There are not many things she takes seriously — one is her lack of confidence at speaking Maori, another is land.

After a "cup-of-tea" which included a woodstove-cooked leg of mutton and a loaf of rewena bread, she took me out to three large vacant sections amongst the houses across the road.

"People say 'sell up Aunty, you'll be rich' — but I don't want to be rich." Businessmen and their lawyers wanted to put flats there. "They came and saw me — they had all the answers." But they tried to win her brain, instead of her heart.

For her, "progress" is the "pollution" sign at the harbour edge, and the scarcity of eels at Taumutu because of large-scale commercial harvesting. Her third home — at Otakou — is now under threat.

"I know where they'll put that aluminium smelter – there's a place where the people are buried."

Going back through the gate she picked up the mail, embarrassed at herself for being so serious. We went back into the house.

The oldest (fifty-nine) and the youngest (thirty-six) of four bachelor sons who stay with her sat by the woodstove,

smiling. Their names are Ngahina, Takamaiterangi, Rakaiheria and Te Rauparaha but they are usually known as Hina, Taka, Chocolate and Junior. "They'll stay until they're nearly 100. They'll drive me to Australia, or Hawaii."

Said Junior, "That's where two daughters are." He put his hand on the room-long solid oak table. "There used to be sixteen kids around here."

Before leaving I enjoyed another feed, with the two sons, and more laughter. When Aunty Leah came out to say goodbye her little dog Spotty followed . . . and bit me on the ankle when I started the motorbike.

She laughed. "He likes you."

It would have taken more than a dog bite, Aunty Leah, to keep me away from your birthday hui. Porirua M.P. Gerard Wall described the mood of that night: "To say that we love you is to put it mildly . . . but what more can we say?"

Ria Moheko Taiaroa of Otakou is great-grand-daughter of Matenga Taiaroa — nicknamed "Fighting Taiaroa" by the Pakeha — and famous for halting Te Rauparaha's southward conquest. In 1834 he brought 500 men from Otago and Southland in canoes up the coast for the final counter-attack against Te Rauparaha in Queen Charlotte Sound. They chased and skirmished with bands of Ngati Toa for two months before going home when supplies ran out.

Strong feelings continued into this century between Ngati Toa and Kai Tahu — then in 1921 Ria Taiaroa became a human peace offering. She was given to Te Rauparaha's descendant — Te Rauparaha Wineera — in an arranged marriage.



## Tuakau Sand Limited

RIVER ROAD, TUAKAU

FOR FRESH PUMICE
AND SAND

PHONE TUAKAU 68-723