



# He māpīhi maurea

A prized possession

TRADING TAONGA:  
THE STORY OF POUNAMU

KŌHATU / STONE

WHEN THE RED MAN CAME

## TITLE

Trading Taonga: The Story of Pounamu

Kōhatu / Stone

When the Red Man Came

## READING YEAR LEVEL

8

7

7

At times, Connected themes require the introduction of concepts that students at this curriculum level may need support to fully understand.

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LEVEL  
4





# Trading Taonga

According to Ngāi Tahu, the taniwha Poutini was the guardian of pounamu for the atua Kahue. One day, while swimming in the waters around Tūhua – an island in the Bay of Plenty – he saw a woman bathing in the sea. Her name was Waitaiki. Enchanted by her beauty, Poutini kidnapped Waitaiki and fled to his home on the South Island's west coast. He lit fires along the way to keep her warm, being careful to make sure she was rested and looked after.

## THE STORY OF POUNAMU

BY MATTHEW ROUT (NGĀI TAHU)

Tamaāhua, the husband of Waitaiki, soon discovered that she was missing. Using the power of karakia, he tracked Poutini south, finding pieces of precious stone in the ashes of each fire. When he reached the Arahura River, just north of Hokitika, he knew he had the taniwha trapped.

Poutini could sense that the end was near. With little chance of escape, he vowed that if he couldn't have Waitaiki, no one could. He turned Waitaiki into pounamu and laid her to rest in the cold water of the awa. In this way, Waitaiki became the mother of all pounamu found in the Arahura River. When Tamaāhua saw his wife, green and grey and completely smooth, he let out a long and painful takiaue. Some say his cry can still be heard ringing through the mountains today ...

## UNLIKE ANY OTHER STONE

Pounamu, also known as greenstone or New Zealand jade, is a valued taonga for Māori. As captured in the tale of Poutini, it is shaped by the forces of fire and water, surfacing only in remote parts of the South Island.

Pounamu forms deep underground in the area where the Pacific and Australian plates collide. Here, extreme heat and high pressure trigger chemical reactions in certain rocks. As the Pacific plate is pushed upwards, these new rocks are lifted to Earth's surface – the same action that forms the Southern Alps. Over time, the pounamu washes down from the mountains to emerge in rivers like the Arahura.

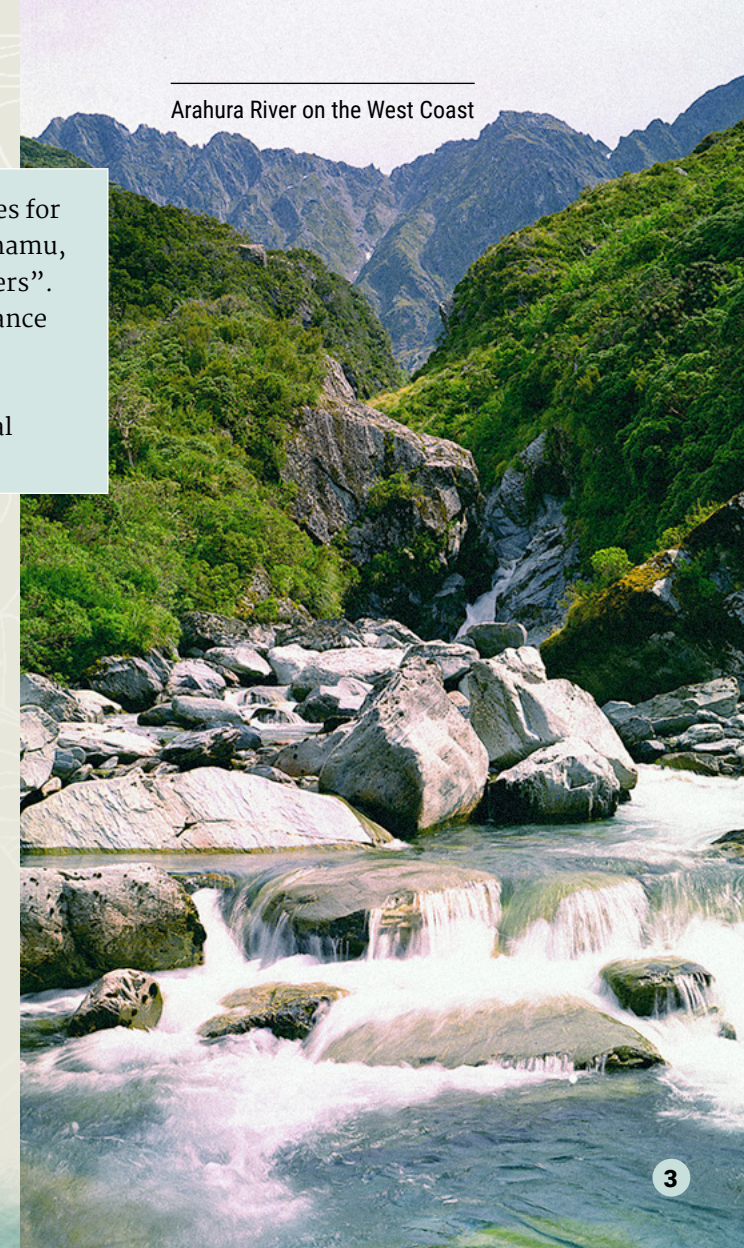
Pounamu looks like ordinary rock in its raw state. It's only after it has been cut and polished that its beauty can be seen, running from milky white to dark, lustrous green. Using traditional tools, it could take months, years – or even generations – for pounamu to be worked into its desired form. But the stone's unique properties made the effort worthwhile.

One of the original Māori names for the South Island is Te Waipounamu, meaning “the greenstone waters”. This name reflects the importance of pounamu to Māori. In 2013, Te Waipounamu was formally recognised as one of the official names for the South Island.



Pounamu boulders cut in half, revealing their distinctive green interior

Arahura River on the West Coast







Mere Pounamu



Whao Pounamu



Toki Pounamu

As the most durable material available in Aotearoa – similar in strength to steel – pounamu was made into tools like **toki** and **whao**. Because of its beauty, it was also carved into jewellery and ornaments, including hei tiki and hei matau pendants, kapeu and kuru ear pendants, and cloak pins. Yet while all these items were highly valued, pounamu mere were the most precious. These short-handled weapons were the main symbol of rangatira and **ariki**, handed down through generations. Some pounamu mere were given names and carried stories of battles fought by revered tūpuna. Like all pounamu artefacts, they had their own mana and, in some cases, were even said to possess magical powers.

**ariki:** high chiefs  
**toki:** adze  
**whao:** chisels



Portrait of Ngāti Maru woman Pare Watene holding a mere pounamu, a sign of her chiefly status (Lindauer, 1878)

## CONTROL OVER POUNAMU

Ngāti Wairaki were the first iwi to live on the rugged West Coast, sometimes called Te Tai Poutini (The Tides of Poutini). The steep mountains of the Southern Alps and the wild oceans of the Tasman Sea meant that, for many years, Ngāti Wairaki were protected from other tribes. Here, they discovered pounamu in the rivers that ran down from the mountains.

By the mid-1600s, Ngāi Tahu were expanding further into the South Island, while Ngāti Wairaki were forging new trails through the mountains. According to tradition, a woman named Raureka became the first person to discover a mountain pass from Te Tai Poutini to the east coast after arguing with her Ngāti Wairaki **whanauka**. Raureka entered what is now the Canterbury Plains and stumbled across a group of Ngāi Tahu men felling a tree with a stone adze. Surprised to see them using such an inferior tool, Raureka unwrapped her pounamu adze and cut the tree down for them. The group were amazed.

**whanauka:** relatives

They implored Raureka to show them her route through the mountains. Raureka obliged, and the increasingly dominant Ngāi Tahu set their sights on the stone.

Both Ngāti Wairaki and Ngāi Tahu sought to claim kaitiakitanga of pounamu.

Eventually, Ngāi Tahu was successful and continue to be recognised as guardians of this taonga. In time, members of Ngāi Tahu who had moved to the West Coast merged with the remaining Ngāti Wairaki, forming what became known as Poutini Ngāi Tahu.



Watercolour of Nōti Raureka (Browning Pass) from the eastern side



## TRADE NETWORKS

By the 1700s, Ngāi Tahu were trading pounamu along the eastern coast of Te Waipounamu and into Te Ika-a-Māui (the North Island). At first, this involved small groups trading pounamu taonga with allies and whanauka. But as more people became aware of the stone's unique properties, its popularity increased. The trade networks became larger and more complex.

Trails to new pounamu sources were discovered, with at least fifteen routes in use by the 1800s. Most of these sites were difficult to reach, which limited the supply of pounamu and increased the demand. Where possible, people used waka to transport pounamu along waterways, but most sites were accessible only by foot. Expeditions included up to thirty people, each with different skills. Waewae mānā were famed for their light-footed endurance, while waewae taurekareka were known for speed. Leaders navigated the trails using "memory maps", relying on recall and place names to find specific locations. Often, the strength of every member was needed to split the pounamu boulders into pieces

small enough to carry. Some trails were even operated by dedicated porters, who carried goods to and from various pā and trading hubs.

Pounamu became the driving force of the Māori economy, exchanged for everything from dried fish and finely woven mats to services like tattoos. Trade networks developed largely along whakapapa lines, extending all the way to Te Tai Tokerau in the north and even to offshore islands like Rēkohu. Sometimes, trade would flow in the opposite direction, with hapū travelling directly to Te Waipounamu to barter for the stone. These networks ensured a reasonably equal distribution of skills and resources that were rare, seasonal, or regional. As well as pounamu, obsidian from Tūhua (Mayor Island), argillite from Nelson and D'Urville Island, and basalt from Tahanga in the Coromandel were all exchanged across the country.

### Where Pounamu was found and traded



## KAIAPOI: CENTRE OF TRADE

Before pounamu was transported north, it was worked into tools, jewellery, and weapons at dedicated Te Waipounamu trading hubs. Kaiapoi Pā, near modern-day Christchurch, was one of the main trading and carving centres in the Ngāi Tahu network. It was renowned for its jewellery and weaponry. The wealthy settlement was home to many skilled carvers who fashioned the stone into valuable items. These carvers were often older chiefs who were no longer able to fight. They embedded their mana into each item they worked, telling stories of people and events through the patterns they engraved.



Engraving of Kaiapoi Pā circa 1830



## THE TRADITIONAL MĀORI ECONOMY

For most of Aotearoa New Zealand's history, people did not use money. Instead, they bartered for goods and services. In some cases, these exchanges took place right away, with each person acquiring new items in an efficient trade-off. But most of the time, a "gift" was not returned immediately. Instead, the person or group who had received the gift was expected to return something of equal or greater value later on.

As well as helping to distribute surplus resources, this system of gifting helped to bind Māori society together. It created long-term social connections and meant that people and groups relied upon one another, with trails of gifts often going back many years. Failure to return a gift diminished the mana of all involved, and of the gifting process. The best way to restore mana was to return an even better gift, providing a strong incentive to make and trade high-quality goods.



## THE LOSS OF POUNAMU

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Crown purchased most of Te Waipounamu from Ngāi Tahu. The Arahura River was not included in the sale, and Poutini Ngāi Tahu were promised continued access to this important pounamu source. In reality, not enough land was set aside, and as Pākehā settlers moved in, the iwi were increasingly cut off. In the following century, Poutini Ngāi Tahu lost all control over their taonga.

The loss was a devastating blow to the mana of Ngāi Tahu. As historian Bill Decker wrote in his submission to the Waitangi Tribunal, “The loss of land and the loss of traditional resources deprived [Ngāi Tahu] of an economic base for their communities, which eventually forced more and more of them to migrate to where there was work. Once the strength of the communities was broken in this way, the people were exposed increasingly to the predominantly negative European attitudes to the Māori and Māori culture. Hence loss of economic strength flowed through into loss of culture.”

Following the Crown’s purchase, the supply of pounamu largely dried up. Knowledge about where pounamu was found, how it was worked, and the meaning behind the designs were lost to the iwi. In its place, a largely non-Māori industry sprung up. European settlers and foreign tourists developed a liking for greenstone jewellery, and by the 1960s, pounamu items featuring knock-off “Māori” designs were popular souvenirs. With little oversight by the government, a million-dollar, black-market trade developed, with helicopters used to poach boulders from remote locations.



Hei tiki made for the New Zealand tourist market circa 1960

## RESTORING MANA

In 1986, Ngāi Tahu lodged the first large claim with the Waitangi Tribunal – the result of 150 years of resistance and protest. The iwi detailed hundreds of grievances and broken promises, including inadequate payments for land and the wrongful takeover of the pounamu trade. The Crown “apologised unreservedly” for the decades of suffering they had inflicted on Ngāi Tahu. As part of the Treaty settlement, legal ownership of all pounamu within the Ngāi Tahu **takiwā** was returned to the iwi.

**takiwā:** territory



Pounamu carver using modern tools to create new designs



Members of Ngāi Tahu witness the passage of Ngāi Tahu settlement legislation, 30 September 1998



Regaining kaitiakitanga of pounamu was a significant moment for Ngāi Tahu. Both symbolically and in practice, it represented a return of economic and cultural independence. Since the settlement, Ngāi Tahu have worked to revive the pounamu economy, blending traditional knowledge with modern methods. Like their tūpuna before them, they are ensuring the pounamu industry can endure long into the future, mana intact.

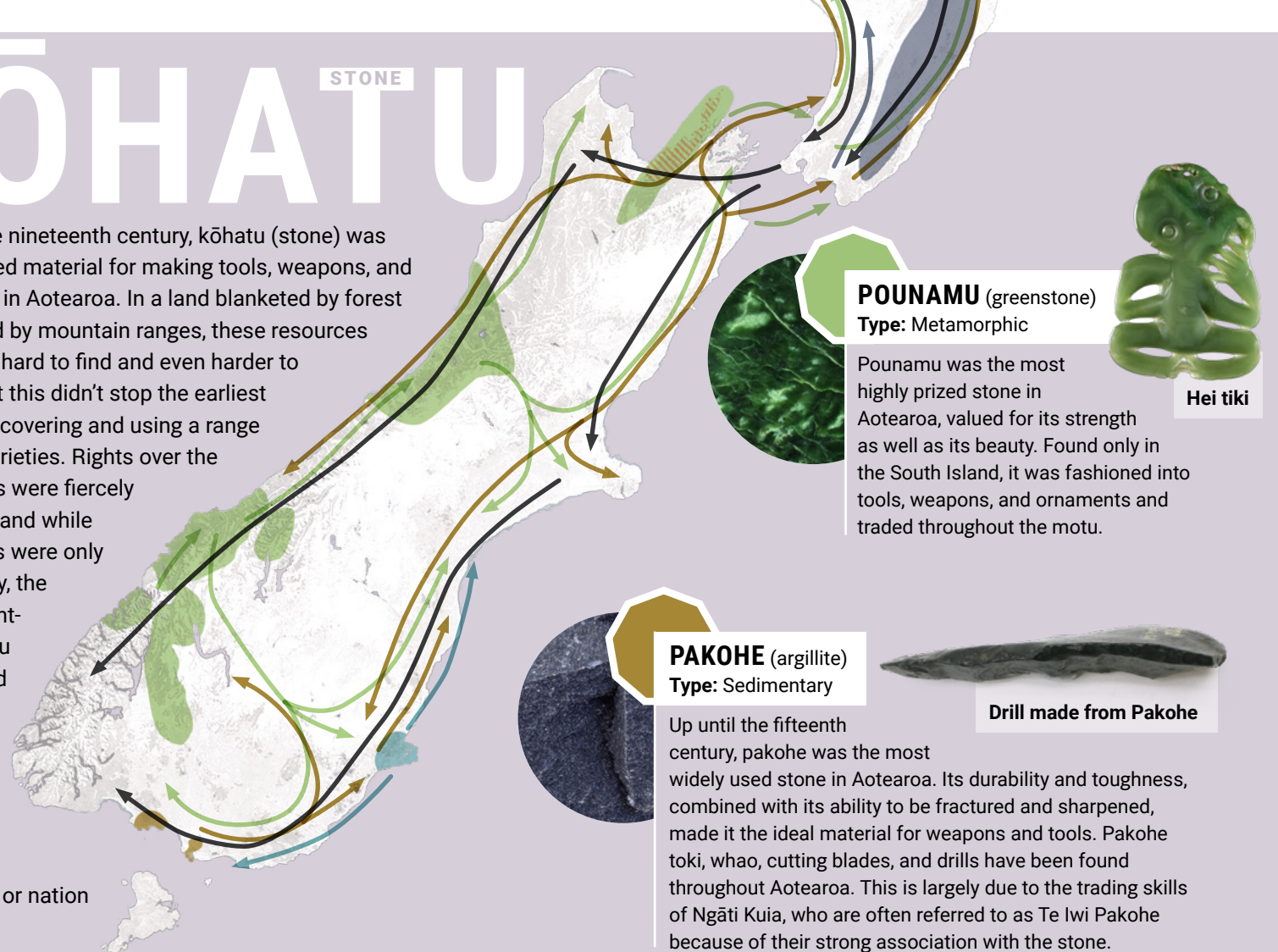




# KŌHATU STONE

Up until the nineteenth century, kōhatu (stone) was the preferred material for making tools, weapons, and ornaments in Aotearoa. In a land blanketed by forest and divided by mountain ranges, these resources were often hard to find and even harder to extract. But this didn't stop the earliest settlers discovering and using a range of stone varieties. Rights over the best stones were fiercely contested, and while some types were only used locally, the most sought-after kōhatu were traded across the motu.

**motu:** land or nation



**POUNAMU** (greenstone)  
Type: Metamorphic

Pounamu was the most highly prized stone in Aotearoa, valued for its strength as well as its beauty. Found only in the South Island, it was fashioned into tools, weapons, and ornaments and traded throughout the motu.



Hei tiki

**PAKOHE** (argillite)  
Type: Sedimentary

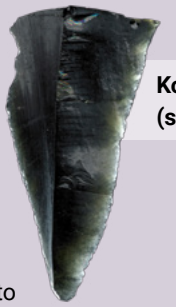
Up until the fifteenth century, pakohe was the most widely used stone in Aotearoa. Its durability and toughness, combined with its ability to be fractured and sharpened, made it the ideal material for weapons and tools. Pakohe toki, whao, cutting blades, and drills have been found throughout Aotearoa. This is largely due to the trading skills of Ngāti Kuia, who are often referred to as Te Iwi Pakohe because of their strong association with the stone.



Drill made from Pakohe

**MATĀ/TŪHUA** (obsidian)  
Type: Igneous

This hard and brittle volcanic glass was made into flake tools like knives, scrapers, and whao, as well as a saw-like weapon called a matā kautete. The volcanic island Tūhua in the Bay of Plenty was the largest source of matā in Aotearoa. When Ngāi Te Rangi took control over Tauranga in the eighteenth century, the Whanau-a-Tauwhao hapū were given the island to live on. They built pā on nearly every hill and headland to defend their matā from invading iwi.



Kota (scraper)

**KARĀ** (basalt)  
Type: Igneous

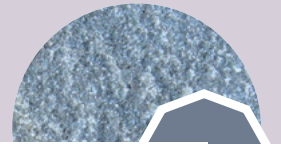
Karā is a versatile stone that was made into a range of weapons and tools. Fine grained karā from the Coromandel was highly valued for making toki. Like pakohe, it could be flaked and sharpened, but it was still hard enough to withstand strong collisions.



Toki (adze blade)

**ŌNEWA/WHATUAHO** (greywacke)  
Type: Sedimentary

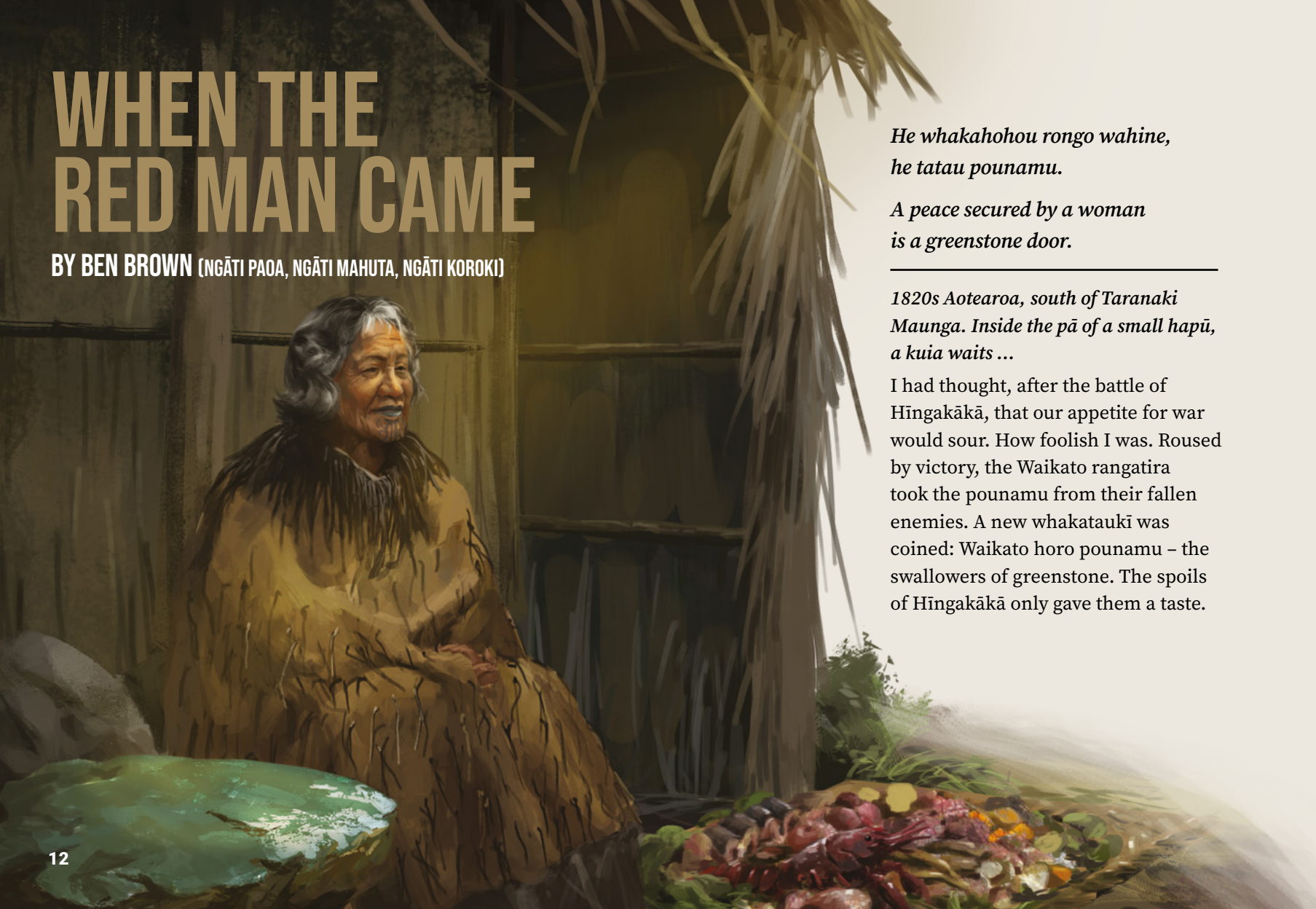
Ōnewa is the most common rock in Aotearoa. This hard grey sandstone was made into patu, toki, and fishing equipment like anchor stones.





# WHEN THE RED MAN CAME

BY BEN BROWN (NGĀTI PAOA, NGĀTI MAHUTA, NGĀTI KOROKI)



*He whakahohou rongu wahine,  
he tatau pounamu.*

*A peace secured by a woman  
is a greenstone door.*

*1820s Aotearoa, south of Taranaki  
Maunga. Inside the pā of a small hapū,  
a kuia waits ...*

I had thought, after the battle of Hīngakākā, that our appetite for war would sour. How foolish I was. Roused by victory, the Waikato rangatira took the pounamu from their fallen enemies. A new whakataukī was coined: Waikato horo pounamu – the swallows of greenstone. The spoils of Hīngakākā only gave them a taste.

The war cries from that bloody day still echo across the motu. Despite the many winters that have passed, they grow louder, calling out for redress. And so I wait for Te Wherowhero – the Red Man – to come. He is bound by mana to chase down his enemies, collecting the price of our failed allegiances. Reports from the north tell me he’s approaching. Barely a day away. *Auē ...*

I am tired to my bones, too old to flee. I tell my moko, “Take the people south, deeper into the forest. Tāne will conceal you. I will attend to the visitors myself.”

The boy’s reluctance is expected. Hīngakākā took his father before he was born. Nor would he ever know his mother – stricken with grief, she could not survive his birth. Now he thinks he is a man, prepared to fall as his father fell on that terrible day. Perhaps he is, but he is also my moko, and the last hope for my people. If I am forceful, he will do as I say.

Today, I am forceful.

...

**i ngā rā o mua:** in the old days  
**kahukura:** cloak



Before our people leave for the forest, I have them prepare a feast of welcome. They spread the food out on whāriki before my house. My moko fetches the taonga pounamu. It is kahurangi, a noble stone of deep colour, unworked by human hands. Named *Tiri-a-Ngahue*, it was left behind **i ngā rā o mua** by the tupuna Ngahue. It has been in the care of my whānau since we arrived in this land.

What would Ngahue think of my intentions today? Exchanging his taonga for peace – surely the only trade worthy.

...

**take:** issue or concern  
**tikanga:** correct practice or custom

So, here you find me then, an old grandmother, sitting before her house and awaiting her fate. This pā has been my papa kāinga my entire life. Now its gates are flung open to welcome the Red Man and his taua. My korowai will keep me warm enough. *Tiri-a-Ngahue* rests at my side, shaped like a kahawai, smooth and sleek enough to swim against the currents. He is a greedy fish, the kahawai. It’s what gets him caught. It reminds me of the **take** that brings the Red Man to my home a generation later; a **take** not of his making, yet **tikanga** compels him to pursue its consequences.

I cannot understand the hearts of men so burdened by mana that only slaughter will satisfy them. It must be a weight too terrible to bear – a curse on the souls of the mighty.

And the Red Man, he is mighty.

He carries his father’s legacy like the blood red **kahukura** that gives him his name. It must be true that, in war, it’s not enough to win the day. You must secure tomorrow. Future generations must respect your victory. I would laugh were it not so grim.





When tamariki are born, mothers will look for omens that reveal their child's fate. Flushed with the joy of new life, they forget that a secure path forward does not exist. Only the past is knowable, unfolding before us as we walk backwards into the future. History requires constant attendance, or else we will lose our way. And yet, when I look closely at the cause of my sorrow, I am left bewildered.

How can a chiefly man of lineage bring so much misery for the sake of wounded pride and a few fat fish? How is it that men in their thousands make another man's honour their own? How did my son see fit to pursue this *take* instead of taking his proper place among his people?

How does one man's anger encircle the land and threaten to devour it? Perhaps the Red Man will tell me these things.

...

The forest alerts me to his arrival. Tīeke, watching from his canopied heights, is raucous in his alarm. Others join in. All but Pīwaiwaka will shrink from the advance. Ever the opportunist, he hunts the insects that are put to flight by the passage of men through the undergrowth. They feast on the fly, fearless of death, or at least uncaring of its presence.

I do not fear death. But I care about it deeply. Death should be dignified. Sadness needs a respectful space for expression. I wonder, Pīwaiwaka, what you make of that – flitting about me now with so much to say and no time to settle. Yes, I am aware they are coming. You cannot miss the energy of their intent. It's as palpable as the wind.

For all that, they are manuhiri. I call them on.

*Haere mai, haere mai, tomo mai nei ki taku kāinga, ki taku ngākau pōhara ē.  
Welcome to my home, to my destitute heart.*

...

“So many fearsome, fine-looking men. How my heart would dance if this were the summer of my youth. You have come far. Please, eat – the birds are fat and succulent. I'm sorry, I wish there were more.”

The Red Man speaks with calm consideration. “Tēnā koe, e kui. You are more than generous. How is it that you are here alone?”

He stands before me, tall and striking, wearing his kahukura well.

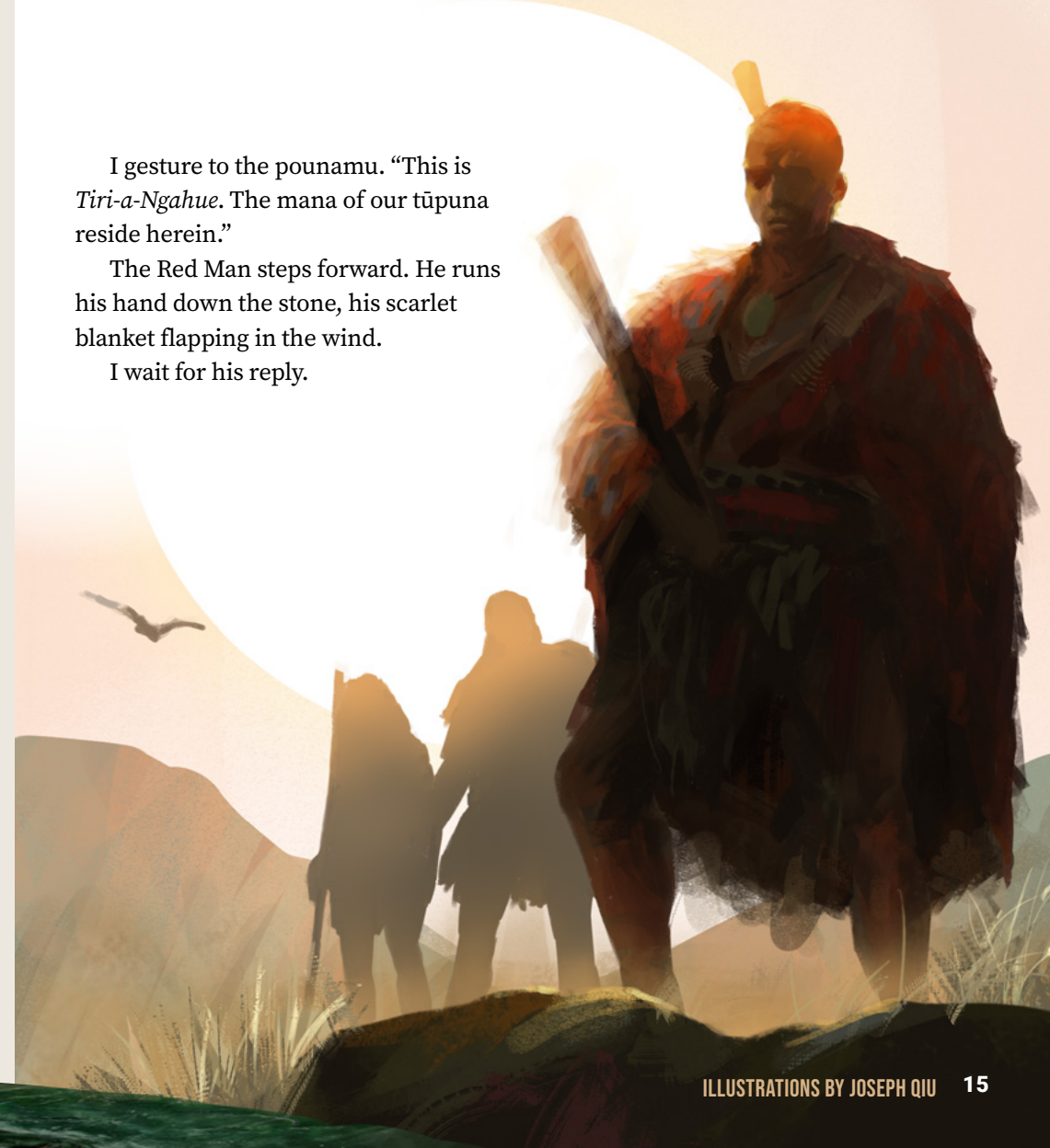
“E noho mai nei, e tama,” I reply. “Sit down here beside me. It hurts my neck to look up at you ... I know why you have come, though I do not understand it. You may not have my people. I have sent them away.”

His silence spurs me on. “As you were on your way here, I thought that I would ask you – why must you continue with this bloody work? Why did my own son think this mahi virtuous – is mana such a fragile thing? But I will not ask. I do not want to hear a fine-looking man talk nonsense. I will offer you a gift instead, if you are able to accept it.”

I gesture to the pounamu. “This is *Tiri-a-Ngahue*. The mana of our tūpuna reside herein.”

The Red Man steps forward. He runs his hand down the stone, his scarlet blanket flapping in the wind.

I wait for his reply.





# WAR AND PEACE

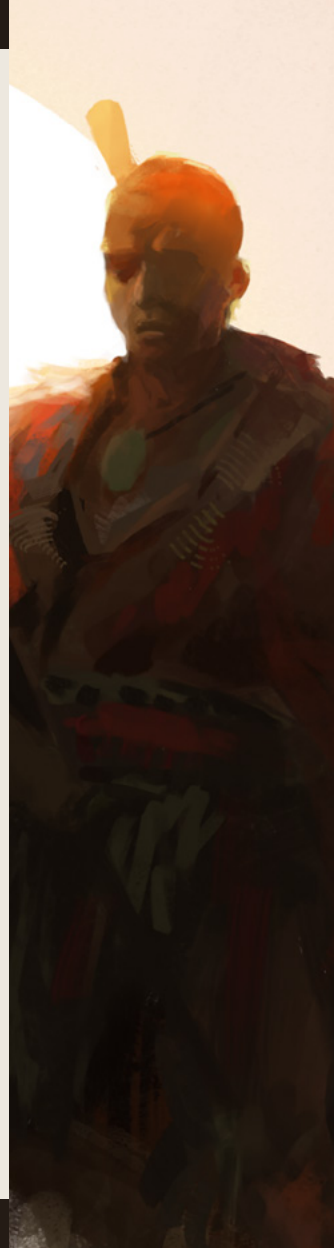


This story is a work of fiction, but the battle of Hīngakākā and the rangatira Te Wherowhero are real.

Te Hīngakākā took place near Te Awamutu in the late 1700s. According to some accounts, the conflict was sparked by what Ngāti Toa chief Pīkauterangi saw as the unequal distribution of a large kahawai harvest. To claim revenge on the offending hosts – Waikato iwi Ngāti Apakura and Ngāti Maniapoto – Pīkauterangi raised an army of ten thousand warriors, calling on allies from across the North Island. But the Waikato iwi had allies of their own. The two armies clashed in what became the largest battle ever fought in Aotearoa. Despite being vastly outnumbered, the clever tactics of Ngāti Mahuta chief Te Rauangaanga ensured a Waikato victory. “Te Hīngakākā” translates as “the plucking of the kākā” – a reference to the feathers in the cloaks of the fallen chiefs who were stacked up after the battle.

Te Rauangaanga had a son named Te Wherowhero – the Red Man. Trained as a warrior and schooled in traditional knowledge, Te Wherowhero would one day go on to become the first Māori King. Before that, he led his people through the decades of intertribal war known as the Musket Wars. During this period (1818–1830s), Māori warfare was transformed, as new technologies made deadly conflicts out of old rivalries. When Ngāti Toa killed one of Te Wherowhero’s relatives, the hostilities that came to a head at Hīngakākā flowed on to the next generation. Te Wherowhero called for an invasion against the old foe.

But war was not the only way to settle disputes. Pounamu was such a highly prized possession that gifting greenstone taonga could restore balance between warring parties. The metaphor of a tatau pounamu – a greenstone door – came to represent a lasting peace agreement. This could be entered into through the exchange of taonga, an arranged marriage, or simply a commitment to avoiding battle. By agreeing to the pact, the two parties were closing the door on their conflict. They were committing to a peace that, like pounamu, endured into the future.



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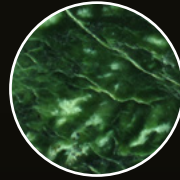




## Inside ...



Trading Taonga:  
The Story of Pounamu



Kōhatu / Stone



When the  
Red Man Came

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