

History Relating to the Panel – Sculptured by Te Aturangi Nepia Clamp

The story starts before man had settled in whanganui-a-tara and the areas had not been named. The only voice heard was that of the seagull.

At that time wellington harbour was surrounded by land and living in the lagoon were two taniwha, Ngake and Whataitai. They had lived there a long time and eventually had the idea that they should break out into the open sea beyond known as the Moana-a-raukawa (Cook Strait). They planned how they would travel over the dry land to the sea.

Whataitai was the first to attempt the escape. He curled himself up, raised his head and his tail whirled. He took off and soared over the harbour and landed on the sandy beach now called Evans Bay. And there he remained, stranded.

The Ngake decided to make his escape. He twirled his body furiously and wound up his tail. When his body rose the whole harbour below him churned and became muddy. This caused the waters of Awakairangi (Hutt River) to become shallow. Then Ngake's tail lashed out sending him to the other side of the harbour where he smashed into the rocks in his pathway. The rocks flew in all directions and some can still be seen today . Te Tangihanga-o-kupe (Barrett's Reef) and Te Aro-Aro-o-kupe (Steeple Rock), when Ngake hit the cliff he broke through into the MOana-a-Raukawa (Cook Strait) and was never seen or heard of again. No place in Whanganui-a-tara (Wellington Harbour) was named after him.

Whataitai was still stranded when the people from the east Coast arrived. These people were filled with love and grief for the stranded creature. When the tide was full the bay was covered and they knew Whataitai was still alive for they could see him moving around and eating.

One day there was a great earthquake. It was named Haowhenua and many areas of land appeared. The land Whataitai was on became dry and was no longer covered by the sea. Whataitai could not live on dry land nor could he reach the water. He died.

His spirit took the form of bird called Kio and flew to the mountain called Matairangi (Mount Victoria). At the tip of the mountain Kio chanted his farewell lament and that is why the highest point is called Tangi-te-kio (the farewell cry of Kio). Then the spirit of Whataitai travelled to the leaping place of the taniwha spirits to their journey to the night.

Whataitai (which means to struggle) was the name given to Kilbirnie Isthmus and also to a small town inland. Today the name is pronounced Hataitai.