

Ngāti Ruapani Historical Account Summary

(1) Ngāti Ruapani mai Waikaremoana did not sign te Tiriti o Waitangi/the Treaty of Waitangi and the Crown had no official presence in Te Urewera until the 1860s. The first substantial contact between Ngāti Ruapani and the Crown was the Crown's armed attacks on Te Kōpani and Onepoto in 1866. Attacks on Waikaremoana settlements continued between 1869 and 1871. The Crown unfairly treated Ngāti Ruapani as rebels, with dire consequences, including loss of life and land. Crown forces used scorched earth tactics, destroying kāinga and crops, and stole horses, cattle, and food supplies. These acts resulted in starvation and exposure that contributed to many deaths among Ngāti Ruapani.

(2) In 1871, the Crown entered into a peace compact with Te Urewera Māori. The Crown agreed to withdraw from Te Urewera and let Te Urewera Māori manage their own affairs. The following year, Te Urewera rangatira, including those from Ngāti Ruapani, united as Te Whitu Tekau to assert their mana motuhake in Te Urewera. However, the Crown did not formally recognise Te Whitu Tekau and had little regard for their opposition to the Native Land Court and its surveys. Between 1868 and 1890, Ngāti Ruapani could not prevent more than 100,000 acres in which they asserted customary interests passing through the court. This process converted customary title into individualised land ownership and undermined tribal structures and collective decision making. Ngāti Ruapani lost land, including land in the Waipaoa block and interests in Lake Waikareiti.

(3) In 1875, the Crown, unfairly claiming Ngāti Ruapani had earlier rebelled against the Crown, threatened to confiscate their interests in the "four southern blocks" of 178,000 acres south of Lake Waikaremoana. Under this duress, Ngāti Ruapani agreed to withdraw their claims in return for a payment and 2,500 acres of reserves.

(4) In an 1895 compact, the Crown agreed to respect the mana motuhake of Te Urewera Māori and to establish an inalienable 656,000-acre reserve. The compact formed the basis for the Urewera District Native Reserve Act 1896, which provided for local self-government within the reserve by Te Urewera Māori. Over the next 2 decades, the Crown delayed implementing the Act, undermined its protective provisions, and promoted unilateral changes to it. The Act was ultimately repealed in 1922.

(5) For many years, the Crown made repeated attempts to purchase interests in the Waikaremoana block, the last substantial landholding of Ngāti Ruapani. In 1921, as part of the Urewera Consolidation Scheme, the Crown put considerable pressure on Ngāti Ruapani, including threatening to compulsorily acquire land in the Waikaremoana block. Ngāti Ruapani reluctantly agreed to sell their interests in the block, but the Crown did not honour all the sale conditions. It reduced the purchase price paid to most owners, and for many years deferred repaying money it owed them, causing considerable hardship. The Crown also set aside only 600 acres of lakeside reserves.

(6) By 1925, Ngāti Ruapani retained only 2,490 acres in small reserves. For several decades, the Crown restricted the ability of Ngāti Ruapani to develop their remaining lands or derive an income from them. It also took land for public works, despite knowing Ngāti Ruapani were struggling to sustain themselves.

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(7) In 1954, the Crown established the Urewera National Park without consulting Ngāti Ruapani. The park completely enclosed the Ngāti Ruapani lakeside reserves, and park policies restricted Ngāti Ruapani customary use of Te Urewera. The Crown also included Lake Waikaremoana in the park without Ngāti Ruapani consent. Title to the lakebed had been awarded to Ngāti Ruapani and other groups in 1918, and confirmed on appeal in 1944. In 1954 the Crown decided to not further contest the title. To generate hydroelectricity, the Crown had, from the 1920s, modified the lakebed as if it owned it, and lowered lake levels, causing erosion, and reducing fish stocks. In 1971, the Crown agreed to lease the lakebed but did not compensate the owners for its many uses of it before 1967, a loss of income that Ngāti Ruapani sorely needed.

(8) Decades of Crown land acquisitions had left Ngāti Ruapani virtually landless by 1895. They have suffered from severe socio-economic deprivation. The Crown did little to alleviate these conditions and, at times, contributed to them. Further, the Crown sought to assimilate Ngāti Ruapani into European culture and encouraged Ngāti Ruapani to migrate from their traditional lands following World War II. Those who moved away have been disconnected from their tikanga, tūrangawaewae, and whānau.

(9) Despite this deprivation and disconnection, Ngāti Ruapani mai Waikaremoana have endured. They are resolute and tenacious in their connections to Waikaremoana.