

In the later 1850s the Reverend William Ronaldson stationed at Papawai made periodic visits to the Maori settlements in the district. He mentions calling at Otaraia to see Manihera on at least two occasions⁸ but makes no mention of any pa thus confirming that by this time the chief with others was living away from it. By now the main settlement was at Waitapu near Tauanui.

Thirty years later, in 1888, some interest was expressed in the reserve by one Te Manga. A notice in the Maori gazette stating that the application would be heard at the sitting of the Native Land Court at Greytown on 7 June gave the boundaries as follows: 'Te ngutu awa o Waiopini – nga rere atu ki Kauru ki te awa o Maiho, ka whati ki te Kauro o Kaiatehaku, ki te Whitinga o te Huarahi, ka whati ki te Ngutu awa ki Ruamahanga, ka ahu ki runga tutaki ki Waiopini – nga i te ngutu awa.'⁹

The precise significance of the place-names recorded has probably now been lost beyond recall. The court hearing was deferred until 26 June when the well-known chief and Maori spokesman Whatahoro on behalf of Te Manga said that the latter wished the land to be surveyed. It was described as Native Reserve no. 63 in the Wharakeka Block on the bank of the Ruamahanga adjacent to Section 23.¹⁰ Whatahoro explained that it was not a reserve but a piece of land exempted from sale in the Block 'where an old pa stood on the bank of the Ruamahanga'. He applied for a survey 'in accordance with the boundaries described in the Deed'. The Court said that it would make representations to the Survey Department, but it appeared on reference to the map that part of the land now claimed had been sold. Although the case was technically only adjourned no subsequent appearance of the matter before the Court in the ensuing few years has been traced. However, although the deed referred only to an area of one thousand acres which clearly Manihera had sold during the intervening years, the burial ground at least must have been confirmed as a reserve either as a result of the application or later.

The remaining question and perhaps still the most difficult of all to determine was when Fox in fact painted the scene.

It was of course the absence of any known documentary record of Fox's journey on which the sketch was made which led to the difficulties in identification outlined earlier. Increasingly after the West Coast journey in February 1846 with Brunner and Heaphy, Fox's sketchbook tended to become his diary as the pressure of his official duties increased. His first visit to the Wairarapa was in April-May 1843 with Messrs Clifford, Vavasour and Whitehead. On this occasion the party followed the Maori track roughly along the present Rimutaka Road route to the Tauherenikau turning north to the bush swamp and plain area between Greytown and Carterton to the Ruamahanga. They returned south parallel to it to roughly the vicinity of Martinborough from where they crossed to the west and left the valley by which they had entered it.