

## **The Wanganui River**

As the river became better known, it became an important access way from the South Island and the lower part of the North Island to the Central Plateau and then the Bay of Plenty, Waikato and even Auckland. This route was much preferred to the rough seas of the west coast and a greater abundance of food was available on the way.(p.72)

To Maori people in early times, the river was ‘the main road’ and families used waka in the way that they use cars today. People lived on either side of the river, not just the side the road was on. As well as being the highway, it was the chemist, the washing-machine, the fish-shop....

When Pakeha settlements became established up the river waka provided a vital service, carrying equipment and provisions to them as well as mail and passengers. Maori people made expeditions to these towns, loading their canoes with foods such as game birds, wild pork and vegetables which they traded or sold for items such as tobacco, saddles, harnesses, tools...

By the 1850’s Maori were growing European crops, such as fruit , vegetables and large quantities of wheat, on the fertile river terraces. Waka gave way to steam in the 1860’s and by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the Wanganui River trip was advertised overseas as one of the great scenic trips of the world.

**A story for the children**

In addition to the many rapids, snags and rocks, people using the river had to beware the taniwha which lived there. One of the worst was *Tutaeporoporo* (*darkened shit!*) which arrived in the river about 50 years after Tamatea explored it and lived in the upper reaches. *Tutaeporoporo* had been the pet shark of Tu-ariki who took it from Nelson to his home in Rangitikei. Tu-ariki kept his pet in a deep hole in the river, fed it special food and said karakia over it. *Tutaeporoporo* grew into a monster and after Tu-ariki was killed, the taniwha caught and ate those responsible. He acquired a liking for human flesh and upset many canoes on the rapids, causing their occupants to drown. *Tutaeporoporo* was eventually killed by the warrior Ao-kehu who hid in a wooden box in which he floated down the river. The taniwha swallowed it and once inside, Ao-kehu emerged and cut up the monster from the inside!(p. 75)...

(Extract from: Nga Waka Maori by Anne Nelson)