

UENUKU – THE ATUA OF THE RAINBOW

The most well-known artefact to be discovered in NZ is Uenuku. He was made from NZ tootara and dated 1200–1500AD. He was found in Lake Ngaroto, Waikato, in 1906.

Uenuku was deliberately stored in the lake to be preserved and protected from war invasion. Lake Ngaroto provided the acidic, anaerobic conditions in peat lakes which are known for preserving organic, wooden material.

Uenuku was found near a stockade artificial paa located around the edge of the lake, years after the lake was artificially lowered.

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

In 2010, the Waikato Raupatu River Trust established a research relationship with Manaaki Whenua as part of a Wetland Restoration Research Programme.

A cultural indicator was identified by the tribe to measure wetland health.

We are investigating the practice of how our tuupuna stored raakau and taonga in wetlands for both their protection and preservation: Raakau Preservation Technique.

This indicator will assist to build a Tikanga Maaori Monitoring Framework for wetland health of relevance to our people.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE?

If so, please contact

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Uenuku Image: Courtesy of Te Awamutu Museum
Cover and inside image: Lake Ngaroto. Courtesy of Nardene Berry
Back and folding image: Opuatia Wetland. Courtesy of Monica Peters

RAAKAU PRESERVATION TECHNIQUE

WAIKATO-TAINUI CULTURAL INDICATOR
FOR WETLAND HEALTH

NGA KOWHARAU O HINEITEREPO

THE MANY HIDING PLACES OF
HINEITEREPO (THE SWAMP MAIDEN)

WHAT IS A CULTURAL INDICATOR?

A cultural indicator is something measured regularly to show a trend or sudden change in the state of the environment. A trend relates to the way people value an environment and cultural values can be important in setting standards and guidelines.

A cultural indicator is a tohu that helps us to measure changes in the environment based on tikanga and maatauranga Maaori.

The Raakau Preservation Technique provides a methodology that has been trialled, tested and repeated over generations.

The practice has developed its own tikanga and karakia.

RAAKAU PRESERVATION TECHNIQUE

Over the last century, hundreds of Maaori wooden taonga ranging from domestic items to ornately carved artworks have been recovered in peat lakes/wetlands during land development and farming activities.

These artefacts were successfully preserved due to the lack of oxygen that prevents bacteria and fungi to cause any damage to the wood carvings.

These discoveries provide clues that the Raakau Preservation Technique was implemented by Maaori who settled in wetland areas of Aotearoa.

WHAT WE KNOW BASED ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Archaeological studies make comment on various aspects of the Raakau Preservation Technique:

- **Carving techniques** involved working the piece of carving in the peat lake/wetland to season the wood; store the carving in the wetland to prevent it from cracking and keep it soft and flexible
- **Wood types used** – hardwoods – maanuka, kaanuka and mapou; softwoods – kauri, mataii, tootara and rimu
- **Known discovery sites in the Waikato** include Lake Ngaroto, Lake Mangakaware, Te Miro and Chartwell – known as swamp paa, fortifications artificially elevated above swampy lakes or ground
- **Possible reasons for burying wooden taonga in peat lake/wetlands**
 - Preservation – wetland conditions provided storage capability and safekeeping
 - Permanent burial – ceremonial rituals
 - Temporary burial – seasonal storage, to season the wood during carving and concealment from enemies during war invasions
- **Taonga were buried** – close to lake edge for disposal or in lake muds in an orderly fashion for temporary burial to retrieve at a later date.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

The Raakau Preservation Technique cultural indicator will allow Waikato-Tainui to:

- Express change in their environment to measure wetland conditions
- Establish relationships to customary resources such as whakapapa
- Highlight the relevance of cultural indicators by embracing tikanga and maatauranga Maaori to understand environmental change
- Contribute to their vision of enhancing and restoring the mauri of lowland Waikato wetlands
- Create a platform to engage with kaitiaki in research and develop frameworks using both maatauranga Maaori and scientific approaches.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

The research project relies on tribal engagement and is highly dependent on the collection of knowledge from tribal members who reside near wetlands, or have knowledge regarding the traditional and cultural practices of wetlands such as kaumaatua, carvers and weavers.

With the support and guidance of Waikato-Tainui tribal members, we'll better understand the kaupapa and tikanga of the Raakau Preservation Technique.