

Being a place of such importance in traditional times, it is not surprising that many archaeological remains — ovens, middens and burials — dating from moa hunter times are to be found at and near Taumutu today. The first “archaeological” investigation of Taumutu was made in 1868 by Julius von Haast. He recognised that Taumutu was a place of long occupation. Modern archaeological investigations of a moa hunter midden at the Rakaia Rivermouth, just south of Taumutu, have dated occupation of the area to, conservatively, 550-600 years ago.

The traditional history of Taumutu begins at the time the Ngati Mamoe kainga there became caught up in the Ngai Tahu “conquest” of the South Island. (There was intermarriage as well as conquest during the Ngai Tahu occupation of the South Island and many South Island Maori to this day proudly claim Ngati Mamoe as well as Ngai Tahu descent.) The pa of three Ngai Tahu heroes, Te Rangitama, Te Ruahikihiki and Moki II, were established at Taumutu. Members of the local hapu to this day refer to themselves as Ngati Ruahikihiki or Ngati Moki.

Te Rangitama, one of the earliest Ngai Tahu chiefs to make his headquarters at Taumutu, crossed Brownings Pass and by defeating Ngati Wairangi in battle at Lake Kaniere, took the Poutini Coast, and its greenstone, for Ngai Tahu. Te Rangitama's pa has been washed away by coastal erosion affecting the shore south of Kaitorete. (The remains of burials uncovered by this erosion have been respectfully reinterred in the graveyard of the Hone Wetere Church.) The pa of Te Ruahikihiki and of Moki II remain, their surviving earthworks guarding the Hone Wetere Church and the Ngati Moki runanga hall. The low earth walls of the old pa rise today out of dry land, but at the time the pa were built the lake's high-water level was more than 2m higher than the level at which the lake is opened to the sea today. The pa, when built, would have occupied tongues of dry land surrounded by swamp and open water and so been easy to defend.

In the early nineteenth century, Taumutu was involved in the Kai Huanga feud, a bitter dispute within Ngai Tahu, and its population was much depleted by the time Europeans first began arriving in Canterbury. The land of Canterbury passed into European hands with the Kemp Purchase of 1848. Reserves were set aside at Taumutu, but they were relatively small



Horei Kerei Taiaroa, his wife Tini Kerei and two of their grandchildren, Tini Wiwi and Ria Mohiko. This is a hand-coloured version, with a new background painted in, of a photograph taken in front of Awhitu House, Taumutu, a short time before Hori Kerei's death in 1905.

areas of poorer land, close to the lake edge and so subject to flooding. The Taumutu Native Commonage Act of 1883 added some 283ha to reserves in the Taumutu area to support the native residents of the vicinity, but already by then the pressure on the Maori community from European farmers occupying the surrounding land and from European fishermen congregating at Fishermen's Point was strong. Kainga remained at Taumutu through the late nineteenth century and turn of the century photographs show parts of the old pa and kainga at Taumutu still occupied.

But by then the largest settlement in the Taumutu district was at Fishermen's Point, a fishing community of up to 250 people of very varied nationalities. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century a substantial commercial fishery developed on Te Waihora. The fishermen caught eel, flounder and “herrings” (yellow-eyed mullet). They built their huts on a landing reserve which had been gazetted by Canterbury's Provincial Government in 1867. (The status of this land is still a source of ill-feeling among local Maori, who feel it should be returned to the commonage of which it was part.)

The community at Fishermen's Point flourished and in the early twentieth century, Taumutu's New Year's Day regattas, held at the point, drew crowds of people from all through the

Ellesmere district.

But as European farmers prospered on the farmlands of Ellesmere and as European fishermen exploited the rich resources of Te Kete Ika o Rakaihautu, the Maori kainga declined. Many Taumutu Maori drifted away, to work on local farms, to Southbridge, Leeston and even further away. Today the sites of the nineteenth-century kainga are bare paddocks, although their locations remain known to those Maori in the Ellesmere district who trace their descent from those who lived in the kainga.

It was at this time of decline, for the Maori people as a whole as well as for the Maori community at Taumutu, that a Maori of national standing and influence entered Taumutu's history. Hori Kerei Taiaroa, Member of the House of Representatives for Southern Maori 1871-78 and 1881-85 and Member of the Legislative Council 1879-80 and 1885-1905, decided, in the late 1870s, to move to Taumutu. H. K. Taiaroa was a member of the influential Maori “gentry” which emerged in the late nineteenth century and which played an important role in straddling the divide between the still more or less separate Maori and Pakeha worlds. Taiaroa is a key figure in the story of Maori adjustments during the difficult years of the colonisation of New Zealand by Europeans.

To be continued in Tu Tangata June/July 1987.