

Ngātoroirangi and the Coming of Fire



The tohunga (spiritual/navigator priest) of the Arawa waka was Ngatoroirangi

This is the story of how ngāwhā (heat) came to the thermal regions. Packing his kete Ngātoroirangi left his home in Maketu he travelled south with companions and his servant until he reached Lake Taupo. As he rested there clouds rolled away and he saw the majestic maunga (mountain) of Tongariro his heart was filled with longing as he wanted to discover and be the first to climb this mountain.



He called his travel companions and said.

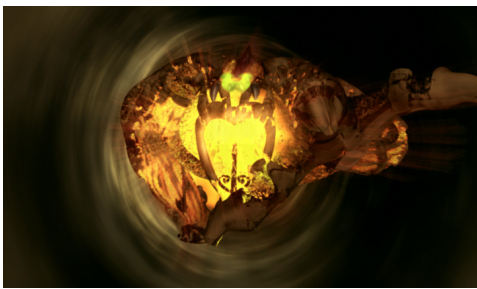
“Stay here. None of you are to climb up the maunga with me except my servant Uruhoe. While I am gone you may eat no food. This will give me strength and the gods will be with me. When I return we will feast together and I will tell you all about the mountain.”

Ngatoroirangi and Uruhoe started to climb through bush and scrub tussock and then snow. After travelling a few days their feet and hands were frozen the sun was hidden and the cold crept through their flesh and into their bones. They stumbled landing in the snow freezing to death.

In *Ngātoroirangi's* agony he called to his sisters in the homeland Hawaiki

“Send fire to warm me, do not delay or I will perish! Kuiwai and Haungaroa come quickly. Ka riro au I te tonga. I am carried away in the cold south wind.”

His companions waited days and thought the two men had perished so decided to eat.



In far off Hawaiki his sisters heard his prayer. They called the fire demons Te Pupū and Te Hoata who plunged into the sea and swam until they came to Whakaari or White island. As they lifted their heads into the air the earth burst into flames which have never died down. They realised they still had much further to go before reaching Ngātoroirangi.

They dived under the land and surfaced briefly at Awakeri, Rotoehu, Rotoiti, Rotorua, Tarawera, Ōrakei Korako, Waimangu and Taupō and finally the mountain where Ngatoroirangi and Uruhoe were warmed and saved. At each place heat was pushed out of the ground and didn't stop.

A tunnel was made that connected Whakaari (White Island) all the way through to Tongariro. Tongariro means riro carried away. Tonga means south wind. The heat continues to be produced today as hotpools, geysers, springs and volcanoes. In science terms we call it the Taupo Volcanic Zone.

