



The hot pools at Parakai have been used by millions of people since their discovery by the Ngāti Whātua o Kaipara tribe. Plans are now in place to ensure that they will continue to be cared for and used for future generations.

I should have looked like a kuia aged over 60 when I visited Kaipātiki (the feeding grounds of the flounder) in 1883. My mind certainly was at last beginning to show signs of the wisdom and maturity that one accumulates through life's experiences, but my body stubbornly refused to age along with my mind. As I looked into the mirror, my face and body were still full of youthful vigour, with pale coloured skin and ever-present freckles that bloomed across my cheeks - thanks dad! The twenty something year old young woman that stared back through my eyes had an athletic physique, one hardened by time spent living away from others, relying only on my skills and wits to survive. The muscles in my arms and legs reminded me of the newly invented wire cables that I had seen in Nelson, tightly packed together and working in harmony, providing strength.

My bathing costume was navy blue and covered me from around my neck to just below my knees. This was the fashion of the times in Pākehā society, with women covering up so as not to reveal too much of their bodies to the gaze of men, so different to the way I was raised. Māori women the age I looked would be free to explore their sexuality without shame, knowing that when they found the right life partner they would be devoted to each other from then on. As I walked from the changing room into the bright light of a crisp morning, steam rose from the waters and the air had the familiar odour of the hot mineral springs at Waiwerawera.

The land looked so different from the memories of my childhood, when my mother and I travelled far from our home in search of birds to use for their feathers. I recall visiting the valley and seeing the hot water bubble up from the ground in small puddles next to some mud pools that always made me laugh, as they plopped loudly, smelling like farts. The springs were used by the local tribe, Ngāti Whātua o Kaipara for cooking, bathing and cleaning and were shaded by enormous kauri trees not far from the Kaipara River. The local council that controlled the area now known as Helensville, had taken ownership of the land from Māori in the 1870's, with the intent of creating public pools. The ancient kauri that had first risen up through the soil before even Māori had arrived were now all gone, cut, milled and shipped away; a valuable building resource for the many Pākehā homes that were popping up all over the country. The only kauri left here were the thick slabs that lined the hot pools so that the bathers of the local area could be comfortable.

The pool that I lowered myself into only had a few women in it, as at this time men and women could not bathe together, having separate facilities. There were no Māori women in my pool. Despite being tangata whenua, the first people of the land, pākehā did not want to bathe with Māori as they perceived them as dirty, perhaps thinking that our brown skin would somehow rub off as we soaked and infect them with colour! Māori had their own smaller unlined pool out the back where the springs came from the ground. This had been provided as an afterthought by the local council.

The warmth of the main pool I entered relaxed my body so that physically I was at peace. Thermal springs always attracted me no matter where they were in the country. Having a good soak in them was almost akin to a religious experience, my body had become attuned to the waters that had born, raised and saved me. My mind however was rarely at peace and I viewed the women around me chatting to each other as threats. I did not dare let on to all about my true identity in case they should discover my background and real age. I imagined their narrow minded outrage if they knew that there was a Māori in their midst! I did take a modicum of pleasure in the knowledge that my soak in the pools was a small act of defiance.

I was a regular visitor over the years, seeing new baths, a bathhouse and boarding rooms for people to stay being created. In the early 1900's a new name was given to the area I had always known as Kaipātiki, with the Helensville Hot Springs becoming known as Parakai. Pākehā had at first labelled the region as Kaipara after the newly established Kaipara Dairy Company which now farmed the valley. Many Pākehā however got confused with the Kaipara Harbour further north so they swapped the name around, with Kaipara becoming Parakai.

The natural healing qualities of the pools were hugely popular for treating returning soldiers from both the Great War and World War Two, with new buildings and sports fields added to the town. Anyone was now welcome to bathe and I regularly took the opportunity, the fashions of my bathing costume changing as dramatically as the town!

On my last visit to my favourite bathing spot of Parakai I learned of a new partnership that would be running the pools. In 2013 the Crown returned the reserve that hosts the springs to Ngāti Whātua o Kaipara. They were now kaitiaki or guardians of the place alongside the Auckland Council. Together they changed the name once more to better reflect the area's past, giving the land back its original name Kaipātiki. I look forward to seeing how the tribe and council transforms the land to better reflect the shared history of this place, promoting the healing waters for all to enjoy and look after for future generations (and me!) to enjoy.

1) Why did Wikitoria visit the area as a child?

- a) To collect feathers.
- b) To bathe in the pools.
- c) To catch flounder.

2) Why did female pākehā bathing costumes cover so much of the body?

- a) Protection from the sun.
- b) Because it was the latest fashion.
- c) To hide the body from men's stares.

3) What were the three names given to the area where the hot pools were?

4) Approximately when was Wikitoria born?

- a) 1883
- b) 1820
- c) 1810

5) Why was the name Kaipara given to the area?

- a) It was near Kaipara Harbour.
- b) It was the rearranged letters of Parakai.
- c) It was named after a dairy company.

6) Which of the following organisations did not control the area after 2013?

- a) The Crown
- b) Auckland Council
- c) Ngāti Whātua o Kaipara

7) What were three uses for the kauri tree mentioned in the story?

8) Why do you think that Wikitoria viewed the women in the pools as threats?

9) What word in the first paragraph gives the reader the impression that Wikitoria is frustrated that she does not look her real age?

10) Briefly explain why you think the hot pools would have been hugely popular after the two world wars.

Word Salad

There are many unusual words and phrases in the story you have just read. Complete the following tasks to ensure your understanding:

1) Find the definitions of the following English words.

- a) accumulate
- b) vigour
- c) harmony
- d) devoted
- e) perceive
- f) attune
- g) 'narrow minded'
- h) modicum

2) Use at least five of the words above in a series of creative sentences. Underline the words you chose to use.

Parts of Speech: Adverbs

Adverbs are used to describe action/doing words. Identify each adverb in the following sentences:

- a) She carefully looked in the mirror for signs of old age.
- b) The council took the land to quickly build public hot pools.
- c) Wikitoria slipped silently into the soothing waters.



Local Histories / Mātauranga Māori
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