



The Pā That Matawhero Built

by Mark Peters

When people visit Pakeke o Whirikoka, the pā Matawhero Lloyd built, they enter a world that existed hundreds of years ago ...

Pakeke o Whirikoka is in Whatatutu, a small kāinga north of Gisborne. The original pā, which overlooked the Waipaoa and Mangatū rivers, was once home to Ngāi Tamatea. Matawhero's tīpuna lived on this land. He's an eighth-generation descendant. He wanted to reclaim his people's heritage by building a living memorial to the past.

The lay of the land

No one knows exactly when the pā was first built, but the land has been in the same whānau for generations. It's a sheltered spot, protected by a hill. Before he started work, Matawhero spent a lot of time on this hill, just looking. "It was the perfect place to study the lay of the land," he says.

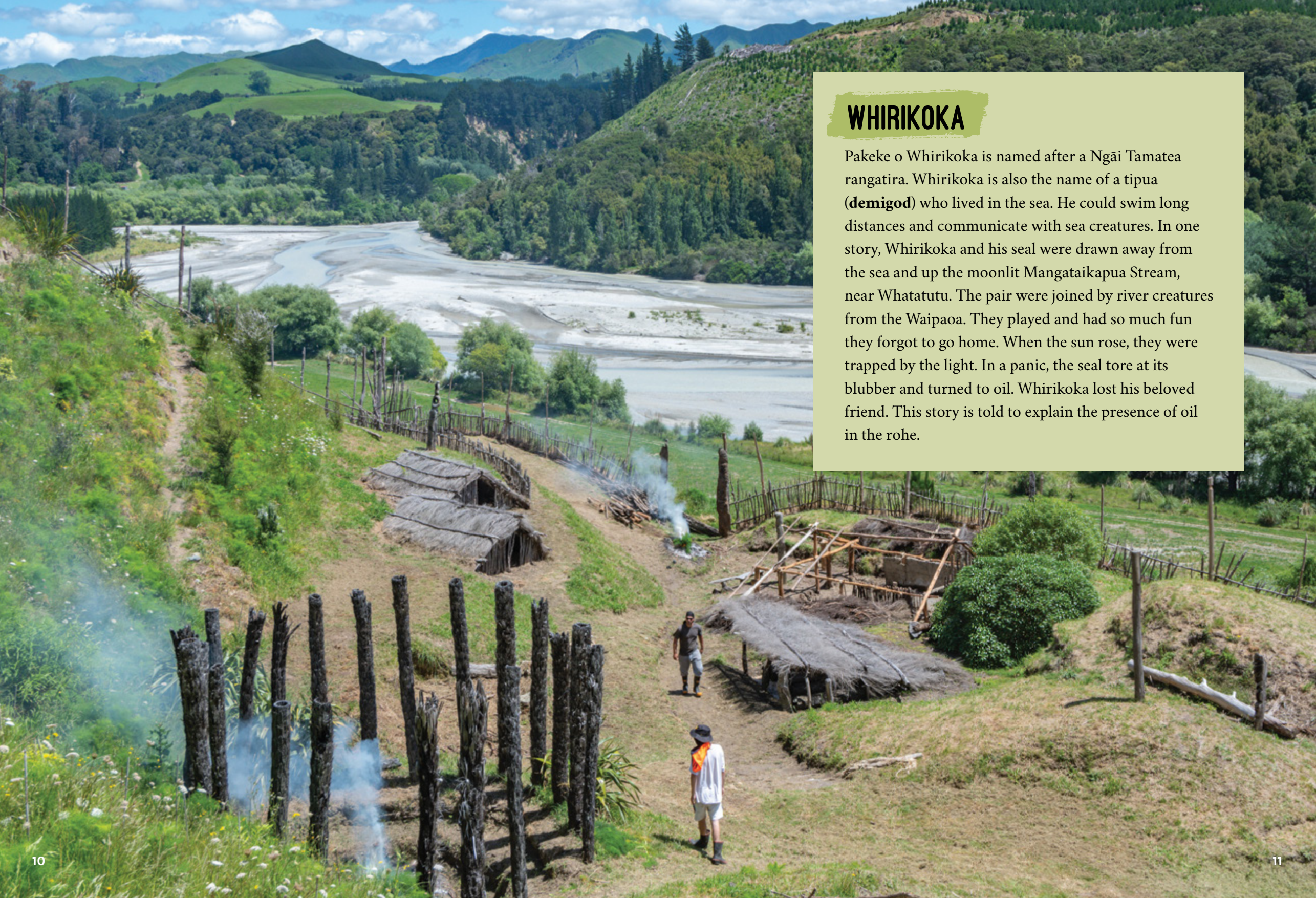
Matawhero spent six months thinking about his **restoration** plan. He knew he wanted to build a pātūtū (palisade), a whare moe (sleeping house), a pūhara (watchtower), and some kūwaha (gates). Deciding what to build was easy; the harder question was where. Along with his own observations (and a "massive amount" of research), Matawhero talked to whānau, kaumātua, and local farmers. He was also guided by what he calls "clues" – small hollows in the ground where buildings once stood. Sometimes, Matawhero wondered if tīpuna had left these clues behind, just for him. "It was like the original builders were telling me what to do," he says.

A pātūtū and a whare moe

Matawhero knew the original pā builders had needed three main things: access to water, security, and shelter. Water came from the rivers. Security came from the pātūtū, which circled the pā to protect it from attack. It made sense to build this first. Matawhero studied the hillside to decide where the pātūtū should go, then he cut mānuka to make the posts. He made bigger posts from tōtara and **lashed** everything together using rope.

The whare moe came next – the shelter. Again, Matawhero used mānuka to build the frame, and he used silt, river sand, and soil to pack the walls. "We always tried to use the same materials as our ancestors," he says. The traditional whare roof was **thatched** with mānuka.





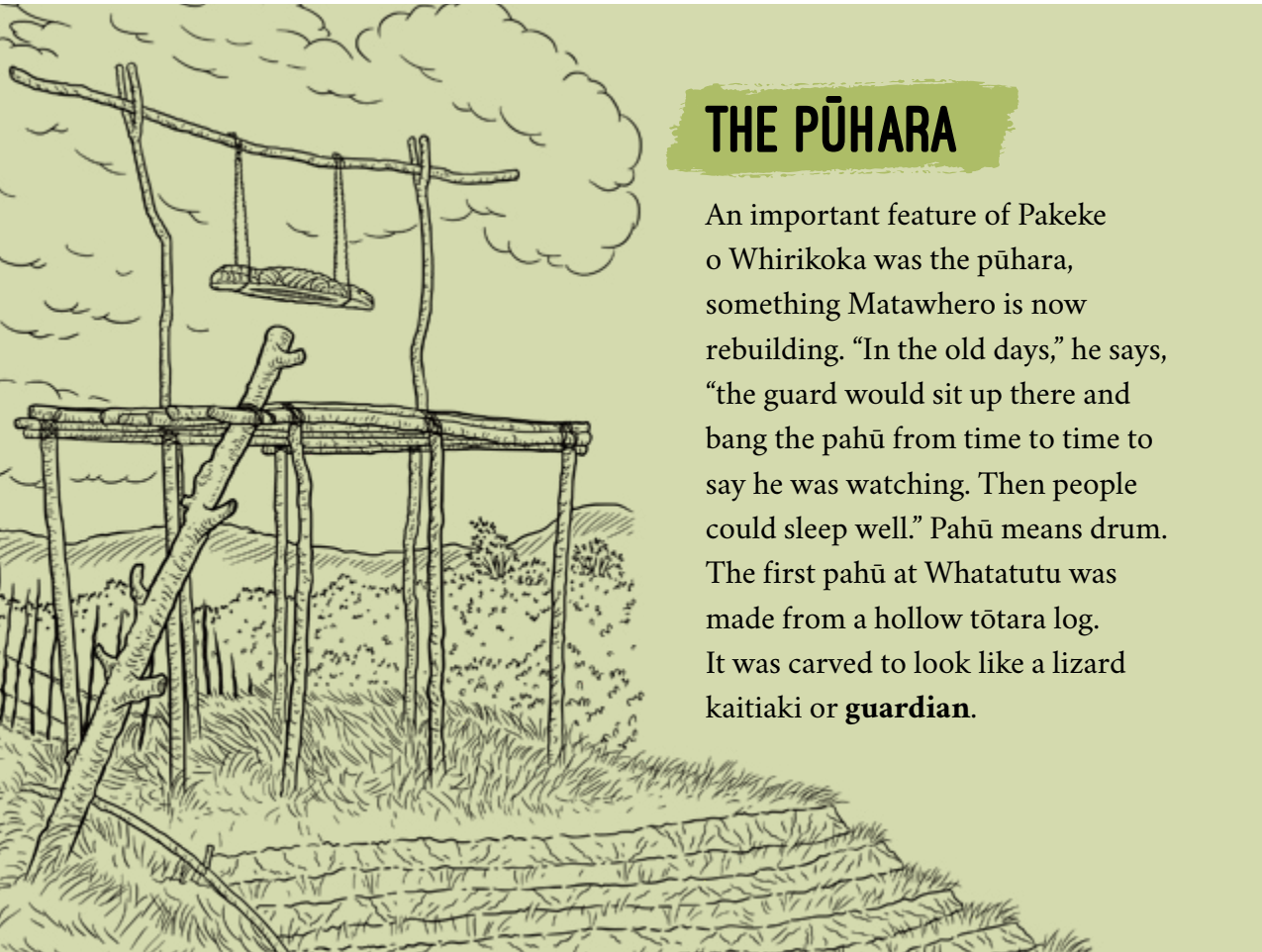
WHIRIKOKA

Pakeke o Whirikoka is named after a Ngāi Tamatea rangatira. Whirikoka is also the name of a tipua (**demigod**) who lived in the sea. He could swim long distances and communicate with sea creatures. In one story, Whirikoka and his seal were drawn away from the sea and up the moonlit Mangataikapua Stream, near Whatatutu. The pair were joined by river creatures from the Waipaoa. They played and had so much fun they forgot to go home. When the sun rose, they were trapped by the light. In a panic, the seal tore at its blubber and turned to oil. Whirikoka lost his beloved friend. This story is told to explain the presence of oil in the rohe.

Tradition

Tradition is an important part of Matawhero's kaupapa. Working with natural materials was an obvious place to start, but he wanted to work using the old ways too. Often, this meant forgetting about modern tools and finding a simpler way to do things. Matawhero says he learnt to think differently. "I had to be more practical, like my tīpuna."

Finding a way to dig holes all the same depth was one challenge – and Matawhero had to dig a lot. Tape measures were out, so he needed a **substitute**. Then he remembered something he'd once heard: the ancestors used a body part when they needed a simple unit of measurement. So Matawhero did the same, using the length of his lower leg from knee to foot. He took a similar approach for the roof of the whare moe. Matawhero based this on the height of the average person.



THE PŪHARA

An important feature of Pakeke o Whirikoka was the pūhara, something Matawhero is now rebuilding. "In the old days," he says, "the guard would sit up there and bang the pahū from time to time to say he was watching. Then people could sleep well." Pahū means drum. The first pahū at Whatatutu was made from a hollow tōtara log. It was carved to look like a lizard kaitiaki or **guardian**.

Finding his own way

Matawhero says it wasn't always possible to follow tradition. Finding raupō (the plant tīpuna used for thatching roofs) was especially tricky. "Raupō grows in swamps, but most of the ones around here were drained for farmland," he explains. Harakeke was hard to find, too. So Matawhero had to **improvise**. He used mānuka to thatch the roofs and natural fibre rope instead of harakeke. He was happy with the result. "Mānuka is less waterproof than raupō, but we still bundled the thatch in the traditional way."

The new pā also includes tōtara logs, spotted in nearby Mangatū. "It was a bit of a drive," Matawhero admits, "and further than my tīpuna would've travelled. But it felt good to recycle, which also fitted our kaupapa." The tōtara once stood in a forest burnt by farmers long ago. "The logs were just lying in a paddock, so we used them to build the whare moe. You can still see where some of them are charred." Matawhero says the trunks are a reminder of another time in history, when the settlers stripped the land of its resources.





Ā mua/The future

Now that he's achieved so much at Pakeke o Whirikoka, Matawhero has begun to think about other pā sites in the rohe. There are at least six around Gisborne, three of which need restoration work. To help with this mahi, he's keen to start a pā restoration trust. "One of the pā, Popoia, was established in about 1500. Imagine seeing that rebuilt."

Matawhero also likes the idea of a pā trail. He didn't restore Pakeke o Whirikoka for tourists but can see how much it has to offer. "We welcome anyone who wants to learn the history of Ngāi Tamatea. Our pā is a great way to engage people." However, Matawhero says Pakeke o Whirikoka is more than just a museum piece. "It's about the next generation. My kids all work and play on the pā. We turn the soil together. We're the latest layer of history. Their kids will come next."

Kaitiaki

Caring for native plants is an important part of the pā project. "It's not just about building a few whare," Matawhero says. "It's about being **sustainable**. We need resources that will always be here."

Matawhero and his whānau have put a lot of mahi into planning for the future. They've planted along local waterways, and they've reforested an area near the pā site.

This work caught the attention of some neighbours who run a plant nursery. "Now they're helping us develop our own nursery," Matawhero says. "We're growing a huge collection of native tree and harakeke species." He likes to imagine the nearby pine forest replaced by wetland, filled with harakeke and raupō. "Maybe one day, we'll be able to make roofs that use raupō thatching."

GLOSSARY

demigod: half god, half person

guardian: something that looks over a place (or person) and protects it

improvise: to use whatever is available to solve a problem

lashed: tied tightly together

restoration: when something is made to be the way it once was

substitute: a replacement

sustainable: when a resource is looked after so it isn't used up

thatched: covered with a natural material to keep out the weather

photographs by Tink Lockett



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