

Kākahu Pekepeke

by Keri Welham

Many people have taonga – treasures that have an important link to the past. An iwi might have a waiata that has been sung by their whānau for many years. A family might have a photo of their grandmother that they look at every day. These treasures are loved and respected, and people take great care to keep them safe.

At Ōtūmoetai Primary School in Tauranga, one of their taonga is a whakairo (carving) called Kākahu Pekepeke. The whakairo was presented to the school by Kerry Wilson in 1992 for the school's new library.



Telling a story



The carving tells the story of three local springs that were very important to the iwi living around them. Long ago, the people of Ngāi Tamarāwaho drank from the first spring, bathed in the second spring, and washed their clothes in the third spring.

Sometimes the third spring would have less water, so the clothes would have to be washed in one of the other springs. People said that the way the clothes were moved between the springs reminded them of the way cloaks are moved between Māori families when someone dies.

This idea gave the carving its name. A kākahu is a cloak, and pekepeke means to move from one person or place to another.



Des Tata, a kaumātua of Ngāi Tamarāwaho

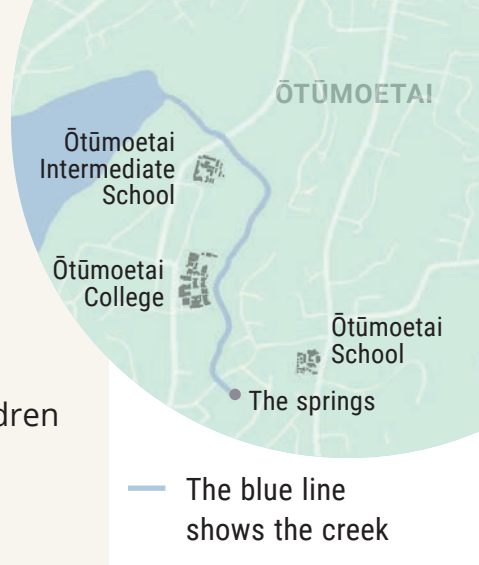


Bringing comfort

Des Tata says that when somebody dies, people bring cloaks that have been passed between their families for many years. The cloaks bring comfort to the family that is grieving. If another person dies, the cloaks move again, bringing comfort to the new grieving family.

The springs today

The springs are at the bottom of a hill below the school. They flow into a creek that runs past Ōtūmoetai Intermediate and Ōtūmoetai College. As the children of Ōtūmoetai School get older and move to the intermediate and then the college, the creek will remind them of the story of the springs.



You can't see the spring water most of the time because it's underground, but you can see the creek that goes behind the intermediate and the college.



A new home for Kākahu Pekepeke

Zara McIndoe is the principal of Ōtūmoetai School. When she came to the school, she noticed that the carving was high up on the library wall above the books, so it was hard to see. Ms McIndoe wanted to move the carving so everyone could see it easily. She asked Mr Tata and other kaumātua to help with a ceremony to move the carving to the office area. Now, students and visitors can see it and enjoy it as soon as they walk through the door.



Maria

On the carving, you can see a mother giving birth to a little baby, and there are springs around it. The eyes of all the family are made out of shells.

Tukairangi

It's a very nice greeting when you come through that door and see the carving.



Other taonga

Ōtūmoetai School has other taonga too. The school has carved panels telling the story of the Tākitimu waka that brought the ancestors of Ngāi Tamarāwaho to the area. They also have a carving of the prow (front) of the waka. Other school taonga are an oak tree planted by the original principal 125 years ago and murals showing the first small classrooms.

What are the taonga of your school?



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