



Voyage from Hawaiki

The story of Te Arawa begins in Hawaiki, the distant land of our ancestors.

Our iwi (tribe) is named after the Te Arawa waka that brought them to the shores of Aotearoa. Theirs was an epic journey; one that took courage, skill, and powerful magic to survive.

Houmaitawhiti was a chief of a tribe called Ngati Ōhomairangi in Hawaiki. His family became embroiled in a series of conflicts which lead to the momentous decision to leave.

Trouble in Hawaiki

The trouble began when the powerful chief Uenuku ate Potakatawhiti, the pet dog of Houmaitawhiti.

The chief's sons Tamatekapua and Whakaturia missed their father's pet and set out to find him, calling his name as they went. When they entered Uenuku's village they were delighted to hear an answering howl – only to discover that the sound was coming from inside the belly of Uenuku.

The two brothers schemed how to take revenge for this insult. They settled on the idea of stealing kuru (breadfruit) from Uenuku's precious tree.

Night after night, they crept up to his house on stilts and took as much as they could carry. But before long, they were found out. A violent battle ensued.

Tamatekapua's forces won the fight, but Houmaitawhiti told his son to seek out a peaceful life in a new land. So he began to make preparations to leave Hawaiki forever.

Houmaitawhiti was too old to go himself. So he appointed his son Tamatekapua leader of the expedition.

The Voyage Begins

A great tree was felled and the waka (canoe) was built, ready to take on the fearsome ocean waves. At least 30 people readied themselves and packed their kete ready to join Tamatekapua on the long and dangerous voyage.

The Kidnapping of Ngatoroirangi

The waka was completed and stocked with food for the voyage. The only thing it lacked was a skilled navigator to guide the way.

Nearby, another waka named Tainui was also being prepared to travel to Aotearoa. Tainui had a navigator – a powerful tohunga (priest) called Ngātoroirangi.

The trickster Tamatekapua persuaded Ngātoroirangi and his wife Kearoa to come on board and bless the waka before departure. But as soon as they arrived, the order was given to cast off into open waters. There was no escape.



Ngātoroirangi was angry, but had no choice but to settle down to the journey.



The Throat of Te Parata

At night, Ngatoroirangi left his wife's side to observe the stars and keep the waka on course. He knew of Tamatekapua's reputation as a womaniser, so he took the precaution of tying a long cord to Kearoa's hair and taking it up on deck so he would know if she moved from her place.

But as soon as the tohunga had gone, Tamatekapua moved over and retied the cord onto the boards of the waka so he could be with Kearoa.

Ngātoroirangi was furious when he found out what had happened. In his anger he called on Te Parata, the huge sea monster (taniwha) that controlled the tides by swallowing and spitting out the ocean waters.

The waka was drawn down into a huge whirlpool – the Throat of Te Parata. Overhead, Natoroirangi's curse moved the stars in the night sky.

Everyone on board cried out in terror, sure they were about to die. All hope seemed lost.

But at the last minute, Ngātoroirangi took pity on the women and children and chanted a powerful prayer to save them. The waka travelled along the coast to the north, stopping at places along the way from Whangaparaoa to the inner harbours of the Hauraki Gulf.

Sailing south again, the people made their way to the western Bay of Plenty, naming places as they went.

When the waka reached Maketu, two big stone anchors were put out to steady the great canoe. Toka-parore (the rock of the mangrove-fish), held the bow; and Tu-te-rangi-haruru (like-the-roaring-sky) fastened the stern. Two rocks with these names still stand in the Maketu estuary, marking the place where the ancestors landed.

Maketu is considered the landing place of the Arawa iwi.

