

First Impressions

*Pakeha immigrants
left descriptions of
their first impressions
of Maori.*



Content created by
Hilary Mitchell
and Waimea Kahui Ako
2022



Te Tau Ihu: First Impressions

The new Pakeha immigrants left descriptions of their first impressions of Maori, recorded in diaries and logs, or in letters to relatives and friends in England. Unfortunately Maori have not left their impressions of the newcomers in their midst.

The verbal sketches of Maori physique and appearance were often coloured by English concepts of beauty and attractiveness. There seems to have been a consensus that Maori men were handsome and well-made, while Maori women were generally plain and ill-favoured. It is difficult to know if there was such a discrepancy in appearance between the sexes, or whether Victorian ideals of feminine daintiness influenced opinions. Whatever the reason Maori women's appearance was often judged harshly.

“The men in general are fine grown and well made, having immense muscle: they have particularly well-shaped heads, high foreheads, and good eyes, and the tattooing gives them a manly cast when you can accustom yourself to the idea; the nose of all the natives I have seen is evidently the worst feature; the mouth is not very good, but the hair being a good black, and naturally curly, they are most certainly fine and pleasing fellows. I am almost afraid to touch at a description of the fairer sex, having at present seen but few specimens even decent in countenance, and not more than two good-looking girls. All are tattooed that are tap-a-tap, or married.”

Source: Bremner T. to his parents in *Letters from Settlers and Labouring Emigrants in the New Zealand Company's Settlements of Wellington, Nelson, and New Plymouth, from February 1842 to January 1843 (1843)*

Content created by
Hilary Mitchell
and Waimea Kahui Ako
2022



free to share and adapt, with
attribution to the source text

Te Tau Ihu: First Impressions

At Cloudy Bay, on 21 February 1842, Barnicoat wrote of the whalers' Maori wives:

"The women were dressed in cotton gowns with blankets as shawls. For ear ornaments they wore half crowns or dollars, tied with black ribbon through a hole in their ears. They were none of them tattoed and looked very cleanly but not nearly so handsome, intelligent, prepossessing, or graceful as the men."

Source: Barnicoat J.W. Journal. Typescript at Nelson Provincial Museum

Agnes Hodgson visited Wakapuaka Pa at Christmas 1845 and was anything but complimentary about Maori appearance:

"I think I never saw such an assemblage of such ugly human beings. The women, several of whom were very near the period of adding to the number of the tribe, were positively hideous, and could only be contemplated by any of our party with only feelings of irrepressible disgust and horror. Both males and females wore nothing but large thick blankets thrown gracefully around the body.....The malesare a very fine robust and active race, with intelligent countenances, but all the women, whom I have hitherto seen, are revoltingly plain although the cast of features certainly bears a strong resemblance to the beautiful portraits of an New Zealand young woman...prefixed to Dr Southward's 'History of Man' I daresay that you will fancy a blanket to be (a) very unbecoming but as worn by the New Zealanders, it is not ungraceful, and strongly reminds me of the ancient Roman toga."

Source: Hodgson A. Letter 14.8.1846. ATL: MS-Papers-1063-1

Sarah Greenwood who lived at both Nelson and Motueka was more measured in her assessment:

"Many of them are really noble-looking fellows, and the women, though less handsome, are frequently very pleasing."

Source: Greenwood, S. Letter 31.3.1844. ATL: qMS-0886

Content created by
Hilary Mitchell
and Waimea Kahui Ako
2022



free to share and adapt, with
attribution to the source text

Te Tau Ihu: First Impressions

Samuel Stephens attributed the women's less attractive appearance to overwork:

"From the circumstances of the native women performing the drudgery of life....they are mostly unprepossessing in their appearance, and inferior greatly in personal features and stature to the men. In these parts there are very few handsome women and they mar even such as would be passable by the practice they had of staining their lips blue. This habit is however not continued in the rising generation...." He concedes that his friend Mary – Te Waharau- is an exception: "Mary's features are on the whole good-and she is very cleanly in her dress and person, which cannot be said of many of them."

Source: Stephens S. Journal 3.1.1843 Nelson Provincial Museum

One Maori habit that did not find favour with Europeans was the use of ochre and oil.

In 1839 William Wakefield disparaged the custom by Admiralty Bay Maori:

"Their faces were painted like an European buffoon, and their bodies thickly anointed with whale-oil and ochre..."

Source: Wakefield W. Despatch 1.9.1839. In Ward J. 1839

Sarah Stephens wrote of Motueka Maori:

"...they are fond of oiling themselves when they can get it – from the head to the foot – and with it they put a red dye – I believe it is to keep off sandflies – but I do not know if it answers the purpose", adding that she tried to entertain Maori outdoors as being enclosed in a small room with ten or twelve oiled visitors could be quite unpleasant. Shark oil was also used with ochre.

Source: Stephens, Sarah to her mother, 29.9.1843 in Stephens, Samuel: Letters and Journals. Nelson Provincial Museum

Content created by
Hilary Mitchell
and Waimea Kahui Ako
2022



free to share and adapt, with
attribution to the source text

Te Tau Ihu: First Impressions

Questions

1. What do these words or phrases mean:
logs, consensus, ill-favoured, discrepancy, a manly cast, countenance, all are tattooed that are tap-a-tap,,
prepossessing, assemblage, unbecoming, the drudgery of life, stature, mar, ochre, buffoon, anointed?
2. Why do we not have Maori first impressions of the immigrants?
3. What aspects of Maori men's appearance met with Bremner's approval? What did not?
4. Where is Cloudy Bay? From the women's earrings what can you conclude about where the whaling ships came from?
5. What do you think Agnes Hodgson was so offended by?
6. Do you think Samuel Stephens's theory about Maori women's appearance is likely to be correct?
7. Where is Admiralty Bay? Where would Maori have obtained ochre?
8. What aspects of male appearance are considered to be attractive in our society?
9. What aspects of female appearance are considered to be attractive in our society?
10. Do these criteria change between cultures and/or ethnicities? Can you give examples?

Content created by
Hilary Mitchell
and Waimea Kahui Ako
2022



free to share and adapt, with
attribution to the source text

Te Tau Ihu: First Impressions

Activities

Write:

As though you are a Maori teenager in 1845 - how you would describe either a male immigrant or a female immigrant when you return to the pa. Look at their facial features, physique, hair styles, deportment, dress and behaviour.

List the main differences between the appearance of Maori men and immigrant men.

List the main differences between the appearance of Maori women and immigrant women.

Draw:

Maori clothing as described in one of the articles.

Clothes likely to be worn by either male or female immigrants at the time.

Content created by
Hilary Mitchell
and Waimea Kahui Ako
2022



free to share and adapt, with
attribution to the source text

Te Tau Ihu: First Impressions

Maori Character

Ernst Dieffenbach, the scientist on the New Zealand Company ship, the Tory, in 1839, was probably influenced by the considerable time the Tory spent in Marlborough when he described Maori:

“All New Zealanders have the Caucasian physiognomy, with the exception, that the mouth is, perhaps, larger, and the lips a little thicker. The skull, or head is regularly and beautifully formed, with a high forehead, hair profuse, black and straight, but sometimes curled.... The women are well made, with small hands; both men and women have black penetrating eyes; they are remarkably soft and amiable in their manners. The stature offers no difference from that of the Europeans; they are muscular, and capable of great exertion. Their mental disposition is excellent; they are of a mild and cheerful temper, but at the same time clever, and easily instructed. Many of them can read and write perfectly. They are honester than any people I am acquainted with; theft by them is an unheard-of thing in the settlements of the whites, and respecting our property, they are conscientious to the extreme. They are hospitable, fond of travelling about to see their relations and friends, and at every interview after long absence, display the most passionate and kind feelings towards each other, the women then cutting their faces and arms with shells, so that they bleed, and tears stream from their eyes.”

Source: Dieffenbach E. Supplementary Information relative to New Zealand. John W. Parker, London 1840

Content created by
Hilary Mitchell
and Waimea Kahui Ako
2022



free to share and adapt, with
attribution to the source text

Te Tau Ihu: First Impressions

F.G Moore , who spent considerable time trading in the Nelson region in 1840-1841, was enthusiastic too, but also had a warning:

“I must say in all my varied travels and former intercourse with other primitive people, I never met a more kindly disposed or honest people....In their ordinary avocations of peaceful culture of the land, nothing so becomes a Maori as his modesty and hospitality, but when he believes he is wronged and thinks redress is not forthcoming, then gird up your loins and guard yourself at every point, or he will certainly try to vantage you.”

Source: Moore F.G. ATL:MS-Papers-0036-1:75-76

Samuel Stephens was also impressed by Maori honesty, noting in early 1843:

“I have had many things stolen from me at different times by the whitemen whom I have employed, but never by the natives. It was highly gratifying to find some time ago that not an article was missing out of the numerous packages that were taken up to my section by the natives that I hired on the occasion although the cases were mostly so bulky that they were obliged to unpack them and carry them loosely – nor was there an article broken.”

Source: Stephens S. Journal 8.1.1843. NPM Typescript

Sarah Greenwood wrote in March 1844:

“The longer we live here, the more we like the native character and the more we feel assured of our perfect safety amongst them. They are exceedingly honest and sober, and though rather covetous, seldom intruding or wanting in propriety of conduct.”

Source: Greenwood S. Letter 31.3.1844. ATL:qmss-0886

Content created by
Hilary Mitchell
and Waimea Kahui Ako
2022



free to share and adapt, with
attribution to the source text

Te Tau Ihu: First Impressions

Questions

1. What do these words or phrases mean: Caucasian, physiognomy, profuse, amiable, capable of great exertion, mental disposition, conscientious to the extreme, intercourse, primitive, kindly disposed, avocations, redress, gird up your loins, vantage, assured, covetous, propriety of conduct?
2. List the good qualities attributed to Maori in these passages.
3. Are there bad qualities too?

Activities

Write:

Pretend you are Samuel Stephens and write a reference for one of the Maori who carried your goods to your section. As a teenaged immigrant, write a letter to a friend in England describing Maori you have seen and met.

Draw:

A cartoon strip based on Stephens' experiences as an employer.

Content created by
Hilary Mitchell
and Waimea Kahui Ako
2022



free to share and adapt, with
attribution to the source text

Pakeha immigrants found the local Maori skills and knowledge invaluable, and sometimes life-saving.

Questions

1. What knowledge, customs and skills enabled Maori to live well in the Nelson region? List as many as you can.
2. What new knowledge, customs and skills did the immigrants bring? List as many as you can.
3. Were there some ill effects on Maori of the Europeans' arrival?
4. What did the new immigrants need from Maori?
5. How did Maori react to the new knowledge, customs and skills the newcomers brought? Please quote your sources.

Content created by
Hilary Mitchell
and Waimea Kahui Ako
2022



free to share and adapt, with
attribution to the source text

Te Tau Ihu: First Impressions

Rescues

“A role in which Maori distinguished themselves and to which they seemed to be particularly well-suited by their courage and physical prowess was rescuing people in distress. Swimming seemed to be almost innate, with Dieffenbach asserting that Maori infants “.....*acquire the art of swimming almost before they are able to stand upright.*” He also observed, in speaking of suicide being not uncommon among Maori; “.... *The love of life is not among the New Zealanders’ strongest feelings: I could record many instances in which they have ventured their lives to save those of Europeans, with a coolness and courage that would have done honour to a man of any nation.*” Maori were generally regarded as superb swimmers: one early settler, Alfred Saunders, after recounting a number of water-related near-disasters he had survived, said that his neighbours regarded him as ‘...*the water-spaniel of the district,*’ but added “....*There were no Maoris living in the Waimea, or I should never have been promoted to that honour.*”...

Source: Mitchell H and J *Te Tau Ihu o Te Waka Vol 2 (2007) p221*

Content created by
Hilary Mitchell
and Waimea Kahui Ako
2022



free to share and adapt, with
attribution to the source text

Te Tau Ihu: First Impressions

In September 1844 there were serious floods in the Nelson region, and the usually unthreatening Maitai became a raging maelstrom:

“In one instance a few days ago, the lives of a labouring man and 4 children were saved by the courage and intrepidity of a Maori, who rushed across the foaming torrent at the most imminent risk of his own life, to a wooden house in which they were, and rescued them from inevitable death – as in less than an hour afterwards, the force of the current completely broke up the building and swept away the whole. The Maori nearly lost his own life by the attempt – we raised a subscription immediately for the gallant fellow. The Natives have often been instrumental in saving the lives of persons in this way, and I have always found them very prompt in rendering assistance in all cases of the least danger...”

Source: Samuel Stephens Journal 25.9.1844

Barnicoat gives a slightly different version of the event:

“One of the greatest floods ever known here last night. A house standing near the Banks of the Maitai was observed to give way after having been surrounded by waters for a long time. There was great danger of its turning over altogether, in which case the lives of the occupants would have been greatly endangered. A great crowd stood on the banks of the river, but the strength and depth of the current prevented anyone giving assistance. At last a native (first having bargained for the utu) leapt into the stream swam across and reached the house and was the means of getting the man, his wife and three children away in safety. Shortly after the house fell over and was washed down the stream.”

Source: Barnicoat Journal 20.9.1844

Content created by
Hilary Mitchell
and Waimea Kahui Ako
2022



free to share and adapt, with
attribution to the source text

Te Tau Ihu: First Impressions

Questions

1. What do these words or phrases mean: distinguished themselves, prowess, innate, ventured, done honour to a man of any nation, maelstrom, intrepidity, imminent, inevitable, subscription, gallant, instrumental, rendering assistance, utu?
2. Why do you think Maori were so good at swimming? Why would the new immigrants not be so good?
3. In the 19th century (1800s) drowning was called the New Zealand disease. Why do you think that was?
4. What date did the rescue take place?
5. What are the differences between the two accounts?
6. Which do you think is likely to be more accurate? Give your reasons.
7. Why did the crowd on the bank not do anything?
8. What would have happened if the Maori had not come along?
9. What skills and character traits did the Maori show?
10. What could the Pakeha have done?

Content created by
Hilary Mitchell
and Waimea Kahui Ako
2022



free to share and adapt, with
attribution to the source text

Te Tau Ihu: First Impressions

Activities

Write your account of the rescue:

As a teenager standing on the bank writing to a friend in England.

As the father who was rescued.

As the Maori rescuer.

Draw:

Draw a picture of the scene of the rescue.

Draw a cartoon strip of the rescue event.

Content created by
Hilary Mitchell
and Waimea Kahui Ako
2022



free to share and adapt, with
attribution to the source text

[Maitai Valley, Nelson | Items | National Library of New Zealand | National Library of New Zealand \(natlib.govt.nz\)](#)



Te Tau Ihu: First Impressions

Resources

[The Mahitahi or Maitai River \(theprow.org.nz\)](http://theprow.org.nz)

[Maitai River Walkway - Nelson City - Nelson Trails](#)

[Pā and Kāinga \(theprow.org.nz\)](http://theprow.org.nz)



[View of Nelson Haven in Tasman's Gulf, New Zealand including part of a site of the intended town of Nelson - Nelson Provincial Museum \(nelsonmuseum.co.nz\)](#)



[Maitai River, Sunday Hole - Nelson Provincial Museum \(nelsonmuseum.co.nz\)](#)

Content created by
Hilary Mitchell
and Waimea Kahui Ako
2022



free to share and adapt, with
attribution to the source text

Te Tau Ihu: First Impressions

Social Science/ANZH Curriculum Progress Outcome Links

Understand	Know	Do
<p>Colonisation and settlement have been central to Aotearoa New Zealand's histories for the past 200 years.</p> <p>People hold different perspectives on the world depending on their values, traditions, and experiences.</p> <p>People participate in communities by acting on their beliefs and through the roles they hold.</p>	<p><u>By the end of Year 10</u> Interactions change people's culture and identity, communities, and countries.</p> <p>People contest ideas about identity as they challenge injustices and social norms.</p>	<p><u>By the end of Year 10</u> Consider whether my sources are valid and reliable, identify gaps in them, and reflect on limitations and biases in representing the people and groups involved.</p> <p>Use historical sources with differing perspectives and contrary views...I can recognise that the sources available may not capture and fairly represent the diversity of people's experiences.</p>

Content created by
Hilary Mitchell
and Waimea Kahui Ako
2022



free to share and adapt, with
attribution to the source text

Te Tau Ihu: First Impressions

Reference List

Content created by Hilary Mitchell
based on text taken from '*Te Tau Ihu o te Waka Vol 2*'
(Huia Publishers 2007, written by Maui John Mitchell and Hilary Mitchell)

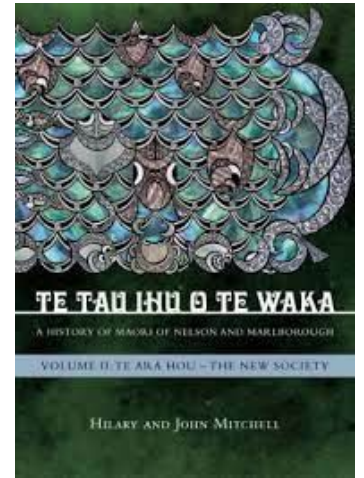
Recommended Readings:

Ruth M. Allan
'*Nelson - A History of Early Settlement*'
(AH & AW Reed, 1965)

Patricia Burns
'*Fatal Success - A History of the New Zealand Company*'
(Heinemann Reed, 1989)

Max D. Lash
'*Nelson Notables*'
(Nelson Historical Society, 1992)

June E. Neale
'*Landfall Nelson*' (1978)
'*Pioneer Passengers*' (1982)



Content created by
Hilary Mitchell
and Waimea Kahui Ako
2022



free to share and adapt, with
attribution to the source text