

Colenso's journal is important for the historical record in that by the time he arrived at the Ahuriri Lagoon in 1843 to establish his mission station "Waitangi", a generation of Ngati Kahungunu had come and gone who had no personal experience of life in the vastness of the Ruahines. At the same time however, earlier epics of the tribe and remembrance of unfortunate disasters to parties travelling in the vastness of the range and which were well remembered. These points of disaster were so well described in the tribal history that the areas were identified by folk who were passing them for the first time.

Colenso's interest in penetrating the Ruahines by means of an ancient trodden pathway was to pay a pastoral visit to Mokai Patea. This upland area was in the watershed of the Rangitikei and on the western side of the range. The inhabitants of Mokai Patea (nowadays called Inland Patea) were the Ngati Paneiri or Te Upokoiri hapu of Ngati Kahungunu. By February 1845 when Colenso made his first attempt to reach Mokai Patea all contact with this far away hapu of Ngati Kahungunu had been lost for many years. Thus finding a guide who not only knew but was willing to lead the way was the missionary's problem.

#### No sketches

From Colenso's journal it is evident that he never resorted to the obvious thing to do by asking local sages to draw a sketch of what they knew of the way ahead. This was the practice resorted to by Edward Shortland when he placed on record the geographical knowledge of the Otago hinterland as imprinted on the memory of the Ngati Tahu and Canon Stack's effort in obtaining the direction of a route through the Southern Alps from an elderly Maori, who had made the journey in the days of his youth. Both these cases have been recorded in earlier issues of Tu Tangata.

After being strongly advised by his Maori friends and benefactors not to attempt the mountain journey, Colenso obtained the services of a not too eager middle aged guide named Mawhatu who had made the trip in his younger days. This journey was an escaped captive. Although his knowledge of the area would be useful, important details

of key landmarks along the way would have become blurred with the lapse of time. This time the guide would also be travelling in the opposite direction and details that would have impressed on the young mind through changed circumstances would assume a different appearance when approached from the other leg of the journey.

Colenso's first journeys to the Ruahines were by roundabout routes. The decision not to make the journey to Mokai Patea as short as possible by making a direct approach to the high peak Te Atua-Mahuru was destined to see the pastoral visit end in failure. For from Colenso's journal it comes out how he considerably underestimated the time required for him to venture into the back of beyond. Also out of his reckoning was any thought of how he was to supplement his meagre rations by living off the land if time ran out.

Guided by Mawhatu, Colenso's party moved through scrub and fern until the edge of the Ruataniwha Plain was reached at the banks of Mangaonuku River. From here the party moved across country through forest and skirting swamps until the Waiapaoa was reached.

Today for convenience of pronunciation and spelling this placename is referred to as Waipawa. At the end of the Waiapaoa's middle course Mawhatu changed direction and led the party up the Makaroro branch.

From a study of the terrain it is obvious that with all the best intentions, Mawhatu led the party too far up the Makaroro before making the ascent proper. For by the time Colenso sighted Te Atua-o-Mahuru the river had changed its character and become a typical mountain stream, with numerous deep pools to negotiate, plus slippery water worn boulders to make footing difficult. In addition to these natural hazards were complicated log jams to clamber over and the numerous fordings of the river.

#### Second attempt successful

Colenso on leaving the river realised that the party had missed the way. Amongst his accomplishments Colenso had a keen interest in botany. At no stage in the climb to the main range were any signs of a track noticed. Although he was on the look out there were no signs of the Maori bush craft

practice of marking a recognised route by the custom of pawhati. This was the practice of bending a prominent branch or shrub in the general direction. The Maori members of the party also failed to notice any trodden moss, which in the days before the liberation of noxious animals into our forest, would be the result of human trampling.

On reaching the main range, Colenso endeavoured to speed up proceedings by sending a scout party to Mokai Patea. Due to shortage of food Mawhatu and his companions were forced to abandon the attempt of renewing contact with the distant Hapu. The failure was also a salutary lesson to all explorers in that it conveyed the message that in the ranges, living off the land was a difficult proposition.

In his next attempt Colenso achieved his objective. This he achieved by following another roundabout route to Mokai Patea. This led him initially up the Mohaka. By following a major track which had led him along the watershed which separated the Upper Mohaka and Rangitaiki Rivers, he eventually reached the shores of Taupo.

From Taupo his party moved southward across the Onetapu desert until the Ruahines were reached. After some further wearying travel across hill and dale which was not always easy on the nerves, Mokai Patea was reached. For all his missionary zeal, Colenso was not cut out for being an explorer. After leaving the kainga of Te Awarua in which he was guided part of the way back to Hawkes Bay by the two elders Te Koapou and Pirere Here, Colenso made things difficult for his party by failing to comprehend the instructions and read the Ruahine terrain correctly. As a consequence of getting off the recognised route the party experienced all sorts of difficulties before returning to Ahuriri.

That the route from Hawkes Bay across the Ruahines to Mokai Patea was part of the old communication net work before changing circumstances caused its abandonment, was brought to the attention of all concerned when in March 1845 the Rev. Richard Taylor reached this inland highland area. This was when after leaving his station on the Whanganui he ventured into the upper reaches of the Rangitikei and reached Matuku, an outer settlement of Mokai Patea.