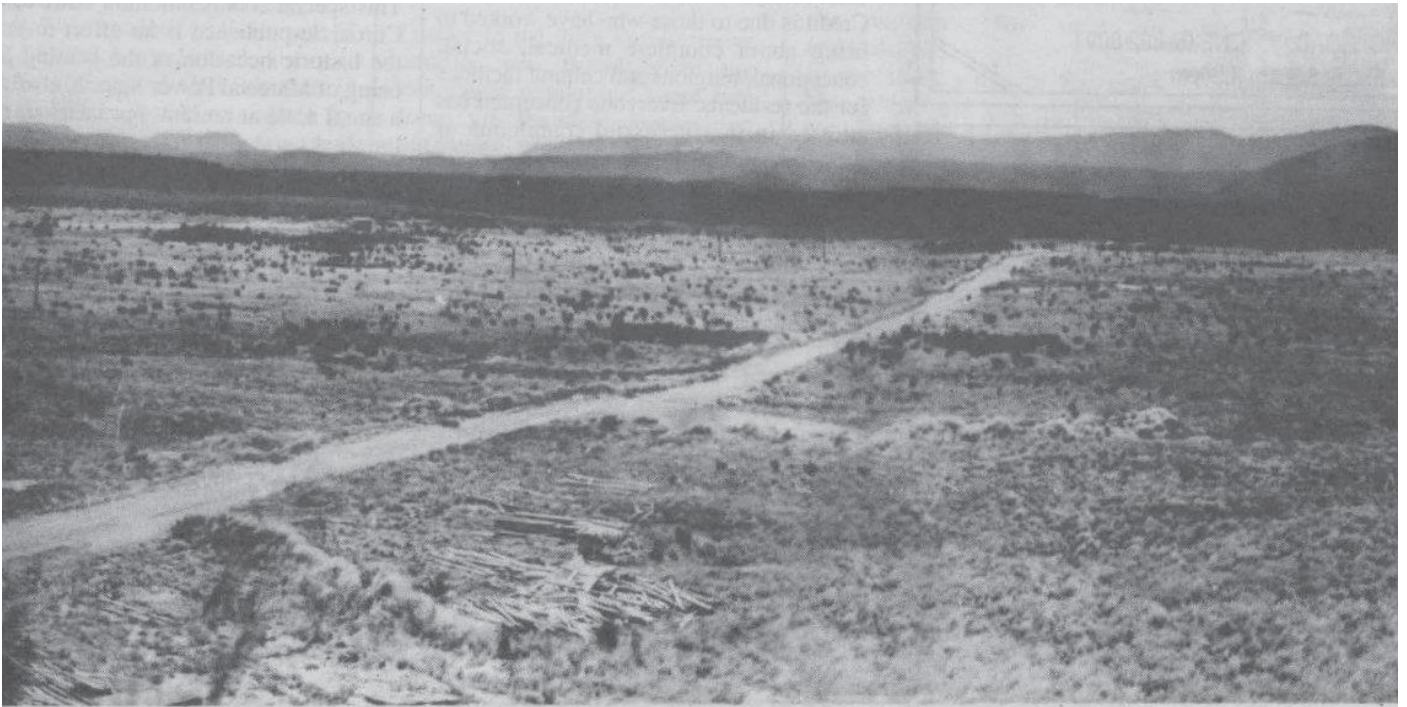


## “A PIECE OF LAND”

The pumice lands of Pouākani



The land on which the modern township of Mangakino was built as it was in 1944, before the hydro development era began.

*Celebrations as Mangakino turns 50, The Mangakino Chronicle, Special Commemoration Issue, 24.10.1998.*  
Unknown photographer

*“there shall be a piece of land set aside, so that when the Natives go to fish they will be able to camp upon that land... the Acclimatisation Society shall not come and put their fish into the lake... that would be against the spirit of our agreement to-day.”*

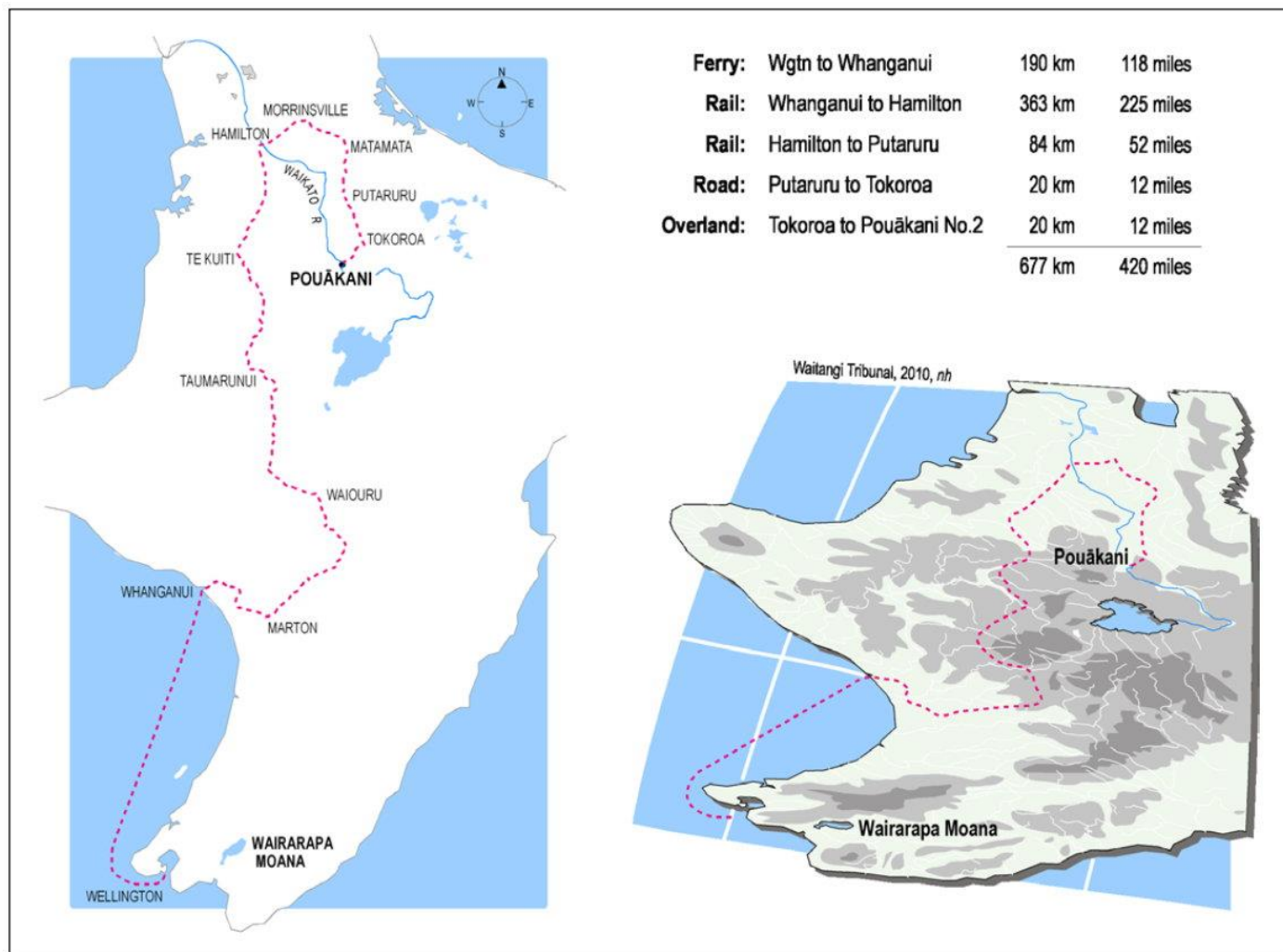
Premier Richard Seddon at Tīpāpaku (Pigeon Bush), 18.01.1896

The agreement that transferred Wairarapa Moana to the Crown, signed at Papawai on 13 January 1896 guaranteed Maori *ample reserves* from land surrounding the lakes. At Pigeon Bush Seddon spelt out the reserve requirement: Maori would have continuing access to their customary fishery, protected by the Crown.

Years passed with surveying delays, increasing land prices and the goal of a lakeside reserve suitable for pastoral farming becoming increasingly unlikely. The one *piece of land* seriously considered in the area of Wairarapa Moana was the Whangaimoana Estate but it exceeded the Crown’s budget. The Crown and a reluctant Maori eventually decided to look elsewhere.

Wairarapa rangatira Tunuiarangi Paraone was the most reluctant, wanting a better class of developed land reserved in the Wairarapa. Te Whatahoro Jury, another Wairarapa rangatira, looked elsewhere for larger tracts of land and went to view Pouakani, which though large, was described by surveyors as very poor land covered in tussock and scrub

Fearing they might end up with nothing Tunuiarangi and others ceased their opposition and in April 1916 title to the Pouakani land in the 'King Country' was vested in the owners of Wairarapa lakes. Inaccessible by road, the 30,486 acres was largely scrubby, pumice land.



*The lower North Island showing the location of Pouākani and Wairarapa Moana, and the likely travel route between them in 1916, Wairarapa ki Tararua, Waitangi Tribunal Report 2010*

In the early 1940's the nation needed more power and major hydropower schemes were constructed on the Waikato River bounding Pouakani. To cure bush sickness in stock, aerial topdressing of cobalt began on the central volcanic plateau.

Construction began on Maraetai dam in 1943 and by 1947 a temporary township called Mangakino was built to house and service the construction workers.

The Wairarapa owners of Pouakani were unaware that their land had been taken until Prime Minister Peter Fraser visited Pouakani in 1947 to consider it for a Maori land development scheme.

Fraser met with the owners in Greytown and it was agreed their families would settle and farm Pouakani, learning new skills, and providing a return for the Wairarapa owners.

### Te heke ki Pouākani

*"We had a dairy supervisor there and all he was doing was to show us how to put cups on the cows. We already knew all that... Nobody was talking to us about the business... We had no training about things like pasture development..."*

Pai Te Whaiti, Wairarapa ki Tararua Waitangi Tribunal Report 2010



*Early Wairarapa settlers receiving farm training, Pumicelands, The New Zealand National Film Unit, 1953*



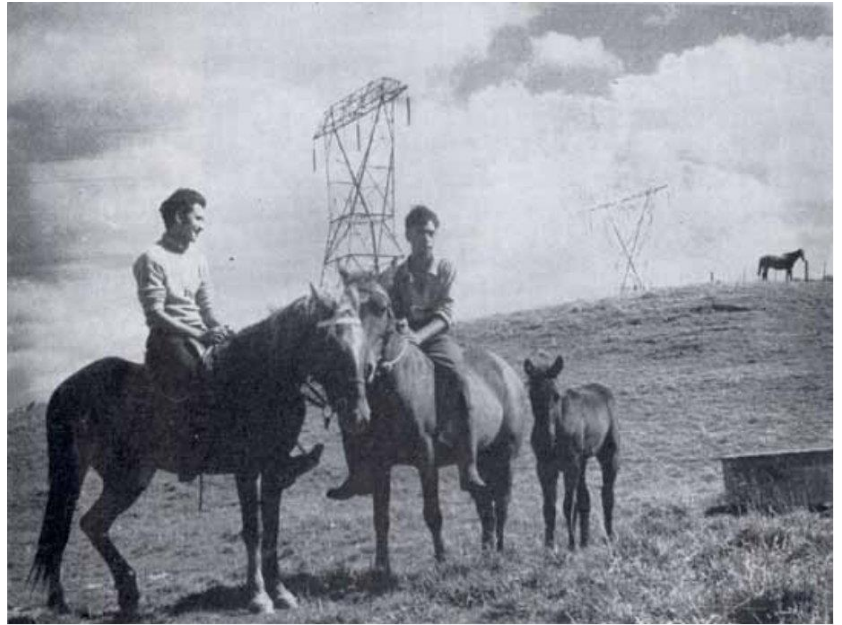
*Sam Te Whaiti at home on the farm. Unknown photographer, ca1960*

Soon after Fraser's intervention, the heke (migration) of Wairarapa people to the pumice lands began. Initially 26 Wairarapa Moana families were selected by their elders for the task, and others followed. They went to become farmers and landlords on their own lands again filled with hope and excitement for the challenges ahead.



Memory Te Whaiti came to Mangakino with her husband Sam in the mid 1950's recalling in her evidence to the Waitangi Tribunal that her old people were against having the land in Mangakino. *They felt we were tramping on someone else's land. [They] refused to move up there and even refused to visit. We had... to visit them.*

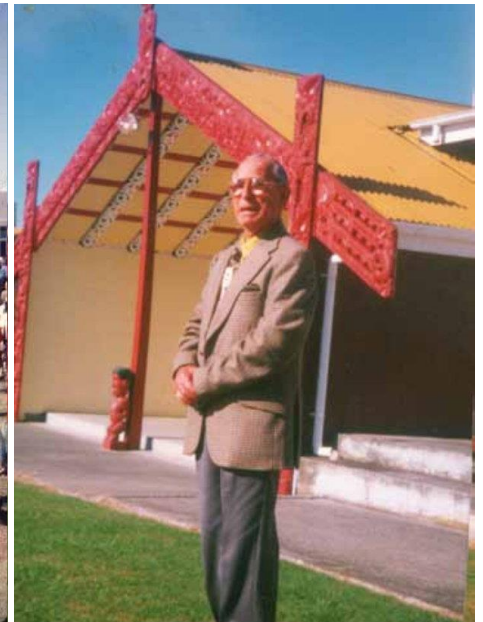
Nevertheless a marae was built and many came to see Pouakani as their permanent home, choosing to bury their whanau there.



*Farmers of the future, From Eels to Butterfat, Anne McIlraith, Te Aohou 1957, Photograph Forest Service*



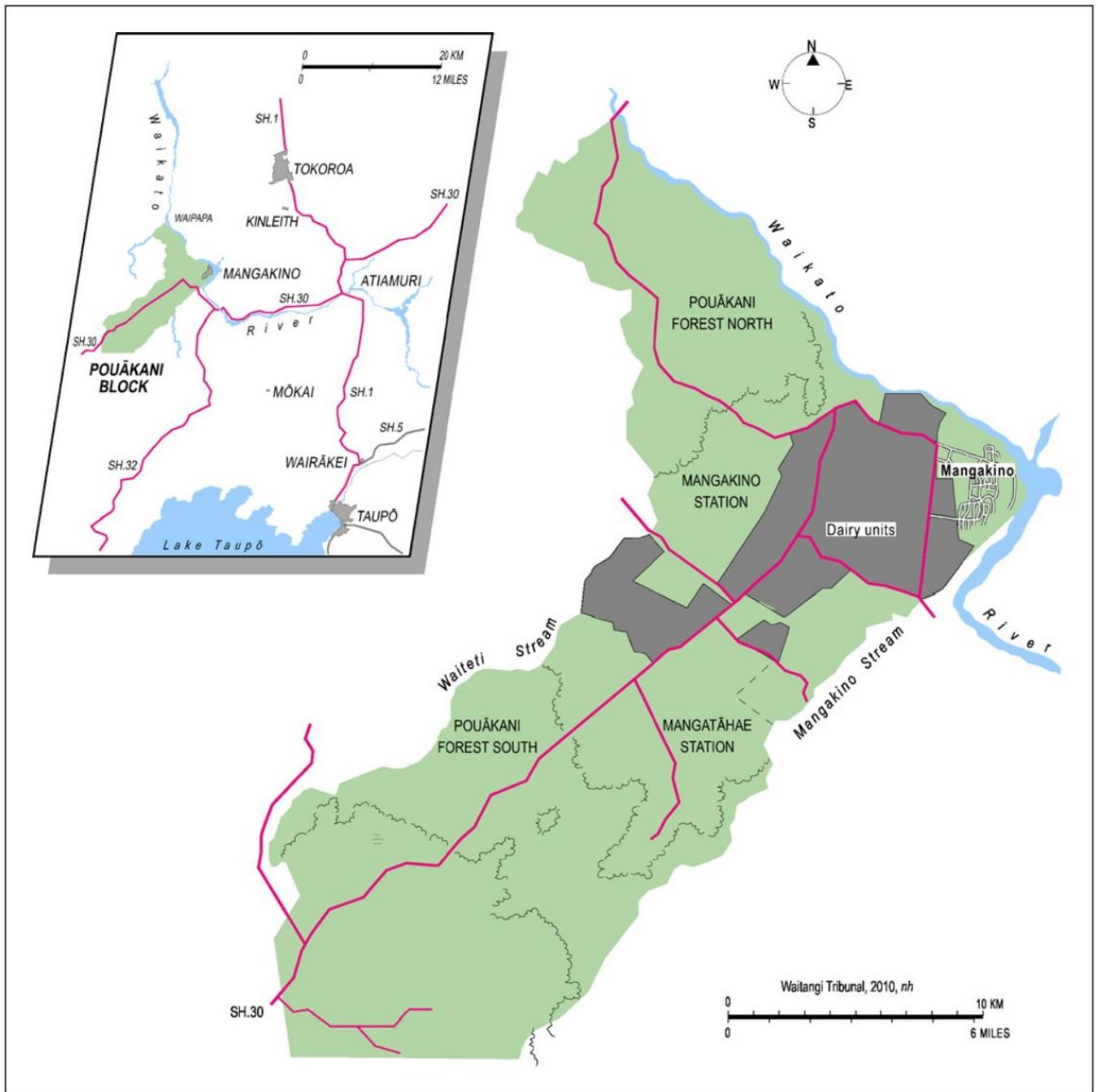
*Official opening of Pouākani Marae. Unknown photographer, 1972*



*Major Mason, one of the first settlers on Pouākani, in a familiar role as kaumātua on the marae. Unknown photographer and date*

Under the Department of Maori Affairs dairy units and a sheep and cattle station were created. A large area of native forest was cleared and leased to New Zealand Forest Products for growing pine trees.

The new settler's prior farming experience in the fertile Wairarapa did not prepare them for the hostile pumice lands of Pouakani, where, according to Pai Te Whaiti, only *red clover would grow, cows died from 'bush sickness' and pumice blocked water bores*. Most settlers did not succeed, in large part due to the inadequate training and support, as well as poor returns on farming, and high development costs. In the 1970's the hitherto strongly held policy of only allowing owner's families onto the farms ceased, and the dairy farms were offered to outsiders.

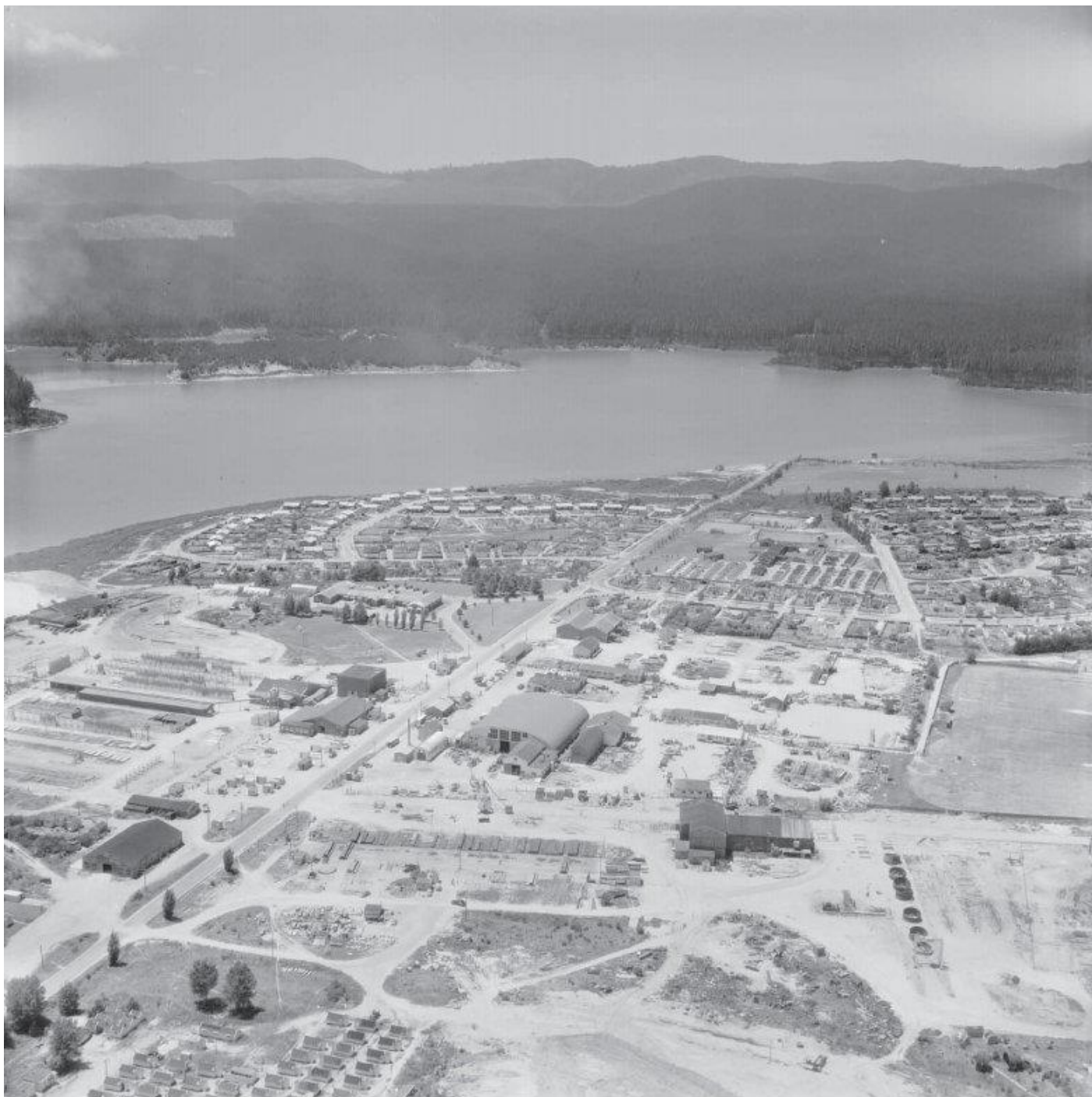


Map of the Mangakino township and farm schemes on the Pouākani block, Wairarapa ki Tararua Waitangi Tribunal Report 2010, Noel Harris

There were successes however, the most notable being Tom Haeata winning the coveted Ahuwhenua trophy in 1958. The Maori Affairs Department report stated that Mr Haeata... *has provided... excellent shelter belts... a first class jersey herd... The house is extremely neat and well laid out lawns, and courts, with all buildings in excellent order.*

In its findings the Waitangi Tribunal reiterates its view that *the development scheme owes its failure to nothing so much as the fact that this was very poor land, in a totally unimproved state, miles from anywhere. If the Crown had granted Wairarapa Maori the decent land in Wairarapa that would have been the proper response to the gift of the lakes, they would never have needed a development scheme.*





*Aerial view of Mangakino, with Lake Maraetai in the background, Whites Aviation Collection, Photographer Whites Aviation Ltd, 2.12.1955, WA-40264, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, N.Z.*

By the mid-1950's Mangakino was a boom town of 5,000 with the highest birth rate in New Zealand. Under pressure the owners formed Mangakino Township Incorporation to run the now permanent town, but with the Crown setting perpetually renewable leases and fixed 14 year rentals, the arrangement was completely unviable. In the 1970's the owners began to sell the town sections and reinvest the proceeds. Some of which were used to establish the Wairarapa Moana Trust to support the social, cultural and educational development of owner's and their descendants.

## Changed fortunes

*"The Pouakani 2 Trust has shown that this land can be farmed successfully. It has rationalised farm production, greatly increasing the productivity of the land by moving from sheep and beef to dairy farming."* Waitangi Tribunal Report



*Aerial view of Pouākani with Mangakino Township in the foreground, Unknown photographer and date*

With the catch-cry for Maori self-development in the late 1970's the Government encouraged the return of development schemes to owners. In 1983 the farmland was handed back to the Wairarapa owners' control. The land, stock and buildings were severely run down. By then the owners had elected trustees who were generally younger and university educated or with business backgrounds. They began the return of all leased dairy farms to owner control under share-milking arrangements.

According to the Waitangi Tribunal report, the trustees *borrowed \$745,000 between 1983 and 1990 to bring the farms up to standard. By investing in soil analysis, fertiliser, pasture resowing, weed control, irrigation and fencing, new buildings, farm consultancy and legal advice, and new accountancy and farm management programmes, and by engaging experienced share-milkers, the trust was able to significantly increase stock numbers, and farm production and profitability, between 1983 and 1991.*

In 2005 Pouakani again won the Ahuwhenua Maori farming trophy with its Wairarapa Moana Incorporation for excellence in its sheep and beef farming operations. Chief Judge John Ackland, said that the approach by the Incorporation was *an excellent example of corporate farming and a great role model for other large scale farming operations in New Zealand.*



*Winning the Ahuwhenua Trophy. Photograph by Meat and Wool Board NZ, 2005*

## Notes and References

- From the Waitangi Tribunal report: We are heartened and impressed by the success of the agricultural enterprise on Pouakani today. Operating in the modern era, the Incorporation does not have to deal with the constraints of the past; the community of owners is now willing to see the land as a business.
- In 1896 there was no way that the piece of land reserved to give access for the Natives to fish Wairarapa Moana meant unproductive, scrub-land, several hundreds of kilometres away in the King Country.
- Owners no longer work the land themselves but they are shareholders receiving regular dividends and support for their social development from a very successful business.
- For those second generation families who remained in Mangakino, the separation has severed the connections with home. In her evidence to the Waitangi Tribunal, Noeline Reti, who moved to Mangakino in the 1960's, said Nowadays we are more isolated than ever from our Wairarapa whanau. We have been unable to maintain or develop our relationships with them and this has meant that we have lost a significant part of ourselves.
- In essence both the hopes and deep misgivings of the elders who sent those first families to Pouakani have been realised. Wairarapa ki Tararua Waitangi Tribunal Report 2010

