

WAIRĀKEI RIVER

Wairākei was located mid-way between Mauao and Maketū on the Pāpāmoa lowlands.

Wairākei was a tidal river and navigable, with people travelling by waka to and from pā in the vast wetlands and dune plains.

The Kaharoa eruption and fires caused the removal of forest cover around 1300AD leaving dense swampland interspersed with patches of coastal and lowland shrubs such as mānuka, on higher/drier ground. Streams originating in the hills around Ōtawa crossed the plain, emptying into the wetlands, then ran into Wairākei or the Kaituna River. This included the Kōpuaroa and Te Raparapa-ā-Hoe. The Wairākei would be fed by the Kaituna River overflow and spill into the coastal lagoon and Parapara swamp. Horoipia swamp was also fed by the Wairākei.

The former lagoon at Wairākei and the river itself was fringed with raupō and manuka, and contained an abundance of fish which could be seen by a person standing on the banks because the water was so clear.

The first Waitaha settler in the Wairākei area was Rongomaitāne, a son of Waitaha. His son was Te Haehae and the son of Te Haehae was Whitikiore who is associated with the pā, Te Kio.

Wairākei is where the Waitaha chief, Tarakawa, killed Hikareia of Ngāi Te Rangi following the battle of Te Tumu in 1836. This battle is where Te Arawa drove Ngāi Te Rangi out of Maketū, which they had conquered some years before. Te Arawa side were in pursuit of the Ngāi Te Rangi forces as they retreated along the coast and caught Hikareia at Wairākei near Te Houhou, killing him as he tried to escape into the sea. Hikareia's death avenged the earlier killing of Rangitahia and the saying by Tarakawa:

He pou tōu

He awatea tērā

He pūkana mutunga i te awatea

I te rā e whiti ana

The deed of thy ancestor was one of darkness! (treachery)

The other (death of Hikareia) was done in the daylight

After warfare, under the shining sun according to tikanga!

The Wairākei later became the boundary between Te Arawa and Tauranga tribes.

When Takakōpiri held the mana of the Tauranga region, he renamed the Pāpāmoa range, *Te Uku o Takakōpiri* (The supporting tribe of Takakōpiri). Later he divided the lands between his two grandsons, Te Iwikoroke and Kūmaramaoa. Iwikoroke then set aside the Wairākei for their younger brother, Te-Puku-o-Hākoma.

Ōtūmatawhero, a settlement located on the bank of the Wairākei Stream was known to Waitaha as *Te Oku o Wairākei*. Te Oku was the name of the porpoise that led Te Arawa waka into the river.

Ōtūmatawhero was also part of an extensive system of tracks, one of which led from the pā to the Wairākei, crossing the Horoipia swamp, towards the Kaituna River. The main roads today were built to follow these old tracks.

By the early 1800s flax became a commodity for trade. Land was drained and large-scale planting and harvesting supplied at least two flax mills near the Wairakei Stream and Kaituna River. Later that century swampland was converted to farmland.

In the 1970s Wairākei was blocked off for land development and the stream was converted to a drain in grazed pasture. It was eventually cut off from its headwaters and the area was subjected to urban development.