E/CONF.105/38/CRP.38

14 July 2017

Original: English

Eleventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names
New York, 8-17 August 2017
Item 10 of the provisional agenda*
Geographical names as culture, heritage and identity (including indigenous, minority and regional language names)

Cultural aspects of Māori geographic naming in New Zealand

Submitted by New Zealand**

* E/CONF.105/1

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NEW ZEALAND GEOGRAPHIC BOARD
NGĀ POU TAUNAHA O AOTEAROA

Land Information New Zealand
Toitū te whenua

Cultural aspects of Māori geographic naming in New Zealand

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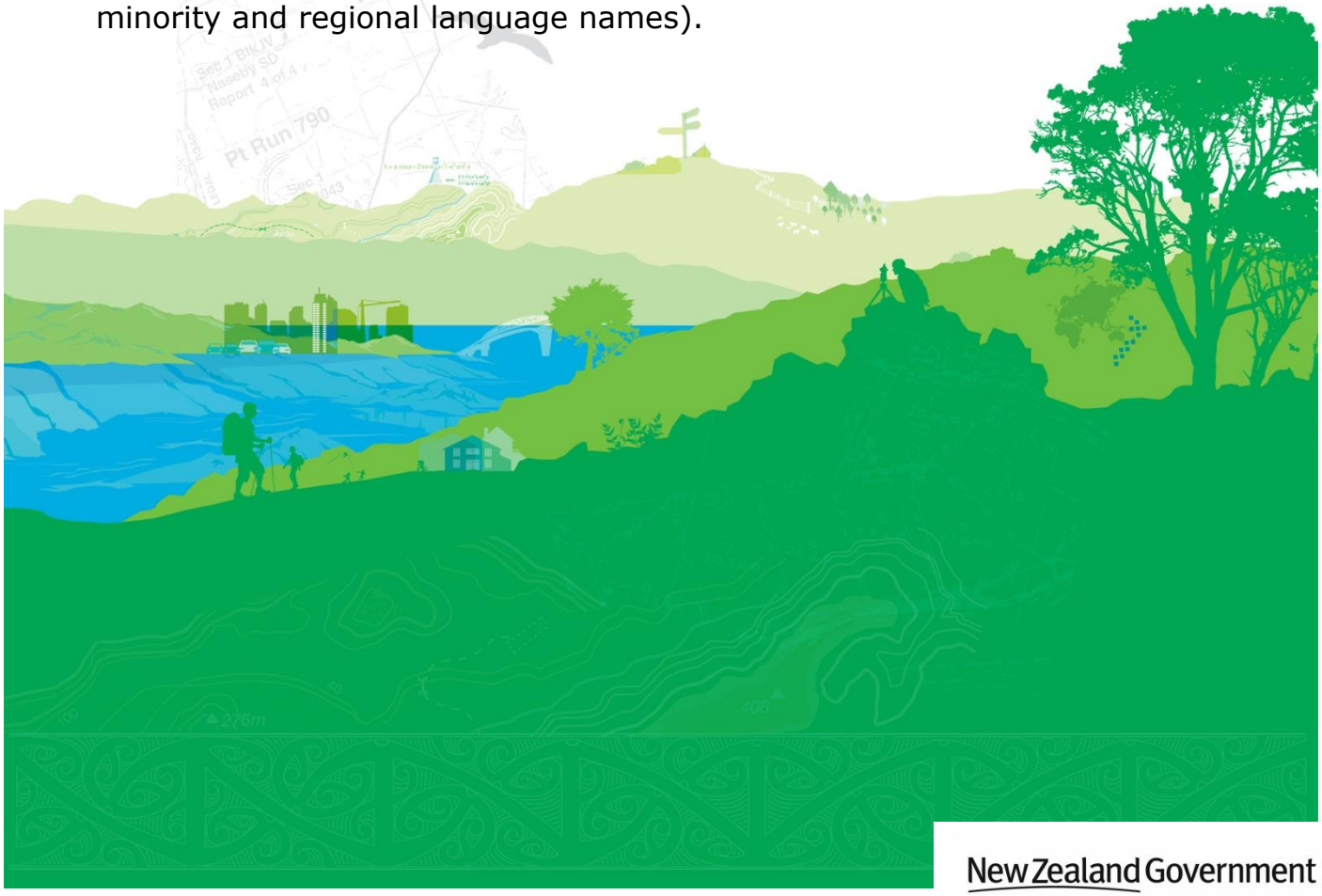

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Introduction

This paper explores the cultural aspects of Māori geographic naming. It sets out the historic context and the framework for official Māori geographic naming. The cultural and technical aspects are considered before drawing conclusions.

New Zealand geographic names reflect the cultural diversity of people past and present. They record New Zealand's history and the different people who have lived here. Geographic names give context to space, help us to navigate from one place to another, enable communication, link the stories associated with places, express identity and assert rights. Deeper still, they can revive or add to our knowledge of the heritage and events that occurred at a place. They are our foundation, our place in the world, our home. They give meaning, whether metaphorical, descriptive, economic, or commemorative. Capturing these qualities in a single geographic name can be a challenge.

Geographic names have existed in New Zealand from the time of the first migrations by Māori. Layers of history, conquest, and seasonal migration have at times introduced multiple Māori names for features and places.

A further challenge for New Zealand is that it has two official languages - Māori and English. This has posed challenges for what to show on modern maps, charts, signs, and other official documents, that is, whether to use the most commonly used contemporary toponym (whether Māori or non-Māori) or to restore an original Māori name. It is important to discover past names no longer in use as a way to recall history, heritage and cultural identity.

Figure 1: Photographs of contemporary signs reflecting geographic names.

The function of determining official geographic names rests with an independent statutory board, the New Zealand Geographic Board (Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa). While names have been used on official publications since the time of exploration by Europeans, and in particular the English, the cultural aspects of Māori geographic names appearing in the official record has a chequered history, generally reflecting the loss of land and language of Māori. Within a broader context of a partnership between the Crown[1] and Māori, the New Zealand Geographic Board has an important role to play in recognising Māori cultural and heritage values associated with geographic feature naming.

History of migration and oral traditions

The arrival of the first canoes (waka) to New Zealand of the Polynesian ancestors of Māori was between 600 and 800 A.D. Oral history, contained in songs (waiata) and traditional stories bear witness to this migration. Most of the waka made landfall in the bays of the east coast of North Island or Te Ika-ā-Māui. From those points of arrival the first indigenous people of New Zealand dispersed throughout New Zealand. Descendants relate their genealogy (whakapapa) back to their migration waka such as Arawa, Tainui, Mataatua, Aotea, or Tokomaru.

Ancestral Māori lived in very close harmony with the natural world, especially the land and its resources. Almost every stretch of river, swamp, bay or bush used as a food source was named for practical identification to aid with food gathering. So those toponyms represented an economic value. Many other places and features were named to commemorate events or people, often connecting people together.

[1] Represented by the New Zealand Government

The following quote from the New Zealand Geographic Board's publication 'Ngā Tohu Pumahara—The Survey Pegs of the Past: Understanding Māori Place Names' elaborates on this connection between places names and culture.

'The meaning of many Māori names, though, can only be understood through their connection to other names and other places. Whole series of names belong together in groups, commemorating journeys of exploration by an ancestor, the myth memory of how the land was made or a series of traditional events and people relationships. They also describe the land physically and identify its resources. In pre-literate Māori culture there was a huge dependence on memory and the careful transmission of history from generation to generation.

The names in the landscape were like survey pegs of memory, marking the events that happened in a particular place, recording some aspect or feature of the traditions and history of a tribe. If the name was remembered it could release whole parcels of history to a tribal narrator and those listening. The daily use of such place names meant that the history was always present, always available. In this sense living and travelling reinforced the histories of the people.

Some of these groups of names, as well as individual names, were of such significance that when a tribe migrated elsewhere it "replanted" its history in its new home by naming its new landscape with the names of the place of origin. Because of the role of place names as a device for recording and remembering tribal history the historical events themselves sometimes became relocated in the new setting. This is one of the reasons why some Māori and Polynesian histories appear so similar and repetitious. They may be the same story being repeated in fresh settings. This does not make the traditions associated with a particular place name, or group of names, any less authentic. It is a perfectly valid process within an oral tradition. It derives from the character of oral tradition. It uses place names in different ways from the way literate societies use them.'

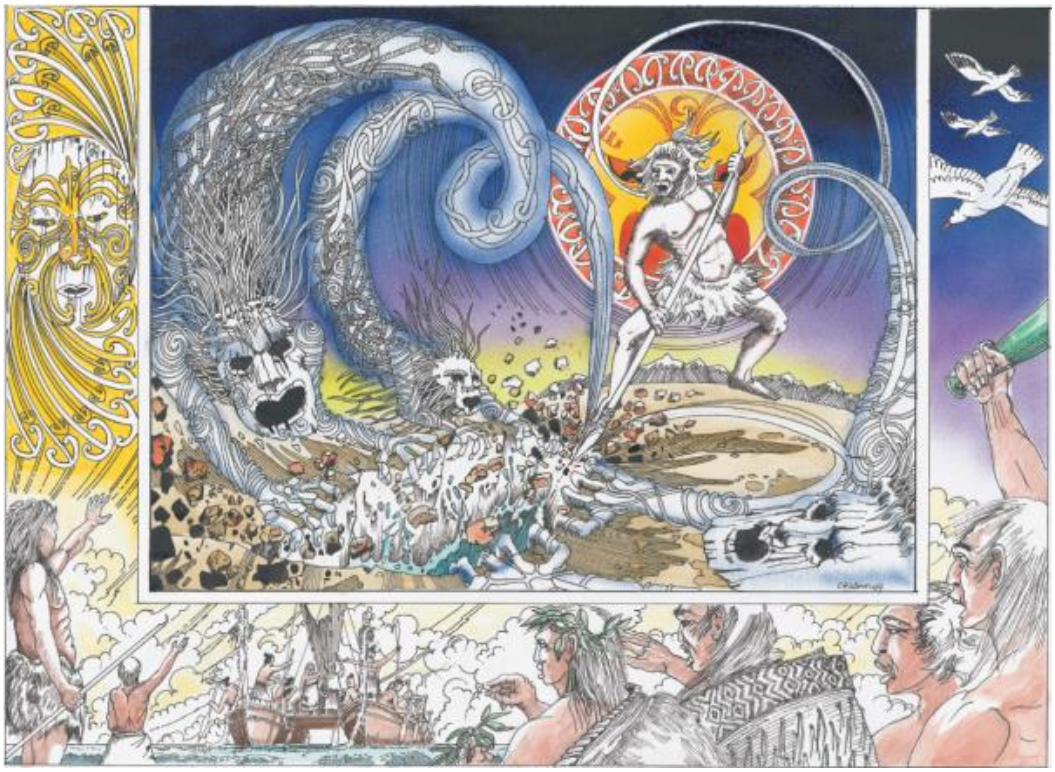

Figure 2: Ngāi Tahu[2] ancestor, Rākaihautū, who traversed the island with his famous kō (digging stick named Tūwhakarōria) and mythologically 'created' and named the southern lakes. Artwork by Cliff Whiting, New Zealand Geographic Board Copyright.

Context for Official Māori Geographic Place Naming

Treaty of Waitangi (Te Tiriti o Waitangi) 1840

'The Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand's founding document, was a written agreement between the British Crown (the monarch) and more than 500 Māori chiefs. After that, New Zealand became a colony of Britain and Māori became British subjects. However, Māori and Europeans had different understandings and expectations of the treaty.'[3]

This Treaty has a fundamental influence on New Zealand's geographic naming policy.

Instructions to early European surveyors

Following the signing of the Treaty, surveyors necessarily worked alongside and were dependant on Māori to explore and map the land. It was recognised that Māori had intimate knowledge of the land and its resources and there was value in capturing this information. Formal instructions were issued to surveyors to facilitate the systematic collection of original Māori geographic names, to ensure their preservation.

Recommendations to the Colonial Secretary by Major Palmer in 1875 stated: *'Special attention should be given to the subject of nomenclature, and care be taken to adhere in all possible cases to accurate Native names: this is a matter of great philological and antiquarian importance'*.[4]

The 1885 survey regulations directed [abridged]: '*The surveyor must fix: 'the positions of all remarkable hills, ridges, pa's*[5]*, eel-weirs, native cultivations, tracks, battlefields, villages, etc., as well as rivers, forests, lakes and coastlines'.* The surveyor was also required to ascertain [abridged]: *'the Native names of all boundaries or natural features' within the block surveyed.'*

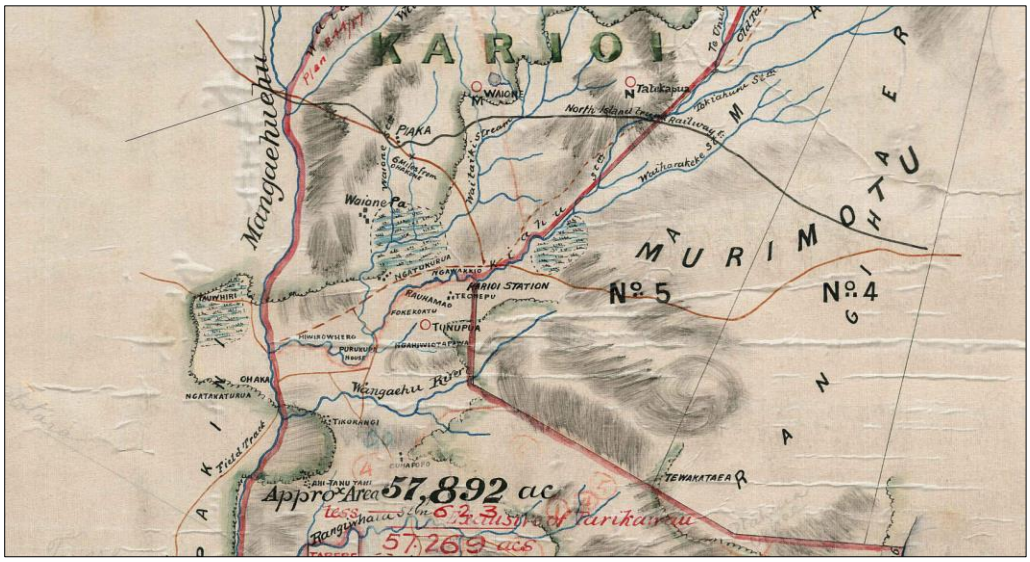

Figure 3: Surveyors sketch plan of Rangiwaea Block, Māori Land Plan 1166 (1895)

These survey plans, field-books, and maps are a fundamental resource relied on by Māori and the Crown alike in the research of original names. When considered alongside oral history and other evidence, orthography or location can be corrected. It is evident that some names displaced the Māori names of features that were significant to Māori with little regard to those original names.

Treaty of Waitangi grievances/breaches

Today there is an Office of Treaty Settlements within the New Zealand Ministry of Justice responsible for negotiating historical Treaty of Waitangi claims. They also advise and help claimant groups so they are ready to enter negotiations.

[3] Claudia Orange, 'Treaty of Waitangi', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/treaty-of-waitangi (accessed 11 July 2017)

[4] 'The State of the Surveys of New Zealand', Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives, 1875 Session I, H-01

[5] Pa: fortified village

Office of Treaty of Settlements 'Red Book'[6] [edited and abridged]:

The Crown intended Māori to be treated fairly and honourably, particularly in the course of land transactions. It envisaged that land would be acquired in situations where Māori were willing sellers and where the loss of a particular area would not harm the relevant iwi or hapū. These good intentions suffered under the practical difficulties of administering a new colony and building a nation. The relationship and transactions between Māori and the Crown occurred in the context of a complex interaction of two cultures.

There is no simple explanation for events following the signing of the Treaty, given the rapidly changing economic and social environment and the variety of motivations among Māori, the Crown, and settlers. However, the statistics of the decline in Māori land-holdings and population are striking. While the decline relates primarily to significant land losses, their importance is not simply economic, but also concerns wider effects on Māori society and culture, affecting mana[7] (status and identity).

As a result of land alienation, Māori today possess only a small portion of the land that they held in 1840. The Crown accepts that excessive land loss has had a harmful effect on Māori social and economic development in general. This loss of land has been accompanied by the loss of access to forests, waterways, food resources, wāhi tapu (sacred places) and other taonga (prized possessions). Māori have lost most of their land as an economic resource and tūrangawaewae (a place to belong), and have also been deprived of traditionally used natural resources and places of spiritual and cultural value.

Many of these features and places have geographic names. Combined with dramatic decline in the Māori language, the inherent relationship between Māori and the land, through place names, was jeopardised.

Treaty of Waitangi Redress

These historical events form the basis of the grievances of Māori that are being heard and addressed today through the Waitangi Tribunal and negotiations processes.

Milestones for New Zealand's response to acknowledging and putting right past wrongs have been enacted in legislation through the Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975, the Māori Language Act 1987 (replaced in 2016) and the New Zealand Geographic Board (Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa) Act 2008, along with numerous Treaty Settlement Acts.

The Waitangi Tribunal has since conducted hearings into many matters relating to Māori land and the economic and social impacts of land dealings from 1840 onwards. Under Treaty settlement legislation, the cultural redress part almost always includes geographic names, whether restored or corrected.

The New Zealand Geographic Board Act 2008 honours the partnership principles of the Treaty by:

- conferring on the Board the function of collecting original Māori names of geographic features for recording on official charts and official maps,
- conferring on the Board the function of encouraging the use of original Māori names of geographic features on official charts and maps,
- requiring two persons to be appointed to the Board, on the recommendation of the Minister of Māori Affairs, and
- providing for the appointment of one person nominated by Ngāi Tahu.

Cultural aspects of Māori geographic naming

[6] Office of Treaty of Settlements 'Red Book': https://www.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Red-Book-Healing-the-past-building-a-future.pdf (accessed 11 July 2017)
[7] Authority, status

Original and contemporary Māori geographic names

In the context of Māori place names 'Original' generally refers to a Māori name that existed prior to European settlement, noting that there may have been more than one given the layers of discovery, history, migration and conquest. However, unnamed geographic features and places can be and are regularly given, contemporary Māori names.

Managing more than one name

In New Zealand dual and alternative names are used, and have been from the start of European exploration and settlement.

A dual name has two parts and each part is usually from a different language, most often Māori and English. Both parts of the name form the full name of the feature or place, each part having equal status commemorating their associated stories. The Māori name is usually first to reflect rights of first discovery.

For example:

- Whakaari / White Island
- Matiu / Somes Island
- Aoraki / Mount Cook
- Steeple Rock / Te Aroaro-o-Kupe
- Hauraki Gulf / Tīkapa Moana

Alternative naming means that either one or more of the names may be used as the official name. This will usually arise when the name for a single feature or place in Māori and non-Māori are both in general use. The depiction on official documents of one or more of these alternative names will comply with the requirement for the official name to be used. If more than one name is used it is recommended that they be separated by the word 'or'.

For example:

- Mount Taranaki or Mount Egmont
- South Island or Te Waipounamu
- North Island or Te Ika-a-Māui

Both forms of dual and alternative names recognise the equal and special significance of Māori and non-Māori names, reflect the two official written languages of New Zealand, meet the government's Treaty of Waitangi partnership principles, and allow for restoration of mana and identity. But they do not uphold the principle of univocity – one name for one place – so the New Zealand Geographic Board does not take the decision lightly to apply them.

The two names are not intended to be translations of each other, but to be independent and uphold their uniqueness. For Steeple Rock / Te Aroaro-o-Kupe, the Māori name means the face or front of Kupe, who was a famous Māori navigator and explorer, and the English name is descriptive of a church steeple.

Dialect

Dialectical differences between tribal groups exist and so are also considered. New Zealand has standardised orthographic conventions for the Māori language, which the New Zealand Geographic Board upholds. However, the home people's views are considered in determining spelling, formatting and macrons. For example New Zealand's highest mountain is officially named Aoraki / Mount Cook. In Ngāi Tahu dialect the 'ki' is used over the standardised 'ngi'. The standardised orthography is Aorangi.

Māori generic geographic terms

Many Māori geographic names are compound words that include the generic term, for example Tararua Peaks, where the specific part translates as 'two peaks'. In this example the added English generic creates a tautology. Other examples are Mount Maunganui (Maunga *lit.* Mount) and Lake Rotoiti (Roto *lit.* Lake). Acceptance and familiarity of Māori generics, including when they form part of a name, will help move away from tautologies.

In 2016 the New Zealand Geographic Board noted that it may apply a Māori generic term rather than an English generic term, if one is required. The application of an appropriate Māori generic will be on a case by case basis, in part reflecting the revitalisation and increased everyday use of the Māori language in New Zealand society.

The New Zealand Geographic Board has published a generic geographic feature list as a way to promote understanding/education of Māori generic terms for different landforms. Line drawings will be published to compliment the list.

Literal translations

Literal translations of Māori geographic names should be treated with caution as many compound words have their own distinct meaning. For example Whairepo (whai *lit.* stingray, repo *lit.* swamp). However, Whairepo is an Eagle Ray, and is now the name of the lagoon on Wellington's waterfront, where the Eagle Rays feed and shelter from Orca whales.

Long Māori names

Many Māori geographic names are long because they tell a story. The New Zealand Geographic Board does not generally encourage long names, but may accept them case by case.

When considering a proposal for a long Māori geographic name, the New Zealand Geographic Board will take account of:

- the usability of the name,
- its euphony (how it sounds to the ear),
- impacts for emergency management and response, and
- the history of the proposed name and its cultural, traditional or ancestral importance to the whole community.

The Crown has restored many original Māori geographic names in their full form and the expectation is that they will be used in that full form. The risk for the New Zealand Geographic Board and Māori, is that the cartographic challenges of long Māori geographic names may lead cartographers to decide not to show them on maps and charts. The obligation is to use the official names when they appear on official documents but the publishers have discretion as to whether they are shown or not.

An example of a well known long Māori geographic name is: '**Taumatawhakatangihangakoauauotamateapokaiwhenuakitanatahu**' which translates to 'the place where Tamatea, the man with the big knees, who slid, climbed and swallowed mountains, known as landeater, played his flute to his loved one.'[8]

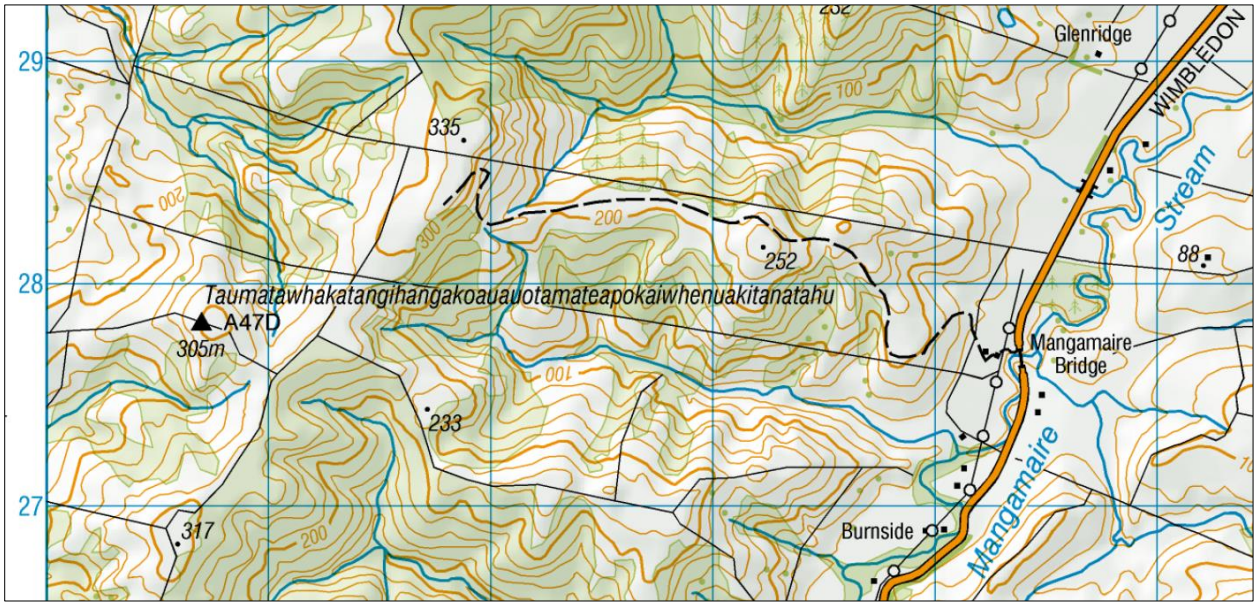

Figure 4: NZTopo50-BM38, Source: Land Information New Zealand, Crown Copyright Reserved

Technical considerations

Dual naming conventions

What is the format?	• The two parts are joined by a solidus, commonly known as a forward slash (/) with a space either side • Past depiction of dual names was to use brackets around the second name.
What does a forward slash do?	• It indicates the separation between the two names from two different languages • It expresses that both parts of the name have equal status and a different story • The forward slash (/) is shorthand for 'and', it does not mean 'or'
What if there are two names from the same language?	• Two Māori or two non-Māori names are not generally acceptable, though there are exceptions, eg: - Wellington Harbour (Port Nicholson), and - Hauraki Gulf / Tīkapa Moana
Why does New Zealand use a forward slash instead of a hyphen to separate dual names?	• A hyphen is used in New Zealand's indigenous language, Māori, to clarify parts of words: Te Aroaro-o-Kupe (translates to 'the presence of Kupe') • It would be confusing to use hyphens in the Māori name and a hyphen to join the two languages of a dual name • Using a forward slash clearly shows the two parts of the name from two separate languages that have equal status: Te Hauturu-o-Toi / Little Barrier Island

[8] Rāwiri Taonui, 'Tapa whenua – naming places - Traditions and place names from Polynesia', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/tapa-whenua-naming-places/page-3 (accessed 11 July 2017)

Engagement with Māori

One of the legislative purposes of the New Zealand Geographic Board is to provide effective notification, consultation, and decision-making procedures for naming geographic features. This applies for all geographic names, but there are some additional processes followed for Māori geographic names.

The New Zealand Geographic Board also comments on geographic names proposed by Māori claimant groups through the Office of Treaty Settlements as part of the settlement process. The New Zealand Geographic Board makes sure that all proposed Treaty of Waitangi names meet its naming principles. Once official, a Treaty of Waitangi settlement name can only be altered with the written consent of the relevant Treaty of Waitangi settlement group protecting the name from future change.

This is due to other legislative functions requiring the New Zealand Geographic Board to collect original Māori place names and encourage their use on official maps, charts and documents, and to ensure their correct orthography.

Conclusion

The rules for geographic naming in New Zealand have evolved and developed over many years, with a strong emphasis by today's New Zealand Geographic Board on preserving and restoring original Māori names. Since the 1970s there has been a steady move towards greater recognition of the significance of Māori geographic names in New Zealand's history and culture. Legislation has supported this. These led to a resurgence of interest in Māori geographic names, particularly through Treaty of Waitangi settlements, which have included the restoration of original Māori geographic names as part of cultural redress. There is a close relationship between acceptance of Māori place names and the revitalisation of the Māori language within the broader context of recognition of cultural and heritage values.

Oral traditions and history remain strong in Māori culture today, with connections to the land and its names being important to unlock past stories, events and mythologies. This helps to preserve the creation traditions, and provides a sense of belonging and identity. Māori geographic names record personal, spiritual and cultural values and connection to place and contribute to a sense of identity. They help to conceptualise and evoke images in our minds of where we have come from, where we are, and connections to other people, places and times – ngā pou taunaha o Aotearoa – the memorials markers of the landscape.

Contacts

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