

Taupo-nui-a-Tia — a central waterway for all travellers

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An ancient communication system enabled goods and people to move about Te-ika-a-maui by means of stretches of navigable water and major tracks that wended their way through bush and scrubland. Lake Taupo, because of its central position served as a vital link in the transport system of those times.

Just when intrepid explorers of old ventured into the North Island's hinterland and discovered that vast sheet of water whose full name is Taupo-nui-a-Tia, may never be known

with certainty for archeological evidence itself, when it comes to light, can only provide an approximate date. What is certain however in the interesting story of the exploration of New Zea-

land is that it will predate the Tamatea legendary account. For according to the Tamatea legend this illustrious ancestor of a number of tribes reached the shores of Taupo some time in the mid fourteenth century and is dated shortly after the migration from Hawaiki.

This was the great exploit which witnessed Tamatea and his party journey up the Whanganui River for the full stretch of its navigable length in the canoe Karaerae. From this locality due to what can only be called super human efforts the vessel was



Lake Taupo

Taupo is a considerable stretch of fresh water when measured by any international yardstick. Being 40 kilometers in length and 29 in width with a shoreline consisting of high cliffs and a sequence of seemingly never ending bays, travelling by canoe came into its own. Unfortunately for travellers, Taupo could be a rough stretch of water and journeying on the lake could only be undertaken when weather conditions were favourable. Ernest Dieffenbach, the scientist found this out in 1842 after reaching Taupo by way of the Waipa which is a major tributary of the Waikato.

Dieffenbach who was an understanding person, was nevertheless left champing on the bit in annoyance, when he was unable to hire a canoe to proceed along the lake because the locals with their knowledge of weather and lake lore judged conditions hazardous in the extreme. After a few days delay when Dieffenbach was able to embark, conditions were still choppy and the scientist had cause in retrospect to thank the judgement of his Ngati Tuwharetoa hosts.

According to one legend, Tamatea took his departure from Taupo by way of the Huka Falls – Hukanui – and the

Aratia rapids. This rash act was undertaken against local advice. There is confusion as to whether loss of life occurred. Johannes Andersen in "Maori place-names" suggests that this shooting of the local Niagara is a local legend. It certainly appears so, for in other accounts Tamatea and his party reached the Bay of Plenty. Anyway this was not the way to head North, for the route was across country to the left which would lead a party to the more sluggish flowing Waipa.

This historic drawing is by J.J. Merrett a surveyor who accompanied Dieffenbach and records the scene as viewed from the southern end of Taupo. In the background is Mt Tauhara where the Waikato empties out of the lake.