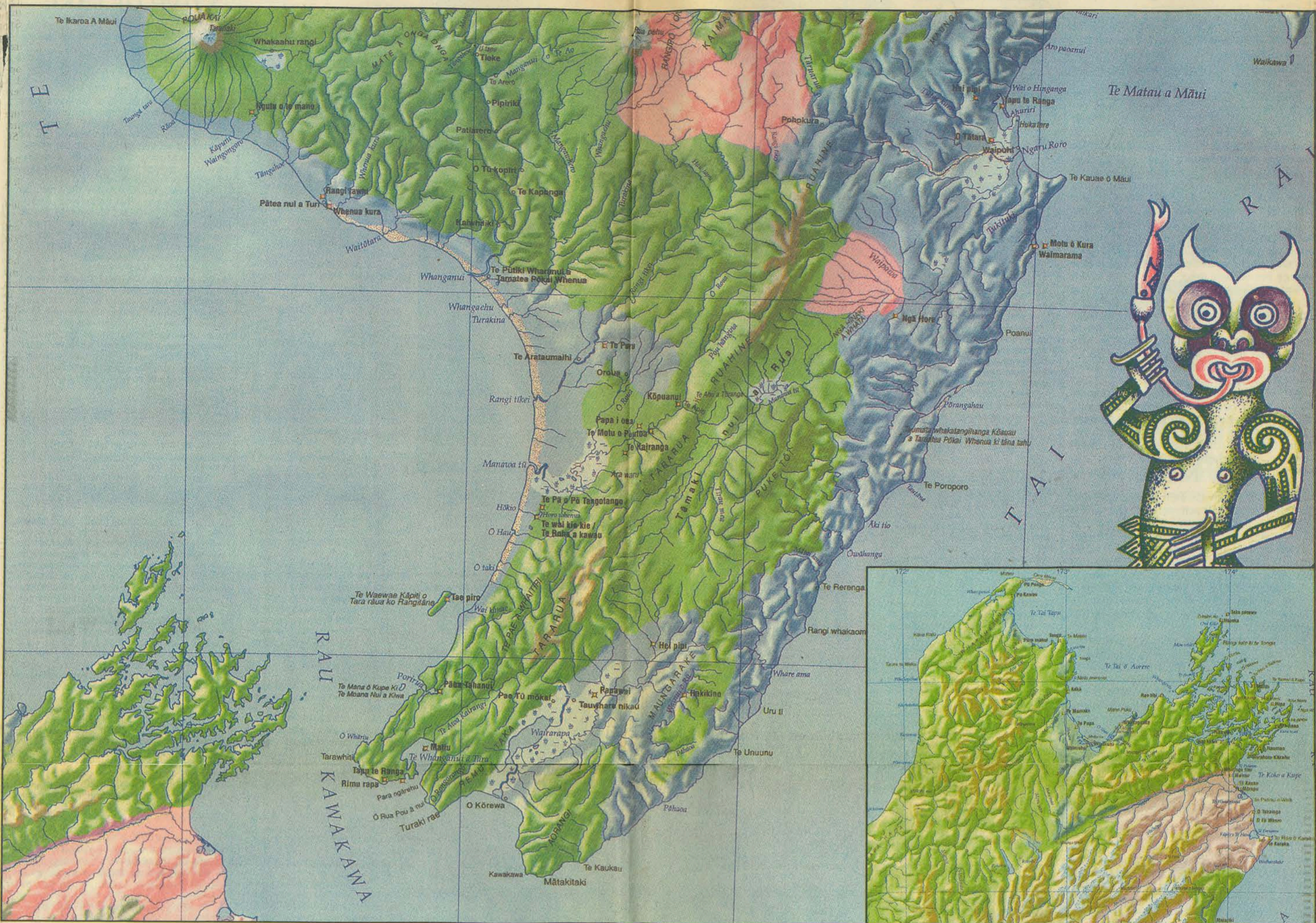


Weekend

New maps of the main Maori placenames in 1840 will give us a peek into history. **Pauline Swain reports**



The southern half of the North Island and the tip of the South Island . . . recreated with the vegetation and placenames of 1840

The renaming of New Zealand



Geographic Board researcher Te Aue Davis, left, with board chairman Bill Robertson, centre, and cartographer Phil Dickson . . . sets of the maps will be sent to every school as part of Maori Language Year kits

SHORT of going back to 1840 in a time machine, it takes painstaking research to establish exactly where Maoris were at that time, and what they called those places.

This isn't only of academic interest to their descendants but could be crucial to valid results in treaty negotiations.

"Naming is part of claiming," says Bill Robertson, Geographic Board chairman and director-general of the Department of Survey and Land Information.

The department this week published maps of the North and South Islands with Maori placenames as at 1840, on behalf of the board, which has a statutory responsibility to establish authenticated Maori placenames.

These maps go some way toward saving an accurate record for posterity, but are just a beginning. There are numerous locally important village sites, ridges, creeks and so on which such small-scale maps have no space for. They await future projects.

The job of getting the names right was headed by Geographic Board researcher Te Aue Davis. She says: "Much of this knowledge came from current Maori elders who heard the information from their old people. When our elders die there is a real danger that the knowledge will be lost."

"Where Maori names are used in contemporary maps they are sometimes spelt incorrectly or used as compound words. This tends to destroy the origin of the name."

"Te Aue has been very consultative," Bill Robertson says, "so I think there will be general support and consensus for the maps. But the maps are dynamic, in the sense that if there is conflict, we can call up the database and eventually produce another map."

He doesn't think people will quarrel with what is there.

Still, without detracting from the value of these attractive maps, what is not there is misleading. For example, anyone picking up the North Island map, *Te Ika a Māui, The Land and Its People*, and seeing the words "circa 1840" would expect

to find on it significant Maori villages at that time.

Around Wellington city all the map shows is three old Maori pa sites: Matiu (Somes Island), Tapu te Ranga (the island at Island Bay) and Kupe's ancient Rimu rapa pa (Sinclair Head).

These were uninhabited in 1840, but the map shows no trace of considerable settlements of Te Ati Awa people who had been living along the northern side of the harbour from Te Aro to the mouth of the Hutt River for two decades, nor of the

Ngāti Toa people settled at Porirua. Mrs Davis says this is because it was impossible to pinpoint exactly where the settlements were, and that the map would have been too cluttered if all known settlements had been put on.

She says that even in pre-colonial days Wellington was something of a way-station with people coming and going through it all the time.

Placenames that did make it on to the map have been well researched.

In the course of earlier work for the Maori and South Pacific Arts Council investigating natural resources for carvers and weavers, Mrs Davis had already gone around the country setting up a network of informants.

She built on these contacts later, doing research for a 1990 atlas of Maori oral history and then the new maps. "I carefully chose the old people I needed to talk to in each area," she says.

A good deal of the work on original placenames had already been done. A centennial atlas was planned for 1941, but was never published because of World War II. The names collected for that were compiled by Sir Apirana Ngata and other scholars, and Mrs Davis's visits to the

kaumatua were to verify this material.

"We also had meetings with people from the Maori Language Commission, from the *Dictionary of Biography* and the Geographic Board," she says, "and argued out what should be done. That's where all the language experts are."

Her research included meanings of names. On the back of each map are lists of all the placenames with their meaning or significance as well as the commonly used present-day name.

So, if you'd been around Wellington in 1840 you might have

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climbed over the Remu taka (torn hem of a cloak) mountains to get to the plains of Wairarapa (glistening flashing water), which you would have discovered was mostly swamp. If you went up the coast to the Manawa tu (stumbling or catching one's breath) river — wading through more swamps — eventually you would get to Te Apiti (confined, steep-sided), today's Manawatu Gorge.

Some of the old names are poetic: Stratford used to be called Rūa Tahanga's journey to marry. Others are less so. A locality near the Kaimai Ranges was named after someone's armpit. A bay on Stewart Island meant "smeared with dung".

Like European placenames, many are simply named after people. The majority say what the place looks like, or reminds people of. Young Nick's Head, for instance, used to be the head of Paoa's dog.

The best placenames tell a story. Some are fairly obvious, such as O Tu kopiri (pinched with cold) up the Whanganui River. Others are more obscure, after wacky or poignant historical moments when you really had to be there, such as

Kohukohu (Kupe's curse on his people for opening the hangi before it was cooked).

Cook Strait, Rau Kawakawa, was named because travellers crossing it would wear wreaths of kawakawa leaves on their heads to prevent them seeing the rocks now called The Brothers, which were so tapu that misfortune was thought to befall any who looked at them.

CARTOGRAPHER Phil Dickson was in charge of making the finished maps, using new digital mapping techniques as well as conventional skills.

"To make the map more attractive as well as meaningful," he says, "I thought we might as well show land cover as it would have been at 1840."

He took existing vegetation maps used in the 1959 and 1976 *New Zealand Atlas* and worked with Lincoln Landcare researcher Matt McGlone to get as close as possible to an accurate historical record.

"Of course we also had to make sure the maps showed the Napier area as it was before the big earthquake, and the South Island's Waitaki River minus hydro lakes," Mr Dickson says.

"We haven't printed the maps in the four standard process colours, as any sane person would have done, but I'm sure it will pay off in the end."

Because the board wanted the map to look different from modern maps, specially mixed colours have been used and artist Cliff Whiting has supplied decorative drawings of significant taniwhas in Maori legends.

Sets of the maps will be sent to every school as part of Maori Language Year kits.

Mr Robertson and Mrs Davis say that as well as being useful in New Zealand, these maps will be of interest in other South Pacific countries, Australia and further afield. Mr Robertson is the chairman of the Asia-Pacific section of a United Nations group on geographic names. "They are very interested in what we are doing, and this is a model that will be looked at in other countries."