

UC Santa Cruz

Pacific Arts: The Journal of the Pacific Arts Association

Title

Mana i te Whenua: Relationships with Place and Sovereignty

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0xz7j5z0>

Journal

Pacific Arts: The Journal of the Pacific Arts Association, 22(2)

ISSN

1018-4252

Author

Kaihaukai Collective, Ron Bull and Simon Kaan

Publication Date

2022

DOI

10.5070/PC222259589

Copyright Information

Copyright 2022 by the author(s). This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

**KAIHAUKAI ART COLLECTIVE
(RON BULL AND SIMON KAAN)**

***Mana i te Whenua: Relationships with Place
and Sovereignty***

Abstract

Kaihaukai is a term that describes the sharing and exchanging of traditional foods, an important customary practice for Māori. The Kaihaukai Art Collective centres on the mahika kai (food gathering/processing) of the Ngāi Tahu (Indigenous peoples of Southern New Zealand), which relates to working with traditional foods in their place of origin and includes preparation, gathering, eating, and sharing. Mahika kai assists in the transfer of knowledge and continuation of cultural practices, some of which are at risk of being lost.

This paper discusses Kaihauka Art Collective's contribution to the Tamatea: He Tūtakinga Tuku Iho/Legacies of Encounter exhibition, shown at Te Papa Tongarewa, the Museum of New Zealand from November 2019 to July 2020. The exhibition centred around the acquisition of a painting by William Hodges, which depicts a hulled Māori canoe beside a waterfall in Tamatea (Dusky Sound). The painting was shown with works by renowned New Zealand artists that responded to it.

Kaihaukai Art Collective's response to the exhibition culminated in an installation that included a feast that took place within the gallery. The feast was a narrative that participants consumed in four parts—Ko Te Tai Ao, Ahi Kaa, Disturbed Earth, and Vermin. Through doing this, they became complicit in the resulting legacy of their own encounter with Tamatea. The meal's remaining detritus—the shells, bones, and other waste—was collected in the form of a midden, a tangible reminder of impact and disruption. This discussion of the installation is contextualised by an exploration of the Māori term mana whenua (relationship to place) and its relationship to mana i te whenua (authority from land).

Keywords: *mana whenua, Māori land rights, installation art, relational art, traditional food, First Nations, Aotearoa New Zealand*

The exhibition *Tamatea: He Tūtakinga Tuku Iho/Legacies of Encounter* was shown at Te Papa Tongarewa, the Museum of New Zealand, from November 9, 2019 to July 26, 2020.¹ It centred around Tamatea (Dusky Sound), an inlet in

southwestern New Zealand, and included the painting by William Hodges *Waterfall in Dusky Bay with Maori Canoe*, which depicts a double-hulled, Māori canoe beside a waterfall in Tamatea.² Hodges was on board Captain Cook's second voyage to New Zealand, during which first contact with our peoples in the southern areas occurred at Tamatea in 1773. While the Hodges painting was the centrepiece of the Te Papa exhibition, it was contextualized by being shown alongside archaeological artifacts /*Ngāi Tahu whānui taoka* and works of art that ranged from the written word to glass plate photography and water colours by prominent New Zealand artists.³ Each artist's interpretation re-envisioned a scene of Tamatea and its environment—including the water, land, and wildlife—through a different cultural lens and with the personal narrative of its artist. These were carefully curated by Te Papa in order to promote a wide-ranging conversation about Tamatea and its history, as told and retold by those who have been engaged with it, and to question the legacy of those encounters. The Kaihaukai Art Collective was invited to consider a live response to the art in the exhibition.

The Kaihaukai Art Collective is a collaboration of mainly Indigenous New Zealand artists that was established in 2012. Its primary members are Simon Kaan and Ron Bull, with a fluid membership of invited collaborators. The main focus of the collective is to capture, maintain, curate, and share the stories around *mahika kai*, traditional food gathering and preparation practices of the Indigenous people of Southern New Zealand.

As the exhibition was already open when we were invited to respond to it, the Kaihaukai Art Collective was able to view the individual works, experience the exhibition as a whole, and, most importantly for the collective, to consider the subtitle of the exhibition: "Legacies of Encounter." The latter prompted vigorous discussion within the collective around visitation, impact, intent, ownership, and sovereignty. These topics were all considered, responded to, and embedded within the installation, but for the collective, sovereignty became the focal point of our response. Our contemplation of the artists' works within the exhibition raised questions for us: Does the depiction and interpretation of place imply a sense of ownership over that place? Can they offer a form a sovereignty by capturing and defining the essence of place? What is each artist's connection to the *whakapapa* of the place?⁴ What is their narrative of the place and how does it interact and/or interrupt Indigenous narratives?

One of the founding principles of the Kaihaukai Art Collective is to use *mahika kai* in a way that connects people to landscapes. From a localised Southern New Zealand perspective, this connection is a foundation of *whakapapa*. This installation, a curatorial response to the Te Papa *Tamatea* exhibition included the

gathering of food; the inclusion of various food practitioners; a live soundscape from Mara T.K. and a multi-media projection by Alex Montieth; and, importantly, including the stories of others who have a connection to the landscape in question.⁵ These stories were shared in *wanaka*, a collective learning and sharing experience. We endeavour to incorporate as many connected voices as possible into our work; we believe the collective's response should not just be an *artistic* perspective, but represent the perspectives of many people connected through *whakapapa*.

In this instance, our curation of these voices and memories culminated in the form of a *hakari*, a feast within the confines of the gallery itself, amongst the other artworks in the exhibition that held the memories and narratives of their creators. While the memories and narratives in the artworks could be consumed visually, feasting required our participants to consume our art narrative orally, presented in the form of a four-course degustation meal. Each course included a narrative reflecting the *whakapapa* of Tamatea through time, and the interactions and interruptions of people as they move through the landscape. The menu was structured around four narratives, one per course:

Ko Te Tai Ao (the natural world), the land and sea prior to human contact

- Steamed Whole Fish “swimming” through Roasted Seaweed
- Cockles Baked in Bull Kelp
- Fresh Sea Urchin in Kombu Soup

Ahi Kaa (the long-burning fires⁶), the light footprint of Iwi Māori

- Smoked Abalone served with its Roe
- Crispy Skin Boiled Muttonbird on the Bone
- Fermented Seaweed and Muttonbird Broth

Disturbed Earth, the impact of European explorers and settlers

- Edible Earth (dried olives, mixed nuts, and seeds)
- Heritage Potatoes and Carrots
- Fresh Spruce Beer

Vermin, exotic predators introduced into the landscape by settlers

- Venison Tartar
- Wild Game on Seedless Lavash Cracker
- Warm *Manaka* Tea

Kaihaukai Art Collective's invitation to feast, to partake in the four courses, was an invitation to consume the four narrative parts. In doing this, the guests in the gallery transitioned from being passive consumers of the artworks to literally consuming the narrative; through the act of eating, they became complicit in constructing their own legacy of an encounter with Tamatea/Dusky Sound. As each course was introduced, it was accompanied by a description of what it was and its importance within the larger narrative. Direct connections between the art and the people, the people and the food, and the food and the land were made. We created a *whakapapa* connection within the gallery. The detritus that remained after this meal—the shells, bones, and other waste—was collected and displayed in the form of a midden, a tangible reminder of impact and disruption. In its own way this midden was also a tangible display of *whakapapa*, the layering of time, experience, and narrative both of Tamatea and of the event within the gallery.

***Whakapapa* and Sovereignty**

The acceptance of the idea of a *whakapapa* connection to the land, and the resources that are derived from it, is underpinned by an ideology that gives preference to Indigenous perspectives of connection to land: "One does not own the land. One belongs to the land."⁷ The fundamental belief systems that go with *whakapapa* have been challenged through the introduction of an alternate discourse based on land ownership and the Westphalian system of sovereignty that accompanied colonisation: that the state owns the land. This arguably began in earnest in Aotearoa (New Zealand) with its mass settlement by people from the northern hemisphere, preceded by British explorer Captain James Cook. This resulted in the individualisation of land titles and the subsequent alienation of Indigenous peoples from the land to which they belonged, relegating connection to memory.

The term *mana whenua* is often used by Iwi Māori, the Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa/New Zealand, when describing their relationships to landscape, places, and resources, and their connection to creation narratives that are used to inform collective and individual identity. These continuous and uninterrupted relationships are told and retold through *whakapapa*, the recounting of the layers of time, experience, and narrative. Breaking this term down, it can be understood as *mana*, a concept that can be interpreted as integrity, and *whenua*, the land. In this regard, *mana whenua* are the people who are responsible for maintaining the

integrity of the landscape. This should not be confused with constructs of ownership of land, as central to the concept of *mana whenua* is the accepted truth that we live under the authority that comes from land, *mana i te whenua*, and that we are mere occupants of place.

The relationship between place and people can be linked to the metanarratives that inform creation stories and give “truth” to the creation of land and all that live within it. This also extends to stories of exploration and discovery—the first human footprints and impact on the land—and the deeds and accomplishments of our relations in previous generations. These stories provide individuals and collectives with a direct connection to *whakapapa* and, therefore, justification of the rights to live on the landscape, as well as the important obligations that extend from this. These obligations include maintaining the integrity of the landscape for the benefit of the land itself, but also for the generations to come afterwards: *whakapapa*.



Figure 1. Alex Monteith, still from *Kā paroro o haumumu: Coastal Flows / Coastal Incursions*, 2019, shown in the Kaihaukai Art Collection installation responding to *Tamatea: He Tūtakinga Tuku Iho/Legacies of Encounter*, Te Papa Tongarewa, March 3, 2020. Courtesy of Alex Monteith.

The integrity of the land is just that; not claimed, not owned, not disturbed, not exploited—land has its own “sovereignty.” Sovereignty as a construct (cultural episteme) was foreign to Māori people before the arrival of Europeans. Relationship to the land is highlighted in He Whakaputanga, the Declaration of Independence, signed in 1835. This document acknowledges Iwi Māori as holding

social and political control in the islands now known as New Zealand: “It asserted that sovereign power and authority in the land (*‘Ko te Kingitanga ko te mana i te w[h]enua’*) resided with Te Whakaminenga, the Confederation of United Tribes, and that no foreigners could make laws.”⁸ Within the text, there is a discrepancy between words and concepts stated in English and those in Te Reo Māori (the Māori language), particularly the phrases “Sovereign Power/*Ko Te Kingitanga*” and “Authority in the Land/*Mana i te Whenua*.” These issues form the basis of the discussion in this paper and the installation that is discussed as a whole.

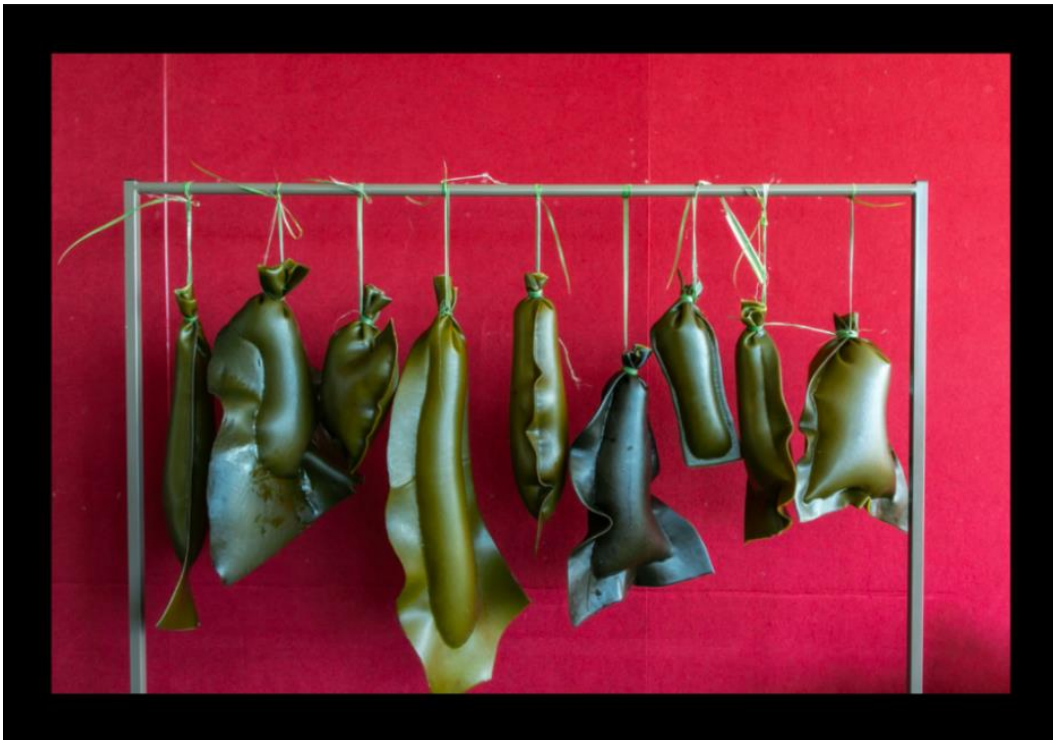


Figure 2. *Pōhā*: traditional food storage receptacles constructed from Southern bull kelp. These were used in the installation to cook and present food for the hākari. Detail from the Kauhaukai installation responding to *Tamatea: He Tūtakinga Tuku Iho/Legacies of Encounter*, Te Papa Tongarewa, March 3, 2020. Photograph by Jo Moore. Courtesy of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

Ko Te Tai Ao

As introduced above, the first representation of the layers or narratives of *whakapapa* in the Kauhaukai Art Collective’s *hākari* was *Ko Te Tai Ao*, the natural world (Figs. 1–3). This was, originally, a place that was undisturbed, untouched by

people. Tamatea was full of life both below and above water—fish, birds, and vegetation. All life forms worked symbiotically with one another. Our ancestors worked with the seaweed, with the fish, and with the birds. We are related, we share *whakapapa*.



Figure 3. Detail of “*Ko Te Tai Ao*,” the first course of the Kauhaukai installation responding to *Tamatea: He Tūtakinga Tuku Iho/Legacies of Encounter*, Te Papa Tongarewa, March 3, 2020. Photograph by Jo Moore. Courtesy of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

The first dishes that were prepared and presented as part of the installation feast tried to capture the natural flowing kelps and other seaweeds. Whole steamed fish were represented as gliding through the weeds, while shellfish and *tuaki* (cockles) were nurtured in kelp. As much as possible, the *mana* (integrity) of the constituent parts was left intact, with as little alteration and adulteration of the essence of the beings that lived and thrived in the water and on the land as possible—it was presented as untouched, natural, sovereign.

Ahi Kaa

The first fires that were lit through human occupation in the landscape came via explorers from Eastern Polynesia, around 850 CE. The following *pepeha*, a saying

that has been handed down through oral traditions from the *tūpuna* (ancestors), tells us:

Ko Rakaihautu te takata nana I timata te ahi kei ruka I tenei motu.
(It was Rakaihautu that first lit fires on this island.)

This *pepeha* speaks truth to the original human inhabitants of the landscape, and connecting to it allows the descendants of these people the rights and obligations to the resources of that natural environment.⁹



Figure 4. Detail of “Ahi Kaa,” the second course of the Kaihaukai installation responding to *Tamatea: He Tūtakinga Tuku Iho/Legacies of Encounter*, Te Papa Tongarewa, March 3, 2020. Photograph by Jo Moore. Courtesy of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

Ahi (fire) can manifest itself in two ways: practically and metaphorically. The practical fire is used to maintain physical wellbeing: heat, light, cooking. In the installation, the practical fire was used to modify aspects of the natural environment: *paua* (abalone) was smoked, *titi* (sooty shearwater) were boiled, *kina* (sea urchin) were poached, and the people were kept warm (Fig. 4).

However, throughout the cooking transformation process, the *mana* of the food items and the sea and land that they came from was kept at the forefront of our minds. The “right” to enjoy what has been provided for us, taking the *paua*, *titi*, and *kina* from their home, is keenly balanced with the “obligation” of ensuring

that we maintain the *mana*. This is *whakapapa*. Through the metanarratives that have been handed down through time, we can claim connection to *tupuna*. Through metanarrative, our *whakapapa* also connects us to Takaroa (the Sea), Papatūānuku (the Land), and Rakinui (the Sky).¹⁰ We have the right to enjoy and we have the obligation to both sustain and regenerate the natural world.



Figure 5. Detail of “Disturbed Earth,” the third course of the Kaihaukai installation responding to *Tamatea: He Tūtakinga Tuku Iho/Legacies of Encounter*, Te Papa Tongarewa, March 3, 2020. Photograph by Jo Moore. Courtesy of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

Disturbed Earth

It is well documented in ship logs and associated writings that Cook’s crew brought with them foods and agricultural processes from England and planted a garden including carrots and potatoes at Tamatea.¹¹ In doing this, the *takata pora* (the people of the boats; British settlers) introduced their ways to the layers of stories, knowledge, and landscape; they did not adapt to what existed, but turned the earth, acclimatising to the landscape by changing it. There was an imposition of colonial sovereignty. The British Crown assumed rights over the land and all that lived within it.

The British settlers’ interactions were more exploitative than those that had come before. They imposed themselves into the land, disturbed the land. The interactions of Cook’s expedition set the pathway for future extractive industries. Sealing gangs began to arrive and, by the 1820s, had built relationships with the

people of Rakaihautu and produced offspring who shared the *whakapapa* lineage of both parents.¹² Subsequent over-exploitation of the seal population for commercial reasons led seamlessly into shore-based whaling in the waters of Te Rua o Te Moko.¹³ These activities were cogs in the industrial mechanisms that paved the way for the subsequent full-scale colonial settlement of New Zealand and its annexation into the British Empire, after the Declaration of Independence (1835) and Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi (1840) the fundamental intention of this was the acquisition of sovereignty on behalf of the British Crown.

The third course of our installation for *Tamatea*, “Disturbed Earth,” reimagined Cook’s gardens. The edible “earth” (dried olives, seeds, and nuts) was “planted” with the foreigners’ potatoes and carrots (Fig. 5). The dirt itself was flavoured through the infusion of peat smoke, with the peat extracted from the earth of Tamatea itself. The peat imparted the essence of the landscape to the participants and was one of only three elements taken from the natural environment of Tamatea. Participants were encouraged to eat the dirt, carrots, and potatoes with their hands. By making them complicit in the activities of disturbing the earth with their own hands, we hoped they would realise that in some way they/we all disturb the earth through even the most mundane of activities.



Figure 6. Detail of “Vermin,” the fourth course of the Kaihaukai installation responding to *Tamatea: He Tūtakinga Tuku Iho/Legacies of Encounter*, Te Papa Tongarewa, March 3, 2020. Photograph by Jo Moore. Courtesy of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

Vermin

The result of direct human contact with the land is undeniable. The land is disturbed, and the fish, birds, and plants are under threat. Introduced species, particularly deer and rats, are the main inhabitants of Tamatea. The once deafening bird songs are now quiet: the trees themselves are now prey, the vermin invades and prevails, claiming sovereignty.

The fourth food interpretation consisted of undistinguishable meat-based products, served on top of the disturbed earth of Cook's Garden (Fig. 6). The meat, wild deer, was taken from the hills in Tamatea. They are one of the main predators on the land, and have had a massive negative impact on the natural environment. The other main predator is the rat.

This dish was served with the narrative of the legacy of our encounters: a once pristine environment is now under severe threat due to overfishing and external environmental issues including predation. The source of the meat was disclosed; it was the only primary food element that had been harvested from Tamatea due to the extreme pressure on the native foods both above and below the water.



Figure 7. Scenes from the Kaihaukai Art Collective installation responding to *Tamatea: He Tūtakinga Tuku Iho/Legacies of Encounter*, Te Papa Tongarewa, March 3, 2020. Photographs by Jo Moore. Courtesy of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

Conclusion

In the Kaihaukai Art Collective’s response to the *Tamatea exhibition*, various legacies of encounter were considered through the footprints of the people who are of the land, feeding themselves and each other on *whakapapa* (Fig. 7). Each of the *whakapapa* layers of our interactions with place—*Ahi Kaa*, *mana whenua*, *mana i te whenua* (keeping the fires burning, maintaining the fires, maintaining the authority of the land)—has left a footprint, some deeper and more destructive than others, from the purity of the natural environment, the light touch of the Indigenous peoples, to the overturning of the earth and subsequent infestation of vermin. The shells, the bones, the feasting, the stories, and the people all return to the earth.



Figure 8. Detail of midden following the Kaihaukai Art Collective installation responding to *Tamatea: He Tūtakinga Tuku Iho/Legacies of Encounter*, Te Papa Tongarewa, March 3, 2020. Photograph by Jo Moore. Courtesy of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

Given correct curatorial attention, the visual representation of what both Cook and Hodges may have encountered in *Tamatea* may last for generations to come (as may the Westphalian tradition of sovereignty within the New Zealand socio-political history). It has already outlived *Tamatea: Legacies of Encounter* as

an exhibition. Indeed, the Kauhaukai Art Collective's art/food installation response to the exhibition retains its power as memory, like the memories and conversations that have been held in homes and cafes, and around fires for many generations.

Tamatea sits silently and patiently, waiting for the exhibition to close, for the installation to be forgotten, for the feast to end. It is waiting to consume all into the midden (Fig. 8), the *mana*, the integrity of all things. It is waiting to return to the earth, *mana i te whenua*, the owner of the layers, the *whakapapa*—sovereignty.

The Kauhaukai Art Collective—Simon Kaan (Kai Tahu/Chinese/Pākehā) and Ron Bull (Kai Tahu/Pākehā)—was first conceived as a cultural food exchange to share food practices between the Ngāi Tahu (Indigenous peoples of Southern New Zealand) and the Native American Pueblo people in New Mexico. The project was presented at the 2012 International Symposium of Electronic Arts, held in Santa Fe. Since then, the collective has worked with artists and Indigenous communities to initiate art projects that explore food and identity and how this informs contemporary cultural practice.

Notes

¹ More information about the exhibition is available on the website of the Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa:

<https://www.tepapa.govt.nz/tamatea-legacies-encounter>.

² William Hodges, *Waterfall in Dusky Bay with Maori Canoe*, 1776, oil on panel. Purchased in 2019 with assistance from Lottery Grants Board, Tuia Encounters—250 Fund. Te Papa (2019-0003-1). The painting may be viewed through the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa's online collections,

<https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/object/1728134>

³ Many of the words and phrases within this article reflect a South Island Māori dialect and may differ slightly from a version of te reo Māori with which the reader may be more accustomed.

⁴ The term *whakapapa* is generally used to indicate genealogy. However, this is a very narrow construct and, with any concept translated from one cultural episteme into another, we lose the true meaning of that concept. Within this conversation, *whakapapa* will relate to the layering of people (genealogy), time (a seamless chronology), and experience with explicit reference to how this relates to landscape as part of the *whakapapa* of people.

⁵ This iteration of the Kauhaukai collective included Ron Bull and Simon Kaan as well as live audio works from Mara T.K. and Alex Montieth.

⁶ *Ahi Kaa* literally translates as “long burning fires.” This phrase is used as a metaphor for Indigenous peoples in New Zealand in relation to continuous contact within place.

⁷ Eddie Durie, “The Law and the Land,” in *Te Whenua Te Iwi, The Land and the People*, ed. Jock Phillips (Wellington: Allen and Unwin, 1987), 78.

⁸ Ministry for Culture and Heritage, “New Zealand History, *Nga korero a ipurangi o Aotearoa*,” “He Whakaputanga – Declaration of Independence – Page 1 – Introduction,” updated January 13, 2022,

<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/declaration-of-independence-taming-the-frontier>

⁹ The concept of *pepeha* is too complicated to explain in a translation of a single word. *Pepeha* is a proclamation that, when evoked, links the speaker to a *whakapapa*, a line of genealogy, experiences, and belief systems whose connection provide the basis for identity, belonging, and practice.

¹⁰ In the South Island Māori dialect, Takaroa and Rakinui refer to Tangaroa and Rangi-nui, respectively.

¹¹ Captain Cook Society, “225 Years Ago: April–June 1773,” accessed July 8, 2022, <https://www.captaincooksociety.com/home/detail/225-years-ago-april-june-1773>

¹² Angela Middleton, *Two Hundred Years on Codfish Island (Whenuahou): From Cultural Encounter to Nature Conservation* (Invercargil, New Zealand: Department of Conservation, Southland Conservancy, 2007),

https://www.academia.edu/944430/Two_Hundred_Years_on_Codfish_Island_Whenuahou_From_Cultural_Encounter_to_Nature_Conservation

¹³ Te Rua o Te Moko is the name given to what is now called Fiordland in Southern New Zealand. The name likens the landscape to the pits of fires that were lit to capture the creosote used in tattooing practices. It connects to the Tamatea *purakau* (traditional) narrative.