

Tribes to meet to settle urupa discord

Karla Akuhata
Maori affairs reporter

ACCORDING to Pouroto Ngaropo, in 1868 the leader of the Ringatu faith, Te Kooti, prophesied a child would come from the east to unite the tribes of Ngati Awa, Tuwharetoa and Ngati Rangitihī.

The Ngati Awa deputy chairman said the child would hold the knowledge of the ancestors and have the ability to heal the land, restore the wellbeing of the people and unite the three tribes.

And if the prophecy is to be proved true then now would be just as good a time as any to see it fulfilled.

Tomorrow, as ordered by Maori Land Court chief judge Wilson Isaac, the three tribes will converge at a meeting for parties with an interest in the Otarā-o-Muturangi burial grounds.

Sometimes referred to as Otaramuturangi, the ancient cemetery is located near the mouth of the Tarawera River at Matata and comprises 0.81 hectares.

It has been at the centre of a dispute between Ngati Awa and Ngati Rangitihī that stretches back more than 40 years.

In 1961 the Maori Land Court wrote to the Department of Lands and Survey asking about the land's title.

However, the department was unable to find one and concluded the cemetery was part of the area confiscated by the Crown following the land wars in the 1800s.

It was eventually confirmed to be Crown land and, therefore, could be vested in Maori ownership.

In 1962 the deputy registrar of the Maori Land Court wrote to the secretary of the Ngati Rangitihī Tribal Committee requesting the names of proposed representative owners.

On April 18, 1963, the Maori Land Court confirmed Arapeta Te Riri, Bernard Perenara, Harry Semmens, Peter Humia and Wetini Moko as the trustees of Otarā-o-Muturangi for the common use and benefit of Ngati Rangitihī.

However, on May 5, 2004, Te Runanga o Ngati Awa filed an application with the court based on the claim that the cemetery belonged to others.

The application was made for and on behalf of Ngai Te



Pouroto Ngaropo,
Ngati Awa deputy
chairman

Rangihouhiri, Ngati Hikakino, Taiwhakaea and Te Tawera.

It was submitted that the registrar of the court communicated only with the Ngati Rangitihī Tribal Committee and that there was no Ngati Awa involvement.

Mr Ngaropo said the tribe presented its historical evidence in court that showed Ngati Awa to be the original owners of Otarā-o-muturangi and, therefore, the tribe should be included on the cemetery's title.

He said Otarā-o-Muturangi was the final resting place of one of Ngati Awa's most famous spiritual leaders.

"It is documented that in 1922 the paramount chief Te Hurinui Apanui said that Te Tahī o Te Rangi was buried at Otarā-o-muturangi."

In response, representatives for Ngati Rangitihī said there was no failure by the court to give notice to Ngati Awa, nor was there an error in the presentation of facts to the court.

However, earlier this year Judge Isaac agreed with Mr Ngaropo and Ngati Awa and cancelled the order from 1963 that vested the cemetery in trustees for the common use and benefit of Ngati Rangitihī.

The land, therefore, reverted back to Crown land reserved for Maori status, but Judge Isaac ordered the court registrar to call a "properly advertised meeting of interested parties" to consider the appropriate beneficiaries of the urupa and the appointment of trustees.

A letter was sent to all interested parties in November by deputy registrar Emerson Rewi notifying the meeting for tomorrow at 10am at the Matata Rugby Football Club.

Mr Ngaropo said Te Runanga o Ngati Awa intended to put up three candidates for the trustee positions including himself, Enid Ratahi-Pryor and Stanley Pryor.

He did not know how many trustees were needed for the trust but he was sure that Judge Isaac would give the tribes some direction.