

28 October and the New Zealand Wars

Dylan Owen

This article originally appeared as part of the Services to Schools 'Resources for teaching NZ history topics web pages' series. These include quality resources to support the teaching and learning of Aotearoa New Zealand histories.

Me maumahara tātou: We must remember¹

Who doesn't love Labour Day? First celebrated in 1890, the fourth Monday in October (28 October this year) marks the first long weekend holiday after what seems an unending winter. Its origins are now part of our mythology. Thanks to Samuel Parnell and his one-man strike, our 8-hour workday is another New Zealand world-first.

However, another event, now commemorated on 28 October, has increasingly been in the news. Its memorable title — Te Pūtake o te Riri, He Rā Maumahara — lies at the heart of our history, our cultural identity, and what we must remember.



'View of Mt Egmont, Taranaki, New Zealand, taken from New Plymouth, with Maoris driving off settlers' cattle', 1861 by William Strutt. Ref: 2015-0042-1 Te Papa.

28 October and the New Zealand Wars

Te Pūtake o te Riri, He Rā Maumahara

There has been so much grief and pain buried in the unspoken history of our land wars.

— Leah Bell²

Te Pūtake o te Riri, He Rā Maumahara is the Māori name for our latest national day, the commemoration of the New Zealand Wars and conflicts, held each year on 28 October. Te Pūtake o Te Riri also means the reason or source of anger or rage, a reference to the lasting importance and disastrous impact these wars and conflicts had on Māori. It is a day of remembrance where stories about the New Zealand Wars are enacted, shared, remembered, and discussed by Māori and Pākehā.

From 2010, the idea for an official New Zealand Wars commemoration day gradually gained momentum. It was championed by a diverse group including the Iwi Leaders Forum, Te Arikinui King Tūheitia, the Battle of O-Rākau Heritage Society, and surprisingly, Ōtorohanga College students.

The Ōtorohanga College petition

It's shocking to hear that there were massacres half an hour from where you live, not that long ago.

— Leah Bell³

In 2014, 186 Ōtorohanga College students and their teachers visited Ōrākau and Rangiaowhia. Each of these two former Waikato battle sites in their own way defined Pākehā's subsequent response to the wars. Ōrākau became mythologised by Pākehā through films like *Rewi's Last Stand* while the killing of the elderly, women, children at Rangiaowhia was conveniently overlooked, though not by Māori.

The Ōtorohanga rangatahi were disturbed by the fact that these sites and their stories were largely unknown, and New Zealand's uncomfortable past of conflict and land confiscations was not compulsorily taught in school. So, they swung into action. Led by Leah Bell and Waimarama Anderson, they decided to start a pitihana (a

petition)⁴. The aims were to:

1. raise awareness of the Land Wars and how they relate to local history
2. introduce these local histories into the New Zealand Curriculum for all New Zealanders
3. to remember those who died during the wars by implementing a statutory day of commemoration.

The pitihana also raised wider questions:

4. Why were New Zealanders so unaware of the New Zealand Wars?
5. Why, over time, were those conflicts ignored, buried, and mythologised?

In other words, what stories were told and what stories were being left out? Even more importantly, why were pupils going through school without learning about these crucial aspects of our history?



New Zealand Land Wars petition presentation haka, Parliament, December 2015 (4) by Dylan Owen. Ref: PADL-001758 Alexander Turnbull Library.

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We gathered signatures on the street, at festivals like the Kawhia Kai Festival, Polyfest, Matatini, at the Tūrangawaewae Koroneihana and Waka Ama regatta.

— Leah Bell⁵

After months of mahi collecting names, the students finally had a petition of 12,000 signatures. At the end of 2015, they marched on Parliament and, supported by MP Nanaia Mahuta, the petition was presented to the Government. Then in 2016, success! The Government formally announced a day of commemoration for the New Zealand Wars. It was to be held annually and funding was made available. The hosting of the commemoration would shift each year to acknowledge the many conflict sites around the motu.

[It's] time to recognise our own conflict, our own war, our own fallen, because there is no doubt at Rangiriri ordinary people lost their lives fighting for principle in just the same way as New Zealand soldiers who lost their lives fighting on battlefields on the other side of the world.

— Prime Minister Bill English⁶

Why 28 October?

We wanted to bring to the fore the 'why' behind the conflicts and focus on the resistance for sovereignty that was taking place at the time, which is why the date of the signing of He Whakaputanga Rangatira, a document signed before the Treaty of Waitangi asserting full Māori sovereignty, is being recognised. Te Pūtake o te Riri is really about raising our critical awareness, and for all of us to start talking constructively with each other about our shared history.

— Dr Ruakere Hond⁷

The date for the national day of commemoration was set for 28 October. This was the date that He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tirene / 1835 Declaration of Independence of the United Tribes of New Zealand was signed. He Whakaputanga acknowledged that Māori exercised

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rangatiratanga or sovereignty over the motu. It was described by James Busby at the time as the ‘Magna Carta of New Zealand independence.’

In 2019, the national commemoration for Te Pūtake o te Riri, He Rā Maumahara, will be held in Taranaki, from Monday 28 October to Wednesday 30 October. The kaupapa is to raise conversations and awareness of the more than 20 years (March 1860 to November 1881) of conflict in the Taranaki region.



Petition organisers Leah Bell, Waimarama Anderson, and Tai Jones (left to right) being interviewed by media at Parliament, 2015 by Dylan Owen. Ref: PADL-001758 Alexander Turnbull Library.

Notes

1. Bell, Leah. 2015. ‘A petition to remember the NZ Land Wars’. Human Rights Commission. URL: <https://www.hrc.co.nz/news/petition-remember-nz-land-wars/>
2. Bell, 2015.
3. Bell, 2015.
4. Committee Secretariat. ‘Petition of Waimarama Anderson and Leah Bell’. URL: https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/sc/make-a-submission/document/OSCMA_SCF_51DBHOH_PET68056_1/petition-of-waimarama-anderson-and-leah-bell
5. Bell, 2015.
6. English, Bill. 20 August 2016. ‘NZ Wars day: From street petition to government goal’. Radio New Zealand. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/311482/nz-wars-day-from-street-petition-to-government-goal>
7. Hond, Ruakere. 2019. ‘New Zealand Land Wars Commemoration in Taranaki – 28-30 October 2019’. Kotahitanga o Te Atiawa. URL: <https://teatiawa.iwi.nz/blog/te-putake-o-te-riri/>