

Fast Facts

TE ARAWA

Myths and Legends

(suitable for pre/post visit)



ROTORUA
museum

Te Whare Taonga o Te Arawa
ART | CULTURE | HERITAGE

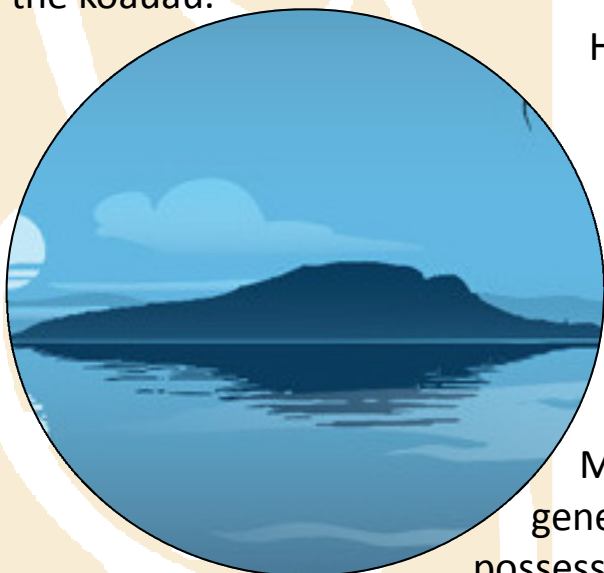
Hinemoa rāua ko Tutānekai

In Rotorua Museum is a bone koauau (flute) called Murirangaranga. This koauau originally belonged to a Te Arawa ancestor named Tutānekai.

Murirangaranga was the tohunga who failed to complete the tohi (purification ritual after birth) over Tutānekai. He was immediately drowned by Whakaue who then fashioned the tohunga's arm bone into the flute Murirangaranga that he gifted to his son Tutānekai.



Tutānekai grew up with his father on Mokoia Island in Lake Rotorua. As a young man he fell in love with a beautiful young woman of a rival iwi at Ōwhata. Her name was Hinemoa. Their union was forbidden so one night Hinemoa swam across the lake to her would-be suitor, guided only by the sound of Tutānekai playing the koauau.



Her three-kilometre swim was successful and the couple was united bringing peace to the district.

Today, some 12 generations later, many hundreds of their descendants live in the Rotorua region.

Like this oral tradition, the koauau Murirangaranga was also passed down from generation to generation, until it came into the possession of Tohi-te-Ururangi.

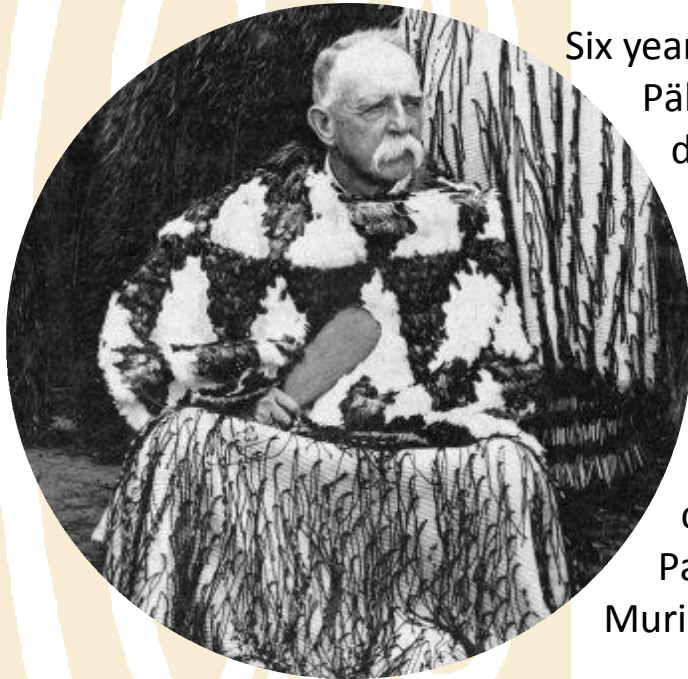
Tohi was famous for his taiaha fighting ability and political astuteness. However it was a musket shot that brought about his death as he led 800 Arawa warriors to victory over their traditional enemies, Ngāti Awa.

After his death the koauau was hidden down his throat lest anyone steal the precious taonga.

Te Arawa brought Tohi-te-Ururangi back to Rotorua and buried him at Öhinemu.



Afterwards Murirangaranga was passed to Tohi's cousin Ngāhuru Pango of Ngāti Tutānekai.



Six years later (7th February 1870) a renowned Pākeha, Gilbert Mair, arrived in Rotorua to defend the people from the murderous intentions of Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki.

Later the Ngāti Whakaue people of Öhinemu honoured Mair with gifts and greetings.

At the conclusion of the presentation ceremony their elderly leader Ngāhuru Pango hung the tribe's most revered taonga Murirangaranga around Gilbert Mair's neck.

Two decades later in 1890, Gilbert Mair's extensive collection of taonga, which included Murirangaranga, was sold to Auckland Museum.

For almost 100 years Te Arawa was unaware that their most prized taonga was in the Auckland Museum. In the late 1960s Murirangaranga was rediscovered and on 28 April 1993, it was returned home to the people of Rotorua after an absence of 123 years.