

RĀPAKI IS A KAIKA – NOT A PĀ

D170: Pā. Updated: 29 February 2020.

Pā – ‘a fortified Māori village or defensive settlement’.

Rāpaki is not, and never has been, a pā.

7,321 historical pā have been identified in Aotearoa. Less than 2% (144) are anywhere in Te Wai Pounamu. (There are nearly as many (139) in the Far North Te Aupori Peninsula). (McDowall & Denee 2019:86).

Up to 10 pā have been claimed for Whakaraupō. 6 didn’t exist, 2 still have to be confirmed and only 2 are accepted – Ohinetahi and Rīpapa. None of these are claimed for Rāpaki.

So, how come people keep calling Rāpaki a pā?

In part, it is probably because the early Pakeha writers on Whakaraupō history often came from the North where thousands of Māori settlements were pā. Eg in 1850 the engineer building the Evans Pass road claimed that 38 of the 88 Māori labourers ‘belonged to local pas’. (Taylor 1950:62). (None of the Whakaraupō pā were occupied in 1850).

One of the strangest claims is for a pā on Mt Herbert. One wonders if the writers had ever been there. Cowan asserts a pā was there (Cowan: 1923: 16). So does Taylor (1950: 60). And it is repeated in Ogilvie (1970: 15) and Robertson (2016:34). I’ve been there several times – it is a miserable place, miles from anywhere, extremely unlikely as a pā site. As Atholl Anderson says “Claims that remains of pā can be seen in various places are often dubious, to say the least, yet persist.” (Anderson: 2019:20). Even so, despite their fascination with pā, both Cowan (1923:29) and Taylor (1950:64) describe Rāpaki as a kaika.

The early writers often took pride in their skill at telling good yarns – and they often did. At times they even cite, approvingly, other examples, mostly European, of warrior peoples.

We have our differences, but surely the big lesson of Kai Huanga is that aggression leading to violence can get out of control with very serious negative results on everyone for generations afterwards. We don’t have to be wimps, but these days indulging in warrior behaviour all too often leads to court appearances and prison with ensuing negative impacts on whanau and endless media stories about Māori failings.

Yes, those of us who grew up in Rāpaki have heard this place referred to as a pa – but that was last century when our traditional culture and language were at a nadir and at their weakest. In this new millenium let’s revitalise our culture and te reo Māori.

Rāpaki was, and is, a **kaika**, not a pā.

That is tika.

Our official communications should reflect this.

References:

Atholl Anderson, *Report on Māori Archeaeological Sites in Whakaraupō and Adjacent Areas*. 2019.

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Chris McDowall and Tim Denee. *We Are Here – An Atlas of Aotearoa*. 2019.

Elizabeth Ogilvie, *Purau*. 1970.

Jane Robertson, *Head of the Harbour*. 2016

WATaylor, *Lore and History of the South Island Maoris* 1950.