



The pouwhenua that stands silent vigil above Ōrewa Bridge is close to where Māori had a pā settlement. It also marks the spot where a mighty taniwha was said to have taken travellers to their deaths. Near the beach stands a defensive pillbox from WW2.

When the Auckland Council constructed Te Ara Tahuna in 2011 I made sure that I was one of the first on the path around the Ōrewa Estuary. It had been many decades since I had walked besides the estuary or along the beach and the area was now unrecognisable from the place I had visited often. I used a walking stick now but held the arm of my mokopuna as a comfort to him, making him think he was steadying my step. Grey hair now peeped out from under the large brimmed hat that I used to ward off the hot sun. The skin on my face was wrinkled like old parchment, fractured by lines that pointed to my longevity, but I felt my eyes still danced with intensity. After all, they had seen some amazing things, two centuries come to pass, where the world had gotten itself into such a great big hurry. Cyclists, runners and old people on their mobility scooters, zoomed past us. Houses seem to have been built in the twinkling of an eye and they now surrounded the entirety of the estuary. The path was wide and smooth and I set a good pace as I spoke about the changes I had seen over the years.

Before the first Pākehā settlers arrived to build and farm in the Ōrewa area in the 1850's, the estuary and wider area had been an important place for tribes to gather seafood, in particular shellfish. My mother told me that when she was young there had been a pā and settlement of the Ngāti Whatua tribe on the steep hill above the Ōrewa Bridge. This had been an important strategic place as the site could control the mouth of the estuary and allow only friends of the tribe to travel up the Ōrewa River and onto Wainui. Now the pā site is dominated by homes, the only clue to its past, the pouwhenua that stands a silent vigil, watching cars and trucks cross the water, instead of waka. It was at this spot that a famous Ngāti Whatua ancestor, Pokopoko, had slain a mighty taniwha (a lizard-like monster) in the deep pool it called its home. This famous taniwha would eat all the people that attempted to walk along the old track from the west coast to the east coast. The taniwha can still be seen if you look closely at the pouwhenua, I said to my grandson.

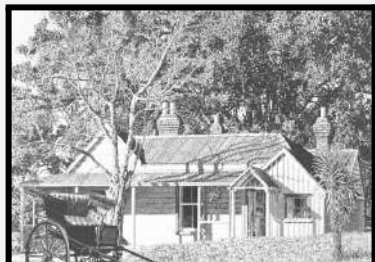
Looking towards the mouth of the estuary, where the river meets the ocean, a small concrete structure can be seen on the shoreline. It was here in the 1940's that government authorities looked to slay their own taniwha from across the seas, the Japanese Imperial Army. During the second world war the country became very fearful of being invaded, with the beautiful and flat Ōrewa Beach seemingly a perfect landing spot for enemy forces to attack nearby Auckland. Pillboxes, so called because of their shape, were constructed with one at either end

of the beach. Inside each were two soldiers who manned long range machine guns that could shoot bullets the entire length of the beach. Fortunately they were never used in anger.

I argued that it would be fine to travel down the steep bank near the bottom of Māori Hut Road, but my mokopuna took some convincing that I would manage. He held my arm in a vice-like grip which only loosened, when we sat on the small bench under the shade of a tree whose branches dipped into calm waters. I used to work near here and eat the abundant shellfish, leaving their shells in a neat pile. It amused me to see that archeologists had now taken my rubbish and encased it under glass as proof of Māori activity. I explained that this area was very important to the early gumdiggers because where we sat was an important source of freshwater for drinking. I had been a gumdigger for a time, working with the men in the water of the estuary, digging up the ancient kauri that had travelled down the river and been covered in silt. The prize we sought had travelled with the tree. My job was to use my small but tough hands to feel the underside of the trunk for what the pākehā called liquid gold. We would break off the hardened gum resin and sell it at the port in Auckland. Here it was polished until it earned its name, the amber swirls being very popular with pākehā women around the world who wore it as jewellery, similar to Māori women. Māori also used it as chewing gum in its softened form and as an important ingredient of Tā moko or tattooing.

The original pākehā homestead from 1858 still stands at the end of the estuary, although now it has been swallowed up by a thousand other homes. The rolling pastures of Stoney Cottage are gone. It was here that many of the gumdiggers from other crews sought food and shelter, some literally on the brink of starvation. My crew were always well fed as I had the skills to snare birds, dig up shellfish and catch the slippery eels which made for such good eating. My cut of the profits were always slighter bigger thanks to the grateful men that I worked with.

As we approached Ōrewa Bridge after nearly completing the Te Ara Tahuna circuit, I pointed out one last place of significance, the large open area that is a popular place for dog walkers and also sees children flip, jump and tumble on the ramps with their scooters and skateboards. Over the years it has been home to a movie theatre but perhaps more unusually, Ōrewa Marineland, which opened in 1968. Here visitors from Auckland, would come and be entertained by chimpanzees, exotic birds and seals and sea lions, one of which used to regularly escape and be seen swimming in the estuary - a very different type of sea monster! By the 1980's the wildlife had gone - as had the little shop that used to sell three scoop ice creams for just 10 cents. In its place came a new form of entertainment, bumper boats and a mini-golf course. These too in time disappeared to make way for new community resources. As my grandson and I made my way back to the car, I wondered how many more changes I would be alive to see.



The images here (left to right) show polished amber which was so adored by women around the world, Stoney Cottage that still stands in Millwater, and a scene from the time when Ōrewa had its own Marineland.

- 1) Which of the following was not an attraction of Ōrewa Estuary?
 - a) Roller Skate park
 - b) Marineland
 - c) Mini-golf
- 2) Where was an important source of fresh water near the estuary?
 - a) By Stoney Cottage.
 - b) By Māori Hutt Road.
 - c) By Ōrewa Pa.
- 3) Why was Wikitoria amused by the actions of the archaeologists?
- 4) When was Stoney Homestead first built by pākehā in the Ōrewa area?
 - a) 1850's
 - b) 1858
 - c) 1950s
- 5) What was the reason that the Ōrewa pa was of strategic importance?
 - a) It protected the taniwha.
 - b) It was good for fishing and shellfish.
 - c) It controlled the river mouth.
- 6) What is the best reason to suggest why Ōrewa was heavily defended in WW2?
 - a) Ōrewa was a flat beach near Auckland.
 - b) New Zealand feared an invasion by the Japanese.
 - c) The long beach gave the ability to shoot for long distances
- 7) List three clues from the story that show that Wikitoria is an old woman in 2011.
- 8) What were three traditional uses of kauri gum by Māori?
- 9) Briefly explain why Wikitoria received a slightly higher share of the profits than her crew?
- 10) What are the three types of 'threat from the sea' mentioned in the story?

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) parchment
 - b) longevity
 - c) vigil
 - d) abundant
 - e) silt
 - f) pasture
 - g) brink
 - h) exotic

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: Prepositions

Prepositions usually come before a noun or pronoun and give the position of that word. Identify each preposition in the following sentences:

- a) The submerged tree rested under the silt of the estuary.
- b) High above the estuary the birds called to each other.
- c) The taniwha dragged victims to their death in the water.

