

CHAPTER 4

FROM AN EEL TO A FORESTRY CULTURE

4.1 THE PLANTING OF THE KAINGAROA STATE FOREST, 1921–39

The planting of the 249,894-acre Kaingaroa State Forest in pine began in 1920, providing a much needed source of winter employment for local Maori. According to Henry Bird, ‘Forestry became a way of life for Ngati Manawa’s young men’.¹ However, in the later years of the depression, relief workers from outside the area were taken on and only one Maori gang, described as ‘the most skilled gang on the plain’, was retained.²

Forestry planting largely ceased in 1939, for fear of a future timber glut, and pruning and thinning work commenced.³ During the Second World War, many local men volunteered for service, resulting in a shortage of manpower in the forest gangs, which was partially relieved by the employment of young women for some tasks.⁴ In the aftermath of the war, Te Ika Whenua were dependent on the forestry industry, supplemented by farming, for their livelihood. Nevertheless, the traditional resources of the river still provided sustenance. Increasingly, however, the river was being used by local Pakeha and tourists for recreational trout fishing.

In the oral testimony he gave to claimant researchers, James Doherty, who lived and worked at Wairapukao Camp in the 1950s, recalled the special places along the Wheao River that were important to the people of Ngati Manawa at that time. There was a big pool about 200 metres from the present-day powerhouse where they used to go at night time with a hand line – ‘a bit of string with a bait on’. In a couple of hours, they ‘would catch between 25–30 good sized eels’; and ‘even for trout fishing there were some really good pools in those days’. Fish were plentiful and easy to get, and you were able to use any device – a short rod and spinner were the best. Flaxy Creek, which used to form part of the big pool, was a main part of the food chain for families in the Kaingaroa area, especially those who worked in forestry.⁵

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1. Document B2, p 90; Henry Tahawai Bird, *Kuranui-o Ngati Manawa*, Rotorua, Rotorua Printers, 1980 (doc B4(c)(3)), p 23
 2. Document B2, p 91
 3. Ibid, p 101
 4. Ibid
 5. Document B4(a)(3), pp 1–3

4.2 THE NGATI MANAWA LAND DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

To appreciate the degree of Te Ika Whenua's dependence on the forestry industry and the traditional river resources for their livelihood since 1920, one needs to know why the Ngati Manawa land development scheme that was begun in 1936 failed. A brief account of this scheme was given by Henry Tahawai Bird in *Kuranui-o Ngati Manawa*. Further information was found in Maori Affairs and Lands and Survey Department files in Wellington.

Beginning in the 1930s, some remaining Te Ika Whenua lands were brought into Sir Apirana Ngata's land development schemes. Several Patuheuheu blocks at Waiohau were consolidated and placed under the administration of the Ruatoki development scheme.⁶ Ngati Whare interests at Te Whaiti and in the Heruiwi block were consolidated and, later, the Karatia and Whirinaki blocks around Murupara were farmed as the Ngati Manawa development scheme.

Representations to the Native Affairs Department by Patuheuheu emphasised that they wanted development both to keep their young people in the Waiohau area and to contribute to the war effort.⁷ William H Bird, writing to Apirana Ngata to thank him for the scheme approval on 22 January 1934, made it clear that Ngati Manawa desired development as a measure to combat unemployment.⁸ Indeed, as the registrar of the Waiariki Native Land Court wrote to the under-secretary of the Native Department on 23 February 1934, they had 'no means of livelihood and to start a Development Scheme on the above Blocks would be a godsend to them'.⁹

Although Ngati Manawa were contracted to plough, drain, and fence the land that lay on the left banks of the Whirinaki and Rangitaiki Rivers adjacent to the Crown's Galatea estate, the scheme never employed large numbers of local men. According to the claimant researchers:

Like many other Maori land schemes of this era it began well but neglect during the war period and the mis-management of the post-war years under the Maori Affairs Department saw it plummet into debt, in spite of the fact that wool prices were at a premium during the 40s and 50s.¹⁰

While local Maori were given some development assistance to farm what remained of their ancestral lands, none of the local Maori returned servicemen was successful in the ballots for the Crown's Galatea station farms after the Second World War.¹¹ Moreover, during the war, Te Whaiti Maori employed in the essential occupation of

6. AAMK 869/903B, 63/57/1, pt 1, 'Ruatoki Development Scheme – Waiohau Area, 1933–46', National Archives, Wellington

7. AAMK 869/903B, 63/57/1, pt 1, National Archives, Wellington

8. Bird to Ngata, 22 January 1934, AAMK 869/874C, 63/43, pt 1, 'Karatia and Whirinaki Blocks, 1934–37: Suggestion that Proceedings be Taken under Section 23/29', National Archives, Wellington

9. Registrar of the Waiariki Native Land Court to the under-secretary of the Native Department, 23 February 1934, AAMK 869/874C, 63/43, pt 1, National Archives, Wellington

10. Document B2, p 100; see also *Kuranui-o Ngati Manawa*, pp 29–32

11. A A Coates, 'The Galatea Story', *Bay of Plenty Historical Review*, monograph, 1980, pp 47–56

timber milling were debarred from military service and, consequently, deprived of the rehabilitation available to returned servicemen.¹²

Little evidence was found on how far the failure of the Ngati Manawa land development scheme encouraged the continuing use of traditional river resources. According to claimant researchers:

People began to work the land as family areas were partitioned out of the reserves and other small pieces of land that remained after the big sales. The old moving lifestyle was still there in the beginning because while many of the large blocks were sold, not very much was being done with them so the people could still use them for hunting, gathering pikopiko, aruhe and other foods. However, as the century moved into the 30's this became more and more restricted and people learned to rely more on subsistence farming.¹³

In June 1933, when Miira Te Tomo wrote to the Native Minister, Sir Apirana Ngata, on behalf of Ngati Manawa requesting permission to go through the Galatea estate to pig hunting grounds near the Horomanga Stream, the Minister of Lands, Ethelbert Ransom, commented:

The necessity for the Natives to have access to what to them is evidently a very important food source is fully appreciated, but on the other hand the interests of the Department must be conserved by ensuring that the Estate is not allowed to suffer through promiscuous ranging or uncontrolled traffic.¹⁴

He therefore suggested that local Maori should obtain three-month access permits from the Galatea station manager. Undoubtedly, the tangata whenua became increasingly restricted in their access to the traditional resources of their wai tipuna with the development of the Galatea Plains for the settlement of soldiers.

4.3 THE MURUPARA PROJECT

In 1949, negotiations commenced between the Crown and Ngati Manawa for the acquisition of Maori land in the Karatia block for a pulp and paper plant.¹⁵ Representations made by Peter Fraser, the Prime Minister and Minister of Maori Affairs, emphasised the national importance of the project and the benefit that would accrue to Ngati Manawa in terms of employment 'for generations'.¹⁶

Ngati Manawa were reluctant to vacate ancestral land for the development and were alarmed at proposals to take river flats that contained highly-prized flax, a clear

12. 'Te Whaiti and its Future' (minutes of a meeting held at Te Whaiti and endorsed at a public meeting of Maori residents on 5 August 1949), p 3, 'Te Whaiti Regional Development, 1944-63', MA 1 19/1/491, National Archives, Wellington

13. Document B2, p 90

14. Te Tomo to Ngata, 17 June 1933; Ransom to Ngata, 'Galatea Estate, 1933', LS 1 21/149/995, National Archives, Wellington

15. Document B1, p 18

16. Ibid, p 27

indication of the continuing importance still attached to a traditional resource area.¹⁷ Originally, an exchange of Crown lands for the required Maori lands was proposed by the Crown, but no agreement on terms was reached. The Karatia land was taken in 1954 under the Public Works Act 1928 and developed as the Murupara log yard and rail head.¹⁸

As Murupara developed to service the logging industry at Kaingaroa, Ngati Manawa became a labour reserve for the Kaingaroa Logging Company. For nearly three decades, they enjoyed full employment and comparative prosperity, and many rented and later bought houses in the township.¹⁹

4.4 THE CORPORATISATION OF THE FORESTRY INDUSTRY

In late 1985, the Labour Government commenced the process of disestablishing the Forest Service and replacing it with a fully commercial forestry agency that became known as the Forestry Corporation of New Zealand.²⁰ Corporatisation of the industry involved a dramatic reduction in the number of wage earners employed at Kaingaroa and their replacement with contract workers from outside.

As a result of large-scale redundancies and a lack of alternative employment opportunities, many younger Ngati Manawa families and unemployed Pakeha left Murupara in search of work.²¹ The mainly Maori population of Kaingaroa Village, however, refused to let their community die and persuaded the Crown to vest the land on which the village stands in Ngati Manawa. A section 438 trust was then established and through that trust Ngati Manawa granted to the Kaingaroa Village Council a long-term licence to occupy the village. This was finalised on 23 May 1991 and the council is thereby responsible for the administration and management of the village.

Kaitiaki of the Kaingaroa Marae is in the hands of Te Huinga Waka, a group formed by the local Maori community. This group does not have an iwi status based on a tipuna but derives its mana from several iwi uniting on a waka basis.²²

Those whanau who remained in Murupara suffered increasing welfare dependency. Statistical evidence presented by claimant researcher Gwenda Paul included estimates that, of the total population of 2325 in 1993, 65 percent were on a benefit of some kind. Registered unemployed were 346, but the Rotorua Employment Service's office estimated that 55 percent of those out of work were not registered. In Murupara in 1992, 86 percent of the population were of Maori descent. A similar situation existed in Kaingaroa, where almost 74 percent of the population of about 900 were of Maori descent and 128 were registered as unemployed.²³

17. Document B1, p 20

18. Ibid, pp 54–55

19. Ibid, pp 66–68; doc B2, p 106; *Kuranui-o Ngati Manawa*, p 44

20. See the State-Owned Enterprises Act 1986

21. Document B2, p 108

22. Ibid, p 111

23. Document B12, pp 1–3

‘Considering the huge forest resource at their doorstep,’ Mrs Paul observed, ‘it clearly provides very little in the way of work opportunities.’²⁴ The area compared ‘very badly’ with the rest of the country in terms of income and employment opportunities.²⁵ All the 1992 secondary school leavers ‘either went on to tertiary education, mainly polytech or to trainee courses run by the Murupara Community Learning Centre or other training providers. None went into paid work.’²⁶ Murupara was ‘a very depressed area’.²⁷

4.5 THE ‘PERMIT CULTURE’

For tangata whenua, employment in the forestry industry at Kaingaroa and Whirinaki meant sharing the rivers with increasing numbers of outsiders and being increasingly subjected to a ‘permit culture’. ‘I suppose Forestry started it,’ said Taima Rangitaurira. ‘There was [an] . . . Aukati, when you’re not allowed to go up there. Like a [permit].’²⁸

Maurice Toetoe explained that:

People have to get permits to get to their own Maori land if access to that land includes going over forest land . . .

The forest is closed to us. There are either gates which are locked outside business hours or a large trench has been dug in the road so that vehicles cannot pass.²⁹

Furthermore, you had to have a fishing licence for the season and this was for trout only. If you wanted to go hunting, you had to get a permit. The retireti used for catching eels and kokopu was prohibited gear, since it might be used for trout fishing. You were only allowed to fish for eels (with worms) from 11.00 pm to 5.00 am.³⁰

The restrictions on hunting and fishing, he added, affected his ability to pass on his knowledge of these things to his sons so that they would be able to do them too.³¹

In Maanu Paul’s view, the whole permit culture was a restriction on their right to the exclusive use and control of their fisheries, a taonga that is guaranteed under article 2 of the Treaty of Waitangi:

We believe that our fisheries includes our methods and artefacts such as our retireti. We have adapted the retireti to catch trout and because of our development of this fishing device we are now penalised.

We, Te Ika Whenua believe that the development of the retireti to catch trout is an integral part of our right to development.³²

24. Ibid, p 3

25. Ibid, p 4

26. Ibid, p 1

27. Ibid, p 4

28. Document B4(a)(2), p 2; doc B16, paras 28–36

29. Document B11, p 4

30. Ibid, pp 1–2, 4

31. Ibid, p 3

32. Document B16, paras 25–26

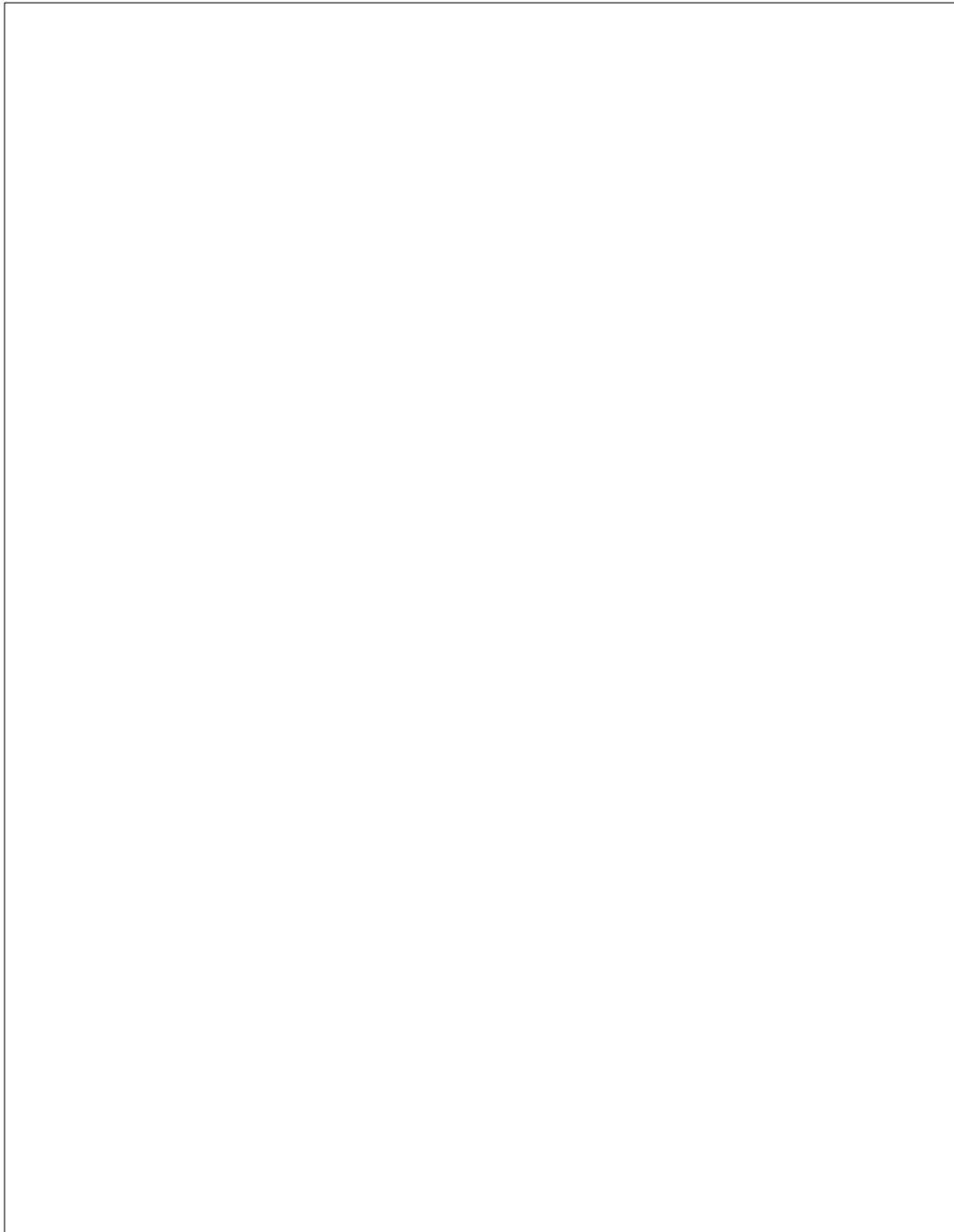


Figure 15: Trout fishing on the river bank at Murupara, near Galatea.
Photograph courtesy of the Whakatane District Museum and Gallery (E933-1).
Originally published in the *Weekly News*, 7 May 1903.

Evidence presented by Crown researcher David Alexander on the Crown and the eel fishery indicated that:

The Crown took little or no interest in eels until well into this century . . . Eels tended to be seen as a Maori fishery . . . the view was that everyone, settler or Maori, was entitled to catch eels.³³

Regulations governing the capturing of eels and the issuing of licences for eel fishing were only introduced when commercial eel fishing for export boomed between 1967 and 1975.³⁴

We understand that commercial eeling for export in the lower Rangitaiki River involved mainly foreign (Dutch) interests and that Te Ika Whenua did not participate. As we shall see, the Crown argued that commercial eel fishing was a significant cause of the scarcity of eels by the 1970s (see sec 6.6), but the claimants contested this argument (see sec 6.8). Whatever the cause of eel depletion, the regulation and licensing of eel catching clearly aggravated the loss of a major food source, and this loss became accentuated with the onset of unemployment in the forestry towns of Murupara and Kaingaroa in the late 1980s.

By 1945, the transition from an eel culture to a forestry culture was largely complete. The claimants grudgingly accepted restrictions on access to once important resources because the livelihood of the whole community had come to depend on forestry and there were times when the fire risk was too high.³⁵ Thereafter, further development of recreational tourism centred around the Rangitaiki, Whirinaki, and Wheao Rivers, where trout fishing, canoeing, and white-water rafting led to further restrictions and prohibitions affecting Te Ika Whenua's customary rights.

In recent years, Maanu Paul explained, it had been 'a bone of contention with us with the Department of Conservation and the Forestry Corporation of New Zealand Limited because of the different rates they charge for these people to utilize our rivers'.³⁶ The River Rafters Company had invited them to raise the issue but they wanted to discuss this with the people who gave them access to the rivers and the rafting permits, not the company itself.

'It seems illogical to us,' he added, 'that we, who own the river, can't do that work and are not in a very wide sense licensed to do it.'³⁷

As long as Te Ika Whenua enjoyed the benefits of the forestry industry Fraser had promised them, they generally accepted the restrictions and prohibitions imposed on the exercise of their customary and Treaty rights to use and control their rivers. But when these restrictions and prohibitions denied them the traditional resources they needed to combat unemployment and welfare dependency, they realised that few of their guaranteed rights remained.

33. Document c6, p 3

34. Ibid, pp 5-6

35. Document B18(b), pp 16-17

36. Document B18(a), p 2

37. Ibid



Figure 16: Hydroelectric power schemes on the Rangitaiki River system. Sources: as noted on map.