

For Northland Maori elder, Ned Nathan, times have changed.

He remembers his grandmother pleading with the authorities not to plant trees on her tribe's sacred ground.

Now, two generations later, Ned Nathan says New Zealand Forest Service staff are doing all they can to heal the wounds and right the wrongs of the past.

Ned Nathan is descended from Chief Manumanu, of the Ngati Whatua tribe and is an elder of the Te Roroa tribe, which still lives in the Waipoua River valley in the heart of Waipoua Forest. He is a retired businessman and a member of the Waitangi Tribunal.

The archaeological sites which are being re-discovered in Waipoua Forest were inhabited by his ancestors.

"Our ancestors came here about 400 years ago," he said. "It was an ideal site. They found all they needed – rich soil for growing food, wood pigeons and a plentiful supply of shellfish."

"Our chiefs called it Whanau Hou – the New Land. One translation of the name, Waipoua, is "the water of the shellfish."

Mr Nathan said prior to the 1950s relationships between Maoris and pakehas were not good.

"In 1876 my tribe sold 35,000 acres of Waipoua land for 2000 (pounds) – one shilling and one pence (about 11 cents) an acre.

"The authorities enforced bureaucratic rules.

"I can remember my grandmother and all the elders of their time went to officialdom and begged them not to plant on our sacred sites. It was very humiliating."

Today he describes the relationship between pakeha and Maori as "beautiful," as they work together on arrangements for excavating the old Maori villages and sacred sites.

He describes the Forest Service's officer in charge of Waipoua Forest, Rod Young, as "a very understanding officer".

"There hasn't been the domination of the past," he said. "The change in attitude by officials is impressive."

Mr Nathan says evidence from the archaeological dig suggests 3000 to 5000 people previously lived in the Waipoua River valley. Today there are four families consisting of 19 people.

"In the past, one mile inland from the sea, they could catch snapper, there were poa, that is big cockles with a taste between a cockle and a toheroa. There were mussels at the river mouth and prolific gardens of kumara and taro."

For Mr Nathan, unravelling the past from the evidence found at the archaeological sites is "a beautiful feeling". He is assisting the archaeologists with identifying the pa sites, terraced gardens and stone heaps as they are uncovered.



Archaeologist Michael Taylor (left) with assistant Richard Paniora excavating in Waipoua Forest.



Ned Nathan (right) with his sons, Alex (left) and Manos at the Matatina marae in the Waipoua River valley. Alex and Manos are teaching Maori crafts on the marae.

