

'The Legend of Mauao'

There was once a hill with no name among the many hills and ravines on the edge of the forests of Hautere. This nameless one was pononga, slave or servant, to the great chief Otanewainuku, the forested peak which stands as a landmark for the tribes of Tauranga Moana.

To the south-west was the shapely form of the hill Puwhenua, a woman clothed in all the fine greens of the ferns and shrubs and trees of the forest of Tane. The nameless one was desperately in love with Puwhenua. Her heart was already won by the majestic form of the chiefly mountain Otanewainuku.

There seemed no hope for the lowly slave with no name to persuade her to become his bride. The nameless one sorrowed. In despair he decided to end it all by drowning himself in the ocean, Te Moananui a Kiwa. He called on the Patupaiarehe, the people with magical powers who dwelled in the forests of Hautere. They were his friends and they plaited the ropes with their magic to haul him from the hill country toward the ocean. As they pulled on their ropes, they chanted their magic chant.

The patupaiarehe chanted as they hauled the nameless one from his place among the hills from Waoku. They gouged out the valley where the river Waimapu now flows. They followed the channel of Tauranga Moana past Hairini, past Maungatapu and Matapihi, past Te Papa. They pulled him to the edge of the great ocean of Kiwa. But it was already close to daybreak. The sun rose. The first rays lit up the summit of the nameless hill and fixed him in that place. The patupaiarehe melted away before the light of the sun. They were people of the night and they flew back to the shady depths of the forests and ravines of Hautere.

The patupaiarehe gave a name to this mountain which marks the entrance to Tauranga. He was called Mauao which means caught by the dawn or lit up by the first rays of sunrise. In time, he assumed greater mana than his rival Otanewainuku.

Later he was also given another name, Maunganui, by which is more often known. He is still the symbol of the tribes of Tauranga Moana.

Ko Mauao te maunga, ko Tauranga te moana.