Journey

## *Te Awa a Tamatea*

The Waioeka Journey – *Te Awa a Tamatea* is situated on State Highway 2 between Opotiki and Gisborne. The highway follows a route carved by rivers through the steep forested hills of the Waioeka Gorge Scenic Reserve.

This beautiful area has challenged people since early Maori travelled and lived in the gorge. In recent years the challenge of travelling in the gorge has resulted in high numbers of road accidents.

'The Waioeka Journey – *Te Awa a Tamatea*', is a multi-agency project aimed at increasing road safety, providing rest stops where drivers can take a break and discover some of the stories of the gorge. The two main agencies involved have been the NZ Transport Agency and the Department of Conservation. They have worked in conjunction with NZ Police, Environment Bay of Plenty, Accident Compensation Corporation, Opotiki and Gisborne District Councils, NZ Fire Service and local iwi, Ngati Ira o Waioweka and Te Aitanga a Mahaki.

Since 2004, a combination of engineering improvements, signage upgrades, enhanced police enforcement and education initiatives, including 'Drive Reviver' campaigns, have been instigated to improve driver safety.

Seven rest areas have been established at sites through the gorge to encourage travellers to stop, rest and reduce driver fatigue, a significant contributor to Waioeka vehicle accidents. Information panels at each site tell of the history, culture, geology, and ecology of the gorge.

In this booklet you will find edited versions of the 18 information panels in 'The Waioeka Journey – *Te Awa a Tamatea*'. Stories of this area show it is not a place to be taken for granted, but has hidden depths that will delight and challenge people for generations to come.







# The WAIOEKA Journey

## *Te Awa a Tamatea*

**Kia ora and welcome to the Waioeka Gorge... beautiful, evocative, with many stories to tell.**

There is more than one name for the gorge. For some this area is known as Waioweka, but at present the official name is Waioeka.

On this journey – at Tauranga, Goldsmiths, Oponae, The Monument, Manganuku, Opatu and at Matahanea, you can discover stories about this unique place.

Some of these originate with Tamatea, legendary navigator and explorer. Tamatea journeyed here leaving a legacy of tales and place-names. They include Te Rotonui Awai, a small lake created by the footprint of Tamatea, “a place where eels with many tails are to be found”. He is said to have stamped his feet, creating a pool of water which he used to quench the thirst of his daughter.

The gorge cuts through ranges of steep-sided hills rising from 400 metres near the coast to 1000 metres inland. The hard yet brittle greywacke has been showered with volcanic ash and pumice over thousands of years. Vegetation includes canopies of tawa, rimu, miro, totara and nikau palms, together with cover of fern, manuka and kanuka.

By the late 20th century, the government progressively added retired farmland to the Waioeka Gorge Scenic Reserve to protect water catchments. Regenerating bush helped reduce erosion, improve water quality and protect the Opotiki plains from flooding. Today, anglers, kayakers, trampers, hunters and walkers appreciate the recreational opportunities of the area.

The land is steep, the soil poor – a hard going place for the early settlers and travellers. A place with tales of hardship, ingenuity and adaptation – and the response of the landscape to the impact of man.





# Ngāti Ira

*“MATAHANEA: MATA (FACE) – HA (BREATH) NEA (REFERRING TO TAWHIRIMATEA THE GOD OF WINDS AND STORMS)*

*You are travelling through the traditional lands of Ngāti Ira o Waioweka. The ancestors of Ngāti Ira migrated to Aotearoa on the waka Tuwhenua. Their first major settlement was at Wairata where the Waioweka River enters the gorge. Five pa (fortified settlement) sites are still visible there.*

*Later the waka Mata-atua brought settlers, Ruiho, Ruake, Manu, Weka, Toroa. Following on from Toroa came Wairaka and Tamatea ki te Huatabi. It is from the tipuna (ancestor) Weka that Ngāti Ira o Waioweka derives its name.*

*Ngāti Ira settled on the Waioweka flats and built pa on nearby hills. Behind the hill to your left is Matahanea Pa, an important site for Ngāti Ira. Sea shells can still be seen there from after kai (meals). Matahanea can be seen from approximately half a kilometre past Te Aroaro bridge.*

*The traditional boundaries of Ngāti Ira o Waioweka extend from Waitangi (the Opotiki Cemetery) to the boundaries of Turanganui. Land from Waitangi to Matahanea was taken by the Crown in the 1860s. Further land was confiscated from Matahanea to Turanganui by the Crown under the 1873 Settlement Act.*

*Ngāti Ira remain today on remnants of those confiscations around Opeke Marae at the mouth of the Waioweka Gorge.”*

HONE KAMETA - Ngāti Ira o Waioweka



*“TAURANGA: TAU (ARRIVE) RANGA (ALIGHT)*

*A recognised landing and resting place of waka on the Waioweka River.*

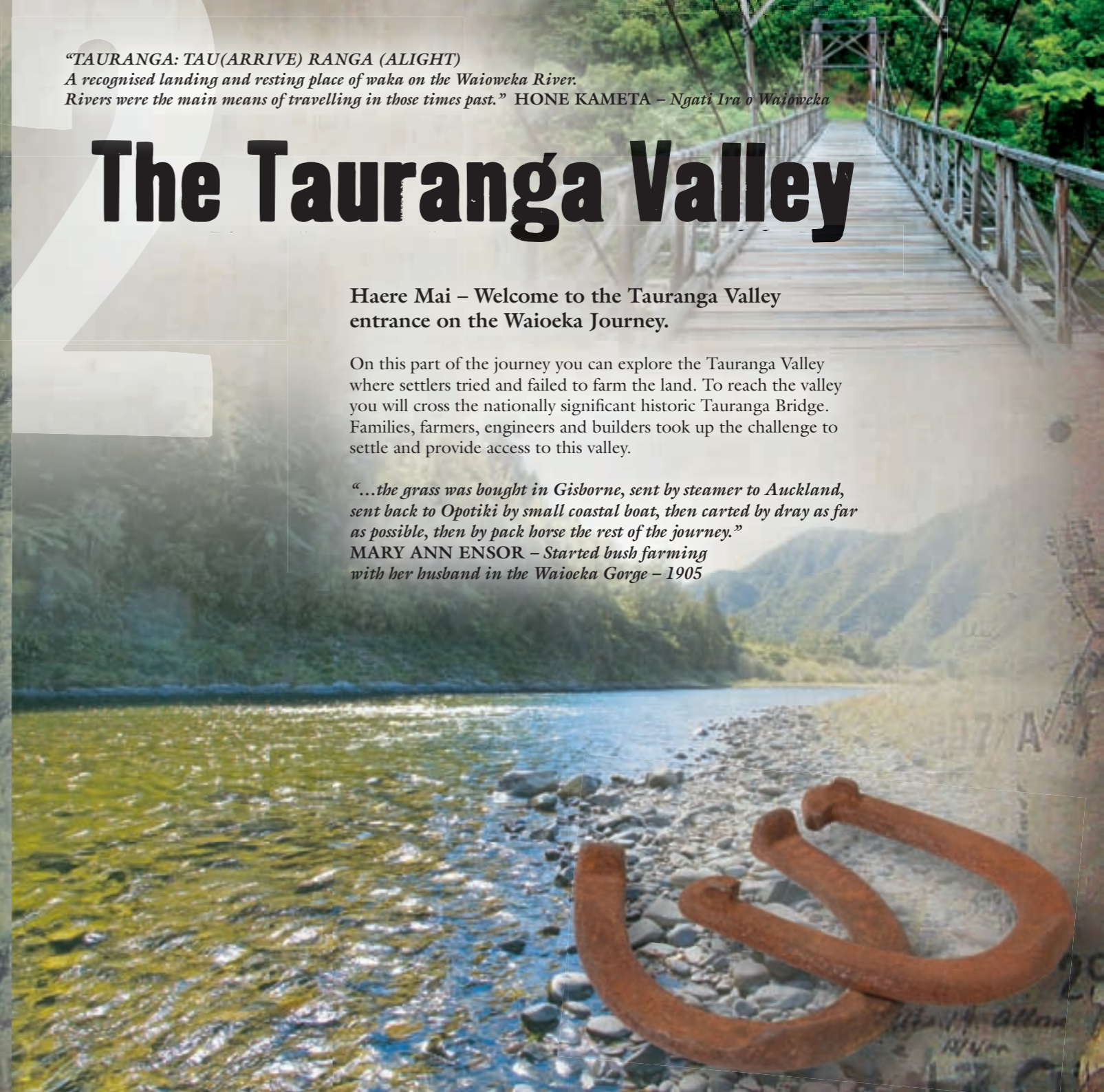
*Rivers were the main means of travelling in those times past.” HONE KAMETA – Ngāti Ira o Waioweka*

# The Tauranga Valley

**Haere Mai – Welcome to the Tauranga Valley entrance on the Waioeka Journey.**

On this part of the journey you can explore the Tauranga Valley where settlers tried and failed to farm the land. To reach the valley you will cross the nationally significant historic Tauranga Bridge. Families, farmers, engineers and builders took up the challenge to settle and provide access to this valley.

*“...the grass was bought in Gisborne, sent by steamer to Auckland, sent back to Opotiki by small coastal boat, then carted by dray as far as possible, then by pack horse the rest of the journey.”*  
MARY ANN ENSOR – Started bush farming with her husband in the Waioeka Gorge – 1905





“...the sad part of our life was seeing a number of men carried out through bush felling accidents; some would be badly smashed about while others would be dead.” MARY ANN ENSOR – Started bush farming with her husband in the Waioeka Gorge – 1905

# Bush Farming the WAIOEKA

## CLEARING THE LAND

European settlement of the Waioeka Gorge began in the 1880s with some land allocated for stock and education reserves. Settlement intensified in the early 1900s. In 1907 there were 400 applications for a 700 acre (238 hectare) block at Oponae. The main challenge was access. Gangs of workers were contracted to clear the bush with concerns raised about the effect bush clearance would have on the steep hillsides.

## SETTLING IN

The first dwellings were rough whare of pitsawn timber and corrugated iron, some later replaced by more substantial homes. As settlements grew, shops opened at Matahanea and Oponae and a telephone connection was established. In the early 1920s a half time school was established between Oponae and Wairata.

## THE CHALLENGE OF THE LAND

Stock needed to be fed. This proved a big challenge as the soil was not fertile enough to maintain vigorous grass growth. Much of the land reverted to fern, bidibidi and wineberry. Properties were lost in mortgagee sales, others simply abandoned.

Families who settled in this area included the Beaufoys, Hamiltons and Lamberts. They all took up leases in 1906 with the Beaufoys and Lamberts leaving in 1927. These early settlers had a dream but in hindsight it is clear that some land is not meant to be farmed. Their leases were incorporated in to what is now the Waioeka Gorge Scenic Reserve.



“...the old suspension bridge was carried away by flood in 1918. Since then the settlers have been battling with this river and a brute of a crossing.” ALICK TRAFFORD – Waioeka farmer – 1921

# The Tauranga Bridge

The Tauranga Bridge stands as a monument to the commitment of settlers determined to make a living off the land of the Waioeka. They shared a sense of optimism and hope, believing they could “make a go” of farming this inhospitable place.

## THE CHALLENGE OF ACCESS

River crossings were difficult and often treacherous, hence the need for a bridge to link the farms of the Tauranga Valley with the outside world. The Tauranga Bridge is the second to cross the Waioeka at this point, the first being destroyed by flood in April 1918.

After the destruction of the first bridge a cable crossing was used while decisions were made about a replacement. The second bridge was designed by the Public Works Department and built by Percy Kerr, probably in 1922.

## THE BRIDGE

The Tauranga Bridge is a single span multiple rope or harp suspension bridge spanning approximately 60 metres. It is one of only two remaining of its type in New Zealand. It is of national significance for its rarity of design and aesthetic quality, and is listed as a Category 1 Historic Place with the New Zealand Historic Places Trust.

The Tauranga Bridge fell into disrepair and became dangerous. A conservation project was initiated by the Department of Conservation and the bridge was officially reopened in 1995.

DOC manages ongoing conservation of the bridge with financial support from the Environment Bay of Plenty Environmental Enhancement Fund.





# Goldsmiths

*A 21st century visitor to Waioeka once commented to a DOC worker, "This place is beautiful – so who planted all these trees?"*

The answer, for most of the native trees, is nobody. The primary forest was here long before people arrived in Aotearoa. The younger native trees in areas of secondary forest have filled gaps created by slips or land clearance for farms that were later abandoned.

Introduced plants (including pine plantations and old fruit and ornamental trees from abandoned settlements), were planted by landowners, such as the Goldsmiths who once farmed in this area. Some introduced plants have had their seeds spread by wind, water and birds and are now weeds.

## A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Native forests constantly change in response to environmental pressures. Kamahi once dominated the primary forest of the gorge, but the species is disappearing because it is a favourite food for possums. Tawa is now prevalent.

If land isn't constantly kept clear, "colonising species" such as fern, manuka and kanuka re-emerge. The settlers who tried to farm this land hated fern. Its appearance in paddocks was a reminder that in this place, maintaining pasture was hard work. After farms were abandoned, the native forest gradually returned.

# The Stock Paddock

Here young rewarewa trees are emerging from the broadleaf vegetation dominated by putaputaweta and tree-ferns (mamaku and wheki). This creates a texture of different colours and shapes. Eventually the larger trees will overshadow the secondary (new growth) vegetation.

Native vegetation has a harder time establishing on the fertile flats and lower slopes where pasture grasses persist. Higher up, secondary (new growth) natives have taken hold. Notice the primary (old growth) trees growing along the top ridge.

## Goldsmiths

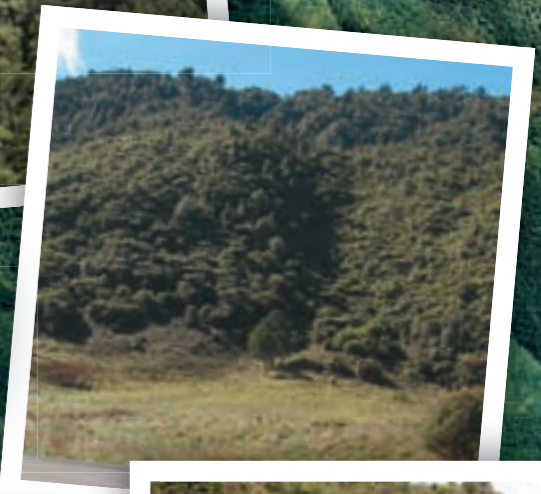
In the past, this hillside was kept clear and used as farmland. Today, colonising native shrubs like manuka and tree-ferns such as mamaku, wheki and silver fern, have started the regeneration process.

This slope, burnt in 2006, provides an example of recently cleared land where the re-vegetation process has just begun. In 2008, when this photo was taken, the area was dominated by early colonisers like bracken fern and native shrubs like manuka.



*Drovers in the Waioeka, 1910.*

*For most of the 20th century, droving was the only way to get stock through the gorge. In the 1980s, fenced paddocks (like the area across the road from this site) were set aside to provide grazing and protect the bush from roaming stock. Truck transport of stock made the paddocks redundant. These days, natural re-vegetation is slowed by competition from weeds and browsing by pest animals so volunteers have helped the process by planting native trees in the old paddocks.*





*“TE MATAARA O NGA WAI RERE RUA: TE MATAARA (LOOKOUT) O NGA WAI RERE (WATERFALL) RUA (TWO) This place can be found downstream on the other side of the river between two waterfalls. It was used as a sentinel lookout to report on people moving up and down the river.” HONE KAMETA - Ngati Ira o Waioweka*

# Toitu Te Whenua

In the early 20th century, large parts of the Waioweka Gorge were cleared and burnt and replaced by pastoral grassland. The farms were later abandoned and native bush gradually returned. Secondary (new growth) native vegetation can now be recognised by its lighter colour and finer texture. Primary (old growth) forests have a darker colour and coarser texture.



Most of this steep south-facing slope is primary (old growth) native forest that has never been cleared. The main tree species is tawa. Notice the darker forest forming narrow strips on two spurs (secondary ridges).



The narrow strips of darker forest are podocarps (conifers) rimu and miro, believed to have established on steep spurs burnt about 400 years ago. The spurs may have been burnt to provide access to and visibility from the high vantage points on the main ridge. The ridge is Te Tii, and commands a clear view of the valley.

Trees give us clues about whether land was cleared recently or long ago. The diagonal band of taller trees running through the centre of this photo is mostly rewarewa. It is much older than the new growth broadleaf scrub in the foreground.

*“...we found very large quantities of food planted here, some 5 acres of taro, and many acres of maize. It is the largest native plantation I remember to have seen.” COLONEL THOMAS PORTER - Diary 1870*

# Oponae THE FOOD BASKET...

There are many places associated with Tamatea, ancestor of Ngati Ira. They include Te Karoro a Tamatea (the seagull of Tamatea) – a massive white rock 200 metres upstream from here which was blasted in an effort to improve water flow. It is said the rock was the most inland point that seagulls would visit. Further downstream we come to Te Heru a Tamatea (the comb of Tamatea) – a large rock in the shape of a ladder.

## NGATI IRA

The Waioweka has been occupied by Ngati Ira for hundreds of years. Many pa sites have been identified, including a number near the entrance to the gorge.

In the 1860s, Ngati Ira settled near here at Maraetai Pa under the leadership of Hira Te Popo. They had been attacked by government troops at a number of pa sites nearer Opotiki. Oponae's strategic location provided both security and an abundant food supply. They remained here for five years, emerging in 1870 to settle at Opeke Marae at the Opotiki entrance to the gorge.



In the 20th century local iwi were heavily involved in the construction and maintenance of the road through the gorge. Many lived in this area in Ministry of Works huts, with children gathering fruit from trees that were planted in the 1860s.

*“Ponae means food basket, Oponae means your food basket. A natural habitat for the tuna, inanga and kereru, Oponae was used as a strategic area, with all its conveniences, security, strategic locality and abundant food source. In the mid 1860s the Crown troops plundered Opotiki and Ngati Ira bore the brunt of this. Troops devastated and levelled their pa, Te Tarata, on the Waioweka flats with the Crown practicing its scorched earth policy.” HONE KAMETA - Ngati Ira o Waioweka*



# Sanctuary

## TE KOOTI

Te Kooti, founder of the Ringatu Church, was one of the great Maori leaders, prophets and military tacticians of the 19th century. He had many confrontations with Crown troops during the late 1860s, travelling long distances across much of the central and eastern parts of the North Island.

Te Kooti moved to this area in 1869 and left later the same year. At the time there was a substantial village near here at Maraetahi.

In February 1870 the Crown offered a £5000 reward for the capture of Te Kooti. A major campaign was mounted and he eventually withdrew up the Waioeka, re-establishing himself here.

## SETTLEMENT AT MARAETAHI

The village was built upstream on the river flat at the foot of the old pa on the western bank. It consisted of 16 houses, with several others scattered a little higher up. When Te Kooti left in 1869 some of his people remained to plant gardens. He vowed to return. A large house was built, a whare karakia, or praying house, during his absence.

*"...a beautifully finished house 84 foot long, and 30 foot broad. It stood 9 feet high at the eaves, and its beaten earth floor was covered with 2 long cross plaited mats running the length of the building. At the centre of each mat, scriptural names had been worked in red wool, in letters 6 inches in depth. In addition there was a pretty little carved house which had been built as Te Kooti's private abode. Altogether there were 42 houses in and around this settlement."* COLONEL PORTER - *Diary 1870*

*Photo courtesy Auckland City Libraries.*

*"The cave is said to be impregnable and of large size – so large that they have plantations at the bottom; the sides overhang, and they go down by a rope ladder." F.E. HAMLIN - soldier who led an expedition against Te Kooti - 1870*

# Challenge and Conflict

## BATTLE IN THE WAIOEKA

For some years, Te Kooti was in conflict with the Crown over land disputes and injustices, often resulting in bloodshed. These conflicts led to several expeditions being mounted against him.

In March 1870 Major Ropata Wahawaha, who with Colonel Porter was leading one such expedition, encountered Te Kooti's guard near Maraetahi Pa, upstream from here.

Nineteen whakarau (Te Kooti supporters) were caught and executed in the riverbed. Porter was told that there were 67 men in the pa at the time, the main body of people were in fact higher up the river at Raipawa Pa.

## ESCAPE UP RIVER

After the attack, those that could, escaped in different directions – including Te Kooti, with four of his wives and a group of approximately 20. A uniform said to be his, was found in the bush by his pursuers after

they burnt Maraetahi Pa. Hira Te Popo also escaped. There are many stories of Te Kooti's escape. One suggests that Te Kooti was hidden in a great cave at the head of the Waioeka.

Te Kooti remained for some time in the upper reaches of the Waioeka until he mounted an attack on Uawa (Tolaga Bay) in July. He eventually returned to the Waioeka. However in January 1871 when Ropata and Porter finally found his settlement at Te Wera (his place of sanctuary after Maraetahi), no one was there.





*"This fine and beautiful land carved out of impossibility"*

QUOTE FROM A SPEECH GIVEN AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING IN 1962

# The Challenge of Access

Maori have accessed this densely bush-covered landscape for hundreds of years. They created tracks and used the often treacherous Waioeka River to access gardens and establish temporary settlements on its banks.

By the 1800s many people were travelling in this area including missionaries who covered great distances, enduring considerable hardship to spread the word of God.

As the area opened up to settlement, the very thing that created this gorge, the river, provided the greatest barrier to creating a road. In fact, for a long time, the Motu Road was the preferred route when travelling between Bay of Plenty and the East Coast.

## CUTTING TRACKS

Access was difficult but early settlers were determined to cut tracks to their sections. The work was dangerous and in places there was a vertical cutting above the track with a straight drop to the river below.

By the early 1900s there was a dray (cart) road from Opotiki to the mouth of the Waioeka Gorge. Access from Gisborne became a priority and so a rough track was formed through to Opato in 1909. By the end of World War I (1918), a road had been formed reaching Oponae, with a track on to Matawai. It was hard going but eventually a link was completed through the Waioeka from the Bay of Plenty to Gisborne.

Photos courtesy Whakatane Museum.

*"...one of the most treacherous, dangerous and steepest roads in New Zealand"*

GISBORNE PHOTO NEWS - 1962

# The Wild WAIOEKA

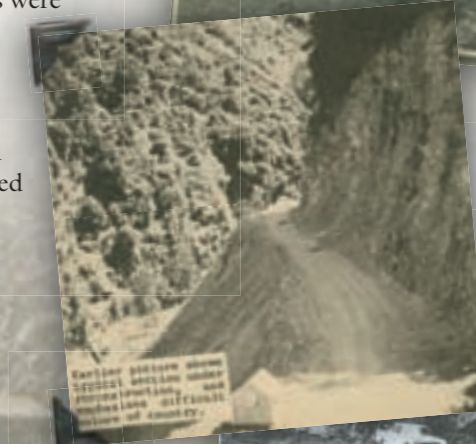
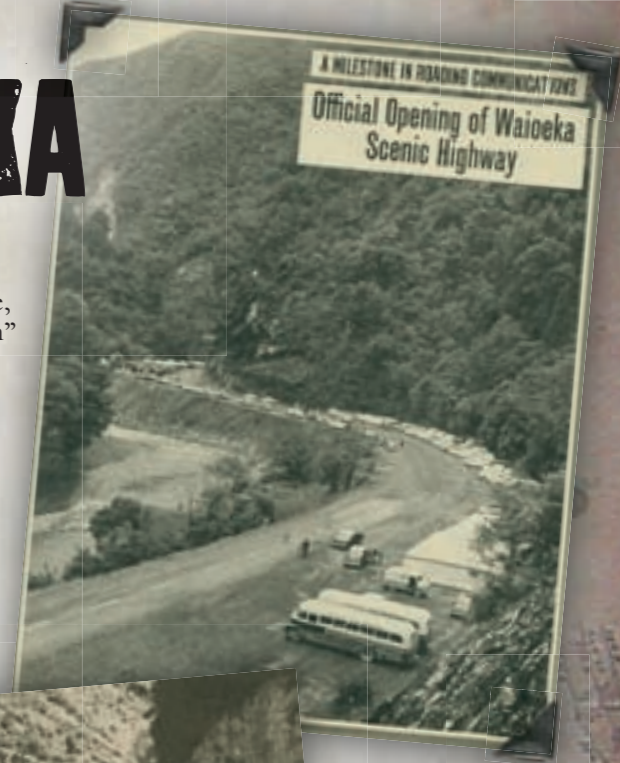
The memorial plaque at this site was unveiled on 15 December 1962 when the Waioeka Gorge highway was officially opened. The event drew a crowd of over 400 people with one paper reporting,

*"The occasion marked the end of one of the most rugged road reconstruction jobs done in New Zealand...that of carving a full-width highway through the 25 miles of unstable, near vertical gorge which follows the tortuous path of the Waioeka River."*

Earlier, in 1959, the Ministry of Works began work to convert the gravel road to a sealed two-lane highway. A camp was built at Oponae and at one point had over 20 single men's huts and four houses. Camps were

also established at Opato Bridge, Sandy's Bridge and "Chinatown" (near Matawai). At this time the Waioeka was a hive of activity with these "temporary" settlements springing up at different points along the banks of the river.

It was a dangerous undertaking requiring rock-blasting and working on steep and unstable terrain. Rock falls were common. The three men who tragically lost their lives while building the road are commemorated at this site.





# Manganuku THE SHIFTING STREAM...

Manganuku is a popular camping place on the Waioeka Journey. Here you can learn of the challenges facing native fish species as they negotiate their perilous journey from the sea to these beautiful waterways before you.

Native fish were an important part of the traditional Maori diet. Nowadays, fishing for introduced trout is a popular activity throughout the gorge. Deep shady pools near the stream banks will often prove rewarding – fishing the Opato Stream upstream of the Manganuku can be very good as far as Sandy's Bridge.

At the back of the campsite is the historic Manganuku Bridge. It is one of the few "Howe Truss" hardwood bridges remaining in New Zealand and was originally part of the Waioeka Gorge road.

The Manganuku provides an access point for walks ranging from 2-3 hours to overnight excursions. There are a number of huts en route.

*For information about camping and other recreational activities in the Waioeka, please visit a DOC Visitor Centre or the website: [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz)*

**"MANGA (STREAM) – NUKU (SHIFTED) – O-MAU-KORA (STAYED THERE)**

*Long ago the Omaukora and Manganuku streams flowed in the same valley. After a time of flooding in to each other, quarrels and arguments started, and then fights. Manganuku had enough of this and decided 'I am out of here', then shifted to its present site." HONE KAMETA - Ngati Ira o Waioweka*

*Have you ever wondered what becomes of a whitebait when its life isn't frittered away? They may be small but whitebait are the most well-known of our native fish species.*

*Waioeka River mouth >*

# The Whitebait Challenge

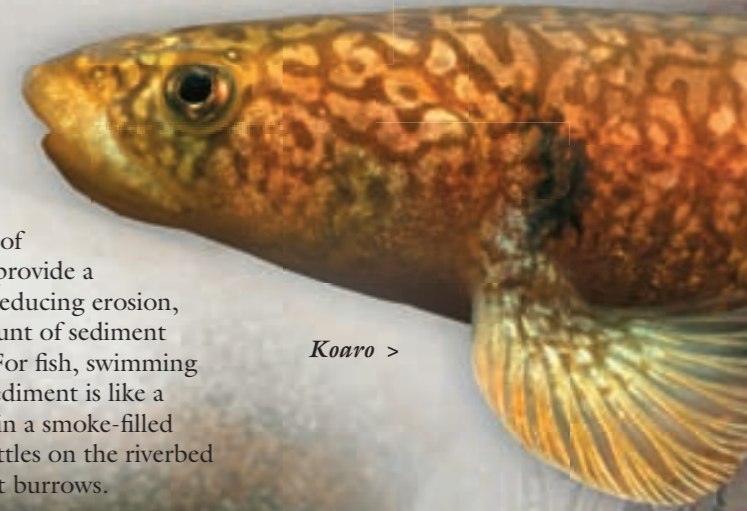
The Waioeka and all the streams that flow in to it represent a large and relatively natural river system. The river flows north from its source in the Huiarau Ranges to its outlet on the East Coast at Opotiki, providing a home for both native and introduced fish species. Native species include inanga, kokopu and koaro. The young of these species are commonly known as whitebait. Other native species include eels, smelt, bullies and torrent fish.

## RUNNING THE GAUNTLET

Migratory fish face many challenges on their journeys between river and sea. The first, after living at sea for 4-6 months, is running the gauntlet of whitebaiters' nets at the mouth of the Waioeka River. If they make it past the nets and don't become a fritter, there are further challenges ahead. These include pollution from developed land as well as man-made structures such as weirs and dams.

## WATER QUALITY

Good quality water is essential for healthy fish populations. Forests bordering the waterways of the Waioeka Gorge help provide a healthy environment by reducing erosion, thus minimising the amount of sediment entering the waterways. For fish, swimming in water full of floating sediment is like a person trying to breathe in a smoke-filled room. When sediment settles on the riverbed it smothers fish and insect burrows.



*Koaro >*



*< Torrent Fish*

*Fish photos by Angus McIntosh, Natural Sciences Image Library.*



# Riverstones

The columns at Opato and Matahanea provide a gateway to your journey through the Waioeka Gorge. They act as pou, signalling the long occupation by tangata whenua that sits beneath the gorge's more recent stories of farming, road and bridge-building exploits.

Most of the structures on the Waioeka Journey use stone-filled gabion baskets as their major element. The gabions are filled with local river stone taken from the wild Waioeka landscape. You can see in the photo that these baskets were used by settler farmers attempting to control the movement of waterways through this country. Later they became popular for road engineering works very evident throughout the gorge. Another historical reference is evident in the shelters that echo the form of early roadman's huts with their steep-pitched roofs.

These structures illustrate and celebrate the ingenuity of early farmers facing a challenging landscape, as well as feats of modern road construction.

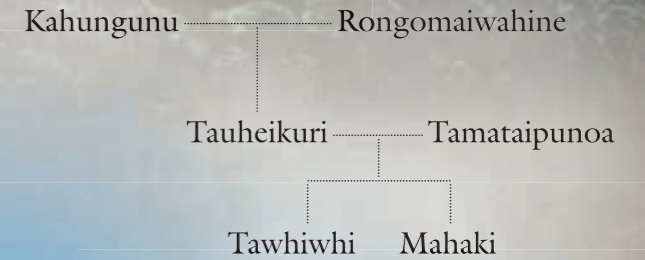


Trafford Homestead, Waioeka Gorge, about 1924.

# Te Aitanga a Mahaki

The origins of the tribe Te Aitanga a Mahaki, who are the original inhabitants of this part of the Waioeka Gorge, stem from the marriage of Tauheikuri and Tamataipunoa. Their story illustrates the ancient connections and boundaries between people of the northern and southern coasts of East Cape.

The great chief Kahungunu offered his youngest daughter Tauheikuri to Tutamure. Tutamure was the son of Kahungunu's nephew Haruataimoana, who lived in Opotiki. Tauheikuri went to meet with him and became confused as Tutamure was with his brother Tamataipunoa. One was handsome, the other not so. Tauheikuri approached the handsome Tamataipunoa at which Tutamure got up in disgust and went to look at himself in a still pool of water.



He returned and told his brother to take Tauheikuri and never return.

## Maunga a Kabia (Mahia) >

*“Kei no koe takahi i runga o Motu, kei kite koe i to puia o Whakaari noho iho, he konei - You may look on the smoke of White Island (in the Bay of Plenty) but come no further.”*

This they did with Tauheikuri and Tamataipunoa remaining together at Maunga a kahia (Mahia). They had two sons, Tawhiwhi and Mahaki. Hence a separation was established from Whakatohea, (eastern Bay of Plenty tribe) with the emergence of Te Aitanga a Mahaki.

1850  
Albert A. Allen  
1848  
137





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Gisborne District Council, Whakatane District Council, NZ Fire Service,  
NZ Road Transport Associations, NZ Automobile Association



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