



Elmgrove and East Taiari Schools Cultural Narrative



Kāi Tahu Cultural Narrative prepared for Elmgrove and East Taiari Schools

This cultural narrative provides two types of information for your schools – that which is of a celestial nature and that which is of a historical nature – and it is important to be cognisant of this when using the information with classes and students. This information is from the Kāi Tahu tribe, with a focus on Otago and the area your school is in. The bibliography supplied will allow you to follow up on particular references for your students, classes and so forth.

It is important to note that our tribal dialect is used in this report. The ng is replaced by the k; for example, “Ranginui” is “Rakinui” in our dialect. We also use words and idioms particular to our tribe.

Macrons are another crucial part of the Māori language. They indicate whether the vowel is long or short. If a word has a macron on a particular vowel, it must be used when naming classrooms or other spaces. This is the official orthographic convention from the Māori Language Commission.

We hope this cultural narrative will be a source of learning and development for your school. Please get in touch with Aukaha Ltd if you have any questions.

Taiari

Mana whenua are on a determined journey to reinstate and embed the original and correct place names to our tribal territory. We ask your school to go on the journey with us and help socialise the correctly spelt name of the Taiari. This requires an integration of the name and its whakapapa (history) into your school, your curriculum and daily mahi. This is a journey that we need to go on together.

Kā mihi.

The online Ngāi Tahu mapping system called “Kā Huru Manu” (<https://kahurumanu.co.nz/atlas/>) describes the whakapapa of the name:

Taiari is the correct spelling for the Taieri River. From its source, the Taiari River flows almost entirely around Pātearoa (the Rock and Pillar Range) before discharging into the Otago Coastline. The wider Taiari area is a major food gathering resource with the coastal area, inland waterways and surrounding hills providing an abundance and variety of kai. In the evidence gathered for the 1879 Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Ngai Tahu land claims, Ngai Tahu kauamatua recorded Taiari specifically as a kāinga kainga tuna (eel gathering area) and kainga nohoanga (settlement).

At the point of European contact with Dunedin, the vista that looked out from your schools would have differed greatly to that of today. According to our people, the bush was so thick in the Dunedin area that when some Europeans ventured in, they never returned. Māori had trails and tracks and understood the area.

Monro made his observations about the mouth of the harbour on the peninsula in 1844:

The sky, a great part of the time, was without a cloud, and not a breeze ruffled the surface of the water, which reflected the surrounding wooded slopes, and every sea-bird that floated upon it, with mirror-like accuracy. For some hours after sunrise, the woods resounded with the rich and infinitely varied notes of thousands of tuis and other songsters. I never heard anything like it before in any part of New Zealand.¹

Monro followed on to note the “absence of a good site for a town”. He mentioned how inhospitable the bush was on the mainland and that whalers had said they never ventured into it.

On his stay at Ōtākou (the Otago Harbour and the village at the end of the peninsula) between 1843 and 1844, Edward Shortland wrote in his diary:

In the morning I woke early; and, as the dawn first peeped forth, was deafened by the sound of the bell-birds. The woods which were close by seemed to be thronged with them. Never before had I heard so loud a chorus. I called to mind Captain Cook’s description of the impression made on him by the singing of these birds, when at anchor near the shore in Queen Charlotte’s Sound. He is wrong, however, in saying that they sing at night, like the nightingale. They commence at dawn of day their chime of four notes, which, repeated independently by a thousand throats, creates the strangest melody. But they cease, as by one consent, the moment the sun’s first rays are visible; and there is a general silence. Again, at even, they commence, just as the sun’s last ray fades, and sing on till dark.²

Shortland also wrote about his crossing to the Taiari River and his experiences:

Accordingly, a few days after my return from Foveaux’s Straits, I again hired Smith’s boat, and taking with me two natives, with Mr. Earle and his servant, as passengers, crossed over to Otakou. We arrived at the heads of the harbour just as the flood tide began to make, and, with this and a light breeze in our favour, we reached its southern extremity in the afternoon. It here expands into a broad but shoal bay, separated from the sea by a low narrow neck of sand and earth, which alone prevents the land on the eastern side of the harbour from being an island. By hauling a boat across this neck—a matter of but little difficulty—the voyage to Taiari could be made, in favourable weather, with much greater ease than by the longer and rougher passage round Cape Saunders. The next morning we left our tent standing, and our boat hauled up above high-water mark, with many things too heavy to carry with us, merely taking the precaution to leave a written notice in “maori,” saying to whom they belonged; we thus felt confident that, although they must remain for several days with no other protector than this paper sentinel, none of the natives—the only persons likely to come this way—would meddle with our property. Having crossed the narrow peninsula, we advanced a short distance along a beach of fine white sand, of such dazzling brightness that it was extremely painful to keep the eyes open. Our progress was then impeded by a headland, and a small wood through which no path could be discovered. Here we lost our way, and so much time before we again reached the beach, that we were obliged to halt for the night by a stream of water, about three miles from Taiari. The rain then began to fall, and we built a temporary shed of flax stalks and grass to shelter us; but, as our clothes were saturated with wet and fine sand, and we were unable to find any fire-wood, but some low blackened “manuka” scrub which had been burnt the year before, we passed a very comfortless night. Recommencing our journey at daylight, we arrived at the entrance of the river near the time of low water. It had then a most wild and inhospitable appearance, being blocked up by shoals and breakers. Very fortunately, about a mile distant off its mouth, there is an island, on the lee side of which a boat can find shelter in all weathers, and there await a favourable occasion for crossing the bar—a passage which it is seldom safe to attempt, except with the latter half of the flood tide. Proceeding along the north bank of the river we found some deserted huts; but, contrary to our expectation, no natives. Without their assistance, or a boat, we saw no possibility of going any further; as steep precipices arose from the water’s edge, and barred a passage along the side of the river. Earle’s man, whom we had already found an excellent travelling companion, and alive to all the expedients of a New Zealander in the bush, had been one of a whaling party formerly stationed at the island just mentioned, and knew the place where the natives usually resided, about five or six miles up the river. This he proposed to reach on a raft aided by the flood tide. Our natives soon constructed one sufficiently large and buoyant to serve his purpose, from the dry stalks of the flax plant (phormium tenax), a material as light as cork, and which we found here in great abundance. An old paddle was also picked up among the bushes, with the aid of which an experimental trip was made across the river; and the raft being then pronounced seaworthy, our messenger shoved off amid loud and hearty exclamations invoking a prosperous voyage.³

Kāi Tahu tribal area of the South Island

The South Island (Te Waipounamu) of New Zealand not only has an entirely different landscape to that of the North Island (Te Ika-a-Māui) but also a different indigenous demographic.

The South Island was originally inhabited by early Polynesian settlers known as Kāti Hāwea and Rapuwai. Anderson claims that these people were certainly Polynesians and among the ancestors of southern Māori.⁴ The following onset of people were the Waitaha. They are an early group of people who are known to have arrived on the canoe, the Uruao, and their legacy was left in the many places they named in the South Island. The well-known southern tribal ancestor Rākaihautū of the Waitaha people was described as a giant. He carved out the lakes and rivers of the South Island with his digging stick named Tūwhakarōria.

The consequent migration and intermarriage of Kāti Māmoe and then Kāi Tahu from the east coast of the North Island to the South Island and into Waitaha procured a stronghold for Māori in Te Waipounamu. Map 1 illustrates the large tribal area now associated with Waitaha, Kāti Māmoe and Kāi Tahu in the South Island.



Te Waka o Aoraki and Tūterakiwhānoa feature as the oldest stories that connect to Otago. Aoraki was one of the senior progeny from Rakinui's (male) first marriage to Pokohāruatepō (female). Raki's second marriage was to Papatūānuku. Aoraki and his brothers were interested in Raki's new wife and descended from the heavens in their waka (canoe) to greet Papatūānuku. The meeting appears to have been amicable, but a mistake was made in the requisite prayers when Aoraki attempted to once again ascend to their celestial home, and the canoe began to list. Aoraki and his crew scrambled to the high ground but were caught by the sun's rays and turned to granite, becoming the highest peaks of the Southern Alps.

The nephew of Aoraki, Tūterakiwhānoa, was charged with the responsibility of determining the whereabouts of his uncles – he discovered that they and their waka had become an island in the vast ocean. After a period of grieving, he grasped his great adze, Te Hamo, and set about shaping the canoe and its inhabitants so that it could be an inhabitable land mass.

He carved out the sounds in Fiordland and Marlborough and formed the peninsulas along the eastern seaboard, including Otago Peninsula, Huriawa Peninsula and the Moeraki Peninsula. He left the atua kaitiaki (guardians) Kahukura and Rokonui-ā-tau in place, and they remained until the time the old religion was abandoned and Christianity was adopted.

After the entire South Island had been shaped fit for habitation, Tūterakiwhānoa returned to Piopiotahi/Milford Sound. It was brought to his attention that the sound was so beautiful that those who saw it would never move on. His relation, the goddess Hinenuitepō, left behind the small namunamu, or sandfly, to ensure that nobody would stay in the area for too long.



Matamata

Matamata is a taniwha. In our indigenous narrative in Otago, Matamata was a giant creature, similar to a serpent or lizard in shape, that carved out the Otago Harbour and rivers on the Taiari Plains of Dunedin. Places are named after his movements, and eventually he solidified in the sun and remains as a distinct hill in Dunedin.

Various narratives are written about Matamata, and the main source from an Ōtākou perspective is that from Te Iwi Herehere Ellison. He was the informant to Reverend Pybus in the 1940s. Te Iwi Herehere was the son of Raniera Ellison (of Taranaki whakapapa) and Nani Weller (Chief Taiaroa's grandchild).

Tahu Pōtiki is also recorded re-telling the narrative. He states that Matamata carved out the Otago Harbour and the twists and turns in the Taiari River, and that he eventually turned to stone. Many years later, he came back to life again and became the protector of Te Rakitauneke.⁵ Furthermore, Karetai, the paramount chief of Ōtākou, used to speak about a taniwha that was the guardian of the spirit of a famous Kāti Māmoe chief.

Another source is Herries Beattie, who collected information in the 1900s from various Kāi Tahu kaumātua alive at the time. The information he collected on Matamata is somewhat disjointed and recorded in different parts of his various publications. One of his informants, Teone Tikao, said that Matamata was a famous "ghost", who came originally from Hawaiiki and was in later times a guardian god of Te Rakitauneke, the famous Kāti Māmoe warrior.⁶

For the purpose of this narrative, we will refer to Matamata's search for Te Rakitauneke as the main theme.

Te Rakitauneke

Te Rakitauneke was a well-known Kāti Māmoe chief, and it was said that Matamata was his kaitiaki (guardian). Te Rakitauneke fought in battles against Kāi Tahu and in alliances with Kāi Tahu from Kaikōura to South Otago and also inland. Traditions state that Te Rakitauneke was buried upon Bluff hill. Te Rakitauneke's ohāki (parting instructions) were: "Kia pai ai taku titiro ki te ara a Kiwa" – "Let me gaze upon Foveaux Strait".

According to Beattie, Te Rakitauneke had a pā near the peak of Mauka-atua⁷ (a prominent ridge that dominates the skyline of the Taiari).⁸



Matamata was living in a small bush beside Whakaehu (Silverstream) below his master. Te Rakitauneke was not sleeping well at night as the noise of the sea disturbed him, so he went on a trip inland. Matamata found that Te Rakitauneke was gone and went searching for him.

Matamata's search for Te Rakitauneke

Matamata journeyed from Silverstream near the base of Whare Flat and as far as the present Mosgiel. It then took its course down the Taiari River and, wriggling, caused all the sharp bends and twists in the river. In Matamata's frustration, he turned and twisted looking for his master. Particular places are named after him:

Wai-pōtaka – a lagoon near Silverstream. Pōtaka is a spinning top, and the name is attributed to the spinning and turning of Matamata in desperate search for his master.

Te Konika o Matamata (the crawling of Matamata) – a depression in the land where Mosgiel is.

Te Korekore o Matamata (the turning of Matamata) – the last 500 meters before the river hits the forge.

This aerial view of the Taiari River illustrates the obvious image of a lizard winding through the earth and making the river (left). Matamata also dug out the Otago Harbour as can be seen by this aerial view (right).



Image credit: GNS Science and Lloyd Homer (photographer)

Matamata eventually got caught by the sun and now lies solidified. The humps of the hill are named Pukemakamaka and Turimakamaka. This is Saddle Hill today.



Trails and movement

Kāi Tahu were a nomadic people who travelled extensively on land and sea. They travelled from Ōtākou villages up the Otago Harbour and into bays and inlets within the Dunedin area, known as Ōtepoti. This area was a landing spot and a point from which the Ōtākou-based Māori would hunt in the surrounding bush. Māori would drag their waka into estuaries and walk by foot to food-gathering places such as the Taiari, which was rich in food sources like birds and eels. Four species of moa roamed the Otago Peninsula, and there were moa hunter sites in Puketai (Andersons Bay), Rakiātea (St Kilda) and Whakaherekau (St Clair).

Māori also followed tracks over the peninsula, around the Lawyers Head area and into the Taiari Plains. The lakes and wetland area now known as Te Nohoaka o Tukiauau/Sinclair Wetlands (a fantastic place to visit with students) was teeming with kai, including whitebait, eels, lamprey and birdlife. Shortland suggests that the ancient walking tracks were falling into disuse by the time he explored the Otago area because of the superior marine technology that Māori had employed over the previous 40 years.⁹ The whaling boat proved to be a more useful mode of transport than the carved single- or double-hulled Māori vessels that dominated sea transport until the arrival of the European.

The Treaty of Waitangi and consequent land sales in Dunedin

In 1836, the ship *The Sydney Packet* arrived at Ōtākou with a few influenza cases on board. The disease immediately attacked Māori and the people died in hundreds, reducing the population to an alarming degree.

Following the demise of the Ōtākou Māori population came the loss of land. This began with the Treaty of Waitangi, which was taken by Major Bunbury throughout the Kāi Tahu tribal region to obtain southern Māori signatures. The Treaty had been signed by many iwi (tribes) in the North Island, and Korako and Karetai signed it at Taiaroa Head on 13 June 1840. They were among seven signatures for southern Māori. The premise they accepted in their hearts and minds was that under the Treaty they would retain their lands and have equal protection and rights with British citizens. Political struggle over the total disregard of the promises agreed to in the Treaty of Waitangi would continue for 150 years. After the signing of the Treaty came the most significant contractual breach for Māori on the Otago Peninsula.

Under pressure from the New Zealand Company, the British Crown waived its right of pre-emption as stated in the Treaty of Waitangi, allowing the New Zealand Company to negotiate with the local chiefs for the purchase of land in the south. The New Zealand Company and the Free Church of Scotland selected the area on the mainland at the head of the harbour for a permanent site, to be called New Edinburgh. Frederick Tuckett, a surveyor for the New Zealand Company, was assigned to oversee the purchase of the site. In 1844, George Clarke wrote an account of the proceedings in Otago, which included Tuckett, surveyors and local Māori. They had come to survey the land for a "New Edinburgh, the Dunedin of the future".¹⁰

Kāi Tahu wanted to keep 21,250 acres of Otago Peninsula land with ancestral sites for themselves. However, the Europeans did not agree and would not proceed with the sale unless the peninsula was included. The Māori conceded to accept only the land at the northern end of the peninsula and a few other areas outside of that, totalling 9,612 acres. On 31 July 1844 at Kōpūtai (Port Chalmers) 25 chiefs signed the Otago Deed, selling around 400,000 acres for £2,400. Of this land, 150,000 acres would be chosen for the New Edinburgh site. Verbal agreements were also made to reserve 10 percent of all land sold, known as "the tenths", in trust for the benefit of Kāi Tahu. The agreement was not honoured, and work began on New Edinburgh on the mainland in 1846.

The organised settlement of the suburban and rural areas of the peninsula began in 1848, focusing on Andersons Bay and Portobello. The peninsula was divided into farms of about 50 acres, which were gradually occupied and supplied a growing Dunedin with food. West states that:

The sale of the Otago Block to the New Zealand Company in 1844 was by far the most significant event that shifted control over the Peninsula... the Ōtākou Māori were stranded on the northern tip of the Otago Peninsula, confined to meagre portions of their once vast property. The way was thereby opened to the European settlement, and the making of a new environment on the Otago Peninsula.¹¹

Place names around your school

It is best to refrain from attempting to translate names from Māori to English as the meanings are often complex or forgotten. Some definitions and descriptions from different resources are recorded here:

Mauka Atua

Mauka Atua on the Taiari Plains was a passenger on the Araiteuru waka that crashed on the Otago coastline near Matakaea (Shag Point). After the waka capsized, many of the passengers went ashore to explore the land, but needed to be back on board before daylight. Many did not make it back, including Mauka Atua, and instead transformed into many of the well-known landmarks of Te Waipounamu. Mauka Atua is the southern inland boundary marker for the 1848 Crown purchase of the Canterbury and Otago area, commonly known as Kemp’s Deed.

Pukemakamaka

Saddle Hill (see this narrative for more information) is the prominent landmark with two petrified humps (hills) overlooking the north-eastern end of the Taiari Plains.

Maka Kahikātoa

Maka Kahikātoa is the traditional name for **Outram**. Maka is the Kāi Tahu word for stream, and Kahikātoa is another name for mānuka.

Te Kirikiri

Te Kirikiri is the name for **Outram Glen**, situated on the Taiari River. Respected kaumatua (elder) Kurupōhatu Ruru recorded that Te Kirikiri was the furthest spot to which a waka could navigate the river. Kirikiri is the word for gravel and is a common place name.

Pātearoa

Pātearoa is the Māori name for the **Rock and Pillar Range** in the Mānīatoto area of inland Otago. During the 1879 Smith–Nairn Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Ngāi Tahu land claims, Ngāi Tahu kaumātua recorded Pātearoa as “he maunga mahinga kai” where weka and the treasured tikumu (mountain) daisy were gathered.

Taiari (See discussion at the start of this document.)



Flora and fauna

It is difficult to truly understand the vegetation that has been so disrupted by human occupation. However, swamp areas like that of Taiari contained stands of kahikatea, tōtara, rimu and matai, kowhai, ribbonwood and cabbage trees (which thrive in damp areas), along with flaxes and different types of grasses.¹² There was also low-lying karamu, koromiko and various ferns. Listed below are some of the plants endemic to your school region.

- Manatu – lowland ribbonwood
- South Island kowhai
- Houhere – narrow-leaved lacebark
- Ti kouka – cabbage tree
- Kāpuka – broadleaf
- Kanuka
- Manuka
- Tōtara
- Matai
- Kahikatea
- Mingimingi
- Koromiko
- Toetoe
- Pātiti – red tussock
- Harakeke – flax
- Pūrei – Buchanan’s sedge
- Karamū – small-leaved coprosma
- Akeake – mountain akeake

Te Nohoaka o Tukiauau (Sinclair Wetlands) itself has more than 46 bird species, including the paradise duck and the pūkeko. The wetlands is a 315-hectare privately owned wetland complex in Otago. Returned to Ngāi Tahu in 1998, it is a vital conservation site and a culturally significant gathering place (mahinga kai). Located just 50km southwest of Dunedin, it features peaceful walking tracks and rich birdlife.

In early farming days, most of the Taiari Plains wetlands were drained and converted to farmland, leaving just two of the original lakes (Waihola and Waipori) and their adjacent swamps. Even parts of the Sinclair Wetlands were farmed. Traces of drains and fence lines are still visible, but farming and the pumping out of water ceased from 1960 under the ownership of the late Horrie Sinclair. In 1984 he announced his intention to gift the wetlands to Ducks Unlimited New Zealand. In 1986 a Queen Elizabeth II National Trust open space covenant was registered against the property titles. In 1998 the property was returned to Ngāi Tahu as part of the Ngāi Tahu Claim Settlement Act.

The wider Taiari area held a plethora of food sources, much like a modern day supermarket. The wetlands provided for whānau and hapū of the area and were teeming with kai.

Wētā

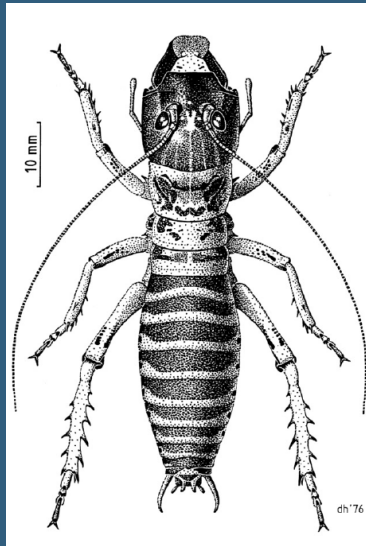


Image credit: Desmond W. Helmore, CC BY 4.0, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>, via Wikimedia Commons



Frozen mountain stone wētā (source as below).

Image credit: Santanu123, CC BY 4.0, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>, via Wikimedia Commons .Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hemideina_maori#:~:text=Hemideina%20maori%2C%20also%20known%20as,orthopteran%20endemic%20to%20New%20Zealand.

Wētā, or *Hemideina maori*, are also known as mountain stone wētā. These are large, flightless and nocturnal insects found on central mountain ranges in the South Island. They live at high elevation above the tree line in mountainous southern areas like that of the Rock and Pillar Range in Otago.



Image credit: Veronika Wild. Source: <https://www.veronikawild.com/2019/12/the-badlands-rock-and-pillar-range.html>.

These giants of the insect world are normally found in dark, damp tunnels in hollow trees, rock cavities or soil, anywhere from sand dunes to above the snowline. Wētā are related to grasshoppers, locusts, crickets and katydids and, like their relatives, have powerful hind legs for jumping. Aotearoa has more than 100 different species of wētā, in four distinct groups:

- Tree wētā
- Giant wētā
- Ground wētā
- Tusked wētā

The mountain stone wētā are only found in the South Island and, unlike other wētā, they live in an alpine habitat, found at altitudes of 1100 to 1500 metres above sea level on many mountain ranges. Although they spend a lot of time on the ground in rock cavities, they are actually a tree wētā, not a ground wētā. They have adapted as the areas where they live have a lot more rocks than trees.

Mountain stone wētā can survive being frozen solid over winter and are estimated to be inactive for at least five months of the year. During winter these types of wētā are often immobile with ice crystals on their cuticle, and the individuals appear to be frozen solid when touched. On warm days, however, they can be found thawed and active under rocks. The immobile wētā are in a state of suspended animation; they can survive up to 17 days in temperatures of about -10 °C. At temperatures below -10 °C, approximately 85% of their body water is crystallised, one of the highest ice contents known for any animal. During winter, their haemolymph (insect blood) contains low molecular weight cryoprotectants such as amino acids, especially proline and the disaccharide trehalose. These substances are synthesised during autumn, and their concentration decreases again over spring and summer. The amino acids and sugars help to reduce the ice content, and also protect membranes and proteins directly or by modifying the water layer closest to the molecules.

This YouTube video shows the incredible thawing of the wētā: <https://youtu.be/HtDlqicyDQw>.

Mountain stone wētā feed on plants and a few invertebrate species, and they apparently don't move far during their lifetime. During the day, they shelter in cavities under tors (rock slabs broken from schist outcrops), and they are exposed to high winds and low temperatures all year round. Tors are separated by alpine meadows with no rocks. It's assumed wētā aren't found in the meadow areas, causing population fragmentation. They stay where the rocks are. In spite of their harsh environment (or possibly because of it), mountain stone wētā are long-lived and may take four years or more to reach breeding maturity. Some individuals go on to survive at least four breeding seasons – making them at least eight years old.

Males fight each other for access to females, and some males show extreme 'head weaponry'. These males have mandibles that tend to be two times longer than those of females, and their head can be up to one and a half times wider. A successful male mountain stone wētā will live with a harem of females – up to seven females to a single male – giving him a much higher chance of mating success than his more solitary rivals.

Mountain stone wētā have been found from the Kaikōura Ranges south to the Rock and Pillar Range in Otago. They're widespread in the Southern Alps and therefore not considered to be at risk of extinction. Potential mammalian predators aren't common where they live, and native nocturnal predators of the mountain stone wētā are most likely to be reptiles such as geckos and skinks or birds such as rūrū (morepork).

They don't all live in the alpine zone however. There are at least two exceptions – populations on Mou Waho Island and Mou Tapu Island, two of the five islands in Lake Wānaka. Here, the species flourishes at an altitudinal range of just 300–475 metres above sea level – instead of their usual 1100–1500 metres. The first few wētā possibly 'rafted' to the islands on floating logs, and the population has grown over time. Mou Waho Island is a predator-free reserve that is accessible by boat and has a jetty and walking tracks. It even has its own lake with its own island – an island within a lake within an island within a lake... There's lots of birdlife to see there, but if you do get to visit this beautiful spot, don't just admire the birds. Keep an eye out for a very unique wētā – or perhaps a whole harem of them – sheltering among the schist.¹³

The wētā communicate by stridation – pegs in their hind legs are scraped over comb-like ridges on the side of their bodies. This produces a chirping sound that they hear through ears on the sides of their front legs.

Recently the mountain rock weta made cryogenic history. A group of physiologists at Otago University had been testing the ability of this weta to withstand the freezing temperatures in its high altitude habitat. John Leader and Jennifer Bedford looked at the blood composition of specimens from the Rock and Pillar Range near Dunedin, and reasoned that they could probably tolerate temperatures well below freezing. What they discovered was that the weta could be frozen solid and yet return to life when thawed. Further research has shown that there is no evidence in the blood of antifreeze, which is often found in insects which survive freezing, so these insects must have the ability to tolerate internal ice formation. The mountain rock weta is the largest known insect capable of this sort of winter survival. ¹⁴

There is some evidence of Māori eating wētā if necessary on long journeys, but it was more likely that Māori ate hūhū grubs. In some instances it is said that wētā was regarded as a delicacy by Māori.

Trees

Some of the traditional flora from the area around your schools are described below:

Miro

Kūkupa (wood pigeon) feed on the berries from the miro tree. Snares of running nooses were placed beside the water troughs or at natural drinking pools to trap thirsty kūkupa. Nooses of cabbage leaves were used for snares, as they were stronger than those of flax. The snares were placed so close together that the kūkupa could not drink without putting their necks through the snares.

Miro oil was made into a liquid paste with kōkōwai (earth from red ochre) and smeared onto the body and garments to kill off vermin and pests. This oil is also one of the compounds used to make the scent, taramea. The gum of the miro pine was used to stop the flow of blood for an open wound and apparently as a cure for warts.

A narrative about Māui tells of how he turned himself into a kūkupa and flew down into the garden where his father was, landing on the garden's fence. People saw the kūkupa and chased him again so that they could snare him. He flew away and eventually met with his father and turned himself back into human form.

Māhoe

Māhoe is a soft wood that burns slowly. It is started by using a rubbing stick, generally of a tougher wood like kaikōmako, which burns well. Dry moss was sometimes put at the end of the stick to hasten the ignition. Māhoe has a special relationship with fire, and this was believed to be the result of the actions of Māui, who made it his goal to discover the secret of fire. Māui put out all the fires in his village and volunteered to go and meet with his tupuna, Mahuika, whose fingernails were made of flame. He eventually persuaded her to part with one of her fiery fingernails and then immediately extinguished it in a nearby river. Māui persuaded her to give him another nail, and another, and continued to put them out in the water. By the last nail, Mahuika realised what Māui was doing and, in a fit of anger, threw up a great flame against him.

With the last of her fire being rained out, Mahuika collected the last few sparks and looked for somewhere to place them to set them on fire. The trees of rata, hīnau, kahikatea, rimu and miro did not spark up, but mahoe was one that did take to the fire. Māui saw Mahuika place the spark of fire in these trees and returned to his village to show his family and friends how they could bring out the fire by rubbing the sticks of these trees together.

Tōtara

The tōtara tree had multiple uses for Māori. Examples include wood for canoes, housing, musical instruments, toys, water containers and more. The tree's importance to Māori is recognised in our language, metaphor and idiom. When a chief dies, it is likened to the fallen tōtara: "Kua hinga te tōtara i te wao nui o Tāne" – "The great tree in the forest of Tāne has fallen".

Tōtara is one of the five trees that Māui's ancestor Mahuika is credited with hiding the gift of fire in according to our Kāi Tahu creation narrative. The bark of the tōtara trees on Stewart Island and in the southern part of the South Island is softer and more papery than that of the trees in the North Island and was used by muttonbirders to make torches – it was interwoven with flax fibre. The torch was saturated in muttonbird fat and set alight. The dry outer bark of the tree was used to make splints for broken bones. The inside of the bark of the tōtara was used to make a medicine that helped with a fever.

Kōwhai

Beattie wrote about the kōwhai's medicinal properties in the South Island. The kōwhai had a number of medicinal purposes. The bark was soaked in water and was an excellent remedy for cuts. Swellings of any sort were treated with wai kōwhai (kōwhai water), and this was a swift cure. Another internal remedy was for colds and sore throats. The bark was steeped in boiling water, and the infusion had to be drunk fresh as it doesn't keep.

Beattie was told of an incident where kōwhai juice was used successfully:

One aged man narrated the case of a Māori who had been with him on a sealing hunt. This man suffered very nasty injuries when his face unfortunately came between the teeth of a kekeno (fur seal). As soon as possible waikōhai (kōwhai juice) was poured into the wounds and in two or three days the man was right again.¹⁵

Kānuka

The common name for this tree is white tea tree or white mānuka. Kānuka is used medicinally by boiling 12 even-sized pieces of bark until the water is dark – it is drunk for diarrhoea and dysentery. Long poles of sharpened kānuka are used to make eel weirs, and its fragrant leaves are used as a scent oil. Spinning tops were also made of kānuka. Captain Cook and early settlers called mānuka "tea tree" because they used the green leaves to make a substitute for tea. Māori used the hard wood of the plant for paddles and weapons, blades and spears. The bark was used for making water containers and the inner bark as a waterproof layer for roofing.

Birds

Some of the traditional birdlife in the area would have been:

- Kōparapara – bellbird
- Tīrairaka – fantail
- Tauhou – silver-eye
- Kāhu – hawk
- Weka – woodhen
- Kakapo – owl parrot
- Pūtakitaki – paradise duck
- Kererū – wood pigeon
- Pārera – grey duck

This birdlife was mainly relegated to the forest areas. Birdlife was also abundant near the ocean and into Ōtākou.

Glossary for your school

- Kai – food
- Kākahu – clothing
- Kekeno – seal
- Kīnaki – relish
- Kiri – bark
- Korowai – cloak
- Mokomoko – lizard/gecko
- Tuna – eel
- Wai – water





Endnotes

1. D. Monro, "Notes of a Journey Through a Part of the Middle Island of New Zealand," p. 96.
2. Edward Shortland, The Southern Districts of New Zealand, pp. 121-122.
3. Ibid, pp.166-169
4. Atholl Anderson, When All the Moa Ovens Grew Cold, p. 4..
5. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1SxyJG8E4w>
6. Beattie, JPS 1917, 71.
7. Known incorrectly as the Maungatuas.
8. Known as Taieri, but the correct spelling is Taiari.
9. Edward Shortland, The Southern Districts of New Zealand.
10. "Scottish Settlers Arrive in Otago," New Zealand History, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/scottish-settlers-arrive-otago>.
11. J. West, The Face of Nature, p. 265.
12. <https://www.orc.govt.nz/media/3828/taieri-river-morphology-and-riparian-management-strategy-2016.pdf>.
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Megan Pōtiki

Tēnei te rūrū te kōkou mai nei
Kihai mahitihiti
Kihai marakaraka
Te ūpoko nui o te rūrū
Terekou!
Ko Pukekura te mauka, ko Ōtākou te awa moana, ko Ōtākou hoki te kāika. Ko
Taiaroa rāua ko Karetai ōku tūpuna. I ahu mai au i te whānau Ellison. Ko Megan
Pōtiki ahau.

I hail from Ōtākou and whakapapa to Kāi Tahu, Kāti Māmoe Waitaha and Te
Ātiawa iwi. My parents are Edward and Alison Ellison. I have a brother, Brett
Ellison. My husband is Tahu Pōtiki who passed away in 2019. I am mother to three
children (Ripeka, Timoti and Tūkitaharaki) and have a large family unit who provide
constant support, as the saying goes “it takes a village to raise a family.”

I currently work at Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka – University of Otago as Pou Tiriti
in Te Tari o te Pou Koko Māori – Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Māori. I
completed my PhD in 2024 and my research interests are focused on the loss of
te reo Māori at Ōtākou and the written Māori archives of the past that have a
particular geographical focus on my tribal region of Kāi Tahu.

I have been pulled in a number of different directions in the last few years and
have been contracted by Aukaha Ltd to provide cultural support, write narratives
and guide tikanga and te reo while instilling our values into design, building
and development.

I prioritise my children and my whānau, hapū and iwi. I was raised at the Kaik and
live there and there is no question about my commitment to Ōtākou, and raising
our tamariki to be the leaders of their future.



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Written and published in 2026.

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