

# DECOLONISING THE LAND – NAMING AND RECLAIMING PLACES

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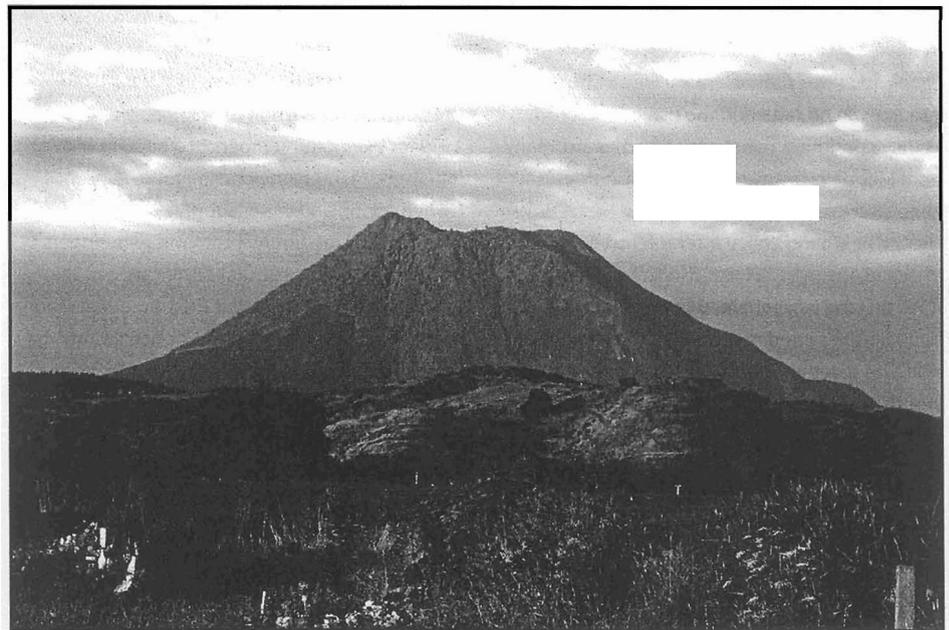
The role of planners in assisting the reintroduction of indigenous place-names

Place-names are an important aspect of culture and identity as they provide a location where history, events, landscapes, relationships and people are remembered, celebrated and reinforced. The tangata whenua of Aotearoa had names for all the natural features within their physical environment before European contact. Mountains, rivers, coastlines, beaches, fishing spots, forests and landscapes, battle sites, and places of events associated with the earliest explorers and supernatural beings, featured as symbolic representations of indigenous spaces.

This article demonstrates the political nature of naming places and examines the roles that planners can play in assisting in the reintroduction of indigenous names through collaborative relationships with tangata whenua.

## Colonial Context

In the past, European explorers and pioneers of New Zealand systematically renamed coastlines and the landscape regardless of the names already proffered by indigenous peoples. The Dutchman Abel Janszoon Tasman and his crew sighted New Zealand's coastline in December 1642. Tasman renamed parts of the southern coastline near Taitapu including ClyppygeHoeck (Rocky Point) and *Steijle* Hoeck (Steep Point). These names were dutifully recorded in Tasman's



journal becoming historic representations of new 'undiscovered' lands. History recalls that due to cultural misunderstandings, initial contact with the indigenous people at Taitapu was not a happy one for the foreigners or the tangata whenua. Four Dutch sailors were ambushed and killed and several Maori were severely wounded. Subsequently, Tasman hastily left the area but not before renaming the place Moordenaiers *Baij*

**ABOVE::** Putauaki is the sacred maunga of the Ngati Awa tribe. Putauaki was renamed Mt Edgecumbe, after an English aristocrat by Cook during his first voyage to New Zealand in 1769. Source: Ngati Awa Research & Archives Centre, Whakatane (2005).

– Murderers Bay (Salmond, 1993).

In 1769 some 127 years later, James Cook circumnavigated New Zealand's coastline. Like Tasman, Cook went about renaming New Zealand from the onset. He meticulously sketched the coastal landscape of New Zealand, filling and embellishing the countryside with European names and visions. On 6th October 1769, Nicholas Young sighted land from the Endeavour's masthead. The place he sighted was *Te Kuri-a-Paoa* on the east coast of the North Island. Nicholas was rewarded with a barrel of rum and *Te Kuri-a-Paoa* became known as Young Nick's Head. Reassigning new English names continued as Cook sailed from harbour to coast to harbour. The Endeavour made its first anchorage in *Turanga-nui* Gisborne. Cook's perception of *Turanga-nui* was that of a place with very few resources so he renamed the place Poverty Bay. As they continued their voyage northward, many more Maori places were given English titles some after crew members including Hicks Bay (Hicks Bay-Wharekahika) after the first lieutenant. *Whakaari*, the island volcano located 50km of *Whakatane* was renamed White Island and *Putauaki*, the sacred mountain of the Ngati Awa tribe, was given the name Mt Edgecumbe after an English aristocrat.

### Contested Histories and Naming – Matata

Following the New Zealand land wars, some Maori place names were supplanted as a result of the *raupatu* or land confiscations. An example of the political nature of naming in colonial times is Matata, a small settlement in the eastern Bay of Plenty. An assessment of the streets names revealed that many of the street names honoured military figures that were directly involved in the government confiscations of the area in the 1860s.

Famous militia involved in the land confiscations of Matata and represented in street names are; Mair and St John streets named after Major Gilbert Mair and Lieutenant-Colonel St John; Wilson and Pollen Streets

named after special government commissioners Rev J A Wilson and Dr Pollen. Clarke Street commemorates Mr Clarke the civil commissioner from 1860 and Warbrick Street a trader and government interpreter. Street names in Matata remind Ngati Awa of their colonial oppressors.

Kupapa or Crown collaborators were awarded the lands of their antagonists, which often resulted in places being renamed to reflect the dominant presence in the area, much to the detriment of the original land occupiers.

Recently, *tangata whenua* representatives have been lobbying the Whakatane District Council to reintroduce Ngati Awa names into the landscape in areas, such as Matata, that were originally occupied by Ngati Awa. The Council in collaboration with *tangata whenua* has recognised the injustices of the past and the need for reinsertion of Maori names. In 1999 for example, members of a hapu in Matata initiated a Maori name change for to a Council owned spring and water supply known as Braemar Springs. Council committee members acknowledged the cultural significance of the area and were satisfied that the traditional Maori name should be remembered. Consequently the Council approved a dual toponym of *Te Waiu o Pukemairie/Braemar* Springs to officially represent the two histories of this place.

Re-establishing Ngati Awa names in the Matata district has created a mutually positive working relationship with surveyors, land developers and Council.

One particular cultural specialist for Matata consults with developers concerning resource consents for subdivisions in Matata. The consultant provides an elaborate historical account of the sites which has resulted in an understanding about the land and its significance to *tangata whenua*. The cultural report prepared includes suggestions for names of new roads and streets and Ngati Awa names have been recommended. Just recently names such as; Awanuiarangi Road after the Ngati Awa tribe (its full name being Ngati Awanuiarangi); as

well as Iramoko, Te Paetata and Te Ramaapakura Roads (famous chiefs of Ngati Awa), have been approved in several recent subdivisions.

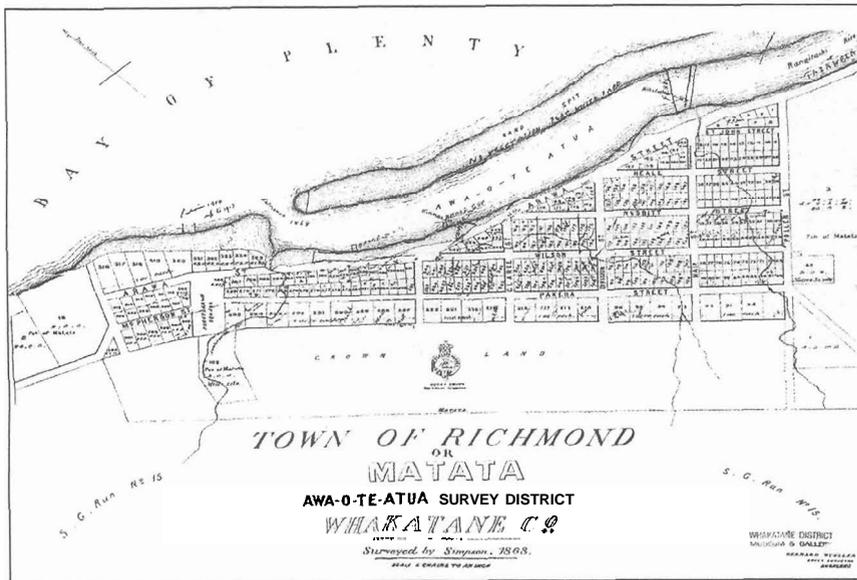
### Contemporary Planning and Modern Naming Practices

Planning has the potential to influence ways in which places and spaces are constructed and ordered. The virtue of street names as a means of preserving history in modern society is underestimated in the planning process. Whether the name encapsulates a generally known or unfamiliar past, all who use them are governed by the power of its name. This power lies in its inherent ability to create a version of its own history, an authenticated element of reality as it is constantly experienced, perceived and interpreted on a daily basis. This is certainly the case with the historical use of military names in the township of Matata.

Today's town planners should possess an adequate local knowledge of their district, maintain positive working relationships and have an affinity with tribal histories, and the nature of hapu dynamics. A senior planner in the region recognised that the historical context of place is important and suggested that there is a political arena between *iwi* and council and vice versa which should be acknowledged, but requires continual awareness and recognition from both sides.

Town planners and developers have an important role to play in facilitating dialogue with property owners. The Ngai Tahu Settlement Claims Act 1998 set a precedent for the reintroduction of Maori names, places, and geographical features. More than eighty names within the rohe of Ngai Tahu have been altered to dual toponyms. Ngati Awa has demonstrated that reintroducing Maori names onto a landscape assists in rebuilding a sense of belonging and social cognition for *tangata whenua*. Mapping significant sites assists in this process (refer to Figure 3).

Although property owners and developers



are often receptive, it has been a challenge for indigenous peoples to maintain a dialogue when faced with the task of re-educating all parties on such issues. The Treaty of Waitangi has been reinforced through legislation. In my opinion this has created a genuine and open forum for discussion into names and naming processes that have significance to Maori, and permits active involvement with local hapu. Planners should be encouraged to regularly engage with tangata whenua when place and street names are on the agenda within their tribal areas.

### Conclusion

New subdivisions are being widely developed, many built on land originally owned by Maori and deeply layered with rich histories. As the demand for residential and commercial properties increases, these developments give rise to unassuming place and street names, which serve to alienate Maori histories, rendering them invisible and in some cases, removing them from memory. In modern society we are experiencing a growing movement from within Maoridom that seeks to reinstate the original Maori names

*ABOVE:: Township of Richmond-Matata. Military names were given to the streets in Matata. Heale, Nesbitt, Pollen, Wilson and McPherson were male military figures that actively participated in the military campaigns and land confiscations of Te Awa-o-te-Atua (Matata) in the 1860s. Arawa Street, the main road through Matata was named after the Te Arawa iwi who collaborated with the Crown and were awarded the largest share of land in Matata. Source: Whakatane District Museum & Gallery (1868) Map 313.*

*ABOVE RIGHT:: Nga Tapuwae a Nga Tipuna o Ngati Awa (ancestral sires of Ngati Awa). This map demonstrates the depth of Maori naming. Places identified include ancient pa sites, kainga, cultivation areas, fishing spots, waka landing places, burial grounds and battle sites along the Tarawera River and the Matata Coastline in Whakatane. Creator: Te Hau Tutua (Ngati Awa Kaumatua). Map reproduced by: Betty-Ann Kamp, University of Waikato. Source: Ngati Awa Research & Archives, Whakatane.*

for places, where currently street and place-names have no association to the original area. In many ways it is an attempt to decolonise the land, revive forgotten histories and reclaim mana whenua.

Naming streets is an administrative and political act; it is a prerogative of local authorities and therefore constitutes an expression of power. Contemporary planning practitioners who have input into the decision making process in relation to street and place naming have the opportunity to influence naming practices. The advent of the

cultural consultant is a positive step in the right direction because it allows for a full involvement with the appropriately qualified tribal representative during the design and planning of new subdivisions, street and road names, or places of significance in traditional areas.

### Acknowledgements

Ngati Awa Research & Archives, Whakatane District Museum & Gallery, Te Hau Tutua (Ngati Awa Kaumatua) and Betty-Ann Kamp, University of Waikato.