

Fact Sheet

In Aotearoa people have a strong connection with the sea (te moana). We are surrounded by ocean and people have always relied on its bounty to supplement food supplies. Most of us live within sight and sound of the sea so it is unsurprising that there is a rich store of culture and traditions associated with te moana.

Connections

All life is connected to water – it is the life blood of the environment. All the spiritual and physical elements of the coast and sea are connected through their mauri (life force). The condition of the natural environment reflects the health of Papa-tu-a-nuku (earth mother) and therefore of people. In this respect, specific practices and restrictions are important to maintain ecological health and the mauri of all the elements.

Due to the importance of water for food, transport, recreation and ceremony, nohoanga (settlements) were located close to major waterways. Ngai Tahu depended on kai moana, kai awa and kai roto as the climate made it difficult to grow food.

Food, its presentation and gifting, is central to Maori culture as it is important for showing aroha ki te iwi (love from the tribe) and manakitanga (being a good host).

Mahinga kai

Mahinga kai refers to the custom of resource gathering. It covers the food and resources themselves, the place they are found and the practices used whilst gathering them.

Over a period of time, Ngai Tahu have accumulated extensive knowledge about the resources within their rohe. The methods used for harvesting reflect a deep understanding of breeding and growing cycles, and feeding habits of various species.

Tikanga or customs and traditions ensure continuation of these resources. Restrictions or rahui are placed to protect the environment and the breeding stock of species. These restrictions include such practices as keeping sewage away from where food is collected or banning the harvesting of certain species seasonally. Historically Ngai Tahu whanui developed enhancement techniques, such as seeding superior strains of shellfish into other areas to ensure a regular supply of food stocks.



BACK TO THE FUTURE

The culture, history and traditions of the sea.

Activity ideas

1. FIND OUT

Research where the important kaimoana sites are in your area and what species were caught or used. Show these sites and species on a map. You could also find out how the kaimoana was prepared or preserved for later use. If you are close to a museum, visit it to see the type of materials used to capture and prepare marine plants (e.g. kelp and seaweed), fish, shellfish and birds (kai manu).

2. WHAKATAUKI – PROVERBS

These reflect the thoughts, values and advice of past generations and are useful ways of commenting on life.

Find some Whakatauki that relate to the sea or kaimoana and illustrate them for display at school or in your community.

e.g. E hoki te patiki ki tona puehutanga? Will the flounder return to the water it has muddied? Flounders lie on the sea bed in shallow tidal waters and dart away when attacked, stirring up mud as they flee; the whakatauki refers to someone who has stirred up trouble but is unlikely to return to sort it out.

3. CHALLENGE

It is important for our future that we look after the coast and sea. We all need to be kaitiaki. Check out whether the coast near you is a clean place to visit and swim. If it isn't, discuss what actions you could take both individually or as a group that would help improve the health of the coast, then take action! Reflect on how your actions help the wildlife in and around the sea.

4. PUZZLING IT OUT

Create a Wordfind or Crossword from terms relevant to the culture, traditions and history of the coast and sea. Try it out on your family and friends or submit it to your school newsletter.

Transport

The coast was a major highway for both Maori and Pakeha (Europeans), particularly when travel by land was difficult. Waka and whale boats plied the coast continuously in the early days for trade and interaction. Tauranga waka (landing places) are found up and down the Canterbury coast indicating old nohoanga, fishing or kaimoana gathering sites.

DID YOU KNOW?

Kai = food

Moana = sea

Awa = river

Roto = lake

Rohe = area

Manu = bird

Tikanga = traditions

Kaitiaki = guardian

Whanui = big family

Myths and Legends

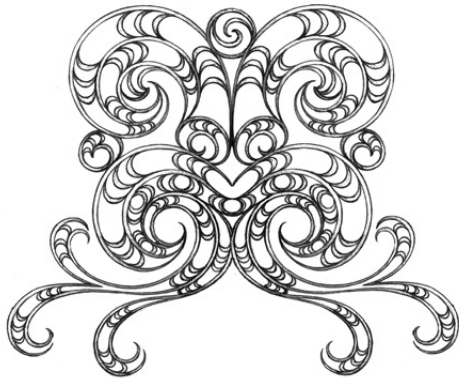


Image courtesy of Chamblett Design

Takaroa, god of the sea

Ko Takaroa ara rau

Takaroa of many paths

According to Maori creation traditions, the god of the sea and protector of its creatures is Tangaroa, the first husband of Papa-tu-a-nuku. Men in waka have gone out since time immemorial to catch the children of Takaroa and battle the might of his domain to return home safely.

Aotearoa was in part a fish, caught by Maui using a magical fish hook shaped from the jawbone of his ancestor Murirangawhenua, with the South Island being his waka. The Southern story of Te Waka o Aoraki tells how the land came to be and was later shaped as a home for people.

Taniwha were powerful kaitiaki of our coasts, rivers, lakes and streams. In some cases they acted as guardians of particular areas or of particular people. In other cases they acted as messengers, signalling an end to a fishing season or, worse, impending misfortune. In the Canterbury region there were two taniwha living in rua (caves) near Opukutahi. These taniwha were left there by Te Ake, an ancestor, to safeguard friendly people on the sea.

Whales and whaling

Whales have played an important part in our culture and history. They feature in mythology, legend, proverbs and historical records. Ngai Tahu had early contact with Pakeha in the form of sealers and whalers from around 1795. They supplied whaling ships with provisions such as pigs, potatoes, wheat and flax, and the shore stations that were established in the 1830s were under the authority of local Ngai Tahu chiefs.

ACTIVITY – TELL THE STORY OF WHALES

Create a story wall about whales for your library so that more people will get to learn about these magnificent creatures.

Your story could cover the following:

- Myth and legend: Ngai Tahu and Mata Mata & Te Raikaitauneke of Kaikoura.
- Scientific and ecological facts
- Whale strandings
- Whaling stations of Canterbury
- How whale meat and bones have been used
- Whale migration patterns
- Whale-watching
- Visual images relevant to Ngai Tahu and Canterbury.



This carving depicts Paikea journeying to New Zealand on the back of a whale.

USEFUL RESOURCES:

Anderson, A. (1998) The welcome of strangers: southern Maori, 1650-1850.

Beattie, J. H. (2004, ed.) Tikao talks.

Beattie, J.H. (1995) Maori place-names of Canterbury.

Dacker, B (1999) The people of the place: Mahika kai.

Orbell, M (1985) The natural world of the Maori Bateman

Ti Kouka Whenua.

www.christchurchcitylibraries.com/TiKoukaWhenua/CanterburyMap/