

INSIDE THE MĀORI HISTORY OF KARĀPIRO

The Battle of Taumatawīwī.

Story source: Waikato Times.



William Thompson

L.H. Jan 4. 1863.

Ngāti Hauā leader Te Waharoa.
Source: Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections 661-006.

It was in 1820 that Ngāpuhi rangatira Hongi Hika acquired firearms and set out to take revenge on his tribal enemies in Hauraki, Te Arawa and Waikato.

He attacked the Hauraki marae, Te Tōtara, and the remnants of the people living there, comprising Ngāti Maru and Ngāti Paoa, moved inland to seek refuge among relatives, Ngāti Hauā and Ngāti Korokī, at the foothills of Maungatautari.

It was suggested that Ngāti Maru began to overstay their welcome and there were reports of aggressive plundering of surrounding villages over the following years.

The matter came to a head when, in 1830, there was a battle between Ngāti Maru against Ngāti Hauā, Ngāti Korokī, assisted by Ngai Te Rangi people of Tauranga.

The battle took place on the southern side of the terraces of the Waikato River, called Taumatawīwī, a few kilometres north of the Ngāti Maru fortified marae on the northern slopes of Maungatautari.



A rock from the Battle of Taumatawīwī sits next to the whareniui at Maungatautari Marae, overlooking Lake Karāpiro.

During a pause in the battle, Te Waharoa, the Ngāti Hauā leader, decided to cremate his warriors who had fallen.

A pyre was built at the foot of a column of rocks, near the outlet of the Hauoira Stream, which flowed into the Waikato River.

The warriors were cremated on these rocks to stop their bodies falling into the hands of the enemy.

The rocks became tapu, highly sacred, and because of the foul odours emanating from the cremations, the place was called Karāpiro.

Karā means rocks, and piro, a putrid smell.

The rocks remained for about 100 years until plans emerged in 1940 to flood the Waikato River to create Lake Karāpiro, in order to build a power station there.

The power station was completed in 1947, and the tapu rocks became submerged.

The situation became worse when planning began for the lake to host the 1978 World Rowing Championships.



This memorial at the Mighty River Domain, commemorates the Battle of Taumatawīwī. The rocks behind the memorial are some of those used to cremate warriors during the battle.

The rocks were blasted with dynamite to allow for the rowing lanes.

Ngāti Korokī Kahukura granted permission but on the proviso a memorial for the battle at Taumatawīwī be set in place at the Karāpiro Domain, after the rowing championships.

It took more than a decade for that promise to be fulfilled. It wasn't until the 1990s that a memorial was established, outside the Sir Don Rowlands Events Centre, just a kilometre or so from the battle site.

Another stone from the battle is set next to the whareniui at Maungatautari Marae, as a reminder of the warriors who perished during the battle of Taumatawīwī.



WATCH

Insights into the Battle of Taumatawīwī.

Source: Te Ara Wai Journeys.

