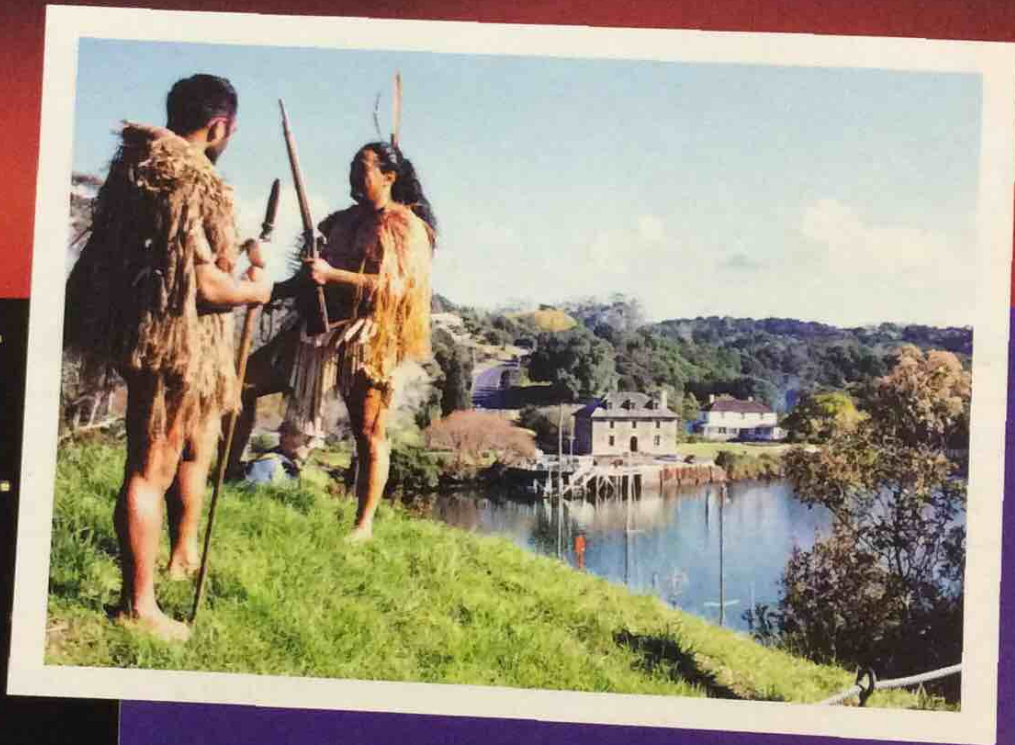




Celebrating Matariki

article and photographs by Sue Gibbison

Just before dawn at the beginning of June, seven bright stars rise in the eastern sky. A few weeks later, the thin sliver of a new moon appears in the north. Matariki is here!




All round the north of New Zealand, people are celebrating Matariki, the traditional Māori New Year. At Waitangi, they're planting native trees, in Kaikohe, they're doing kapa haka, and in Whangārei, they're flying kites. Here in Kerikeri, we're waiting on the hill at Kororipo Pā for the celebrations to begin. The great chief Hongi Hika used to launch his waka taua from here. In those days, this place was called Te Waha o te Riri – The Mouth of Trouble.




Today it's quiet and peaceful – but suddenly a warrior leaps out from the bush in front of us. He sticks out his tongue in a pūkana challenge and stares at us. Other warriors join him. They are wearing maro and pākē made from flax, feathers, and hemp cloth. Their bodies are smeared with orange clay, and they're carrying weapons – taiaha, a tomahawk, and a musket. Those weapons look a bit scary, and we wonder what's going to happen next.

“Haere mai, haere mai, haere mai,” calls a woman from the far side of the hill.





Then Hōne, one of the warriors, welcomes us with a pōwhiri. He invites us to celebrate Matariki with the people of the Ngā Puhi tribe, descendants of Hongi Hika.

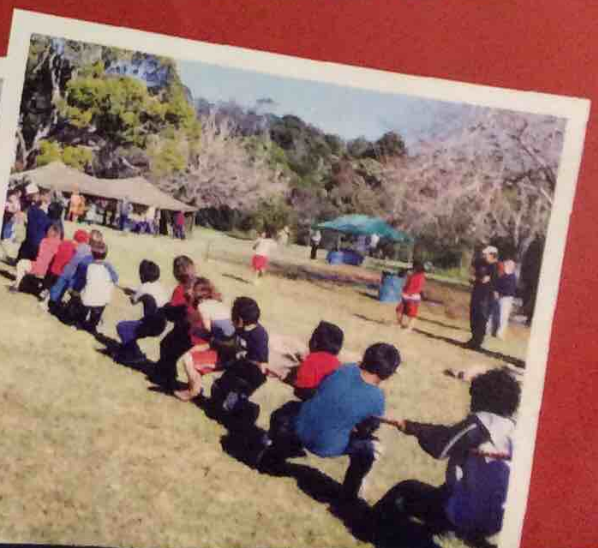


After the speeches and waiata, Hōne turns to the north and raises a huge pūtātara, or conch shell trumpet, to his lips. Its sound echoes out over the water.

A man from our group thanks the Ngā Puhi people for welcoming us. We sing a waiata, say a karakia, and hongi with our Ngā Puhi friends. Now it's time for the Matariki celebrations to begin.



Big tents have been set up on the reserve. Some kids are having their faces painted, and others are getting ready to play tug of war with a long rope. "Pull," yells someone. Everyone tugs hard on the rope until at last one team pulls the other over to their side.





Pere has chosen a sheltered spot to demonstrate his carving skills. He draws a design on a piece of wood, chooses a sharp chisel, and gently taps the end of it with a wooden hammer. The sharp blade cuts through the wood as if it's butter.

Another man is using a traditional wiri to drill holes in the handles of patu and mere. The wiri has a string that makes the drill bit spin back and forth. It takes a long time, but the wiri can even drill through greenstone.

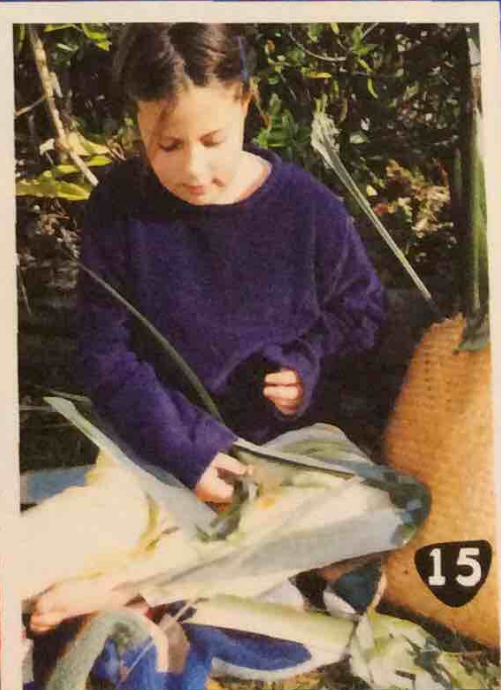


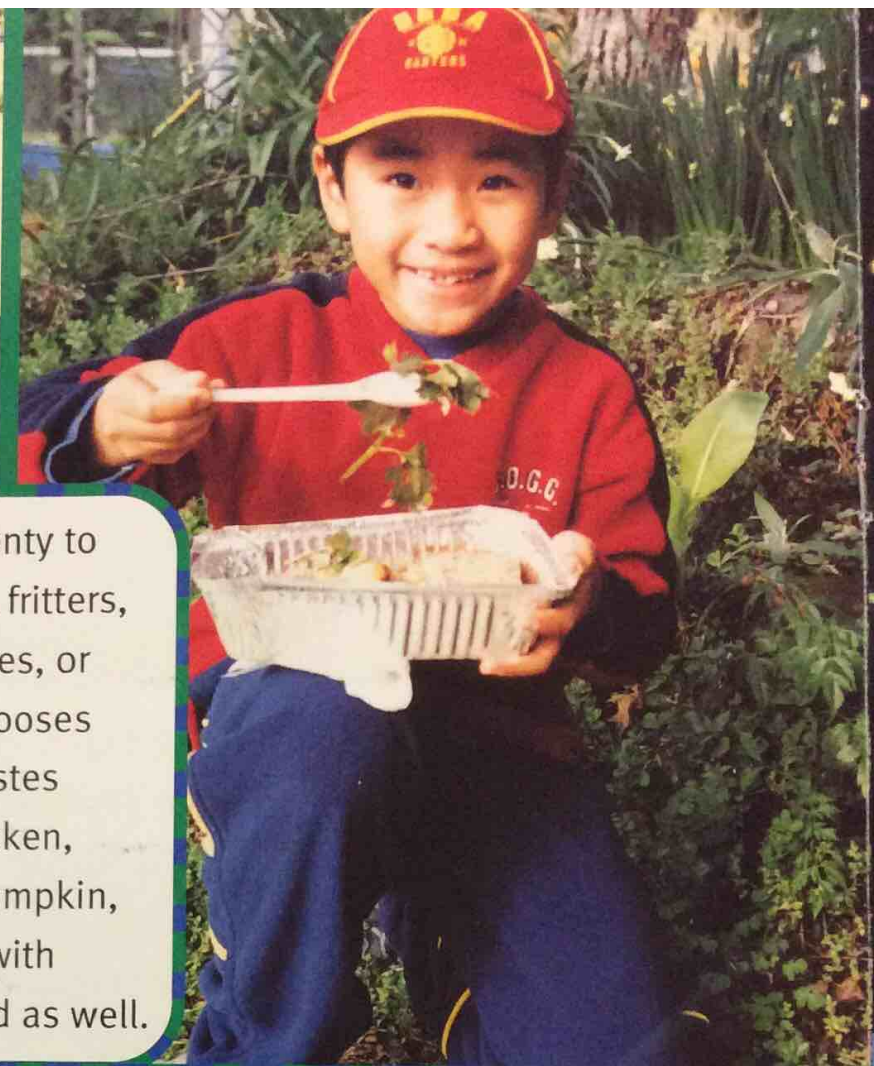
At the front of the tent, there's a stall selling beautiful flax kete and other woven objects.

Freya sits on the grass and practises weaving putiputi from flax.¹



¹ There are instructions for making putiputi in *School Journal*, Part 4 Number 1, 1999.

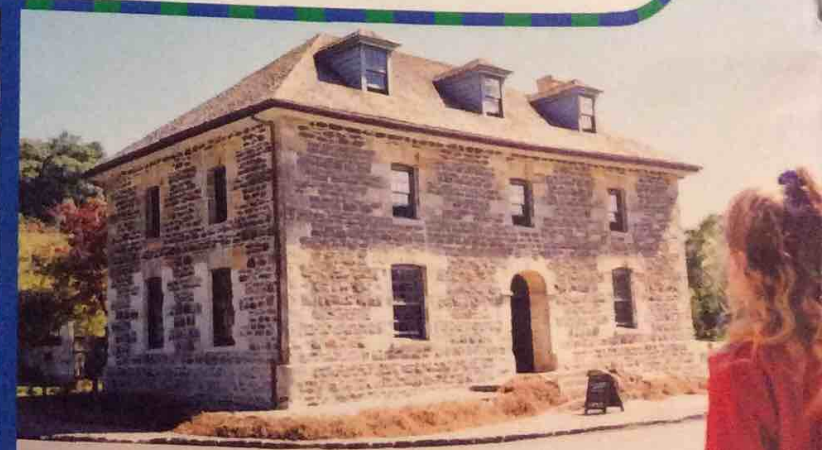




At last it's lunchtime. There's plenty to choose from – mussel fritters, barbecued sausages, or hāngi. Elliott chooses hāngi, and it tastes delicious – chicken, pork, potato, pumpkin, and watercress, with chewy rēwena bread as well.



After lunch, there are rides in a horse and cart, just like in the old days. An old steamship gives people rides across to the Stone Store jetty. The steamship blasts its horn as it passes Kororipo, where Hongi Hika's waka were once launched. Even though the horse and cart, the steamship, and the Stone Store are old, Kororipo and the traditions of the Ngā Puhi people are much older.



It's great to be able to celebrate all these things together at Matariki. It's a good time to learn about what has happened in the past and to think about what we'd like to happen in the future.

Every year, the festival of Matariki brings a fresh new start for Aotearoa New Zealand.

Matariki ātua ka eke mai i te rangi e roa,
e whanainga i hoki te mata o te tau e roa e.
*To the stars that herald the return of light,
bringing new growth, new life. ■*

Glossary

maro	loincloth or apron
mere	club
pākē	cloak
patu	club
pōwhiri	welcome
pūkana	to glare with wide eyes
putiputi	flowers
taiaha	a long, wooden weapon
waka taua	war canoe
wiri	drill

